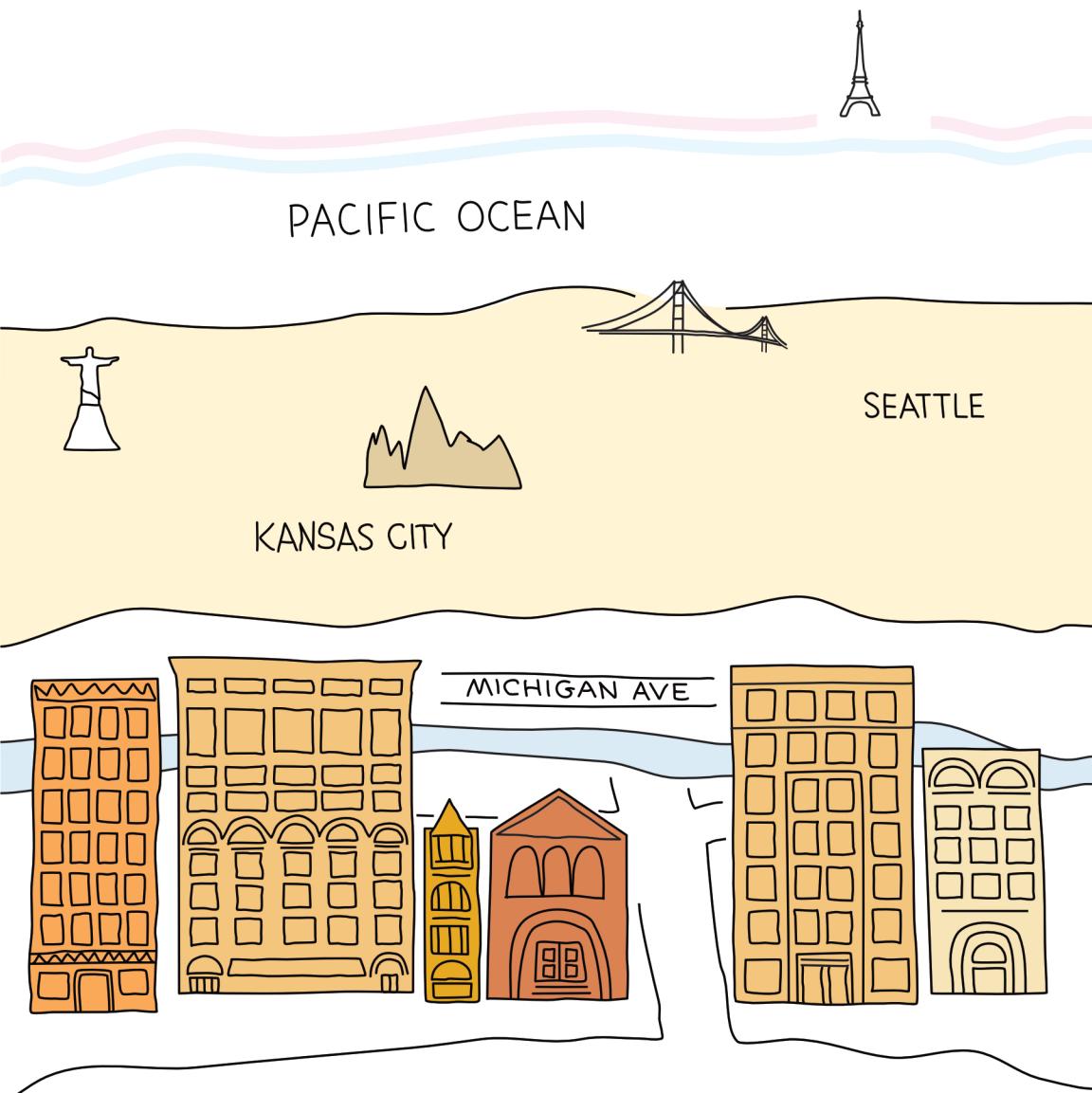


HERE AND THERE

A Collection of Writings



HOWARD S. BECKER

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WISE GUY PRESS
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For Fred Turner and to the memory of Doug Mitchell

This epigraph appears at the beginning of Mark Twain's classic, *Huckleberry Finn*, and I have always recognized him as my literary model, so I stole it for my own purposes here, which it suits perfectly.

NOTICE

PERSONS attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.

BY ORDER OF THE AUTHOR,

Per G.G., Chief of Ordnance.

Thanks, Mr. Clemens.

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PART ONE: CHICAGO

The New Yorker and Me

As a child, my head was filled with print from an early age. The *Chicago Tribune* every day. And *The New Yorker*, the well-known magazine, that was born in 1925, three years before I was. When I was born in 1928 my father was already a subscriber and, I suppose, had been since its first issue. At any rate, as I grew up it was always there, and I guess (though I don't remember) that it was one of the first things I used to learn to read.

A word about my father. He was born in the Maxwell Street Jewish ghetto of Chicago in the very early 1900s, his parents having migrated from what was then Russia but eventually became the separate country of Lithuania. The neighborhood was then largely Yiddish speaking, and my father didn't learn English until he was six and started school. But he clearly soon learned to read, and to speak without a trace of an accent (other than the Chicago accent everybody had). He developed (I suppose in his teens) literary tastes: for instance, the novels of James Branch Cabell, a once well-known but now pretty well forgotten author of vaguely romantic fantasies, and those of Joseph Hergesheimer, in his time a competitor of F. Scott Fitzgerald but now similarly forgotten. He also read the Yiddish novelists popular in the United States the same era, like Sholem Asch (he read them, and encouraged me to read them, in English). He always presented me with the idea of reading fiction as a thing worth doing and when the *Chicago Tribune* offered low-priced twenty-volume sets of Mark Twain and Charles Dickens to its readers he bought them, and I read them. I didn't go much for Dickens then, but Twain fascinated me, and I read all twenty volumes, not just the well-known books about Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, but obscure works like "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" and the travel books, like *Roughing It*

and *Europe and Elsewhere*, and the almost-sociological analysis of his own training as a steamboat pilot, *Life on the Mississippi*. And loved them all, what Twain wrote about and the way he wrote, the vernacular colloquial style.

My father worked in the advertising business, having followed high school with a six-week night school course at the YMCA, apparently enough of an education to get him a beginner's job at the Ed Weiss Agency, the big Jewish ad agency in Chicago (advertising agencies were then segregated according to the ethnic / religious affiliations of their clients). He was, above all other things, an "idea man" (what now would likely be called a "creative") and a writer. He had heroes in contemporary journalism, among them Bert Leston Taylor ("BLT"), whose column "A Line o' Type or Two" ran in the *Chicago Tribune*, a local competitor of New York's Walter Winchell. He passed all his favorites on to me, with varying success.

My father, conventional in almost every way, had a fit when, at the age of fifteen, I learned to play the piano well enough to replace the musicians who had played in strip tease clubs on Chicago's Clark Street until they were drafted into the armed services for World War II. He wouldn't accept me playing in such clubs and being out until very late, meeting all kinds of people he didn't approve of, even though his own sheltered life had never brought him into contact with strippers and bar owners and other lowlifes, about whom he had only stereotypes. Which, of course, were partly, but only partly, true. He really believed, I think, that working in such a club would expose me to the danger of being killed by a stray bullet. But I was getting paid a living wage, so he couldn't threaten to put me out on the street. This experience led me into the life of a professional musician, someone paid a living wage for making music in public.

But, making more difference, I had also won, in the same year, a scholarship to the University of Chicago College, the undergraduate school of that famous place, which unconventionally admitted students after only two years of high school. So, there I was, being led, by the university's very permissive but interesting and unconventional curriculum, into far more adventuresome intellectual "regions of the mind" than I would ever have known existed if I'd gone to a "regular" high school. I read a lot of material whose existence most third-year high school juniors don't learn about until much later, if ever.

Simultaneously with the Big Influences that hit me in the College—David Hume, Ruth Benedict, Karl Marx, etc.—was the continually Big Influence of *The New Yorker*. In my earliest memories, the family living room was littered with not-yet-fully-read copies, and I was leafing through them and, I guess (but can't truthfully say I remember), I read them. But I do have vivid memories of particular pieces which appeared in it. For instance, an article, by their medical specialist Berton Roueché, about a truck driver who had appeared in his doctor's office because, although he had no painful or disabling symptoms, he had turned orange all over. No test uncovered the cause of this weird symptom, until a random question led him to mention that being a truck driver, he got hungry on his trips and routinely brought along a sack of carrots to help him through long stretches on the road. I loved learning things like that, though I had no use for them.

I read the magazine's two great foreign correspondents—Mollie Panter-Downes, who reported from London, and Janet Flanner (using the pseudonym Genet) from Paris—all through World War II, when I was still too young to be drafted into the army (my eighteenth birthday came in 1946). They gave me the "inside picture" you couldn't get from the *Chicago*

Tribune: on the scene reportage, clear prose and a knowledgeable and insightful collection of observations, and that was part of what distinguished *The New Yorker* for me (from *Time*, for instance). It's fair to say that that exposure (the University of Chicago, in all fairness, had a major part in this too), taught me how to read and to write. I didn't know at the time that I was being taught those things, I just knew I was finding out about the war, more than I could find in a newspaper or *Life* magazine, a layer of stuff that wasn't available anywhere else I knew.

And, of course, not only that and probably not most importantly that, I read all the still remembered stars of that legendary staff, including the one-of-a-kind Joseph Mitchell, whose excursions into odd corners taught me that even things that were of "no real interest" politically or culturally were rewarding if you looked at them closely and for a longer time. My Clark Street experiences playing in strip joints gave me, in another direction, a real taste for John O'Hara's "Pal Joey" stories, which took the form of letters from someone who inhabited a milieu similar to the places I played in and wrote letters about his life there to a friend. I always felt that I might have met Joey, or someone like him, in my life on Clark Street. Or on 63rd Street, where I later played, though just for drinking patrons rather than strip acts. Joey's letters to his friend led me to O'Hara's other books and their accounts of life in still other milieux than the more-or-less staid South Shore area of Chicago's South Side, filled with solidly middle-class Irish and Jewish families, whose male heads, like my father, worked in solidly middle-class occupations. I was ready for the discovery, which came later, that odd corners of big cities were perfect locales for social science work to be done (though not the only ones).

And, of course, I also read James Thurber's pieces—witty,

comic, allusive—and the more straightforward reportage of writers like A. J. Liebling and Richard Rovere.

I soon found another major intellectual companion in *The New Yorker*: the long-time book review editor Edmund Wilson. Unlike most book review editors, he seemed to write (my memory may exaggerate here, but I don't think so) most of the reviews himself, most often of obscure books related to whatever he was interested in at the time. I especially remember him reviewing the most obscure conceivable books related to the Civil War: military histories, the letters or diaries of ordinary people who had lived through the war in small Southern towns or on plantations, and so on. More experienced readers of Wilson probably knew long before I did that this was how he wrote his major studies of Big Topics, that all these essays on what seemed to me obscure little books eventually showed up as parts of a major historical study (in this case, *Patriotic Gore*). That book didn't intrigue me enough to turn me into a maybe-historian. But another book (in which Wilson included the famous long piece by the elusive and mysterious Joseph Mitchell on "The Mohawks in High Steel") consisted of anthropological essays, reporting on his own real honest-to-god field work that any professional academic researcher would surely have been proud to have done, largely among the Iroquois and other American Indian tribes of the Eastern United States, and presented in his inimitable prose.

In this way, *The New Yorker* helped nudge me into what turned out to be my own academic destiny—not anthropology, but what always seemed to me a very close relative, fieldwork-based sociology—mingling with the people you were going to write about face-to-face instead of through the intermediary of a questionnaire or some other “scientific instrument.” Reading the books of Ruth Benedict and Margaret

Mead in the Social Science II course in the College had softened me up for this. Then, just as I was on the verge of graduating from the College and having to choose a department to do graduate work in (to placate my father, who would put up with my eccentricities as long as I was in school, even though I wasn't studying law, which he would have preferred), I ran across and read (as well as hearing the authors, St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, discuss their book in person) *Black Metropolis*, a massive sort-of-anthropological study, based on all kinds of fieldwork and statistical material about the South Side of Chicago. I'd always liked the idea of anthropological fieldwork but didn't want to live in New Guinea or any place else lacking the comforts of home. And saw that sociology done in that style filled that bill. So, I signed up in sociology, led there partly by Wilson's adventures with Native Americans *The New Yorker* brought to me.

And all of this rich description and thinking came to me in the clearest prose imaginable. The one three-month class in writing that I took at the university had successfully impressed on me the necessity of getting rid of extraneous words and phrases, which we all put there just because everyone else seemed to write like that. Or maybe, as a graduate student later told me, because it was "more classy." *The New Yorker* writers each had a distinctive style (I was going to say, "way of talking" and that's in fact the way it felt to me).

With the weekly delivery of *The New Yorker*, I was getting booster shots of "no fancy, formulaic writing" to counteract what I would routinely be exposed to in most of the professional products of my chosen field of sociology. Perhaps the most influential of the many New Yorker authors who taught me about writing without knowing he was doing that was John McPhee, whose series of books titled *Annals of the Former World* (which originated as articles in the magazine) showed

me how you could write about an obscure and not particularly newsworthy topic like North American geology and make it not just interesting but put-you-on-the-edge-of-your-seat interesting. This was a variation on what I had learned in the music business: it ain't what you play, it's the way that you play it.

The New Yorker helped me in another way, occasionally alerting me to books, events, objects and ideas relevant to my solidly academic work by showing me a new way to think about something I was thinking about that departed decisively from the standard sociological approach. Or by describing something that embodied an idea I wanted to explore in a way I hadn't known about because I had never heard of the object or event in question.

So, years later when I was writing *Art Worlds*, a book about the social nature of art (Becker, 1982) I put great emphasis on the inevitably collective nature of any artwork: the large number of people who had to cooperate, directly or indirectly, for the work to finally be what it was. And, conversely, what happened when all that cooperation wasn't there, and you had to do it yourself. I finally understood that situation in a visceral way when I read about the perfect example of it—the Watts Towers, a very large sculpture (I guess I can say, though Simon Rodia, the Italian immigrant who made it, never called it that) in suburban Los Angeles—in Calvin Trillin's article about it in *The New Yorker*. It was a curiosity never mentioned in conventional art sources. But my weekly reading of *The New Yorker* alerted me to it and so I could use it in my thinking as the ultimate example of what it would mean to do an artwork “all by yourself,” as Rodia boasted he had done the Towers.

I still remember a telling detail from the story. When Trillin

showed Rodia pictures of buildings designed by the Catalan architect Antoni Gaudi (whose works looked a lot like his), Rodia asked suspiciously, “This man, he had helpers?” Trillin said yes, he did have helpers, a lot of them, and Rodia said, triumphantly, “I did this all by myself!” A strong reminder that artists never do anything all by themselves, there are always a lot of people assisting, delivering raw materials, etc., etc. Stories like that fed the half-formed intuitions I was turning into what I had learned to call “concepts,” but which might better be called ideas or even clues. My intuitions about this finally coalesced in the term “art world,” which I proposed as the name of the complex of people and organizations whose cooperation made the finished products we recognize as art—paintings, plays, symphonies, jazz improvisations, novels—possible and easily available.

A meatier (and more conventionally scholarly) contribution to my work on *Art Worlds* came when Winthrop Sargeant, *The New Yorker* music critic, reviewed Leonard Meyer’s book on how to understand musically evoked sentiments, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, and so introduced me to a current of art interpretation I might well never have found. Sociological training had never pointed me to this current of thought in any of the arts. Meyer, a professor of music at the University of Chicago at the time, explained the emotional impact of musical experiences as the result of social conventions: listeners *learned* to interpret sounds as having an emotional meaning—a simple example might be the way a minor chord evokes sadness. Once listeners learned to hear minor tonalities as sad, composers and players could use minor key sounds to evoke that emotion. I probably would never have found this clue if I’d only been reading sociology journals, which never reviewed books in musicology. Why would they? And I could read and understand the book’s ideas because my years in the music business had taught me the basic ideas of tonality and

harmony and musical form that made it possible for me to do that kind of work.

Meyer's discussion gave me what I needed: a formal way of thinking about art that coincided with my own sociological understanding of my professional musical experiences, talked about the same kinds of things I thought about as a piano player sociologically, in the detail that musical language afforded (which, as it happened, life had already taught me to use well enough to support myself). Like this: a basic socio-logical concept is the idea of a *shared understanding*, something we all (or some or most of us) understand as meaning more or less the same thing; a musical example would be the idea of "minor tonality." And a general term for things that did that is a *convention*.

I could have read books of sociological theory forever and not found the makings of such a connection to the everyday realities of music-making. But there it was, in the pages of *The New Yorker*. And finding that prepared me to find similar applications of the idea in other fields of the arts: in the work of Ernst Gombrich and William Ivins on visual art, for instance, both of whom showed me how painters created the illusion of three dimensions by manipulating well-established conventional visual textures everyone knew how to interpret. Similarly, Barbara Herrnstein Smith dissected the conventional signs poets used to alert readers to the end of a poem arriving in the next few lines.

So, *The New Yorker* connected me to the idea and way of using the defining idea of *Art Worlds*. But it did more than that. It solved another problem I was in danger of suffering from, though I was barely aware of it: the academic problem of the intellectual quasi-monopoly possessed by "The Literature."

Specialists in scholarly subjects, especially those working in university departments, usually find that a large part of what everyone around them says they *must* read consists of “the literature,” a vague term pointing to a variable-in-quality body of published research and ideas on “your topic.” No one in particular is empowered to say what The Literature consists of, but it’s widely accepted as everything anyone who wants to be an expert on Subject X **must read** to be considered knowledgeable by people who believe in that sort of thing, especially people deciding whether your new article merits publication in a major journal of your discipline. The Literature on Subject X usually doesn’t include the kind of work I often find most useful (like Calvin Trillin’s article on the Watts Towers) when I enter a new field: ideas from other areas of human activity that I can borrow and use on the superficially quite different empirical examples that interest me, rather than, say, the conventionally accepted literature about “art and society.” You’ll never find a reference to work published in such a place as the ... *New Yorker*, god forbid, in the official literature. Instead, when I was starting to work in that field you found the heavy-handed analyses of Marxist “sociological” critics like Theodor Adorno or Lucien Goldman, who connected musical works and their own theoretical essays based on allusive metaphors: Composer X’s music “reflected” (or some other term that shrouded what was actually going on) the class structure of the society you found it in. These vague statements didn’t specify how this reflecting happened, where you would find that work being done in the score or the recording of the music the musicians were playing, and listeners were listening to. Metaphors like “reflection” did the only analytic work being done.

Meyer, whose book I didn’t find in any sociological reference but in the music column of *The New Yorker* magazine, talked about metaphors but didn’t use the idea metaphorically.

Rather, he used it to identify specific compositional elements: chords and scales whose third degree was lowered a half step and then, through repeated use by composers and players in situations culturally identified as “sad,” like death, come to embody a generalized mood of “sadness.” He identified other musical elements that connoted the end of a section. The classical musical version of the harmonic sequence that conventionally indicated that a section of what was being played had been finished was called a *cadence*, and people familiar with the kind of music being performed recognized it as “the end” (temporary or final), a definitive sign that an end of some kind had been reached. Jazz players called the highly conventionalized forms these two bar sequences used in most of what they played II-V-Is, that is a sequence of chords built on those degrees of the scale (any scale), which players and listeners alike interpreted as “that part is over.”

Identifying what musical elements sounded “sad” or signified the end of something and, beyond that, all the other musical elements that carried other emotional messages, Meyer gave me the connection between musical language and sociological ideas I needed. Through him, I found a link to sociology’s basic idea of “shared expectations,” which participants in recurring situations negotiate and renegotiate from moment to moment as the basis for the cooperation that is life’s way of going on seamlessly even though no one had agreed to what they were doing as “the way to go on”.

Well, so what? Today’s sociology graduate students live in a far more regimented professional world than I ever did. In my generation, as I remember, we spent a lot of time trying to find out what anyone in authority wanted us to do. The professors never bothered telling us what they thought we should do. We had to figure out for ourselves what was going to fly and what would lead us into some kind of trouble.

Mostly no one got into serious trouble. Any student who seriously wanted to get a degree could pass some tests and find someone to supervise some kind of thesis and eventually walk away with a degree. We figured out how to write a thesis by reading theses the faculty had accepted, whose authors were now out in the world of professional sociology, doing it and getting paid for it and so starting academic careers.

Still, we worried about all this. Of course, we did. After all, we were students. But we could see for ourselves that many varieties of work passed, and the authors left in good standing. I'm not so deeply involved in this kind of world anymore. But from time to time, I get a whiff of what's going on now and am taken aback by what seems a much more highly regimented way of professional life and practice.

Here are two examples. Several years ago, Robert Faulkner and I (Faulkner and Becker 2009) called on our memories of years in the music business to jump start us on a study of its contemporary version. What was going on with the musicians who played in bars and for dances and parties and *bar mitzvas* and weddings? We thought of this world as a small-scale version of what goes on in all sorts of situations, the development, on the spot and without a lot of discussion, of ways of organizing several people to do what has to be done to get on with whatever needs to be gotten on with. For the musicians playing these kinds of engagements, the work was simple enough: get on the stand and (this was often the way it was) though we perhaps didn't know each other and had never played together (the limiting case), we would play for several hours, even though we had no written music to play from. Our research problem was simple: how did we do that? It's not obvious, but the answer is, of course, a variation of what basic sociology suggests: we quickly negotiate, using past experiences, what we have sufficiently in common to let

us use what we know and can play, improving our cooperation as we go along.

Faulkner and I did a lot of observation and interviewing, put together an analysis of what we had learned and published it as *"Do You Know? The Jazz Repertoire in Action."* The University of Chicago Press, the publisher, had taken the usual precautions and had the book vetted by competent readers who would not OK it if it didn't meet professional standards. We hoped our colleagues in the discipline would find it of interest and up to their expectations.

One colleague, teaching a course for incoming graduate students in his very prestigious department, assigned the fifteen newcomers in his class a book a week, to read and to write a short (3–4 pages) paper about: their impressions, what they learned, what they thought was good, what they thought was bad. At the end of the term, they turned the papers in, and he learned something about their degree of professional sophistication, among other things. He learned what he wanted from this exercise and then he sent the papers about our book to us to read and digest.

And of course, we were interested. How could we not be? But we really didn't know what to expect. For the most part the students reacted positively. It was a world they didn't know, and it satisfied any curiosity they might have had. It wasn't on a standard topic and so they didn't have anything to compare it with. Some were really interested in music, some weren't.

But one criticism appeared in every report. "Everybody knows the review of the literature is supposed to be in the first chapter, and their review of the literature only appears in the very last chapter!" They knew, so to speak, that we "knew

better.” Why had we done such a thing? They were confused by this blatant violation of what they had learned, before they ever got to graduate school, as one of the bedrock requirements for any sociological writing: “FIRST, review the literature!”

A few years later, I had finished another book—*Evidence* (2017)—and, before I published it, I sent it to a number of colleagues whose opinions I respected to see what changes they thought I should make. One of them called me, a little bit concerned that I had failed to respect what he thought was a cardinal rule. “Howie,” he said carefully, “I think that I have to tell you that you’ve made a real mistake. The first chapter *has* to contain a list of what follows in the book. You know, in Chapter 1, I do this, in Chapter 2, I do that, in Chapter 3, etc., etc.” I said that I knew that some people did that, but I didn’t understand what made it necessary. He explained that the author has to do that because some people wouldn’t want to read the whole book, they will just want to read the parts that might concern them. So, they need to be able to find those parts. I said that I knew some people liked to do that, but I hadn’t written the book that way and wanted all the readers to start at the beginning which I had written in a way that posed a problem the rest of the book was intended to solve, and I wanted them to read it in that order. If they didn’t want to, I said, they didn’t have to, of course, but I didn’t intend to make it easy for them. I think he must have remembered how stubborn I am because he let it drop.

This episode upset me a little, because I felt sure that he was actually teaching his students to read books that way and also to write them that way when the time came. And I more or less felt that he was contributing to the delinquency of minors.

I have always been suspicious of “the literature.” And I’m not

the only one, though most social scientists take it as given, and don't ask who bestows the title and on what basis, and why they should pay any attention to it. Harvey Molotch's article "Going Out" (1994) explains why a reader should be so suspicious of the idea that it should never be necessary for anyone to ever explain it again. But social institutions and customs are stronger than common sense, as Molotch shows us, touchingly and convincingly. The demon we focused on, each in our way, is the refusal to engage with the world of ordinary life, the lives of the people we write about in all the different places they live them. If all we know is the university and the classroom and all that, we will never make a decent sociology. That's why he called his article "Going Out." We will make better sociology if we *go out* into other people's worlds and get to know what the places and people and activities we write about in our abstract "theoretical" prose are really like, in detail that we've seen with our own eyes.

I had developed a taste for that kind of activity—seeing other places and people, different from the people and places I knew from my home and immediate neighborhood and the place I worked. *The New Yorker* didn't do the whole job, but it was certainly part of the team that helped me overcome this obstacle.

Many years later, I had one final *New Yorker* connection, the totally unexpected experience of being the subject of a *New Yorker* profile. One day I got an email from someone who identified himself as Adam Gopnik, one of their longtime writers whose work I in fact admired, announcing that he had for a long time found my work interesting and wanted to write a profile about me. Both Dianne and I thought this was surely one of our friends trying to play a prank on us and didn't believe he really was who he said he was. He had a trip to California planned but, when I wrote him we were in

Paris and would be for a while, he said that was better yet, he was coming to do a story about the closing of the *Samaritaine* department store there. And so, we settled on a date.

On the day, we waited to find out who it “really was,” still not believing it was on the level. When the doorbell rang and I let him in I saw that it wasn’t a joke, it really was the guy who wrote for *The New Yorker*. We had a long talk that covered a lot of ground, then went to the Café Lea, a local place, to have a very good lunch, where he got to see that I was a *habitué* and really did speak some French, and we talked for a long time more.

He clearly knew my work, which in a way didn’t surprise me. He had written an important book with the art historian and NYMOMA Chief Curator Kirk Varnadoe, which began life as a catalog for the exhibit “High and Low” in 1990, and I supposed he had come across my book *Art Worlds* in some way connected with that. But it turned out that he knew a lot more than that.

The resulting article was a little bit of a disappointment, because of a quirk in *The New Yorker’s* way of doing business. Adam had intended, he told me, to write a long article that would go into more of what I write about, but at the last minute the editor (David Remnick) said he needed a shorter article for the upcoming issue and what Gopnik had as a start would do just fine. We were both disappointed but that was that. (Gopnik 2015)

And that *was* that. Except that there was a subtle, and in fact quite small, upgrading of my reputation. I was now someone who had been “written up in *The New Yorker*.” That’s not an official position, and there’s no official specification of “what it means” to have that happen. Still, lots of people read the

The New Yorker and Me

magazine and had seen it, and even more people heard about it and, I guess, occasionally mentioned it. And other interviewers from the non-academic world (e.g., *The New York Times*) saw that I gave a good interview and occasionally called me. So, in some very small way, I became “someone.” No substantial advantages accrue from that. But still ...

I still read *The New Yorker* and learn odd facts, serious ideas, and all the things I’ve always learned from it. And it epitomizes the way I read in general—whatever sounds interesting, a category that often enough includes conventional sociology, but also a lot of other stuff. Not all in English either.

Learning to Observe in Chicago

The French sociologist Jean Peneff spent his childhood and adolescence, after World War II, in a small town in Southwestern France and wrote a fascinating account of the observational activities and experiences of his generation of children (2009). He describes them watching the tradesmen at work in the street, because most workshops weren't big enough to hold all the things the artisans did; how these workers recruited the kids to help them ("Hold this, kid!") or sent them on errands ("Go get me this or that tool" or "Go get me a beer from the tavern"). He describes watching the business dealings, honest and not so honest, of the area's farmers as they bought and sold cattle and horses; and tells about watching, and so seeing, how some of them put the money from the sale they'd just made in their wallet and went home, while others went off to the tavern and drank it up. He explains how the kids knew all about the adulterous affairs which were common in the town, because they were recruited to carry the notes that arranged these rendezvous. He says that experiences like these gave him and his age-mates a taste for observing, and some real experience and skill in doing it, a good skill for the sociologist-to-be he was.

He asked me to write a similar account of my own experiences growing up that would, of course, not be the same as his. He lived in a small village in the southwest of France while I lived in one of the world's great cities, Chicago. His request posed an interesting challenge and what follows started as my attempt to fill his order. But he stopped with childhood experiences. I, on the other hand, found that what I was writing, though it started with me at perhaps the same age he was when he was carrying love notes for Gascon villagers, did not stop with my childhood ramblings and explorations. Because those merged seamlessly with later

experiences in educational institutions and in the occupational world of the music business, which I entered when I was in my early teens. All these had the same educational effect on me that Peneff's village had on him. We both learned such elementary but important lessons as "what's really going on doesn't happen on the easily observed surface of everyday existence," and such important skills as not telling everyone what we had seen and heard, not calling attention to ourselves, and remembering everything.

The City and Downtown

When I was a kid in Chicago, I had some experiences similar to Peneff's. Of course, we didn't have a lot of people working at their trades in the street where we could easily observe them. But we had more places to observe, a wider variety of things to see and think about. My childhood self didn't know I was developing curiosities, and observational and behavioral skills, that would dispose me to be interested in a field like sociology and would come in handy when I wandered into it, as I eventually did.

The El. When I was perhaps ten, my friends and I would take advantage of the structure of the Chicago rapid transit system —everyone called it the El (because it was elevated above the streets)—to pay one fare and ride all day long. Our mothers packed sandwiches for us and we walked a few blocks to the Lake Street station, where the Lake Street El line ran from Austin, our neighborhood on the far West Side, to the Loop, the downtown center, so called because it was ringed by the elevated lines, all of which converged from every part of the city, near and far, on this center, went around it (hence "the Loop"), and back to where they had come from. Once you got on a train, you could find places where the lines crossed—especially in the Loop—and change to another train that went

to another part of the city. Six or seven major lines ran to the three main parts of the city—known simply as the North, South and West Sides. Chicago being a very large city, they went a long way in almost every direction except east, where they soon encountered Lake Michigan.

So, for example, we could ride the Lake Street El from our neighborhood, nearly at the end of that line, downtown; transfer to the Jackson Park line, which went to the South Side, and ride 6 or 7 miles to its end at Stony Island Avenue; walk across the platform to take the same train back to the center, where we could transfer to a North Side Rogers Park train, and ride that to Howard Street and return to the Loop and transfer to the Douglas Park train, and do that all day long, covering the entire city before we went home, tired and happy.

What did we, precocious observers, see? We saw the buildings and how they varied from place to place: the poor deteriorating wooden apartment buildings in the city's poorer neighborhoods; the multi-story brick buildings in neighborhoods that were more well to do; the one family houses of some ethnically distinctive neighborhoods; and so on. We learned the characteristic ethnic patterns of the city by reading the signs on the businesses we went by and learned that the Poles lived on Milwaukee Avenue, the Swedes farther North, the Italians on the Near West Side, the Blacks on the South Side, and so on. We saw people of different racial and ethnic groups get on and off the train and learned who lived where and where they went. We were very good at reading ethnicity from small clues, including listening to the languages spoken, styles of clothing, even the smell of the food they carried with them and sometimes ate.

We saw the industrial parts of the city: the factories, their

machines and the buildings that housed them, and the lines of trucks that delivered raw materials and took finished products away. We saw the railroad yards that served the city—Chicago was the major railroad hub of the country, and six or eight major terminals were scattered around the downtown area. We saw the thriving neighborhood shopping centers, the kinds of stores they held, the kinds of people who shopped in them.

We saw things close up as well as from a distance. As all these people got on and off the cars we rode in, we knew we were different from many of them—racially different, different in class, different in ethnicity. We knew that we were Jewish and lots of these people weren't. We weren't always sure what to make of that, but we thought it was probably just as well if the other passengers didn't know it.

In many of the places the trains went through, the buildings were very close to the tracks, maybe no more than five feet away, and the windows in the buildings looked out directly on to the tracks. So, we could look into people's apartments and watch them going about the ordinary routines of apartment living: making and eating meals, cleaning, doing laundry, sitting around listening to the radio and drinking coffee, women doing each other's hair, kids playing. We never saw anything as private as people having sex, but we sometimes saw women who weren't fully dressed and that excited us, it wasn't something a ten or eleven-year-old boy saw very often. This gave us (me, the sociologist-to-be, though I didn't know it then) a lot of material on differing ways of life to compare and develop proto-sociological ideas about.

We took everything we saw through our little window on the city back home to think about, all the observations and comments we had traded about the differences we saw. By

the time I was, say, twelve, I had a pretty comprehensive, semi-explicit understanding of the physical and social structure of the city, at least from a geographic point of view.

When I wasn't much older, no later than twelve, I started to go downtown to the center of the city by myself, mostly on Saturdays. My parents always wanted to know what I did when I went downtown and I could never really tell them, because I wasn't sure myself what I was doing when I was there. Mostly just wandering around, looking in store windows. This was my chance to observe the city, not from the distance between the window of the El train and the buildings we went by, but close up.

"Downtown" was a big place, perhaps six blocks by seven blocks, anywhere from forty to fifty square blocks depending on how much of the fringe you included. People from every part of the city came there to shop at the major department stores (Marshall Field's, Mandel Brothers, Carson Pirie Scott, Rothchild's, Wieboldt's) and the smaller stores, to transact business at City Hall or the County Building or in one of the big banks on LaSalle Street, to go into one of the many buildings that housed who knew what kinds of businesses on their many floors. There were "medical" buildings, mostly filled with the offices of doctors and dentists. Most buildings had a mixture of businesses: little watch repair stores that couldn't afford storefronts on the street; jewelry wholesalers; insurance offices; booking agents for theatrical performers; private detectives. Everything you could find in the Yellow Pages of the phone directory was there and you could walk into a building, get into an elevator (they were the modern kind that didn't need an operator to make them go), get off at any floor, and wander up and down the halls looking at the black (but sometimes gold) lettering on the translucent glass doors. You couldn't go inside without a legitimate reason, of course, and

I had no watches to repair or people we needed to have a private detective investigate, and no money to pay for anything anyway. I did, however, develop, for a short time, an interest in learning to do magic and spent hours at a time in a store that catered to amateurs and professionals who shared my interest located in the office-building like arrangement on one of the lower floors of the Palmer House, a major hotel. This didn't last long but while I was doing it the store owner and salesmen tolerated my presence, and I learned a lot of this and that, including a sense of what a life in that profession might be like. I wasn't the only such spectator.

I went into City Hall or the adjacent County Building and watched the well-dressed men who came and went, not having much idea who they were or what they were doing there, although I knew that there was a mayor and a city council and all kinds of city offices that did things like keep records and collect taxes. I walked up and down the halls and could see all those offices listed, look inside them and see the typical city office open to the public—a counter the public walked up to and behind which city employees could come up and serve them, when they got ready to. I had the city kid's easy skepticism about bureaucracy and government, I knew about them from school, where some of our teachers had "political connections" they bragged about, and we already knew that some people had "political" jobs and didn't really have to do any work, though they had to be there. There were court-rooms in the building too, but I didn't go in them. No one had to tell me I didn't belong there. I saw lots of policemen who, I knew, as another thing any well-socialized city kid knew, it was better to be invisible to.

I walked by the many theaters in the downtown district. Some theaters alternated movies and a stage show. The stage-show often featured one of the big swing bands of the era (Benny

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Goodman or Count Basie, for instance) or some popular entertainer, and a few years later, when I became a budding jazz player, I would often spend all day in such a place, sitting through the movie several times in order to hear these bands live. Other theaters had plays and they were open only in the evening, but I could walk by and look at the marquees and the pictures of the stars and the quotes from theater critics posted on the outside walls.

I saw all the restaurants: the cheap ones that served inexpensive meals to stenographers and salespeople and people who worked in all those offices; the more expensive ones you could sort of see into from the street, so I looked and saw what I could; the fancy ones you couldn't see into at all, maybe the restaurant itself was up a flight of stairs. And I saw the bars and the people who hung out in them, people I'd become a lot more familiar with a few years later when I started playing piano in places like that.

And I went into the stores, although I now have a vague memory of not being at ease in the big department stores. I thought they would suspect that a kid by himself didn't have enough money to buy anything and therefore might well be there to steal, so they kept an eye on you. I went up and down in them and looked at the clothes or the toys. But not much, because I didn't know my way around, and feared finding myself among the brassieres or some other place I would be totally out of place.

I went into bookstores, of course, the big ones like Brentano's where you could lose yourself for hours looking at what they had for sale. It was in Brentano's that I committed my one and only theft, but that was much later, when I was a graduate student, and stole a copy of the Mills-Gerth translations from Max Weber's German. It scared me so much I never did it again.

And I saw things on the street. People. All kinds of people. Every age, every size, every ethnic group and race, beggars, businessmen, smartly dressed women out shopping, pretty girls, not so pretty girls, tough guys, not so tough guys. You could watch them, observe the details of their dress and behavior, how they carried their bodies, where people like that came from and went. You could wonder about them—where they lived in the city, what they were there to do, what it might be like to talk to them. But I never had enough nerve to talk to anyone, just watched and listened.

I quickly learned to keep my eyes where they belonged, to obey the rules of civil inattention my friend Erving Goffman formalized for all of us years later. I learned how to cross a major intersection—downtown was all major intersections—with hundreds of other people without bumping into anyone.

In other words, I became a well-socialized big city kid.

High School

Going to high school took me out of my immediate neighborhood, even though the school was close by. The school drew its students from a larger geographic area and thus went beyond the ethnic mixture of my neighborhood, which I had observed since childhood and grammar school: Jewish and Irish, with a sprinkling of Italians and Greeks. Where we Jewish and Irish kids had played together in the streets and visited in each other's houses, we now met Swedes from another, more distant (not really that far, but it seemed like another world) part of the area, who we knew only from a distance, attracted by the dazzlingly blonde Swedish girls but sure we would be rebuffed by them. We also met different kinds of kids from those groups: not just the quiet Italian kids of my grammar school, but the large tough Italian guys who

played on the Austin High School football team.

A word about the neighborhood kids. We did visit each other's houses and saw ways of life that weren't our own. My best friend on our block of Monroe Street was Jimmy Sullivan, whose father delivered, from his truck, the butter and eggs he picked up from nearby farms to a list of clients. Jimmy's father was a quiet man, who endured the presence of his wife's brother, Paddy, who could never find a job (it was the Great Depression, but I didn't know anything about that) and just hung around the house all day. Another neighbor, also Irish, was an assistant fire chief and we played with his daughter, who I think now (looking back) may have been slightly retarded. She went to the Catholic school nearby, as did Jimmy. A third neighbor was a Jewish undertaker, whose two daughters were part of our block's "gang." We were in and out of each other's houses, even though the houses of the non-Jews had for me a slight air of the "different," if not the "forbidden." The Catholic kids had crucifixes and holy pictures on the wall, which seemed very exotic to me. I observed all of these things carefully and thought about them, though I can't say now what I was thinking when I did that. Looking back, I think now it was some kind of amateur "anthropology," some kind of wonder about ways of life that weren't the same as the way my family and I lived.

This was nothing unusual in urban childhood, at least in my family. Many years later, when I was grown, with a family, I lived in San Francisco, in North Beach, a very urban part of the city. By now, I was a professional observer, a sociologist who had learned to do, and did, the kind of observational research these explorations had been useful preparation for. I learned more about childhood exploration from eavesdropping on some of the life my daughter Alison led at roughly the same age. Alison was ten years old when we moved there

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and went to school in the neighborhood for three years, until we moved to Chicago. I'll just mention a few of the things I knew, or that she later told me, about her urban adventures.

She and her friends, when they were eight or nine, used to hide in the shrubbery below the parking lot on top of nearby Telegraph Hill, which attracted large numbers of tourists. They would, from their hiding place, start calling "Mommy, mommy, I'm lost!" hoping to panic the parents and sometimes succeeding. And they used to walk downtown, and especially through nearby Chinatown, observing the Chinese residents, the Chinese merchants, the very different forms of retail stores, and the tourists. When they were downtown, they would go into the big department stores, to the cosmetic counters, and let the salesgirls do a "makeover" on them.

On a Sunday morning, when everyone was still home and no one was on the streets, these girls would walk all over the neighborhood, up all the little alleys and small streets. They walked up and down the Embarcadero, the area of wharves where the big freighters and passenger ships came in, just looking, walking out on the piers that were open. Not all of them were.

The University of Chicago

My opportunities for observation increased a lot when I was a little older—15 and up—and became a professional musician, which happened before I had ever heard of sociology and well before I entered graduate school and began becoming a sociologist. I hadn't even heard of sociology. That came about in a different way.

I had, through no doing of my own, received a scholarship to the University of Chicago College. (The folk wisdom I was

exposed to at that time categorized the available colleges a Chicago kid might attend this way: if your family was rich, you might well go to Northwestern, far off in the nearby northern suburb of Evanston. If you were smart, that is, if you read a lot and knew a lot of "stuff," you could go to the University of Chicago, on the South Side. If you were neither, you would probably go to the University of Illinois "down-state" in Champaign-Urbana.

I don't know where, left to myself and the whims and ambitions of my father, I might have gone. But Fate intervened. My "home room teacher," Mr. Goldstein, one day called me aside and told me there was going to be a test to see who might win a scholarship to the University of Chicago undergraduate College, and he thought I should take it. I heard that as an order and, though I had no interest in going to the University of Chicago, and had never even thought of such thing, I thought I had to do it. Perhaps more to the point, my father had never considered that possibility either.

But Mr. Goldstein said that I should take the test, and I was an obedient enough student that I went and took it. And, to my surprise, and to the even greater surprise of my parents, I was awarded a four-year scholarship to the College, the somewhat experimental undergraduate school that was part of the University of Chicago. The scholarship, specified to be awarded to Jewish boys, and financed by a wealthy Jewish family living in Kenwood, just to the north of the university, consisted of full tuition for four years. Tuition was \$300 a year, then a substantial amount.

This award coincided with something I think my father had actually been considering doing anyway, which was moving from our West Side neighborhood of Austin, on the far western edge of the city, solidly middle-class and essentially Irish

and Jewish ethnically, to a slightly “better” neighborhood, South Shore, along the lakefront on the South Side, with the same ethnic mixture. South Shore was quite close to the University of Chicago, an easy streetcar ride: Austin would have been a real trek for me every day. My father took the occasion of me getting the scholarship to make this social leap, and the next fall I entered the University.

The University of Chicago didn’t resemble either my high school or the more conventional undergraduate schools I might otherwise have entered. The invention of Robert Maynard Hutchins (its president at this time), it had two parts. The Graduate School was a highly regarded collection of departments in all the fields of scholarship, staffed by some of the leading scientists and scholars in the world. The Department of Sociology, which I had never heard of when I entered the College, was justly famous, credited by many people (I’m one of them) with having invented this relatively new field.

But one of the innovative aspects of Hutchins’ version of the University was the complete separation of the College and the Graduate School. The scientists and scholars with the big reputations taught in the Graduate School. The College recruited more experimentally minded people, often affiliated with several disciplines, most of them younger. And this faculty didn’t teach any of the standard fields. Instead, they offered, and you took (because there wasn’t much choice), three year-long courses in Natural Science (that is, physical and biological sciences), three year-long courses in social science (a smorgasbord of political science, anthropology, sociology, economics, some psychology), three year-long courses in humanities (literature, philosophy, history, music, etc.), and some other potpourris like that.

A second innovation of the College was that you weren’t re-

quired to attend class. No one took attendance. Imagine the effect of that on someone who had experienced his two years of high school as like being in prison. Each course consisted of a list of readings and two lectures a week, delivered by various faculty members to all the students taking the course who wanted to show up, and two discussion sections a week, a dozen or so students and a faculty member, who talked about the assigned readings.

The third invention, which made all this eccentric innovation work, was that your grade for the full year course was based on one six-hour comprehensive examination at the end of the year. The "comp" was created by the joint efforts of the full faculty of the course being tested for and was graded by an Office of Examinations, which none of the faculty had any influence over. That meant that all of the ordinary tricks of trying to figure out ahead of time what was going to be on the exam were irrelevant. It also meant that you could graduate from the College without ever attending any classes. Most students attended some, but probably not all, of the classes, read the required books for the other courses, and took their chances. I was one of many who took advantage of all this. I religiously went to the social science and humanities classes and to a smattering of the others, relying on reading the required books to pass them. So I was a well-read scientific illiterate and a pretty well read and serious social science and humanities student. Since you only had to pass thirteen of these six-hour examinations to graduate it could be done in three years, which I did.

And that meant that at the age of eighteen I had a bachelor's degree which would carry the full weight of whatever that might be good for claiming anywhere. It was, as we assured each other, "accepted everywhere" and it was. That degree would get you into any graduate school in the country. And

now I had reached a point where I couldn't just "go with the flow," I had to take the initiative. As I'll explain shortly, I had for a while been pursuing another career entirely, playing the piano in bars, strip joints and for dances, weddings, etc.—the full range of what an ordinary jobbing musician did. School in the daytime, the music business at night.

My father—I was still living at home—didn't approve of the music business part of this package but couldn't figure out how to stop me. I knew, however, that the minute I stopped going to school I wouldn't be able to live at home and I hadn't figured out the economics of that yet. So, I decided to go to graduate school. In what field? That was a hard choice. I thought for a long time that I would try English literature. I liked to read novels, what the hell! But during my last year in the College, I read and was astounded by a work of social science, *Black Metropolis*, written by St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, two anthropologists or sociologists (I wasn't sure which, and I'm not sure they were sure either, but I think they identified the book as anthropology), a massive study of the Black community of Chicago's South Side. And I decided that was what I wanted to do when I grew up.

I had read a lot of anthropology, some of it assigned in the College Social Science II course (Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict and others), and it was clear that if you did that you had to go to far-off places which were not as comfortable as living in Chicago: sleeping in tents, eating god knows what, and I didn't want to do that. And then, just in time, I learned from Cayton and Drake that you could do a version of anthropology called sociology AND continue to live a "normal" Chicago life. You just had to call it sociology. OK, I could do that. So, I applied to the Sociology graduate program and was accepted, I guess on the basis of having graduated the College. And they even gave me a scholarship.

The Music Business

All this time I had been pursuing a second career, one I intended to continue to pursue: playing the piano. And I did pursue it, in an unexpected way, at the university as well, though no one there intended anything like that to happen. I'll back up a little now to explain this parallel track.

I was fourteen or fifteen, still at Austin high school, when I began to play with other kids my age in public or semi-public places and get paid for it, although not much. Getting paid for it was (and in many ways still is) my informal definition of what it meant to be a "professional" musician. My first jobs, when I could barely play, were with a small group of equally incompetent age-mates, playing for dances at schools whose students could not afford to hire bands who played better than we did.

When I got to the University of Chicago, however, I made a crucial connection. I met, at one of the student gathering places (Ida Noyes Hall), a slightly older guy named George Davis, who played alto saxophone. He was old enough to be drafted for the U.S. Army but had some physical problems that got him exempted from military service. We talked about music, and jazz, and all that. Every time I said or did something stupid, he caught me up on it and bawled me out.

I remember a classic reprimand. I was trying to sing the melody of a blues record I had heard and sang it incorrectly, not leaving room for the bars that no melody notes occurred in. He stopped me in the middle of whatever I was trying to show him and asked me where the missing bars were. I said I left them out because there weren't any melody notes in them. He explained to me, harshly, that that was *not* the way a real musician would do it, that every bar and every beat in

every bar counted and you couldn't leave one out just because there wasn't a sounded note in it, the rhythm was still going on, etc. I was very ashamed and tried never to do such a thing again and I guess I pretty well succeeded.

George was playing in a big band, fourteen or fifteen pieces, made up of students at one of the South Side high schools and when they lost their piano player, he got them to try me. I passed whatever test they applied and there I was: a working musician. We played all over the South Side of Chicago, mostly for dances in the public high schools. All the neighborhoods we played in were ethnically distinct, so playing at Taft High School meant watching a bunch of kids quite different in ethnicity and class from the ones I had grown up with.

Though I still lived with my parents, I was no longer there very much, my time being spent either in school or in the places where I played. All the places I played in were sites of observation, though I didn't think of them that way, and didn't think that I was doing anything as important or grand as "observing." I was just "living" and learning how to interpret the new environments I was moving in. Good training for sociological observing, but I didn't know that.

The band leader decided we were ready to join the musicians' union, so we went downtown and "took the test," played for a number of union officials, as a band. We semi-realized that they didn't care if we played well or not. What they wanted to ensure was that *if* we were going to be paid for playing, we were members of the union. And now I was a union musician.

That made me eligible for work anywhere, and I soon learned to go to the Union Hall on Randolph Street, downtown, on Saturday afternoons when hundreds of musicians would show up, either looking for work or looking for musicians for

that Saturday night or maybe even for a steady job. Many of these jobs were in bars and taverns and strip clubs. And so eventually I connected with a drummer who was responsible for the four musicians who provided the music for the strip tease dancers who performed at McGovern's Liberty Inn, one of a number of strip clubs on a small stretch of North Clark Street. I was fifteen or sixteen at the time, a student at the University of Chicago by day and at night playing forty-five minutes out of every hour while the girls stripped down to a G-string and "pasties" that covered their nipples.

We sat just behind the small stage the girls danced on and looked beyond them to where the customers sat. I watched night after night as men who had come to Chicago for, perhaps, a business convention, bought drinks for the dancers and spent thousands of dollars without even getting any sex for it. We occasionally saw someone well known sitting in the back of the club masturbating while the girls took their clothes off. And the club was near a lot of other places that let me see other styles of entertainment, most notably a club that featured hillbilly music across the street (where one of the saxophone players I worked with got a tooth knocked out one night by a drunk who disliked the way he looked).

For the next several years I went to school by day and played at many bars in many parts of the city at night. Most of these places were not clubs that had a "show" of dancers or anything else; the band was the entertainment. In all of them, I sat on a bandstand with two or three other players, from which we looked down on the bar and the tables beyond it, and watched people drink, get drunk, dance, and gamble. We watched people flirt with each other, we watched fights between two people turn into major brawls, occasionally involving the club owner and the bartender as well as the customers, we watched the owner of the club bribing police-

men. It was a rich education in some aspects of urban life.

And the bars were located all over the city, at every “major” intersection. Chicago’s map is very regular: every half-mile in either direction is a “main” street with public transportation, usually, in those days, a streetcar, and anywhere two “main” streets crossed a small shopping center existed, which usually included several bars. Playing in such places eventually took me to almost every part of the city to spend several hours a night watching local life. Which often included unusual sights: one club was located beneath the meeting room of a group of people who were deaf. They used to come into the bar to drink, converse in sign language, and often enough get drunk and fight. It was quite bizarre to see all that happen in total silence.

In another year or so, I was playing well enough to join an inter-racial big band, usually at least fourteen pieces and sometimes more, organized by Harold Fox, who owned a tailoring establishment on Roosevelt Road, where he made suits for people in show business, for the police, for criminals. And, importantly, for musicians, including uniforms for members of such well-known big bands as Fletcher Henderson, Woody Herman, and Stan Kenton.

Sometimes we played for teenagers. Sometimes we played in the major ballrooms of the Black South Side—The Savoy, the Sutherland Hotel, the Parkway—and once or twice we played for people I might otherwise never have known existed: the upper levels of Black “society,” people who had balls of great elegance, where the men wore tails and the women evening gowns. These people belonged to the upper classes described in *Black Metropolis* and had gone to the respected all-Negro colleges of the period. I was seeing the reality the book had described.

All this meant that I was often out on the main streets of the neighborhood at the center of *Black Metropolis*—South Parkway and 47th Street—late into the night. I soon got over the feeling of being a white guy out of place. I didn't feel out of place and so probably didn't appear so. No one seemed to pay much attention to me. Jobs with Fox's band took me there often enough that I felt at ease on the streets and in the venues we played. I saw the “policy slips”—lists of winning numbers in the daily illegal lotteries that littered the streets—as well as parades of well-dressed people out for an evening on the town. I even played for a black debutantes' ball, a feature of that community's life few of my fellow graduate students knew existed.

Fox's band was thoroughly mixed racially. Because Harold made uniforms for many of the most famous swing bands of the era (Count Basie, Stan Kenton, Woody Herman), he could get copies of their arrangements, so we were playing the best. One of Harold's many eccentricities was to rename all his piano players “Count,” after Count Basie. As a result, I became “Count Becker,” and followed “Count [Lou] Levy” on to the band when he left and was followed in turn, when I left, by “Count [Junior] Mance,” both of whom went on to become far more well-known pianists than I ever was.

The experiences of my daily and nightly life gave me opportunities to see and hear things that could be sociologically interesting. I had a lot to learn about what might be considered “interesting.” A lot of this “observation” from the bandstand took place before I started graduate school. I did not “observe” because I was a sociologist and had a reason to be there observing. I was there to pursue my musical ambitions. But I learned a lot of things that affected my interpretation of what I was learning in sociology, and what I learned affected the way I interpreted and judged other

things I saw in other places. For instance: Some of the sociology I read and heard used terms like “social disorganization” to describe scenes of social life that I had seen were, in reality, highly organized, and alerted me to the critical use I could make of the most ordinary activities—if I watched them closely and remembered what I saw and heard and (I eventually learned) wrote it all down.

That lesson stayed with me. It’s the way I was taught field-work and the way I taught it for all the years I spent teaching. Any place is a good place to observe social life. When people are with each other they are doing *something* together. The only questions a sociologist has to answer are: what are they doing together and how do they get it together and keep it together? The *together* is what sociology concerns itself with centrally.

I learned to do it myself by paying attention to what the people around me were doing *together*, with each other. I listened to what they said, watched what they did, remembered it all as best I could and then *wrote it all down*. Everything that preceded this in this piece of writing is designed to lead you to understand, and accept as a good thing, that the life you lead makes you sensitive to some things and insensitive, or at least less sensitive, to others. All the little experiences I described, rooted in the way I connected to the world around me, alerted me to aspects of that world I might otherwise have taken for granted and just not noticed, not given conscious attention to. As a result, they wouldn’t be available to me to use when I thought about my research, planned it from day to day, and finally wrote it up to present to others. And, doing that, I wouldn’t have had the sense of a problem there for me to investigate, look into, make the focus of some research. This way of thinking leads to a very different strategy for searching for and choosing research problems from the

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“review of the literature” most commonly recommended to academic researchers.

Everybody Winked

A transcript of a taped conversation recorded in 1998 between Dianne Hagaman (my wife) and me, about my experiences playing the piano professionally in Chicago in the late 1940s and early '50s. Dianne in italics.

A Musician's Joke:

Well, did you ever hear the one about the lady who comes up to the piano player and says, "Say, fella, do you know your fly's open and your joint's hanging out?" And he says, "No, hum a few bars."

...

It was during World War II and all the guys who were eighteen and over were in the army, practically, except the 4F's.

And here are all these strip joints on Clark Street and State Street in Chicago. And they had a lot of business because there were a lot of sailors in town, and there were merchant marine, you know, sailors from off the Great Lakes boats ... and soldiers from Fort Sheridan, and guys passing through town. They were making a killing, hustling all these guys.

But there was a shortage of players, mostly all the musicians were in the army, so everybody winked at the fact that there were these kids like me working in there. I could tell you a million stories about the bar, about JoAnn Dare and Candy René and Marquita and all these other terrific people. And Johnny and Vera McGovern who ran the place. Who were brother and sister. It was called the, uh ... what the hell was it called ... the Liberty Inn.



On the side of the building ... it was at Clark and Erie, it's not there anymore, but on the side of the building was painted a big sign that said, "McGovern's Liberty Inn: Chicago's Oldest Nightclub." I don't know what that was about. But they were a pair, Johnny and Vera.

It was actually one of the nicer places on the street. It wasn't run by hoodlums. I mean, all the rest of these joints were run by real Mafia thugs. And Johnny and Vera were, you know, just ... I don't know, they probably inherited the bar from their father. So, they weren't gangsters, they were independent.

Anyway, I worked in that place ... I was maybe fifteen ... believe me, it was the first naked girls I ever saw. And they weren't completely naked either. They wore G-strings.

And then it depended on the cops whether they took their bras off or not. Because the cops would come in every week and tell Johnny and Vera they can take their brassieres off ...

Everybody Winked

or they can't take their brassieres off. I don't know what it depended on, you know, like whatever the cops got told. I mean, they were paying off the police. That was just a fact of life. This week they're doing it, next week they're not.

There were about six or seven or eight girls who danced. I think six, and I don't know if I told you about this before or not, but there were four of us in the band. It was a continuous show, so there were only three of us playing at any one time. We each worked fifteen minutes off and forty-five minutes on.

The drummer was a guy named Bob Perry, whose real name was Perry Viggiano. He was a little short, fat Italian guy, 4F. I mean, they were all 4F except me. And then there was a guy named Eddie Beyer who ... there were two saxophone players and one doubled piano, so when I took off, he played piano. And the other doubled drums, so when Bob Perry took off, then the other guy played drums. So, there were only ever three of us on the stand at one time, but it also meant that you could never take more than your fifteen minutes because the other guy was waiting to get off.

So, Eddie Beyer and Joe Weber, I think his name was ... was the other alto player. Joe was kind of spacey and I remember he wandered across Clark Street one night during his 15 minutes off, into what would now be called a country and western bar but in those days it was called a hillbilly bar. And he walked in, and some guy looked up and said, "I don't like you," and hit him in the mouth and knocked two of his teeth out. So, he was out of commission for a while.

And Bob, the drummer ... he used to get off on teasing the girls. So, he would figure out what nationality they were and then, while they were on stage dancing ... we played behind them on a little, you know, on the back of the stage.

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While they were dancing and taking their clothes off, he would be muttering dirty remarks in whatever language he thought they would understand ... like Italian or Polish or ... there's one girl who claimed to be an American Indian and he immediately made her for Jewish, and he was right. The way he found out was he'd start saying dirty things in Yiddish and she'd just turn bright red all over, her whole body turned red.

What kind of neighborhood was it?

You know this neighborhood, it's the Near North Side. This was Clark and Erie, so it's not far from, let's say, where the Frontera Grill is now. I mean, these days it's all art galleries and antique stores and you know ... But in those days, Clark Street was just a long strip of strip joints ... bars. It was really seedy.

Did they have residence hotels and that sort of thing?

Yes. Exactly. It wasn't Skid Row, but it was cheesy. State Street was kind of the dividing line, and east of State Street toward Michigan Avenue was very classy. There's a famous sociology book called *The Gold Coast And The Slum* which describes that neighborhood. It wasn't all that different when I worked there.

And I got a hell of a training, you know, because I was playing ... the hours in those joints, you played nine at night to four in the morning during the week. And nine to five in the morning on Saturday. So that's a lot of playing, I mean, you really get to practice a lot.

And by this time, I ... somewhere ... maybe not then, but after a while I was studying with Lenny Tristano, a legendary jazz pianist, who seldom played in public, instead making his living teaching.

What Provoked Candy René?

So, there were six girls and there was always an MC. And I think the whole time I worked at McGovern's Liberty Inn the MC was a guy named Ronnie Mason, who really did tell the most terrible, dumbbell jokes that you ever heard.

If anybody was going to the bathroom he would stop everything and say, "Hurry, hurry, the radio show is gonna start shortly, 'Wee Wee The People'." Because there was a show called "We The People." He smoked a cigar, he always carried a cigar on stage, that was his prop, like George Burns always had a cigar.

His big number, that he would do once in a while, was a comedy striptease. He would take off his clothes and he'd have on little silk shorts and a brassiere. And he had a little thing that squirted in one of the pockets of the brassiere. So, he would squirt it.

And McGovern's, because it was independent, it was kind of wild. They didn't have the kind of discipline that they had in the other places. Well, I mean, the gangsters wouldn't put up with anything from the girls. But Johnny and Vera, you know, when people were in the right mood, they didn't care what happened. So, the girls used to drink, which they never allowed in the other places.

So, one night a couple of them got drunk. Ronnie was doing his striptease and they snuck up on the little stage behind him and pulled his shorts down. He had his jockey shorts on underneath, and they pulled those down too, which was really a scandal because they could have got shut down for that. So, Johnny and Vera got pretty mad. But it was a great moment in the history of Clark Street.

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Would you play during his act?

Yeah. We played for his dancing ... and, usually, when he told jokes, Bob Perry, the drummer, would do little DADUM's, rimshots, behind him.

And ... what else ... oh, there was also the night that Candy René reached into her G-string and threw a bloody tampon at somebody in the audience. This was considered very gross.

But Candy, Candy was like ... I can still remember these people, she was kind of tall and thin and blond and kind of hard, you know, sharp features. And she was a little nutty, not nutty, but kind of wild, so would do things like that. Many of the dancers were much more conventional, quiet people. JoAnn Dare was being kept by a Jewish dentist, we were all told. She was sort of a plump one.

What provoked Candy René?

Well, you can imagine, there were some weird people who came in there and this one guy used to sit by the edge of the stage ... it was, as they say these days, a thrust stage ... it was just a little dance floor. There were tables around three sides of it.

So, he sat right up there, and he grabbed hold of her when she came by and stuck his nose in her crotch. She was wearing a G-string and she let him do it for a little bit and then she got mad at him. See, the girls were always trying to get tips off the guys in the audience.

Like Marquita ... Marquita used to bum bills from people in the audience, a ten if she could get it or a twenty, which she didn't get that often. Then she'd tear a hole in it and make her nipple hard and stick the bill on her nipple and she'd cross

her arms above her breasts and kind of pull on the skin and make the bills go up and down. Then she'd keep the money, I mean, that was the idea.

I don't know what would get them mad. They're all right, they're nice girls. But the big deal there was to get the customers to buy the girls drinks, what they called B drinks. I don't know what the origin of that phrase was, but what it meant was a shot glass filled with colored water, like tea or something so it looked like whiskey, but it was just tea.

So, when there was "a live one" in the house the girls would just descend on him whenever they weren't on stage and sit around and want him to buy a drink. The next thing the guy knew the waitress would come with a tray full of shot glasses, like maybe twenty shot glasses full of this stuff, and the girls would swallow it down and he would be paying for it.

In hopes of what I don't know, because the guy never "got anything." Although, he got fleeced is what he got. And some of them, who had been there before, knew that they weren't buying sex. I don't know what they thought they were buying ... being big shots.

But when a live one was in the house, or a party of live ones, it was like the whole ... everybody who worked there was into it ... the bartender, the musicians. And so there would be news bulletins: "First tab on that table from the Hybrid Seed Corn Convention was eight hundred dollars." It would be like that.

And I remember the Hybrid Seed Corn Convention because those clowns came back every year. Well, the convention, I guess, was always in Chicago and they came back every year and ... I remember this one night, they ended up spending

three or four thousand dollars and then, when the joint closed, Johnny and Vera took them out for breakfast. This is like four o'clock in the morning. And I heard one of them saying, "God, Johnny, you people are really great, buying us breakfast, that's really terrific." And we're like sitting there howling with laughter. I mean, it was a very strange education for a fifteen-year-old.

I worked a number of other joints on Clark Street, you know, a night here and a night there. Like I remember I worked at ... there was a place called The Talk Of The Town, and another called, I think, The Primrose Path. I worked the French Casino, that was another place.

The thing I remember from one of these other places was I was filling in for somebody and there was an act called ... I think her name was Rosita, it was the name she used. I had never seen her, so I had no idea what she did. Before she started one of the guys in the band said to me, "Have you ever seen her act?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, wait till you see this."

Then he said, "Just play blues in B flat." So, we start playing. All the lights went out, the place is pitch black. And I heard this really horrible blood-curdling scream from backstage, and then another one. Then a blue light went on and here's this girl and she ... what she had was a life size puppet on one arm ... it turned out she had three of them, this one was a gorilla.

So, here's the girl and the gorilla on stage and the gorilla is, as you can imagine, grabbing her breasts and sticking his hand in her crotch, and generally carrying on, right? And she sort of wrestled him for three, four, five minutes. That was her act.

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Then she had an elephant who was... an elephant head with a trunk so he did it with his trunk, the elephant's trunk was pawing her. And the third one was a guy in a tuxedo. It was actually a pretty ingenious act. She would scream and writhe around in mock ecstasy or agony or something.

But to me it was like ... after a very short time what you got into was the life of the street. News would go around, you know, what was happening in this joint and that joint. And there was a world of musicians and ... actually we didn't have hardly anything to do with anybody else, nobody had anything to do with the dancers.

During the night they were all busy and we were busy. So, we knew them all, you know, "Hi Candy, hello JoAnn." That'd be about the size of it. Our lives didn't intersect, the musicians didn't have anything to do with the girls. It really was like two different worlds.

Anyway, so I did that off and on for a year, year and a half, something like that.

This Dumb Little Neighborhood Bar

Somewhere in there I met Bobby Laine and got to be part of the Bobby Laine Quartet. And this is something ... I spent a lot of time with the Bobby Laine Trio or Quartet. Bobby Laine was a guy named ... I think his real name was McLaren and his father, he told me, was an old-time boxer named Jimmy McLaren.

And Bobby had been in the Air Force, so this must be after the war. He'd lost an eye; he was shot, and he'd lost an eye and he had a glass eye. And sometimes he would wear a patch over it instead of the glass eye, but mostly he had the glass eye.

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And he was a horrible saxophone player, not horrible, I mean he was ... yeah, he was horrible.

But he was a good singer. He was really ... I think there's a picture of him someplace. He was a tall, nice-looking guy, and had a really nice kind of personality, you know, he was fun, but very crude.

But he had a thing for black blues singers, I mean he just loved them and, you know, he'd go down to the South Side and listen to all these guys and his special favorite was Dr. JoJo Adams who appeared at the Club DeLisa a lot, which was what was called a black and tan, meaning both black and white folks went there.

And I went with him one night. JoJo Adams always wore a suit of tails but in bright colors. He had a green tailcoat and pants, red tailcoat and pants, blue, yellow, he was a sight. But he was a good blues singer. So, Bobby sang blues like that, I mean he sounded like a black man when he sang. And he also sang other pop tunes. And he had even written a song, a dumb song, called "Jump, The Water's Fine," which we played quite often.

So, I got on the band. The band was me, Bobby, and a drummer named Pete Skourlas, who was a Greek guy from Chicago. He was not a bad drummer, he was okay. His big thing was he could do handsprings and back flips. He would do like John Belushi did years later in front of Second City. He would go out and do it on the sidewalk on 63rd Street. Which was really scary, you think, god, what if he landed on his head?

And the other guy on the band was a trumpet player named Warren Steen. And Warren was the one I told you about. He

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and Bobby used to drink *so* much, it was incredible. And Warren would practically fall off the bandstand.

When I joined this band we were playing a place called the 504 Club, at 504 West 63rd Street, which was sort of an Irish neighborhood. The place was run by an Italian gangster, Joe Contino—who was the uncle of Dick Contino, the famous accordion player, who was exposed as a draft dodger. It was very embarrassing for Joe.

But Joe was a real hoodlum, and he had an assistant hoodlum named Ralph. They booked horse bets in there during the day, and they had dice games and all sorts of shit that you weren't supposed to do.

And they had a revolving bandstand. In the middle of the bar there was this revolving bandstand. It was a little disconcerting, it would go around while we were playing. And there was one place where there was a little hitch, you know,

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KZUH. It would sort of jump a little when it got to that place. And Warren had a lot of trouble staying on the bandstand when he drank, which he did all the time. I mean, he really did.

So, Bobby used to tie him to the bandstand. He'd put a rope through his belt in back and he'd tie it onto the back of ... it was a little spinet piano and had those wooden things in back, so he would tie him onto that and untie him when the set was over, because Warren would just get completely smashed.

And he'd still be able to play?

Well, sort of. Sometimes not so good.

There were changes in the band. Pete left, and a guy named Georgie Rott, whose real name was George Rothman, Georgie came on the band. And he was a drunk, but he was a *drunk*, I mean, he wasn't like Warren. His problem was if he *didn't* have a drink, because if he *didn't* have a drink, his hands would be shaking.

And I saw him do something I'd heard about, but I'd never seen before or since. He would come into the bar; he couldn't lift the shot glass up to get it to his mouth. Did you ever see anybody do this? He tied a handkerchief around his neck and sort of held the shot glass against the handkerchief to get it up to his mouth so he could get the first drink down.

And what would happen when he got the first drink?

Well, then his nerves would settle down, he'd say.

And Georgie used to do a lot of benzedrine. He would break

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open benzedrine inhalers, you know, that you would take for a cold. And if you broke it open there was a strip of folded up, like accordion pleated, paper inside that was impregnated with benzedrine, I guess. He would put that in a coke.

He would sort of swirl it around. Then he would drink that. So, finally, he left. Warren departed, I don't know, I think that Joe made us cut back to three pieces. And Frank Duffy came on the band and Duffy and I got very tight.

He was a skinny little kid, a nervous little kid, but he was a wonderful guy, he was really fun. Very serious. He wanted to be an intellectual so he read a lot, you know, this was like a big deal among musicians.

Some musicians were really into reading a lot, you know, highly intellectual. Like Bill Russo was like that.

I remember you told me Billy used to give reading lists to ... who was it?

His wife. Shelby. Shelby Jean Davis, she was a real country singer, Shelby. That's another story too. Li'l Shelby Jean. She was on one of these sort of Western bible programs in the morning, you know? Which she would often go to completely smashed from a night out.

Anyway, Duffy came on the band and he and I really did spend a lot of time together and got to be very good friends. And he ended up ... he's a schoolteacher in Chicago. Teaches music in the public schools, or in one of the suburbs, maybe.

I wasn't always playing in these bars, because I know I was playing other jobs. Like there's a guy ... he's in one of the pictures we have of me playing on 22nd Street. Johnny Lee, a

big, kind of heavy-set guy. Very good trumpet player. A lot of fun. He's the one who got drunk and sat down on his trumpet one night and smashed it and stood up and started to cry. But we played a lot of Polish dances, Polish weddings, stuff like that.

So sometimes I was playing in the bars, sometimes I was playing these other jobs. I'm trying to think ... well, I'm not going to be able to keep the chronology straight. I don't remember when all these things happened, but ... I know the summer I started my master's thesis, which must have been ... 1946, I was playing on 63rd Street with Bobby. I'm pretty sure that's where that started.

But with Bobby Laine I played a whole bunch of places. We were always getting fired from the 504 Club, because Joe Contino had a really wonderful faith that somehow he could turn this dumb little neighborhood bar into a big money-maker.

And what he hated ... the place would be full, it was always full, people liked Bobby and it was a neighborhood bar. But you'd say, "Gee, Joe, look, isn't business good?" He says, "Yeah, what are they drinking? Beer!"

So, I said, "What should they be drinking?" He says, "Scotch." Well, you know, these were not Scotch drinking people. Once in a while they'd have a Seven and Seven, that was a big deal. Seven-Up and Seagram's Seven Crown.

And these guys were a trip because they had all these different kinds of whiskey behind the bar and it was all the same thing. They had a room in the back that was filled with cases of something called Old Philadelphia, which was some *dreck*, I can't even imagine what it was.

When they emptied a bottle up at the bar they would take the bottle in the back and put a funnel in it and fill it up with Old Philadelphia. It's a wonder they didn't go to jail, because you can go to jail for that. And it's federal. You're not supposed to refill liquor bottles, it's a federal crime.

So, Joe would fire us because he would decide that if he only got the right band in there, then he would get the scotch drinkers in, see. So, he fired us and he got a gypsy band. The gypsy band emptied the place out in about a month. And then he would come and try to hire us back, and finally we would end up going back. And then another six or eight weeks and he'd be complaining because they're drinking Seven and Seven and beer. And he would fire us. Another time he hired an all-girl band. And they emptied the place out.

But we worked there, the first time, for quite a while and there was a bartender who came to work there named Jimmy Fletcher. Jimmy was a real Irishman. And he didn't have too many teeth, but he was really personable, you know what I mean? He was a nice-looking guy and he had a great personality, very outgoing. He was the perfect bartender. And he was a singer, so he loved the way we accompanied him.

He would sing songs like "Angry": "Angry, please don't be angry, because I'm only teasin' you." Or "Jealous": "I'm jealous of the something something something ..." Anyway, those kinds of songs. Or "Heart Of My Heart." Real barroom songs.

And "Ace In The Hole." That's where I learned "Ace In The Hole." Jimmy Fletcher. Which he sang with *great* feeling. So every once in a while he'd grab the microphone and say, "Let's do 'Ace In The Hole,' boys." So, we'd do "Ace In The Hole," or whatever. And when we got fired, soon as we got

another job, Jimmy quit the 504 Club and came to work where we were working. He used to follow us around because he liked the way we played.

And so, we played there ... we played a joint, what the heck was the name of it? I don't remember. It was farther out on 63rd Street. A lot of these bars were run by guys who were real amateurs. I mean, running a bar is ... when a guy's working in a factory and he says, "I'm gonna save up my money and go into business for myself. I want to be my own boss." That's the kind of business they go into.

So, this guy, Bill something or other, real skinny guy, he worked behind the bar. It was his bar and there was a liquor store next door. But for guys like that ... a lot of times there's a whole fantasy involved ... like he wanted to be a big shot.

So, on Saturday night, which would be a big night, the end of the night, like five o'clock in the morning, he would go into the cash register, take all the cash out, put it in his pocket. And there were after hours joints you could go to. So, I went with him once, he wanted us all to go with him, and we went up to 63rd and Kedzie where there was an after-hours joint. And he's in there buying drinks for the house, and he spent up all the money that was in the register. Then, of course, he couldn't pay his bills, but he was being a big shot.

He finally got into real trouble because he couldn't pay his bills. He broke into his own liquor store and robbed it to get the insurance. He got caught, so he went to jail. And about that time, we went back to the 504 Club.

A lot of people used to come and sit in with us there. Johnny Lee used to come and sit in. And there was another guy, a good friend of Duffy's from high school, I think, John Ellison,

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who was a really excellent bass player, and a really good-looking young kid.

John was kind of dumb and Duffy used to lord it over him, you know, intellectually. So ... I might have told you this story, he ... one night Duffy says to John, "You know, John, they've discovered that all men really want to fuck their mothers." John said, "That's ridiculous, that's disgusting." Duffy says, "No, it's true. Science." So, Johnny said, "Listen, I'll show you how ridiculous it is. I've often thought that it's the last thing I would ever think of doing is fucking my mother."

This is the high level of conversation that went on.

I Believe You Joe

Another place we worked was called the Red Wagon at 22nd and Michigan, which was run by a guy named Frank Fish. I don't think that was his real name. It was right across the street from the New Michigan Hotel on Michigan, which had been the headquarters of Al Capone, and this bar had been Al Capone's hangout.

The bartender who worked there was an older guy named Bananas. I said, "Bananas, what's your real name, come on." He said, "Never mind what my real name is. I don't want people to know my real name. I can't afford to have people" ... you know, some big gangster thing. Which could have been true ... or not.

But he used to tell stories about Capone coming in there. And he said, "Big Al would come in, he'd say, 'Lock the doors, nobody's leaving, we're having a party,' give everybody in the joint a hundred-dollar bill, and then everybody would stay there as long as Al wanted to party."

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The bandstand had a giant mirror behind it—floor to ceiling mirror. It must have been about eight feet tall and, I don't know, probably fifteen or twenty feet from side to side. And there were two rosettes on it, sort of near the sides. Bananas told us, which I believed, but who knows if it's true, the reason they were there was one of them was covering a bullet hole. But that was the kind of atmosphere, and Duffy and I ...

Now Duffy and I used to smoke dope. In fact, quite a lot of dope. We'd get very stoned and Bobby Laine who was a fairly heavy drinker ... when Bobby would come to work he wouldn't sound very good because he'd be nervous and he'd have to have a couple of drinks. He wasn't as bad as Georgie Rott. After he got a couple of drinks in him he was just wonderful. He just swung and he was relaxed. And then he'd get a few more drinks and he wouldn't be able to play at all hardly. So, there was a period of about two hours when he was in top form. Before and after wasn't so good.

But I did improve his act because I got him to sing much hipper songs. I taught him things like "Do It Again," the good songs. And he liked to do them. He wasn't a good musician but he had good instincts.

What was he singing before?

Oh, just whatever was popular, you know. But I got him doing Nat Cole songs like "It's Only A Paper Moon," which he liked to do. We would sort of imitate the Nat Cole version.

But after a while he says, "Listen, you guys are so nutty when you're high." "But," he says, "you don't pass out, you don't fall off the bandstand, you're here on time, you get up and play every set, you sound okay. You talk crazy, but alright, from now on I'm not hiring any more drinkers, only dope

smokers, that's it." And he was serious, and he was right because the drinkers were big trouble.

Junkies were bigger trouble, because we also had junkies. Like for a while we had a bass player, Don Lundahl, who was a very excellent bass player, but he was a junkie. So, Don would, like, not show up. Where were you? I was waiting for The Man. Waiting to score. So that was heavy.

Then Duffy left. I don't know what happened, why Duffy left. But we got a drummer who was very good and became very well known, Hal Russell. And Hal was ... he had a terrible habit and he was forever showing up late with that excuse.

Junkie, you mean heroin?

It's a heroin addict.

He lived with Marilyn Bishop, who was the person who did the interviews with me that became this book, *The Fantastic Lodge*. She and Hal were a trip. And she finally died, she OD'd on something while she was in the hospital in Dunning. A mental hospital. She was a terrific person, I liked her a lot.

Hal's father had a private detective agency. Did I ever tell you about this?

I met him once. His father was ... seemed like a right wing ... they were Germans, his name wasn't Russell, it was Lutembacher. So, his father said to me ... by this time, I guess, I had a master's degree ... "You have a master's degree in sociology," he says, "I think I could use you. How would you like to work as a private detective?"

I said, "Well, alright, sounds interesting." You know, I

thought, oh it'll be good sociology. I said, "What would you have me doing?" So, he explained that he had certain kinds of nut cases, people who imagine that they're being poisoned by poison gas that's being siphoned in through the faucets or something.

He says, "I have this box that's all fixed up so that I can push switches and it has dials on it and stuff. It's got something that makes a Geiger counter kind of sound, you know, click click click click."

He said people come in and want him to find these poison gases and rays. So, he carries this box around and makes it click, then he says he's found the source and he goes out and comes back and says he's taken care of it.

"I just had a guy in the other day who told me his wife feels that there is poison gas coming in and x-rays and things and to look into it. So, I told him, 'Look, that's ridiculous, you know it's ridiculous.' The guy says, 'I know it's ridiculous, but maybe you can convince her that you found it, and if you do, it's worth \$200 to you.' "

He figured this is the kind of thing I would be good at with my background in sociology. So, I went down to his office one day to fill out a form. He says, "Okay, now you have to apply for a license to carry a gun." I said, "Wait a minute. I'm not signing up for any gun carrying." "Oh," he says, "you have to carry a gun." So that was the end of my detective career right there.

So, what else ... there was Hal. Oh, and then we got Dominic Jaconetti as a drummer, he was another one. He was very gullible. Joe Contino had this thing, I think they call it eidetic memory. He could look at something and it would just be

imprinted on his brain, you know, he would just see the whole thing. He used to do a trick at the bar. He would ask someone to pull out a dollar bill and he would hold the dollar bill for a second and give it back to the person. And then he would be able to read off the serial number. He used to bet people he could do that and he'd win a lot of dollars that way.

So, he did it to Dominic one night, and Dominic said, "Ah, there's a trick." Because you see, I think he had asked me for a dollar. So, I gave him one. He said, "You and Howie had that cooked up." So, Joe said, "No, no, no." He said, "Take a dollar out of your own pocket." So, Dominic did, and he wouldn't believe that it wasn't a trick. Finally, Joe got angry at him, and to get Joe angry was not ... because, I mean, it's like Dominic was calling him a liar.

And Joe was the kind of guy when ... he was keeping company with one of the dice girls. There were four dice girls in this place. Well, there was a game called 26. I think you threw 13 dice ten times and you chose one of the six numbers and if that number came up 26 times, then you won, and the odds were against it happening. People would play for a quarter, if you won you got a dollar or something. It was just a shuck to keep people drinking and spending money.

Joe was going with one of these girls, and some guy started coming on to her, which, of course, was the whole point. He got sort of fresh with her and she called for Joe, and Joe took him in the bathroom and beat him up with a blackjack. Then called the cops and had the guy arrested for disturbing the peace. This kid was bleeding. The cops came and arrested him.

So, Joe was not a person that you said I don't believe you, Joe. I believe you Joe! He was a *momser*, he really was a terrible person. So that was tricky right there. Bobby had to talk to

Dominic, "Dominic, cool it."

Oh, I didn't mention the place on Ashland Avenue, that was another one. Bobby developed a new wrinkle in his act in this place. The bar was ... in relation to the bandstand, you could step off the bandstand onto the bar. You know, they were near enough.

So, when Bobby was in a mood, that is, after he was lit up enough, he would get on the bar and start playing the saxophone, walking up and down the length of the bar honking. You know, HONK HONK HONK, like he was playing "Flying Home," the Arnett Cobb version, where there's a lot of honking. Kicking over glasses.

And we would egg him on, of course, Duffy and me. We thought Bobby was *very* funny. He thought we were goofy, but we thought *he* was goofy. Then a couple of times he jumped off of the bar and walked out of the club, playing the saxophone, on to Ashland Avenue. You could see him through the window marching around playing. We'd keep playing. That was a lot of fun.

Where else did we play? ... also, I have a wonderful memory of one night, we didn't have a job, and Duffy and Bobby and I went scouting around looking for work. That meant going into a lot of bars. So, we went to a lot of bars. We didn't find anything, and we were drinking in these bars, so we were a little drunk.

And we ended up in a bar someplace, where there's some lady in a blue, lacy dress, that sparkled or something, playing the Hammond organ under a blue light. And it was like cold and there was snow and ice outside and the bar was nice and warm. And it was, I don't know ... she was playing all these,

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you know, probably Christmas tunes or something.

I have a memory that she was playing "Moonlight in Vermont." It was so romantic, it was just like one of those moments of ... probably you would call it an epiphany. Somebody would call it that. It was just like this great moment. I mean there was nothing happening. It was just a great moment.

You were in this bar listening to this lady.

Yeah, bemoaning our inability to get a job. And of course she was playing terrible, it's not like she was playing good. That was very commercial organ playing. I'm not talking about Count Basie playing the organ.

Do You Know What A Rhumba Shirt Looks Like?

But, of course, all the time, I was getting much more sophisticated about music. Hanging around Lenny. I was practicing hours and hours every day, it's a wonder I got through school. That's another whole story. And now we should eat dinner.

Now we should eat dinner, yeah. Howie, first tell me, who was the guy who made the suits for the big bands?

Oh, Harold Fox. I forgot all about Harold Fox. How did I get into *that* band? I don't remember.

You could tell me some other time.

No, I'll tell you now. Harold Fox. Harold Fox was this Jewish tailor. His father had had a tailor store on Roosevelt Road. Around 12th St., Roosevelt Road, and Halsted, which is the heart of the old ghetto. The old Jewish ghetto. It was now

completely black, essentially, in the 40's.

But he had this tailor store, and he had inherited it from his father. I think he had a brother who worked there too, but Harold was the dynamic partner. He was a terrible Dixieland trumpet player, but he loved music. He made uniforms for all the big bands, Basie and Woody Herman and Stan Kenton and I don't know who else. Everybody went in there for uniforms. And he had a band, it was like his hobby.

He had an eighteen-piece band, which is a big god-damned band. Five saxophones ... I think he had four trumpets, that's nine, and three trombones is twelve. Sometimes he had five trumpets and four trombones, plus four rhythm, you know, piano, drums, bass and guitar. And a singer, Skylark Ketchum, who in his other life was a letter carrier for the U.S. Post Office.

And it was a mixed band, racially mixed, which was very ... it was unique, I don't think there was another one in Chicago because there were two unions. There was a black union and a white union. The only integrated local then was in New York. There was no place you could work with a mixed band. The white places wouldn't have it.

Wouldn't have black musicians?

Wouldn't have a *mixed* group. And the black places ... that was a union thing ... the black union leaders wouldn't let you play in the black clubs. Or something. I don't remember how it worked. But essentially we ended up playing nothing but black dances and things. We didn't play in a club, we played for parties and dances and stuff. The only thing we played for that wasn't black, all black, was the Meat Cutters Union. We played for their annual dance because that was a racially

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mixed union.

But there were a lot of good players in that band. Lee Konitz played in that band. Milt Bernhart became a very well-known trombone player. Gail Brockman who was a good trumpet player and uh ... what was his name Wells something. Oh, John Avant, he's a trombone player. These guys all became very well-known.

And there were quite a few different piano players who played with Harold's band. The most well-known ones were Lou Levy, who preceded me, and Junior Mance, who followed me. We were all known as Count. That was Harold's little foible. Count Levy, Count Becker, Count Mance. Harold was a little nuts, but he was very good hearted.

And he made uniforms for us. When I first joined the band he had made cardigans which were like these collarless jackets. They were like double breasted jackets, but they didn't have a collar and lapels.

Sort of like the Beatles had in the 60's?

Yeah.

I'll be damned.

He'd really done it up. He had different shades of blue for the different, you know ... the saxophones would wear navy blue, the trumpets were royal blue. They were all different shades. We were a sight.

But these jackets tended to disappear, the boys would take them and not bring them back. They would get lost ... you know, they were liberated. So finally, he decided, fuck this,

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he's going to make uniforms that nobody would steal. So, he had a bolt of chartreuse corduroy that was really nauseating and he made these sort of ... do you know what a rhumba shirt looks like?

Well, he didn't make the frills but it had balloon sleeves and it sort of buttoned diagonally across your chest and then straight across from shoulder to

shoulder with red pearl buttons and there were five patch pockets on it. I mean, you wouldn't want to wear it anywhere. So, we all wore those for quite a while.

He even made little caps. Dizzy Gillespie used to wear these little caps. So, they were called Dizzy caps, and he made little Dizzy caps out of this chartreuse corduroy, but nobody would wear them. We drew the line. There was a rebellion.

But Harold ... one of the things that he did was he would make uniforms for all these people and he would get their arrangements. They'd give him the charts and let him copy them. So, we had a book that was unbelievable, you know... all of Woody Herman's good things, Basie things, and especially Stan Kenton. We had a lot of Stan Kenton things including a pretentious piece of shit called the "Concerto To End All Concertos."

See, Kenton was a piano player. There was a big piano part which I was required to learn note for note which I never

actually did. I came close. And the places we played, if you didn't play these things exactly the way they were on the record these kids would start hollering, "That ain't right god damn it, you ain't playing that right, motherfucker, yeah." There were three things I had to learn, that was one, and Eddie Heywood's recording of "Begin The Beguine," and Avery Parrish's solo on "After Hours," which is the only one I ever really got down. I could probably still play that if I had to.

And we played for all these black dances. And we played in places like the Pershing Ballroom in the Hotel Pershing at 64th and Cottage Grove Avenue. And the old Savoy Ballroom which was on South Parkway near 47th right next to the Regal Theater, which was *the* black vaudeville house. And the Savoy was of course named after the Savoy in New York where Chick Webb and Ella Fitzgerald and them became famous.

And the best place was the Parkway Ballroom, which was a very modern ballroom, it had an electrically operated curtain so we'd start playing behind the curtain, the curtain would open. Very classy. And there was a control booth, you know, I don't know what they did with it, and there were lights. I mean it was ... class. They'd probably hold 400 people. The Savoy was gigantic. Then there's the Pershing. There's another one, the Sutherland Hotel.

We played for these black parties, we played a lot for these black fraternities and sororities. And I'm not talking about high school and college, these were grownups, they weren't connected to schools or anything. They were like big fancy social clubs. These were classy dances. The guys would be wearing tails, the women would be wearing new dresses. There was a whole side of black social life there, you'd never know it existed if you weren't in that community. I don't know where they got the money for all this stuff.

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When I worked with Harold I was all over the South Side, all times of the night. You didn't feel like you were in any danger or anything. I didn't have a car. I was taking the streetcar to and from work in a way that nobody would think of now. You wouldn't be caught dead doing that. So that was ... yes, Harold Fox. He always called it Harold Fox, The Band That Rocks. But actually, the name of the band was Jimmy Dale.

Was there a real Jimmy Dale?

I don't know, I don't think so. This was just Harold's band. He had it for years.

And he loved ... especially when we played "Concerto To End All Concertos," there's a place where the brass and the saxophones are answering each other with these chords. Big chords: BUOMM BUOMM BUOMM BUOMM, slower and slower and louder and higher. And Harold would stand in front of the band and jump up and down with each one and jump higher and higher. Here's this middle-aged Jewish tailor jumping up and down. It was a sight.

Let's stop and have dinner.

Okay.

Black Metropolis

When I got my bachelor's degree from the University of Chicago College in 1946, at the age of 18, I was still living with my parents, though by then I had begun to make an adult living (\$80 for a forty-hour week) playing piano in bars around Chicago. But I knew that if I didn't continue school my father would have a fit and I might have to move out. I wasn't quite ready to do that and knew that the only solution was to stay in school by starting graduate work.

But in what field? I first thought of English literature, because I liked reading novels. Not a very good reason. But then I happened to hear a presentation by Horace Cayton and St. Clair Drake at the Parkway Community House, a black institution not far from the university, who talked about their new book *Black Metropolis*, which exploited a massive research project paid for by the WPA and other New Deal make-work programs. I got the book, read it, and fell in love with its picture of what you could call "urban anthropology," all the thrills of studying the exotic without having to go farther than the Chicago streetcars and buses could take you. You slept in your own bed and ate food you were used to, without the privations real "field" anthropologists had to endure. I learned too that some people called this kind of anthropology "sociology," and the university had a good department in that field.

Looking into the things like the ones described in the book, especially the evenhandedly neutral descriptions of both "respectable" and "shady" parts of the community, seemed like a fun way to continue school and keep my father off my back. And Cayton, but more so Drake, seemed like the kind of people I wouldn't mind being one of.

So, I applied to and was accepted by the sociology department. In that post–World War II era, standards were less rigorous.

Some details of the Drake and Cayton analysis struck me as particularly cool. Not only did they describe the class system of Bronzeville in meticulous detail, but they portrayed in the same way the vertical split in the community between the “respectable people” and the “shadies.” This appeared at every class level: between the upper-class entrepreneurs who owned the cosmetics companies that catered to African Americans and the *Chicago Defender*, the nationally known Black community newspaper, and the equally well-to-do men who ran the policy game; between the middle-class professionals and shopkeepers and the equally middle-class owners of bars and liquor stores; down to the very poor churchgoers but also the equally poor people who drank and whored and gambled. A social science that recognized such divisions—which working in bars and strip joints as a pianist had convinced me could be found everywhere—looked like something I wanted to do.

The next five years convinced me I’d made a lucky guess and was on to a good thing. So, eventually, *Black Metropolis* let me make music my “other,” rather than my primary, occupation.

Chicago 1950 — Another Look: The 2014 Erving Goffman Memorial Lecture (Edinburgh University)

[A transcription of the lecture I gave on November 27, 2014, as part of the annual day devoted to Erving Goffman at the University of Edinburgh, commemorating Goffman's connection there when he was doing the research in the Shetland Islands that produced The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. In this lecture I reminisced about the time when Goffman and I were students together in the University of Chicago Sociology Department.]

Here's a story about Erving Goffman. I'm probably one of the increasingly few people who still remembers him personally. This story comes toward the end of his life, when he was working in Las Vegas, Nevada, where he had taken on the role—the job, really—of a blackjack dealer. And in fact, he did deal blackjack in order to do the observations of people gambling that he never was able to report fully. He told me this story:

He was living in a kind of complex common in Las Vegas, that looks like a motel but in fact is an apartment building: one story divided into a series of little apartments off a central courtyard. Most of the people who lived there worked in the casinos as dealers or waitresses, and there were also some musicians. He thought that I would appreciate this because I had spent some time being a musician. He told me that one day one of the musicians had a psychotic episode. He ran out into the central courtyard stark naked, shouting and screaming unintelligible things, and his friends were out there trying to calm him down and didn't know what to do. The manager of the apartment complex had already called the police to deal with the problem, so Erving took a look, assessed the situation, and went up to the man who was

having this so-called psychotic episode and said to him "Listen, the police are coming. When they come, they're going to ask you questions. They're going to ask you if this has happened before. I don't know whether this has happened before or not, but you say no. They are also going to ask you if you are in good health and you say no, you've been sick for the past several days. You think you may have a cold or a fever or something. So those were the instructions, and the police came. The guy had realized that this was good advice, so he explained to them that nothing like this had ever happened before, that he'd been feeling ill for several days, etc. and they advised him to see a doctor and get some rest and they left.

Since this guy was one of the musicians, the other musicians were gathered around. And they had never had anything to do with any of the other people in the complex, they were a sort of self-contained elite and they did not want to mess with the ordinary people. Goffman was one of the ordinary people, so they had never even said "Hello" to him. After the police left, and they got their buddy packed away, they turned to Erving and invited him in for a drink. And he thought I would appreciate that because now they realized he was OK and could be treated like one of them.

What I want to talk about today is the legendary University of Chicago Sociology Department during one of its two legendary periods. The first was in the 1920's, when Professor Robert E. Park, a former newspaperman, led a massive, not very well coordinated but very complicated, group research on the city of Chicago, which is surely the most studied city in the entire world. Park, whom I never had the good fortune to meet, was apparently very persuasive and, as a result, people in every social science department on the campus were doing research built around his ideas. Not just in sociology but also in history (a famous three volume history of Chicago

that he instigated), and in political science where researchers investigated ward politics, and in economics, where researchers were studying things like land values, etc. Everywhere you turned there was research, all stemming from a key text he had written called “The City as a Laboratory for the Study of Human Behavior.” To this day whole subfields of sociology can be traced to sentences in that essay.

That period produced a whole generation of remarkable sociologists, many of them still well-known names. For instance, Louis Wirth, a student of urban structure and urban life who wrote a dissertation on the ghetto as a form of social organization. And Everett C. Hughes, who was my teacher, and who trained a whole generation of us in community studies and especially in the sociology of work because he had picked up this line from Park’s essay: “In the city, every kind of work tends to the organizational form of the profession.” Park just left that laying there among thirty or forty similar statements. Hughes spent a lifetime developing the implications of that remark.

A third person was Herbert Blumer, who coined the expression “symbolic interaction,” which most sociologists are familiar with. Blumer had also studied with the famous philosopher George Herbert Mead. Another famous member of this generation, Samuel Stouffer, was one of the leading developers of quantitative methods in sociology. All that was going on at the same time and the people outside of Chicago—and there weren’t that many who hadn’t been trained there, the original department had trained an enormously large proportion of all the sociologists who were there in the United States at the time—had scattered around the country and developed departments in other places. These graduates varied quite a lot in their interests and skills, like the three professors I’ve just mentioned, but people in the

field associated the word “Chicago” with the department in a way that produced a reputation as a “school of thought,” embodied in the educational organization associated with it.

I want to introduce a tiny bit of theory here. A student of ours at Northwestern (I was a professor at Northwestern at the time) developed an idea some years ago that I found, and still find, tremendously useful in talking about the so-called Chicago School. Sam Gilmore studied contemporary musical composers, making a distinction I want to invoke here, between *schools of thought* and *schools of activity*. People talk about the Chicago School and I remember Louis Wirth, often mentioned as a member of the “original Chicago School,” saying that he could not understand what people meant when they mentioned the Chicago School. He said, “I can’t think of any single idea that every member of this department shares. We are very different people with very different ideas.”

How can we understand that? Gilmore’s idea was that a school of thought is created from outside the organization being talked about, and members of a school of thought often don’t even know they are members of that school of thought. They might not know each other and, in many cases in the field he studied—contemporary musical composition—they **didn’t** know each other, they were scattered all around the world and had very little in common. They often had conflicting ideas and approaches. A school of activity, on the other hand, is a group of people who actually do something together. And Gilmore was able (from his studies of contemporary composers in New York City) to describe what a school of activity **did**. A lot of composers in New York who completely disagreed about all kinds of aesthetic and compositional issues could nevertheless get together and organize a concert where all their music could be played despite their

theoretical differences. Combining their efforts that way, they could sell enough tickets to pay the rental fee for a concert venue, because each of them would have a certain number of fans, adherents, and family members to sell enough tickets for that and have a real concert, even though they disagreed with each other completely. That's a school of activity, people who know enough and share enough interests to engage in certain kinds of collective activity.

I had always thought that the Chicago department, the original "Chicago school," the one about whose history Jean-Michel Chapoulie wrote a wonderful book, was a school of thought. People both inside, but mainly outside, referred to it as though they were all in it together. Well, they were all in it together, but what they were in was an enterprise. They engaged in specific activities, they trained students, they gave classes, they gave Ph.D. degrees, they published a journal together, the *American Journal of Sociology*. And they placed their students in teaching positions, so that wherever you went in the country, and it was and still is a large country with a lot of sociology departments, you were very likely to find somebody with a Ph.D. from Chicago who had been put there by Robert Park or Ernest Burgess or one of the other professors who knew somebody there who called and said "Do you have somebody for me? We need someone to teach introductory sociology." "Yes, we have a fine young man" (and, of course, they were mostly, though not entirely, men in those days), "I'll have him be in touch with you." So everywhere you went, there were Chicago people.

That was the original Chicago School, an invention of people outside of this alleged entity who saw a connection between what Herbert Blumer was teaching and Louis Wirth was teaching and what Everett Hughes was teaching and what Samuel Stouffer was teaching, and together they called that

the Chicago School. The members of the department in some cases really didn't even like each other, they were barely on speaking terms. I failed to mention one of the other famous names associated with that department: William F. Ogburn, the sociologist who convinced the U.S. government that they had to sponsor large scale, nation-wide social surveys and data gathering operations because that would enable them to identify what he called "recent social trends." And they published several volumes of recent social trends that Will Ogburn had invented.

And then came World War II, and that shook everything up. A cohort of graduate students already studying for the Ph.D. had been interrupted and ended up in the Army or the Navy and, in many cases, were gone for several years. When the war ended, the GI bill provided that, if you had been in the armed services during those years, you were entitled to a free college education and you got, as I remember, \$20 a week, which was not a princely sum, but you could live on that (and even support a family) for several years while you completed a bachelor's degree or even a Ph.D. And the GI Bill paid for tuition and books too.

So suddenly the Chicago sociology department, which consisted of 10 faculty members, occasionally one or two more, had 200 prospective graduate students because the faculty didn't know how to say "No," and suddenly there they were. And among them were a few youngsters like me who had wandered in who weren't old enough to be in the army. I often tell people that the secret of my successful career is that I chose the right year to be born in. Being born in 1928 made me too young to be in the army during WWII and thus too young to be drafted and then, later on, too old to be in the army when other wars came. I just escaped the whole thing and so was there at the right time when the baby boom came,

and the colleges were filled with students and no one to teach them. Youngsters like me were able to find work, positions we probably never would have found otherwise.

So, there we all were, with 200 students and 10 faculty members, and it was perfectly clear to everybody that it was impossible for them to teach us, we were just too many. And so, we more or less taught each other. It was a remarkable generation because there were a lot of people who had had far more experience of life than the average college student usually has—they'd been in strange places, they'd seen all kinds of situations, and were eager to learn, worldly and smart. They understood that this was an opportunity no one should miss.

We taught each other, sitting around drinking coffee in the neighborhood drugstore lunch place; we taught each other in the halls outside the Harper Library Reading Room, where many of us went to smoke. The Reading Room had the bound volumes of the few sociology journals that were publishing at that time, and we had to go there to read them, which we all did. You couldn't smoke in the library, but you could smoke in the hall. And those of us who smoked (which I still did in those days) would be out there teaching each other, having intense discussions about all kinds of things that had come up in classes. And then we began to talk about the research we were doing because one of the things the faculty did agree on was that we were there to learn how to do research and now was the time to start. We were encouraged early on to begin some kind of a research project that would end up as your master's thesis. Some of the older students who had been in the army and come back had already written an M.A. thesis and that was a good thing, because the rest of us didn't know how to do it and they did, and they helped us.

The department had defined a number of fields in which you had to take preliminary exams ("prelims") to proceed to a degree. There were five areas you could take exams in—you could choose three from among them. One, for instance, was social psychology, another was demography. Each one "belonged" to one of the faculty, so social psychology belonged to Herbert Blumer (who many think of as the father of symbolic interactionism). Social organization was headed by Everett Hughes, and Lloyd Warner, an anthropologist, who had made his reputation with a giant book on the Murngin (at that time described as an "aboriginal" Australian population) followed by a multi-volume series reporting on his study of "Yankee City," a small city in New England. Philip Hauser presided over population and demography; theory belonged to Louis Wirth. So, you chose three and took your exams and hoped for the best.

Then you had to write a thesis. That's when the fun started because none of us knew how to do that. Fortunately, there were older people around, finishing Ph.D.s. who had already written an M.A. thesis. The way we actually learned what to do was by reading what they had done and getting them to tell us how they did it.

I knew something about fieldwork, for instance, because a required course when you entered the program was "Introduction to Fieldwork," which sent you out into "the field," under Hughes' guidance, which wasn't very detailed or useful, he just sent you out. He assigned you to a census tract in the city of Chicago. A census tract is a very small unit maybe a quarter-mile square, about which you could find statistics in the reports of the U.S. Census, because they reported by units that small. So, we were sent in pairs to census tracts to do "exercises." The first one was to look at the statistics on our census tract: the sex ratio, for instance, the educational level,

the income level, etc. so that you walked into your census tract with some vague idea of what you might see.

You were supposed to stay there for twenty-four hours, that was one of the exercises, and see and describe who was on the street at all hours of the day and night. Then you had to make someone's kinship chart, get them to help you construct their genealogy, who were their relatives, their parents and uncles and cousins and all that. You had to have a group meeting of some kind. I should say that most of the census tracts were in the African American community which was very near the University. So, my partner and I—we worked in pairs—went to a black church, which was actually the first Christian church I'd ever been in in my life, and the second religious building of any kind I'd been in, the first being the Conservative Jewish temple where my parents had coerced me into taking the lead role in a *bar mitzvah* ceremony.

The church service my research partner and I “observed” was quite a show. We went to the Sunday school first and listened to that and when the teacher in the Sunday school asked us if we had a few words to address to the students I didn't know what to say but, thank God, my partner did, and he said something kind of simple-minded, complimenting the children on how well they had learned their lessons. (Likely not the inspirational lesson the teacher might have expected, because I imagined they were visited by divinity students more often than sociologists). And we were supposed to do three interviews about this or that, usually something Hughes was interested in at the moment. Then you “knew how to do fieldwork”.

At the end of that first year, I took a course in “advanced fieldwork.” I didn't know what that was, but I was already playing the piano professionally. Having started my working

life as a player in bars and strip joints and other such places, I thought "Well, maybe I can start a master's thesis about that," and then Professor Burgess, who was teaching that class, gave us a choice: we could either get twelve questionnaires on old age filled out for a study he was doing, or we could start a thesis. That made my mind up because I didn't want to spend the summer interviewing old people. I knew that if I wrote down everything I saw and heard when I played the piano in a trio working in a bar on 63rd St., those were fieldnotes and, by some mysterious process, which Hughes had never gotten around to explaining to us, they could be turned into a research report. At the end of the summer, I had maybe 20 or 30 typed pages of fieldnotes, and Burgess sent me to see Professor Hughes because that was Hughes' specialty, "occupations and professions," and one thing led to another. Hughes was very glad to see me, though he ordinarily was not that glad to see students who he felt intruded on his own work. But, because the sociology of professions at that time mostly consisted of the study of the occupations with high prestige, like medicine and law, the clergy, etc., things that had very excellent public reputations and were thought, in a way that Talcott Parsons later insisted on, to embody the "higher" (i.e., more respectable) values in American culture. An odd way to think about it, really, and Everett was always looking for students who would study lowly occupations where people weren't so classy and didn't have such high-falutin notions about what they did, about the majesty of their social mission and all that. People like the musicians I was one of, who played in bars, and all the people I worked with, the people who were in my fieldnotes. And when he read my fieldnotes he must have decided to encourage me, so he did, and I ended up writing an M.A. thesis on those musicians. I gave him all the field notes I wrote, and he annotated them with all sorts of remarks and queries.

But Hughes didn't give a course in how to turn fieldnotes into a thesis or research report. When I asked what I should write about, he said "Take one idea from your master's thesis and make that the theme of the paper." I filled out that minimal advice by talking to older students and by reading a dissertation that had been written under Hughes' direction, indeed about doctors, by a Canadian sociologist named Oswald Hall. Hall had laid out his whole procedure. He had some simple ideas that were very effective. He studied careers, which consisted of moving around from one position to another in the system of offices and hospitals that constituted the medical work world, with doctors getting an appointment in this hospital, getting to be an associate of this particular doctor and work in his office, and so on. And so, I thought "Well, I can adapt that." I read Hall's thesis carefully and when he came to visit Hughes I spent a lot of time harassing him with simple minded questions about how you get from your interviews to this kind of report, and he was kind enough to explain how to do that to me. And the rest of us were doing things like that, we were getting started on pieces of research, consulting each other, consulting older students, occasionally consulting a faculty member (but often only much later on in the process). It all seemed very haphazard, but in fact a lot of work got done and that generation of researchers are now looked back on as a sort of Golden Age.

So, beginning in the late '40s and through the '50s into the '60s, there was an efflorescence of research and ideas that was really quite remarkable. All kinds of ideas were broached and pursued, and pursued in common. Hughes had a seminar in occupations and professions that met weekly, where we told each other what we were doing. One of the great things he did was to forbid us to pester each other with impossible questions to answer. The favorite one in my time was about your sample: did you have a good sample? Well, nobody ever

has a good sample. It's just not possible. And it's not worth doing in ethnography anyway. And anybody who tells you they have a random sample, take a good look. They don't. Because it's tremendously hard to do something like that, and not worth the trouble if you're not going to arrive at a certain kind of conclusion. So early on in this seminar, Hughes one day just forbade any questions about samples, that's out. "I don't want to hear it, forget it".

The faculty had different ideas about how to do research, each of them gave us something, sometimes the messages were conflicting: Herbert Blumer liked to tell you that if you really wanted to understand some area of social life—if you wanted, as he used to say dramatically, "strip away the veils that cover the reality of social life," it would take you fifteen or twenty years. Well, I didn't want to spend 15 or 20 years writing a dissertation. So, a lot of us turned to people like Hughes who would help us get that job done. You've collected this, now what do you know? Tell me what you know, write it down, write a draft, show it to me. And after a while you would show him something and he would say "Why are you showing me this?" I was working for him, I was interviewing schoolteachers, doing these interviews and writing them up and giving them to him, and one day he said, "Why are you giving me these interviews?" and I said I thought I'd been hired to do that, and he said, "You know how to do this, leave me alone." Well, it was a great way to teach, because he was right, I **did** know how to do it by that time. We would meet, and trade ideas, not as Professor Hughes and a student but more like two researchers collaborating on a research project. Other students, working with other professors, developed other kinds of relations with their supervisor.

Erving Goffman was unquestionably the star of the show, widely known among the students of that generation as the

brightest. Goffman used to distinguish himself by arguing with Louis Wirth. Wirth was a champion debater. One of his specialties was giving lectures on the baneful influence of the Catholic Church on science, with Galileo as a famous case in point. And there were always several priests among the graduate students, who would generally put their heads down on the desk when he started that and just wait until it was through. Most people knew better than to argue with him because he was sarcastic and would use every kind of unfair debating trick to make sure that people understood he was smarter than these students who were trying to give him a hard time. One young French priest, Father Jean Jammes, knew that area of argumentation thoroughly and argued Wirth to a draw!

Erving Goffman didn't have Father Jammes' skill in debate, but he would try to do that too. One day Wirth was speaking about "operationalism," which was a fad in those days. In that system, concepts were defined by the operation you did to produce the data that embodied the idea. A man named Bridgman, who I think was a philosopher of science, had proposed this idea. Wirth thought Bridgman was a fool and said so. One day Erving showed up in class with Bridgman's book in his hand. He said "Professor Wirth, you said on Thursday that Bridgman says blah blah blah ... Let me read to you.," and Wirth looked at him and said, "Which edition is that, Mr. Goffman?" So, we learned not to mess with Louis Wirth.

Herbert Blumer had another style of teaching. I don't know if anyone who reads his classic papers notices this, but they almost all take the same form, as in his famous paper on public opinion: "There are three ways people now study public opinion: a), b) and c). a) is wrong for the following reasons ... b) is wrong for these other reasons ... c) is wrong too ... The correct way to study it is this way ..." which would be

deducible from the principles Blumer had derived from the impenetrable published transcripts of George Herbert Mead's lectures on social psychology. And he did turn the content of those lectures into a very usable and understandable frame of thought. It was kind of the general background to what we did. It wasn't of any particular help in doing your research, but it got you away from all those questions about the nature of society and that kind of thing and gave you specific things to look for. And when you worked with someone who knew a specific empirical area, like Hughes, and who could point you toward the specifics that would embody ideas like that, you were in business.

But the students had a lot of choices, there were 10 or 12 faculty members, depending on the year, and you could pick and choose and put together a committee which was the working unit, what turned out to be your Chicago, that committee, and that's how you got your thesis done.

My generation of students was large, around 200 people. If you look at the perhaps 200 dissertations students wrote during the late '40s and early '50s, you will see that the committees that guided their writing consisted of every possible combination of faculty members imaginable, people we students were sure (until we learned better) could never have cooperated to allow any dissertation to be acceptable.

Blumer was not often on people's committees—even though he was influential in many ways for everybody—because he was so discouraging, he was the one who would tell you it would take twenty years to finish a respectable study. People knew that they should learn from him but not get involved in that kind of thinking. Hughes, on the other hand, was very practical and gave you sound advice which, if you followed it, would lead you to a finished thesis and a degree.

One of the great members of our post-war generation of students was Donald Roy. I don't know how many people read Donald Roy's classic articles these days. He studied industrial workers, had worked in a machine shop in a big factory for a year or two and was interested in a very specific problem: the restriction of production, which is something Max Weber actually wrote about (Hughes told me this, but I never found it) as did many other people in a variety of haphazard ways. They didn't study it intensively the way Roy did. He worked as a machinist and in a shop where they paid you by the piece, so there were dozens of kinds of things you had to make on your machine and you had to do certain specific movements, dictated by the time-study management people, to produce a certain piece and you got paid a set price for each piece you produced. The workers quickly figured out much quicker ways to make some of these pieces, but they didn't make them as fast as they could because they knew—they thought they knew and Roy's experience was that they were right in thinking so—that if you made too many pieces, the time study people would show up and retime the job and you would get paid less for the same amount of work. So, they would agree among themselves to do just **this** much and no more. Enough to make a little more than what you get paid no matter what you did, but not enough to wake them up so that they would cut the price. And Hughes generalized that into the idea that people doing a specific kind of work determined collectively the direction and level of work effort that they would put out, which is a very pregnant notion. You could go a long way studying that, you can study doctors the same way, asking the same questions.

We students had our heroes, and Don Roy was one of them. Some of the people in that group of two hundred that I went to school with were producing what came to be regarded as classic Second Chicago school products. Goffman was one,

Fred Davis (who wrote about taxi drivers) was another one, Don Roy was one, I was one. Many of these dissertations were then published as short articles. In those days you could write an article that was just eight print pages long and have everything in it that you needed to have to communicate your findings and ideas. These days a journal article must have about eight print pages of preliminaries, theoretical citations and methodological discussions and whatnot before you get to the meat of it. The *American Journal of Sociology* was produced in that department, so of course the editor, who was Everett Hughes' wife Helen McGill Hughes and a Ph. D. trained by Robert E. Park too, surprised no one by liking the articles we submitted because the research that produced them was what she had herself learned to do. But she had journalistic experience too, so the way she edited our wordy prose shocked us, though we knew it only improved what we had sent her. And then we scattered around the country, so that people everywhere were surrounded by Chicago Ph.D.s.

Daniel Cefai, a French researcher, who has done a heroic job of reading and summarizing the 200 or so dissertations my generation turned out, has discovered—a remarkable, wonderful finding, I mean, I didn't know this, I may have "known" it, but I didn't *know* it—that the committees students put together to supervise their theses were far more various than any of us could have imagined. (Cefai's research is as yet, unfortunately, unpublished.) People would have Ernest Burgess, Will Ogburn and Hughes on the committee, which might surprise anyone who knew the reputations of these people. In fact, most students might have guessed that these were three people who couldn't get along with each other and probably barely spoke to each other. I remember one day, after I got a Ph.D. and had become a very junior and temporary member of the faculty (which meant that I attended faculty meetings) asking Hughes something about

that: "How come you and Ogburn seem so friendly?" He looked at me like I'd lost my mind (I've always thought that he must have often felt that way) and said "Are you joking? Will Ogburn and I are great friends. He taught me how to put together the tables in my book on French Canada." Live and learn.

We all were marked by the people who were there, all of them. So even though I never took a class with Ogburn I understood what he meant about measurement, I had learned that. And that was in my bones, so to speak. Just as what Blumer had to say was in the bones of people who did very quantitative research, they knew what he was talking about, and they knew that those criticisms had weight and that what he said and wrote had to be considered carefully.

If you pushed the clock ahead to around 1970, this generation had now made their mark and gotten established. They all found jobs because of the baby boom and the enormous increase in the size of sociology departments around the U.S. and a lot of them were very productive. And so Gary Fine wrote a book about "The Second Chicago School," which has become the school Goffman and I are described as belonging to and I feel just like Louis Wirth did in 1950 when he disclaimed belonging to the supposed earlier version of this social phenomenon when I say, "I don't know why people call us the Second Chicago School because we don't have that much in common." But the truth is that we do have a lot in common, but not just the people who are identified as the Second Chicago School. It's not just Goffman and Becker and Anselm Strauss and some names like that. It's a lot of other people who do work you might not even think of in this connection but that all of us knew, all of us made reference to, all of us used to organize our own thinking.

I invoked, earlier, Sam Gilmore's distinction between schools of thought and schools of activity. The first Chicago School wasn't a school of thought. There were marked connections between Robert E. Park's thought and that of other people, including Ogburn, but they weren't the same. They behaved like a real school when they cooperated to turn out Ph.Ds, to publish the *American Journal of Sociology*, and did all the other things that a sociology department in good working order would do. The second Chicago School, so-called, consists of people who had and still have a lot of ideas in common and disagree about as much as we agree. Some people in our cohort did highly quantitative research, but we didn't think badly of them. I didn't do that kind of research, Goffman didn't do that, and they didn't do what we did, but we understood we were all in the same business. And one of the things we were in the business of was promoting empirical research. As opposed to what? Well, there **were** other schools of activity. On the East coast, the Harvard school, led by Talcott Parsons, created highly abstract theoretical systems, which we didn't find useful. The students who worked with him didn't quite know what to make of what we did; we didn't seem to be concerned about questions that they thought were as important as what they did.

And by that time the enterprise of sociology had grown enormously. When I first became a sociologist and went to a meeting of the American Sociological Association I think it had perhaps 1,000 members, if that many. By the time the '70s came in there must have been 12,000 or 15,000. Now it's more than 20,000 (I don't have the latest figures). That's an order of magnitude difference, it makes a really tremendous difference. So, what's happened is there are no longer schools of thought that cover the entire panoply of topics that sociology alleges to be about. In the old days theory would take care of the family, urban sociology, race relations, social

disorganization, six or seven topics that just happened to be the topics of the courses usually taught to undergraduate students. That meant that those were slots that you could be hired to fill and, as a result, topics you could identify. By now there are I don't know how many specialties, the American Sociological Association is now divided into sections which, realistically, are the organizational units that matter, where people actually know each other and see each other and converse. I think there are thirty or forty of those. It's quite a different world than the one my generation grew up in.

Departments now, in a country like the U.S., are very different from what I know of French sociology, which is highly centralized. And also, quite different from British sociology. And by virtue, essentially of size and geographical distances, it's hard to get all the American sociologists together in one place. If you're in France, they're all in Paris, or on their way to or from or going through and everybody knows everybody else. And they really do, you can't mention a name and people say, "who's that?". They know who everybody is. I'm sure that that's not true in the U.S. So, the organizational world of sociology is a very different kind of organism in the U.S. than it is elsewhere, much more fragmented and what I think anthropologists call multi-cephalic, many headed, many different branches, and so on.

That's the story about the Chicago School, there is kind of such a thing, but don't take it too seriously, is the best way to put it. And understand that there are things that people more or less accept but often disagree about and that it's a much more varied and complicated organism than any simple formula will account for.

Robert Park's Ideas

This story was told to me by G. Franklin Edwards many years ago. Frank Edwards was a black sociologist who had been an undergraduate at Fisk University when Park was there after retiring from Chicago and he knew how much I admired Robert E. Park, who I thought had pretty much invented sociology, at least the kind that I admired and tried to practice.

Park always hired a student to be his “driver.” Everett Hughes had been his driver for a year in the 1920s, for instance. He continued to do this when he went to Fisk, and one year he hired Edwards, who was an undergraduate, for this position. Being Park’s driver included having dinner with the family every night.

One night Park was sitting around before dinner, having a whiskey, which was also his custom, and talking about “the old days.” He said, “You know ‘the marginal man?’” Edwards said he did. Park said, “I gave Stonequist that idea.” He took a sip of whiskey and, after a long silence, said, “You know the ‘race relations cycle?’ I gave Louis Wirth that idea.” Another long silence, another sip of whiskey. He went on to name several other people and to say that he had given them the major idea that had characterized their work. Finally, after a very long silence, he slammed his hand down on the arm of the chair and said, “Goddamnit, they fucked up every one of my ideas!”

Northwestern

Northwestern and the Music Business

My first contact with Northwestern came about when I became pianist for a while with the Chuck Kramer band, which had a semi-monopoly on dances and parties on the campus of Northwestern University, mostly for the resident fraternities and sororities, and occasionally for the "independents" who lived in university dormitories on campus, all of whom often had small parties they hired a five or six piece band for, and an occasional bigger event for which they hired the full orchestra (the "big band"), perhaps thirteen or fourteen pieces, whatever they could afford.

The Chuck Kramer band was, more or less, a fiction. As far as I knew, there once actually had been a student named Chuck Kramer, who had played saxophone and somehow accumulated a book of arrangements for a twelve-piece band and a set of music stands to put the parts on, which said "Chuck Kramer Orchestra" on the front. When he graduated, he sold the name, arrangements, stands and phone book with the names and phone numbers of people and organizations—mostly Northwestern fraternities and sororities—to another student who then became Chuck Kramer and ran the band until he graduated and sold it to someone else. That was still going on when I joined them sometime in the early 1940's.

The personnel changed all the time, whoever in the Chicago area was available for any particular night, and after demonstrating that I could handle whatever came up, I became the more-or-less permanent piano player for a while. The band was usually a mixture of Northwestern students (mostly WASPS) and the rest of us, who they referred to as the "foreigners," a mixture of ethnicities, mostly Italians (like my

friend, the trombone player, Bill Russo) and Jews (like me), from Chicago.

The first night I played with them, one of the tenor players, Lloyd Schad, suggested we go outside for a cigarette. As soon as we got out of the building, he pulled a 98-cent half pint of Dixie Belle gin out of his pocket and offered me a drink. I accepted and we became friends, discovering that we shared a lot of musical tastes. The next week, seeing that I had been such an apt student, he produced a joint and offered to share it with me, which I did.

His girlfriend Ruth Nelson, a good-looking blonde singer, had become a regular member of the Kramer ensemble, playing third trumpet and singing, backed by arrangements Bill Russo and I did for the band. And that led to a distinctively negative impression I acquired of Northwestern students. Ruth ordinarily played sitting with the other two trumpet players and occasionally got up to sing. One night the band had set up so that I was sitting on the dance floor, almost in the audience, and near enough to hear a young sorority member say to her friends, "Look at her, isn't that disgusting? Imagine sitting there with all those guys like that!" I couldn't tell whether she had offended them more by just sitting in the brass section or by her actually playing. Ordinarily, I paid no attention to audience members. But that overheard remark shaped my stereotype of the University.

And then I had nothing to do with Northwestern for many years, until I met Ray Mack.

Ray Mack and a Long Courtship

After I got my Ph.D. from Chicago in 1951, I left for a fellowship at the University of Illinois and followed that with a

seven-year research position in Kansas City, where both my musical and sociological careers flourished. But then a once in a lifetime opportunity (or so I thought) to live in the San Francisco Bay Area came up, a position in a research institute at Stanford, and I took it. I also insisted on an appointment in sociology. That turned out to be a mistake: sociology at Stanford then was in the hands of a small sect whose members planned to take control of American sociology and convert it to their formula of "formal theory, mathematically expressed, and experimentally tested." After a year of listening to these unrealistic fantasies I quit the department and worked full time at the research position.

And then Northwestern appeared in my life again. Some years earlier I had met and become friends with Ray Mack, another sociologist of my generation, who was also a musician (a drummer), at the time in his first academic job, at the University of Mississippi, where he had met Ernest Burgess, a founding member of the University of Chicago sociology department, who knew me from there and knew that I was a jazz pianist. He suggested that Ray might find it interesting to get to know me.

We soon met, when the American Sociological Society met in Chicago, and I went to the meetings. Ray, alerted, was looking for me and soon spotted me (my semi-zoot suit, whose oddity I really wasn't aware of, gave it away). He introduced himself and we spent an hour talking and, like so many people, I quickly succumbed to his intelligence and easy-going manner. We became friends.

I was at the time in Kansas City and Ray had moved to Northwestern where he soon teamed up with the then department chair, Kimball Young. Kimball—the names are classic Mormon names and Kimball descended from some

of the founding families—was what was called a “jack Mormon” (that is, a Mormon who drank alcohol) and he had started to build and improve the till-then very ordinary department. Ray was one of his first hires and Kimball had recognized that Ray could be instrumental in helping with that project.

As part of that assignment, Ray asked me to visit Northwestern whenever I was near Chicago. I was being invited to visit sociology departments here and there a lot at that time and so dropped in a lot. Ray soon became chair and one of his innovations was to have department meetings at lunch, and he invited me to join those lunch meetings whenever I was in Chicago. Those informal visits showed me what an interesting group he had put together and, something more remarkable than it might seem, how well they got along with one another.

He had hired several people trained at UCLA, among them John Kitsuse and Aaron Cicourel, both students of Harold Garfinkel, and Scott Greer, an urban sociologist. And Ray had been one of the first department chairs to hire an African American, Walter Wallace, a student of Peter Rossi, from the University of Chicago. And he had also hired a young woman, whose name I've forgotten, who stayed for only a year. But he was clearly aiming for a department that took into account “cultural sensitivities” that had hardly been formulated at the time.

After I moved to San Francisco, he kept tabs on how well I was getting along at Stanford and how ready I might be to leave. So, though I hadn't seen it coming, I wasn't completely surprised when one day in 1963 Ray Mack called me and offered me a full professorship at a very good salary (for those days), \$20,000 a year. I knew this was “The Job,” the

one offer that would lure me from the Bay Area. So, I said, "You son of a bitch!" And, as I knew he would, he started laughing, and then said, "Well, there's no hurry about this. It's not a slot that's just opened up, it's not for anyone else, so you can take all the time you want. When you make your mind up, call me." And that was that.

For me it was a simple choice but difficult to make. If I ever wanted to teach—which was not a given, I'd done quite well without teaching so far and there was no urgent reason to abandon that policy—I'd never have a better chance. A good department, no resident nuts or chronic built-in feuds, and Chicago, the only city that could tempt me to leave San Francisco.

Still, the attraction of continuing to live in San Francisco was strong enough that I stewed for six weeks; my family stewed too. He never called. Finally, I called him and said, "You win." He laughed, I laughed. And he said, "By the way, you still have to come in and talk to the Dean, you'll enjoy it." And he explained the Dean to me so I wouldn't be surprised or shocked.

The Dean needed explaining. This episode occurred during a brief period when the "classy" Eastern universities had realized, each for its own reasons, that their traditional "polite" antisemitism, which amounted to having a small, informal quota of Jewish students and faculty, was going to run into trouble. Like Stanford on the West Coast, Northwestern was recognized as an academic and social equal of those Ivy League schools. And, like them, was having to adjust to the post-war world in which universities got and kept their academic reputations by having professors who did well-regarded research and brought money into the university to do it with. Ray Mack had made it his business, shortly after

arriving in Evanston, to alert the trustees of the university to the new facts of life in the world of government and foundation research funding, and to explain that if you wanted to get your share of that money you had to have Jews on the faculty, because a lot of smart scientists were, as he explained to them, Jews. The trustees took that hint and hired a new dean, Simeon Leland (an economist, not Jewish himself, then at the University of Chicago) to implement the changed policy. Leland was the Dean I was going to meet, and Ray would only say that I'd find him interesting.

Sim Leland *was* interesting, and then some. Ray accompanied me to the meeting to make sure it didn't get out of hand. Leland was, to start with, so short that his feet didn't reach the floor when he sat at his desk. And he wore sleeve garters! I know Ray enjoyed the look on my face when I saw those. He greeted me and then wasted no time: "Well, Becker, what's it going to take to get you here?" I made a short, entirely sincere speech, saying that I didn't need convincing, I knew that Northwestern was the best sociology department in the country (Ray, sitting in a corner, grinned). "Well then, why are you hesitating?" I said that my family and I thought that San Francisco was the best place in the world to live. He waved a dismissive hand and said "Nonsense! It's too damn foggy!" "Well, I like fog!" "OK, we'll buy you a fog machine. What else do you want?" I could see that I was licked.

The final moments of my hiring had a typical Leland twist. I went home promising to make up my mind in a few days and three days later called Ray and said yes. And a few days after that I got a letter appointing me as a full professor at a salary of ... \$19,000 a year. I called Ray for an explanation. He said, "That old son of a bitch, did he do that *again*? I'll take care of it." And sure enough, two days later the identical letter, except for a change in the salary to \$20,000, arrived. I accepted

the offer. It was all settled amicably but I knew I'd have to keep an eye on any future college administrators I dealt with, wherever they were.

Almost everyone in Ray's department lived in Evanston, the first suburb on the lake front north of Chicago but, as a Chicago native, I knew we'd be happier in the city and found an apartment on the Near North Side, near the small entertainment area on Wells Street that soon became the home of Second City, the comedy club that had developed around Mike Nichols, Elaine May, and my sister-in-law at the time, Barbara Harris. It wasn't San Francisco, but it was good enough, though a lot colder in the winter (and hotter in the summer). It was also a short walk from the Belmont Avenue El station, which got me, easily, to Evanston's stretch of Sheridan Road, a short walk from the sociology department.

At first, the department was housed in a typical post-WWII three-story academic building, bland and comfortable. Sociology shared the ground floor with the Art Department and consisted of a bunch of offices along a corridor, with a room or two for students to hang out in at one end and, at the other end, the chair's office and secretarial space, presided over by June Weatherly, who kept everything going smoothly. She knew how to mobilize everybody you needed to know in the university to make our work environment comfortable and dependable.

The location on the same floor as the Art Department soon had a very interesting consequence for me. One day someone from the other end of the building showed up at my office and said that he'd heard that I was interested in art. I said that that was true, and he told me his problem. His friend Hans Haacke, an artist from New York, had started making art works that consisted of large documents listing the trustees

of various important museums there and identified them as important members of the economic and political worlds of New York City, thus calling attention to the upper-class domination of places like the Metropolitan Museum and the Museum of Modern Art. And, my visitor explained, critics had started to complain that that wasn't art, it was sociology, and, after all, what did Haacke know about sociology? So, my visitor wanted me to look at what Haacke was doing and give an informed opinion of it as sociology.

I had already seen Haacke's work, in *Triquarterly*, a literary magazine published at Northwestern, and loved his use of social observation as a kind of political analysis and thought it was interesting as a way of calling attention to the class complications of art. So, I said I'd be glad to write something about that, but I'd like to do it with a new colleague in my department, John Walton, who had recently done some work that used similar kinds of indirect indices of political influence. John liked the idea, and we wrote an essay that sociologists and artists found interesting, which was eventually published in a book devoted to Haacke's work.

The Culture of Sociology at Northwestern

The sociology department was soon enough moved to something more interesting, an old sorority house in the center of the campus made up of two joined residential buildings that were comfortable and not too academic. And I got the prize office, one that looked out over Sheridan Road to the lake and had a fireplace.

I had no detailed idea what kind of social entity I'd joined, but knew it wasn't going to be anything like Stanford or the University of Chicago, which had changed from the welcoming place I'd received a degree from a short generation ago into

the contentious factional cockpit that Andrew Abbot describes in his book (1999). Chicago had in fact offered me a position a few years earlier replacing W. Lloyd Warner, one of my thesis advisers, who had left in the wake of all the contention and fighting, but it wasn't enough to lure me from San Francisco. Morris Janowitz, then chairman, who had never been especially welcoming to me, was angry. How dare I say no? I should have at least visited and smelled the atmosphere in the halls! But the Chicago department was no longer the place I'd grown up in and I had no trouble rejecting that offer.

All I knew about Northwestern was that Ray Mack was smart and had good ideas and would make a great chairman if anyone could be such a thing. That was just my intuition talking. But it was right.

There were no dramatic revelations of startling administrative genius, just a continual display of common sense, an avoidance of bureaucratic time-wasting routines and arguments, and easy ways of taking care of the kinds of questions and issues that lead to endless, boring meetings, of the kind I had sat through for a year at Stanford out of a kind of anthropological curiosity.

The absence of argumentative meetings about obscure issues first drew my attention. The Northwestern department had had plenty of experience with complex issues of the kind that so often interrupt peaceful routine. Ray had developed a simple way of dealing with them. He spent an hour or so many mornings walking from one faculty office to another, to drop in and, in the middle of some idle gossip, bring up an administrative issue or problem, something a dean had said to him or asked about, maybe a rumor of some organizational change, the kind of thing that in many departments would

provoke the appointment of a committee to discuss, study, debate and eventually provide a recommendation about something that there was probably no disagreement about anyway, but which would provoke an hour or two of discussion and possibly some serious disagreement. After all, these were professors. Ray avoided that and instead, in the course of one of these visits, might bring up this issue and ask what you thought about it. He might suggest some possibilities, but often not, instead just feeling out what you thought about the larger question, and would get a sense from these casual conversations of whether anybody in our department cared about the issue and whether the interest was casual but no more than that, whether (if anyone did care) they were seriously interested enough to want to affect the result, and so on. There was seldom any resolution to these little discussions, which were more like casual talk than anything serious. It was just another morning conversation, punctuated by family gossip, political talk, etc. He would also get a general sense of the kinds of things his colleagues cared enough about to warrant sharing that concern with the administrators he dealt with, perhaps soon enough to avoid the appointment of an inter-departmental committee which would then have to have meetings and make a report, etc.

So at the next department meeting he might casually report that such-and-such a problem had been raised by one of the deans who wanted to know what sociology thought about *that* and what he'd told the dean—and then he'd deliver a sort of summary of what he'd learned from his casual conversations with everyone and, since he'd concocted his statement from what he'd learned from all the members of his department earlier on, no one objected, and that was the end of it, instead of the fifteen or twenty minute discussion that might have ensued and even, heaven forfend, provoked someone to idly take up some part of the thought and explore it just for

the hell of it. So, issues that no one cared much about almost never blossomed into an argument, let alone a quarrel.

Some issues were perpetual, and we never found permanent solutions for them. But occasionally we found ways around these “insolubles” by making a virtue out of an issue we could never achieve consensus about, usually by finding ways of turning “yes-or-no” solutions into multiple possibilities, because you can get happy agreement about issues when a group can choose between alternatives at any time.

One of my favorite examples had to do with the perpetual problem of how to choose each year’s quota of incoming graduate students from a pile of applications from people about whom we knew little or nothing. We had argued over how to do this for several years. Because there really is no “good” method, guaranteed to produce satisfactory results, which might have been defined as a cohort whose members finished all the coursework we wanted them to do, and then went on to write respectable dissertations.

We did have a more or less agreed-on list of such courses, the usual traditional choices—theory, statistics, perhaps history of the field, etc.—that would guarantee that these students wouldn’t give our department a bad name when they got out in the world and could be observed by our peers elsewhere.

So, we wanted whatever method we used to choose new students to do that much and, as we immediately discovered, all had our own pet ideas about what kinds of people we could choose to accomplish that. Every year we had a desultory argument about criteria, and agreed on one, secure in knowing that when it turned out to be seriously flawed, we could change it the next year.

Until Bernie Beck came up with what we eventually agreed was the perfect method: let the proposer of every method have a year to use that method exclusively, the choice to rotate annually, and the rest of us not required to pay attention to the method used. This solved all the problems: everyone got their way occasionally, and the others had no work to do and no responsibility for the result. We collectively recognized that it was the best we could do. And so, we did it.

One professor had a year to test her idea of using undergraduate grades to make the choice and, after we'd all worked with that cohort for a year, agreed that they had a reasonable variety of outcomes, not perfect but good enough. The second year, the proposer required an essay on some topic and then had to read and judge them in time to make a timely reply to the applicant and award such fellowships as were available. Janet Abu-Lughod spoke for all of us when she described spending hours agonizing over impossible decisions when it was her turn and realizing that she could have made the same choices in a fraction of the time and still arrived at decisions that were just as good.

Of course, as Bernie foresaw, we didn't really know whether we had made good choices, because the results of our experiment wouldn't be known for several years, at the least, after the people we picked had done dissertations that were out there to be judged by the rest of the profession. Using undergraduate grades to guide our choices didn't produce any remarkable successes. But, this was the unavoidable conclusion, neither were there any striking failures. The one inescapable, undisputable conclusion was that most of us, all of us other than the one who had made the choices for that year, were relieved of an onerous, time-consuming, and not very rewarding job.

In succeeding years, every scheme was tried. One year Andy Gordon tried out his idea that we would do better by getting an older class, by not choosing anyone less than 35 years old, and this cohort did about the same as the other ones.

Bernie Beck and I wrote a short article called “Modest Proposals for Graduate Programs in Sociology,” describing this experiment and published it in a new journal published by the American Sociological Association, *The American Sociologist*, edited at that time by Ray Mack.

Reducing Intra-department Disagreement

Northwestern had some customs that promoted understanding, sympathy and consensus, where at best in many departments you could hope for tolerance and instead often got anxiety-producing arguments and experiences. We had, instead, the Wednesday lunches and the monthly evenings, both of which gave faculty members ways to test out ideas and experiments without feeling you were running any great risk and thus an efficient and painless aid to getting research and thinking done.

The department lunched together most Wednesdays, in a seminar room in our office complex. Everyone connected to the department, both students and faculty, was welcome, although the usual reasons interfered with perfect attendance: illness, travel, routine doctor visits, etc. And anyone might be invited to talk: a visitor to the department, or a department member, or someone from another department or research center at the university. These talks were usually interesting, and often far better than that. And they were specialized in ways our faculty would never have absorbed otherwise. As a result, our faculty was better informed than most departmental faculties and had developed broad tastes for a great

variety of kinds of sociological work.

We also met once a month after dinner, at someone's house, with liquid refreshment available, usually beer, though hard liquor was mostly available when someone wanted it, which some people usually did. For these events, faculty members talked about their own work, and the distinctive feature of these talks was that the work could be, in fact, preferably was, at any stage in its history: a research possibility, a rough draft of a serious project, or all the way to a potentially publishable article. The author could get useful ideas, critiques, etc. at any stage of the process without worrying about being exposed to harsh, discouraging criticism. This worked well, which might be hard to believe if you'd had experiences of the other kind, but we all shared the expectation that the audience's intention was to be helpful, and the results usually were in fact helpful.

Among other byproducts of these evenings were unexpected discoveries of shared interests that no one knew existed. And another was the disappearance of the typical quantitative-qualitative antagonism, and that's best illustrated, perhaps, by Charles Ragin's joining the department and being part of an unusual combination of those tendencies.

Charles joined the Northwestern sociology faculty in 1980 so I must have met him in 1979, when he visited Northwestern to interview for a tenured professorship. When he came into my office to talk, he was, he later told me, nervous because he feared I was a stereotypical qualitative type who would be antagonistic because the work he did was mathematically sophisticated. He couldn't have known that, during my short stay at Stanford, I had gotten interested in mathematics, which I'd never studied beyond a sophomore high school course in geometry, and worked my way through the book

that department had its students study to learn the math they needed to do the mathematical sociology the faculty was championing. Which meant that I learned a number of important things: for instance, that you had to do the exercises at the end of the chapters in a math text because that's where some of the most important things you had to know were hidden. But, more generally, how to find my way through technical discussions of things like matrix algebra. All of which disposed me to find Charles' work interesting.

Once we got that potential misunderstanding sorted out, I also got to ask him about the rather esoteric topic of his dissertation: Welsh nationalism, an interest I'd acquired during a summer I worked next door to a social scientist who was a real Welsh nationalist so that I had semi-informed questions to ask him about that. In any event, he learned from our brief encounter that we had a lot to talk about. He liked the idea of coming to Northwestern and I loved the idea of him coming.

All the years we worked in the same building we traded ideas easily and often. We discussed the vague ideas that seemed to me to be the product of our overlapping interests in doing comparisons that could combine qualitative and quantitative techniques and ways of thinking. We talked about the overlaps in the way we thought, "overlaps" suggesting that there was a lot in common but also that there were also lots of potential overlaps which could be explored profitably, which we did a lot of the time. Students were always interested when they caught us at it. In the end we agreed to meet at regular times in the area in the center of the department where coffee was available. We would be in that coffee lounge at a certain time every week and anyone who wanted to talk about how to combine our specialties, which seemed from the outside to be undoable, but to us it seemed like something that would be fun to work on.

Field Work

I had never taught seriously anywhere and had never thought seriously about ever doing it. On the other hand, I had a lot of ideas and prejudices about university teaching that came from my experience studying the process at the University of Kansas medical school and then, the university's undergraduate college, which furnished the basis for the way I organized my own educational offerings.

I was determined, for one thing, not to let my relations with students be colored or influenced by any version of the grade point average perspective, about which my colleagues and I had written a book (Becker et.al.). I hadn't become a professor to help students create a record of conventional academic accomplishment, recorded in grades, that would help them get a job, find a romantic partner, or win office in campus organizations. I was there solely to help them learn some sociologically based skills of thinking and doing that might be useful wherever they wanted to employ them. That determination lurked in the background of all the teaching I did.

There are a lot of ways to teach field work. Here's how I taught it to fifteen or so anxious first-year graduate students that first year and then during all the years I taught the class until I left Northwestern, twenty-six years later. I taught my own version of the way Everett Hughes taught it when I took the course from him years earlier.

The first day, I told the students, "Before the next class, go someplace where people are doing something together. Stay there four hours, write down everything you see and hear, and give me your notes on Thursday." And then I insisted they tell me where they were going to go to do this, before they left the class. They balked, said they weren't ready to

choose a topic yet, they needed to think about such an important decision. I said they would never be ready, they were as ready then as they'd ever be, so just do it and turn the notes in. They tried changing the subject. "Where is the syllabus for the class?" I said there wasn't any. That produced a stunned silence. "Where is the reading list?" I said there wasn't any but, after they got started writing field notes, I'd be better able to suggest relevant things for each of them to read, depending on what they were studying.

The first time I pulled this on students I really didn't know what to expect. But they eventually grumbled a lot and then did what they had to do after I said, "I'm not going to let you leave the room until you tell me where you're going to go to get started." This was a little unfeeling. Many of them were in their first week in Evanston and barely knew where anything was. But greater local knowledge wouldn't have helped them.

Finally, one of the men said he would go to the neighborhood fire station, and he knew where it was. Another one had seen an open coffee shop on his way to the university. Little by little, they all came up with something. That let me ask them pertinent questions. How long was this place they were going to study open to the public? I wanted to make sure they didn't choose some place that was only open every other Tuesday. Practical questions like that. And, by the time the class was over, they all knew where they were going to go and stay for four hours.

And, at the next class meeting, they all had notes to give me. Some had half a page; some had several pages. But they all had, with varying degrees of conscientiousness, followed my ambiguous direction to "write everything down," which gave almost no direction at all. I collected the papers and, without so much as glancing at them, asked if anyone had had any

problems or difficulties.

Several had difficulties to report. Some hadn't known what to do once they got there and announced what they were there to do. One student said people had been quite nice to her, hadn't been suspicious about her motives, which were, after all, pretty innocent. But she didn't know how to explain what she wanted to do, now that she was there. For the simple reason that she didn't know herself.

She, and the rest of the class, waited for me to explain the "right way" to answer a question like that. Instead, I thanked her and asked if anyone else had run into some version of this difficulty. Now that the ice was broken, several others said that the same thing had happened to them. I asked them to tell us what they'd done and finally they stopped addressing themselves to me, waiting for the "right answer" to be delivered by Professor Authority, who clearly had no intention of doing it, and began to talk to each other. They told us what they had said and how it went over with their audience, and gradually we began to develop the rudiments of an approach that let you satisfy questioners and get on with it, whatever it was.

At which point I felt free, finally, to make a few suggestions, ask more questions, participate in the discussion as one of them rather than the Big Shot Outside Expert, and finally explain that it sounded like no one "trick" would solve all the different versions of this difficulty. No magic words could smooth over all the awkward situations they had described. There might be a general solution, but it wouldn't give them the "right thing" to say in their specific field site. They would just have to figure out what to do themselves. That didn't offer much help, but the trouble seemed less impossible, less scary, now that they knew that no one had known what to

do, and it could only be solved in the specific circumstances of their own research situation with some words and actions they'd have to invent.

After a couple of weeks, I provided some reading suggestions, a long list of exemplary fieldwork research—well-known masterpieces like William Foote Whyte's *Street Corner Society* or St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton's *Black Metropolis* as well as journal articles like Donald Roy's studies on machine shop workers or Oswald Hall's study of medical careers in a small city. And lots more. None of these references offered any magic words but they let readers see that everyone, even the most experienced researchers, routinely had problems like this.

My strategy worked. The students, after their initial balkiness, got to say what was on their minds, and they could all get on with their research, find a place to study, spend a lot of time there, write a lot of field notes. And, most important, as the quarter went on, they all started generating "research questions," things they didn't understand and wanted to find out more about. I encouraged these speculations about possible foci of their continuing work, the beginnings of ideas of what their research could be about.

And so, they learned how to start with some puzzling little thing they had seen in the immediate present, and use it to find a more general question that might lead them to a genuine "research question," something other sociologists would be interested in. They had been *doing research* without knowing that's what they were doing. Because they had thought, most new graduate students in sociology and quite a few more advanced ones would have felt this way too, that "doing research" required a lot more preparation—reading "the literature," developing a sampling strategy, all that stuff—

and only after that could you do “real research.”

I explained that you might eventually have to do all that stuff, but only after you’d done all the nosing around I’d led them into, vacuuming up details that would help them decide what they wanted to sample for, what literature might be helpful—turning rituals into productive work that answered questions whose importance people in their research situation had pointed to in what they said and did, the things they had recorded in their field notes.

Toward the end of the quarter, the question I’d been dreading finally came up: grading. How was I going to grade them? They already knew that I wasn’t a scold, wouldn’t chastise them for mistakes. In fact, I never told anyone they had made a mistake for the good reason that it isn’t that easy to tell, immediately, when someone *has* made a mistake in the field. And there really aren’t so many serious mistakes you can make if you just relax and behave as you would in any other social situation.

But … this was a class and “everybody knows” that, at the end of the term, you write a paper or take a test or something like that and then the teacher tells you how you did by giving you a letter grade. I hadn’t said anything about what I was going to do about that. They knew I’d been reading their field notes throughout the ten-week quarter and giving them all kinds of feedback on what I read. When someone finally asked the question—what kind of paper do you want us to write?—I said to write me a letter (that is, *not* a paper), as though you were writing to a friend in school somewhere else, explaining what you’d done in the class and what you thought you’d learned about the fire station or play school or wherever you’d done your fieldwork. The students, who quickly named these letters “Dear Howies,” knew that they

could relax, this only required them to keep on doing what they'd been doing all quarter long.

I also explained that I never gave anybody a grade other than A, and my research-based reason (I referred them to *Making the Grade*) for that. And I added that they shouldn't take the A to mean anything particular about the work they'd done, which had already received weeks of specific critiques which told them, in much more specific detail, exactly what I'd thought about their research as the quarter went on.

I didn't explain, but it soon became evident to anyone who tried working this way, that it saved you a lot of preparation time before the class began but did take a lot of time once it started. It's not the only way to teach, but it became my way for all the years I taught field work at Northwestern or anywhere else. A surprising number of master's theses resulted from these preliminary investigations, proving to the students that these apparently trivial beginnings led to useful products. And with a little tinkering, it became a model that worked for me for all sorts of classes.

Social Psychology with Don Campbell

Northwestern was filled with interesting people, people with original ideas and unusual skills, and it didn't take long to learn that. Ray Mack didn't want me to wait until chance, as it surely would have, threw me together with Donald Campbell. Instead, he solved a small problem he had in a way that made my first experience with Campbell come shortly after I arrived.

Sociology participated in an interdisciplinary program in social psychology that brought it together with psychology and anthropology. Its most visible manifestation was the yearly

graduate seminar, usually staffed by people from two of these departments. The year I arrived it was the turns of sociology and psychology, and psychology's representative was Donald Campbell, who had become an authority on quasi-experimental design: the specialty that psychology hoped would save it from losing its ability to establish results with true experiments, in which randomly chosen experimental subjects were subject to random variations in the variables whose effects were of interest. The big problem for these experiments lay in the impossibility of randomly choosing experimental subjects. Since most subjects were college students who were hired for a small amount, it was clear that they varied considerably from any randomly chosen sample, though the degree of variation and the variables that were throwing the sample off were unknown.

Campbell insisted that psychology had to take steps to remedy this threat to the validity of all the findings that suffered from this flaw, and coined "quasi-experimental" to distinguish the ingenious variations he had invented to overcome it. He knew the problems and knew they had not yet been solved, but he and his colleagues were working on it. And he was a smart, inventive guy and Ray Mack thought that he and I would find a lot to talk about. So, I had to teach something, and this sounded interesting, and I agreed to co-teach the seminar with Campbell.

When we met to decide what the seminar would be about, he told me he had come from a few years of teaching at the University of Chicago, where he kept running into the ideas and forceful personality of an old teacher of mine, Herbert Blumer, who was extremely critical of academic psychology. He knew that I had studied with Blumer and thought I might be able to help him overcome his problems with Blumerian social psychology. I was taken in and agreed to take charge of

the seminar for the quarter. “Taken in”? In the sense that he had gotten me to take the responsibility for the seminar. But I didn’t really mind because debating with him about these things was stimulating and I saw the sense in which the “quasi-experimental” approach was not foolish at all, though it had not solved all the problems, but who had? (Who, after all, had solved all the problems of any field?) Still, interesting. We had a lot of intellectual fun debating for that quarter, and I ended up with a lot of respect for what he had to say. I saw the brilliance of the approach he was working on, and he discovered that there was a method to the way I approached and solved the problems of “proving” with the necessarily less-than-perfect methods of field research.

I profited from Don’s inquisitive mind in other ways. Perhaps most from his deep understanding and imaginative repurposing of Darwin’s theory of evolution as a theory of knowledge acquisition on the scale of entire societies. How did sciences find and keep good theories, theories that survived multiple and repeated attacks? His thinking rested on two ideas: random variation and selective retention, which Darwin had used to explain how populations of a specific organism changed in ways that better suited them to survive in the conditions of their current environment. A population of connected ideas—a theory—can survive if it develops effective responses to damaging criticisms. And a good way to find those effective responses is to try many possibilities, the more randomly chosen the better the results, and wait for the critical environment to selectively retain the ones that survived and that would do the trick.

Two Big Changes

Halfway through my second year at Northwestern, Ray Mack surprised all of us by announcing, at our weekly lunch and

department meeting, that he was taking a year off and spending it at the Russell Sage Foundation in New York. Well, we could absorb that, we'd miss him, but he'd be back. But the second part of his announcement was that when he returned, he would no longer be the head of our department. He would instead be the head of a new entity called the Urban Affairs Center, to which faculty members could be attached for various lengths of time.

He seemed cheerful about this but the rest of us were really shaken up. Who was going to take care of us? Who would make sure that we didn't act like damn fools?

Since we had still to drive back from lunch to the university, we had the whole drive back to talk about this. And, somewhat to my surprise, once I got in the car, everyone turned to look at me expectantly, waiting for me to say something, and I finally realized that they had all decided that I was the logical successor to Ray. I had immediately thought that the logical successor was Bob Winch, older than the rest of us by an academic generation, a good researcher who had studied with Ernest Burgess at Chicago and done some questionnaire-based research on what variables could predict success in marriage (that is, the continuing existence of the marriage) but definitely a quantitative type.

I told everyone in the car that I couldn't do it, couldn't and wouldn't be chair under any circumstances. I think they heard the determination in my voice, because they pushed back but not for long. And then raised the inevitable question: "If it isn't you, then who?" "Bob Winch," I said immediately. The others were afraid: he's too quantitative; he was an officer in the Navy during the war and he'll be used to issuing orders, etc. They could see that I wasn't convinced and wasn't going to be convinced. Over the next week or two they finally

accepted that I would never change my mind.

Sometime in that week Ray had a talk with me and said, essentially, "The way it looks to me, if you became the head of the department, you'd spend 90% of your time on your own work and 10% on the department. And if Bob becomes the head of the department, it will be just the opposite. Have I got that right?" I told him he was exactly right, and we were both relieved.

And that was more or less the way it worked out, and Bob didn't seem to resent the result. And things went on much as before. We went through other chairmen over the years but the tradition of not fighting about departmental matters lasted as long as I was there.

The second change for me came when Northwestern received a large sum from the MacArthur Foundation (yes, the one that later started giving the "Genius Grants," for which this seemed to be a trial run). Northwestern used the money to endow a chair in perpetuity. I was surprised to be the first person chosen to occupy the chair, which came with a noticeable increase in my salary and a sizeable annual sum to spend on whatever I wanted within reason. I spent it for books, for travel, and, most importantly, for inviting interesting people to come to the university to speak and spend several days with our faculty and students. People I thought would make a contribution to the intellectual life around me, and who would never be invited to visit in the ordinary course of university business in the part of the university I inhabited. One such person was David Antin, a poet and thinker whose work is hard to describe. He did what he called "talk pieces." These were never prepared in advance. He didn't even choose the topic on any occasion until he started and then he let the theme develop spontaneously. The results didn't fit

into anything that any department did but were always, in my experience of seeing him at work, interesting and unexpected. Another person I invited was Michael Joyce, a novelist who was also one of the developers of the hypertext authoring software, *Storyspace*, and wrote the first novel in that format, *afternoon*.

Exploring Society Photographically

In 1970, I had a year off, spent it in San Francisco and, somewhat accidentally, took a class on photography at the San Francisco Art Institute (I lived across the street from it) to repair a gap in my education with respect to visual art, and returned to Chicago with a new and engrossing interest in making photographs, reading about photography and writing about it; some new skills, including not only making photographs but talking about them intelligibly, and some new social circles to move in.

One day, as I was sitting in my office at Northwestern, a young woman knocked on the open door and introduced herself as Kathy Foley, the just-appointed director of the brand-new Block Gallery, an elegant small exhibition space in a brand-new building in the center of the campus. She explained that she wanted the Gallery to avoid becoming a sort of adjunct of the visual art departments, which was the usual fate of campus museums, and so she was visiting faculty in every department in the university to explain that she was looking for people who thought they might be able to use the space to exhibit visual versions of things important for them. So: did I have any ideas for an exhibition?

Yes, I did. I knew, from the year I'd spent studying photography, that one of the chief interests of early and continuing generations of photographers was what went on in the social

world, and I could see that that focus was just the kind of thing she was talking about. I could think of a lot of photographic projects, both contemporary and dating back to the invention of the art that would make interesting exhibits for the Gallery. She looked interested, so I made a real sales pitch. Finally, she interrupted me to say, "I think I could raise money for that."

And the project was off and running. We decided to list what we could think of that might fit. My own interest had brought me into contact with a lot of sociologists and anthropologists and quite a few had dabbled, or more, in photography. And many photographers had, sometimes without knowing it, dabbled, or more than that, in social science, and published or exhibited the resulting work. There was quite a history, and we shouldn't, and in the event didn't, have trouble finding museum-worthy photographic materials. *Exploring Society Photographically* was born.

We had some interesting discussions. For one thing, she was insistent that all the art had to be original, no reproductions. I agreed with that in principle, but there was a serious problem over one of the great photographic works of social science: *Balinese Character*, a book-length combination of Gregory Bateson's photographs of Balinese child-rearing practices, and the analysis of what they showed by Bateson and Margaret Mead, all in the service of developing a grand theory of culture-and-personality, then a hot topic in social science.

Kathy appreciated the book but insisted that what we needed were the original photographs or negatives the reproductions in the book had been made from. As I had expected and long ago learned, no one knew where they were buried in the Library of Congress. All that remained accessible to us at that time, were the printed versions in the book. And the original

book itself from 1942 was relatively rare, but I had a copy. Kathy solved this problem, sort of, by saying she would have the book taken apart so that we could frame pages from it, and in that way make them kosher enough for the museum walls. And she added that after the show was over the pages would be rebound in the book. I trusted her and it came to pass just that way.

The real fun for me was dealing with the photographers I had on my list of potential exhibitors. They were quite a various bunch. Some were fanatic about the excellent shape of their prints, and others had never taken care of their work—after they did it, they were through and it was your problem, seemed to be their idea. John Collier, a well-known San Francisco anthropologist, produced our single greatest problem. He was alive and well and had all his prints and most of his negatives still available, but he didn't seem to care what shape they were in and, where others took care of their negatives and prints as though they were made from the most delicate possible materials, he just threw them into cardboard cartons of the kind groceries sometimes come in. Many were scratched and dirty, not fit to be displayed. And John didn't seem to care. But he did have the negatives. They weren't in mint condition either but were salvageable. But salvageable only after we hired a graduate student in photography from the San Francisco Art Institute to spot them (the photographic term for painting over small flaws in a negative or print). But spotting was hardly an appropriate term for the excellent reconstruction of the pictures the student did over several months. The exhibit paid for this work, and I "supervised" it.

In the end, we had a gallery filled with fabulously interesting photographs, beautifully matted and framed. Only one of the photographers was unhappy with the end product. I decided that was a pretty good average.

When the show opened, a respectable crowd showed up at the Block Gallery, including Ackie Feldman, the chair of the sociology department at the time, and the entire faculty as well, who were very pleased at this addition to the department's reputation.

After the opening I lost track of the show for the most part. I knew that it was a great success in another way that was meaningful to me and to Kathy Foley: it traveled to at least ten other exhibition spaces around the country. That is, these galleries rented it and paid their share of the transportation.

One gallery that rented it was the one in the San Francisco Art Institute, where I had learned to be interested in photography. It was there for a month, and one night I oversaw an open meeting in the gallery of sociologists and photographers and other people interested in photography. And I got to look at the exhibit again as a "new experience." And then I lost track of it.

But that, for me, was part of the Northwestern experience too.

PART TWO: ELSEWHERE

Kansas City

A transcript of a conversation with Dianne Hagaman (my wife) and me recorded in 1998. Dianne in italics.

Another Era

So, when did you...?

... play for magicians and jugglers? That was in Kansas City.

And that was where Jack E. Leonard was too?

See, in Kansas City ... that was another era, I was playing with the Jimmy Tucker Band. And we used to play a lot for country clubs because in Kansas City essentially all the nightlife was in the country clubs. There were hardly any night clubs and so people would have these dances and parties at these country clubs. And some of them were like real country clubs and some of them were like quasi nightclubs. The one that we worked at a lot, I forgot what it was called, was run by a gangster named Eddie Spitz who ... I don't know if I had read about him, or I went out and looked him up in the Kefauver hearings on organized crime that were held all over the country. One of the places was Kansas City and I read that volume; I think in preparation for moving there. They were a scream, because they'd get these guys on the stand, they knew all sorts of things about them, and they'd ask them these embarrassing questions. And one of the guys he interviewed, or interrogated was Eddie Spitz. And I remember his testimony was very funny because they essentially got out of him that he ran illegal gambling things and had been involved in all sorts of terrible stuff. And the counsel for the committee toward the end of Eddie's testimony said, "Mr. Spitz, do your children know what you do for a

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living?" This was all on television, early television. And Eddie says, "They do now."

But Eddie was a tough guy, but I mean it wasn't a real country club, it was kind of a country club, I guess people belonged to it. They would have parties and they would have entertainment sometimes. And the entertainment would be these acts which were known generically as "acts". You know, "we have some acts", "we have a show tonight, what kind of acts have we got?"

Well, sometimes they'd be people we had played for before like the one I told you about, Dave and Dottie Workman, who played a variety of bullshit instruments like auto horns mounted on a stand, they'd play a song on the auto horns or he had some kind of a garden hose, he'd play something on that. Blow into it. And they did bell ringing, Swiss bell ringing. They had bells with different notes, and they'd pick them up and ring them. And they had musical glasses which are crystal glasses that are filled with water to different levels, and you rub the rim, and it makes a sound. Mozart wrote for that, he called it the glass harmonica. It's actually a pretty sound. So they'd play stuff on that.

See, all these acts would have their music, and their music was very often totally unreadable. I mean it would be so old and ragged and held together with scotch tape and the ink was faded and you really couldn't read it. We didn't rehearse with them, we had what was called a talk-over rehearsal, which meant we'd meet with them backstage, and the guy would say, "Okay, first I do two choruses of "Yes Sir That's My Baby" in F about this fast ... one, two, three, four, and then I go into "When My Baby Smiles At Me" and I do a soft shoe and that's in B flat." And Jimmy Tucker, the band leader, would say okay and he'd make a little note, and that

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would be it. So, then that's what we did, Jimmy would just holler out "When My Baby Smiles At Me" in B flat and we'd play it.

So, there were different acts like that, singers and jugglers and Dave and Dottie. There's one guy, all I can remember is he wore some kind of ... not skis but like the rockers off the bottom of a rocking chair, only they were wide like skis. And he rocked around the dance floor on them. It's just an image I have of him doing that. But there were people who, you know, made a living doing that shit.

That was in the fifties, right?

Yeah, mid-fifties, late fifties. I mean they're the kind of acts that you could see on television. Ed Sullivan, he had a lot of those weird old vaudeville acts, because that's where that stuff started.

Were these older people then or were they ...

Well, they weren't all that old. I mean, I don't think Dave and Dottie were that old. It wasn't a living, you know what I mean, it would be something they'd do on weekends to make extra money, you couldn't make a living doing that kind of stuff in Kansas City. But they did get a lot of work.

You moved there in the mid '50's?

Yeah, I moved to Kansas City in 1955 to work on this research on medical students. And when I got to town, one of the first things I did was go down to the [musicians'] union and put my card in. Which is to say I transferred from the Urbana local, where I had had a postdoc, to the Kansas City local. And I didn't know a soul there, you know, in the music business.

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About a week later I got a phone call from somebody, "Are you working Saturday night?" So, I thought, "This is really great." Every year the Kansas City Symphony did the Katz drugstore concert. It was a pops concert that Katz' drugstore, which was a big drugstore there, sponsored and they always had some popular star. And this year it was Kay Starr. She had arrived, the concert was that evening, and it turned out that every piano player in town was working. So, like, there's nobody. So, they called the new guy, I mean, I was the only piano player anybody knew of that wasn't working, but nobody knew me. So, I got down there, and in the meantime Kay Starr, when she found out that they didn't have one of the regular good piano players that everybody knew, she had a fit and she had wired or called to the coast, to California, to send a piano player, in fact, to send a whole trio. So, these guys arrived from California, but not in time for the rehearsal, so I played the rehearsal, which was pretty funny. Well, I mean, here's me and the Kansas City Philharmonic and Kay Starr.

Why did she have a trio coming?

Well, in case the whole Kansas City orchestra was no good was probably her thinking. Who knows why? She didn't tell me. She was very nice, but she didn't fraternize with the musicians.

But what happened was I met the timpani player for the orchestra, Benny Udell, who was this little Jewish guy from New York. The Kansas City orchestra was very bizarre. About half the orchestra only came for the season which wasn't that long, it was maybe twenty-five weeks or something. And then they would go right back to New York or wherever they came from. But over the years, some of them stayed, and they'd get jobs, they'd end up teaching and they'd do other stuff so that they could make a living all year round.

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Benny was one of those. He'd come out from New York and one thing led to another and there he was. He'd been in Kansas City, I don't know, ten or fifteen years. So, when he heard me playing, he decided he liked me, and we got to talking. Ben was a kind of a self-taught intellectual, so he loved the idea of, you know, this sociologist.

So he and I hit it off and we got to be quite good friends. And there were some other people like that in the orchestra too and a lot of them played dance jobs, like Ben did. There was a very good trombone player named Bill Drybread, and one of the bassoon players, Mike Spielman, I think his name was, played baritone saxophone and tenor.

What about Jimmy Tucker?

I don't know how I got next to Jimmy Tucker, but Jimmy Tucker was a bandleader in town. He always had a band, but he always had something else too because he could never make a living off the band alone. Like, for a while he ran a short order thing in a drugstore and also did quite a bit of fencing, I mean, he was buying stolen goods. So, all the thieves would come into the store and sell him stuff.

There's a wonderful story about when this kid came in and wanted to sell him a bassoon for fifty dollars. Well, bassoons are very expensive instruments, but they're also relatively rare because there are very few bassoon players. Turned out that someone had commissioned this kid to steal a baritone saxophone and the kid didn't know the difference, so he stole a bassoon. Jimmy had no use for a bassoon, but he couldn't resist it, so he bought it for fifty dollars. About half an hour later the kid came back and said he had found somebody who knew what a bassoon was and wanted it so the kid wanted to know if Jimmy would give it back to him, so

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Jimmy sold it back to him.

And then another time he bought a toaster for ... you know those toasters they have in those short order places where you put in a dozen pieces of toast, and it revolves? I don't know if they have them anymore, but they used to. So, you put in all this bread, and it would go around and around in front of the heat elements. Jimmy's wife, Frances, used to work in the drugstore too. He bought this toaster from a thief and was really pleased he got it for practically nothing. So, Frances fills it up with bread and it starts going around and around and the bread never toasted. Turned out it wasn't a toaster, it was a bun warmer for hamburgers. He never heard the end of that from her.

It's a Terrible Name for a Really Nice Instrument

So, anyway, Jimmy had a little band, and it was three saxophones, trumpet, piano, bass and drums. He would play bass, but sometimes we'd get a bass player and he'd play guitar. He was a big guy, a nice-looking older guy and had a very suave "leader" manner, you know: "Now ladies and gentlemen blah blah blah."

And he had a set of stands and he had all these arrangements. There's a technical thing I have to explain: all his arrangements were written for three tenor saxophones which is a sound that among musicians was identified with the worst kind of commercial crap. You know, very soupy, sentimental, like Guy Lombardo and Wayne King. And bands like that were *not* jazz, nothing like it, not good dance music like Glenn Miller or Benny Goodman or something.

And so, it was pretty terrible you know, they'd play these dumbbell songs like "Josephine", that was a favorite of those

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kinds of bands. Da Do Do Do Dododo Doot do do doot do doot do doot do do bup bah bup bah bup, that kind of stuff ... like Lawrence Welk. So, Jimmy knew better but he figured that's commercial, that's what sells, that's what we have to play.

So, I was playing with them and one of the tenor players was a guy named Dick Albrecht. Dick and I got to be great buddies and we decided we would write some arrangements for, instead of three tenors, it would be alto, tenor and baritone saxophones which gives a much hipper sound. You have to take my word for this.

So, it would give this hip sound, and the trumpet player, Freddy Mitchell, was really a good trumpet player and he also played flugelhorn. Flugelhorn is like a trumpet only it's a much mellower sound. It's really pretty, it's a terrible name for a really nice instrument. Well, you played trumpet. You know how a cornet is a softer sound? This was more like that, even more than a cornet. It was really pretty, and it blended with saxophones very well.

I had done some arranging before when Bill Russo and I worked together. We wrote a lot of arrangements for that campus band at Northwestern, and then he got some connection with Johnny "Scat" Davis, whose theme song was "Hooray For Hollywood." Johnny was a trumpet player, and he had a band, and he used to be in the movies. He was a nut, he was a drunken nut, but he had this band. So, Bill talked him into buying some arrangements from us. I think he paid us twenty-five dollars apiece and I wrote two, I think. One was an original composition I called "Escape," which Johnny thought was weird, but I had the thrill of hearing it played over the radio. It was really a trip.

My handwriting is very bad as you know, and when I write

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music out it's just as scratchy looking and terrible and hard to read. So, when I wrote an arrangement somebody would have to copy the parts anyway, because you write an arrangement on score paper where you have a separate staff for each of the instruments, and you write out the parts, and then somebody has to copy the parts out onto separate pieces of paper for each player.

When I was in Chicago Bill [Russo] used to do all that and he has a beautiful hand, and he writes a beautiful manuscript. So, he would do that. And in Kansas City Dick Albrecht did that. He used to copy the parts out for his arrangements and mine.

Jimmy said he'd pay us ten dollars an arrangement if they were any good. So, we started writing these arrangements and it turned out people liked them, and they would dance to them just like they did to "Josephine". And pretty soon it was getting pretty hip, we did things like Count Basie's "Lil' Darling" and I wrote one on Basie's "Moten Swing" and we'd do songs like that. I wrote one on "Life Is Just A Bowl Of Cherries" and one on "I Want A Little Girl." In the end Dick and I had written, between us, I don't know, seventy or eighty arrangements for the band and it was very sharp, and it was really good.

We'd write the flugelhorn playing lead over the saxophones or the flugelhorn and the tenor playing and the baritone playing some kind of a contrapuntal thing. We worked out all sorts of things, so it really sounded good. We did do some weird things. Like "Lil' Darling" which is that Basie tune. Do you know that one it goes dee dee dee dee dee deedee dee dee dee dee dee deedee doot doot do do do doot doo? Well, you mustn't play it too fast. We got into a thing, and Jimmy was completely corruptible, seeing how slow we could play it without it falling apart altogether. And we

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would sometimes play it so slow it was unbelievable, and people would be kind of shuffling around the dance floor looking like ... what?

But we had a lot of fun. Those were good times in Kansas City with that band. And the band got very tight, I mean, you know, we had picnics and our families would get together, there was a lot of that.

Unheard of in Chicago?

Yeah, well it's kind of unheard of generally, we had a lot of esprit, you know.

Then there was a contest for bands. I don't know who the hell ran this contest, but we had to go up to St. Joseph [Missouri] to play in it. There was a very famous ballroom in St. Joseph called, you won't believe this, it was called The Frog Hop.

And we went up to St. Joe to play The Frog Hop. And we were in this contest with like five other bands or something.

Jazz bands?

Yeah, dance bands. I don't think we won.

You don't remember.

I don't remember. I'd remember if we won.

And then we played the Air Force base, Richards-Gebauer Air Force Base. And all these country clubs and different parties. We worked a lot and we worked all over. You would travel all over within maybe fifty miles or so to play for VFWs and American Legions and the Elks and the Moose and all

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that, they were really something.

All those places were full of gambling too.

Was that legal then?

No, it wasn't legal, but the fraternal organizations were allowed to do it. It's like there was a private club, right, so mostly what they had was slot machines, they had a lot of slot machines. So that was Kansas City.

I played other things there too. There were some very good players in town, but a lot of people left because, you know, limited opportunities. The most famous one was Bob Brookmeyer, who was a very terrific trombone player who became a nationally known jazz star.

He was there when you were there?

No, he had just left. And there was another guy, a tenor player named Ralph Aldridge who was around, and I played with him, then he left town. Most of the people there who were playing a lot, with a very few exceptions, had day jobs. So, I ended up being maybe the third or fourth best piano player in town, not because I was that great but because everybody who was any good left.

One of the guys in town who was a very good musician was Bert Lanfried, who was a cereal chemist. He worked for one of the companies there, and he said they made the poisons they put in your bread, that was his definition of his job. He played vibraphone. He was a very good vibes player and worked very hard at it, he was very serious. But, you know, he had a good day job. And there was a trumpet player, Jack somebody. Same thing, he worked in the insurance business

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or something.

She Could Cure Him in Like Two Minutes

And there was a very good, very crazy piano player named Sammy Tucker. He was really a drunk and was completely crazy, but he was a good piano player.

No relation to Jimmy Tucker?

No.

He was married at one time to Patty Tucker who was a very good singer, but she couldn't stand it anymore because Sammy was a hypochondriac, and he was always getting cancer and heart attacks. I mean not really, but he thought he was. And every time he got cancer or had a heart attack or something, Patty would get right into it, she believed it, and get all upset. I think she just couldn't stand it anymore. She was really an excellent singer. So, she split and went back to California. I think she came from Monterey.

And then he married Marilyn Maye who became fairly well known. She sang the Chevrolet song—"see the USA in your Chevrolet"—after Dinah Shore. She made some records but that was after she left Kansas City. But she was married to Sammy and her attitude was completely different. Whenever Sammy would get cancer, she'd say, "Oh, shut up, you don't have cancer." So, he'd stop. She could cure him in like two minutes.

And once in a while Sammy would have another job. I remember I once went to fill in for Sammy one night. They were working in one of the downtown hotels, in the bar. It was usually him and this bass player from California, Bob

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Scagliotti, and Marilyn Maye. Bob was kind of a dumb kid, very nice guy but kind of naive and, well, he wasn't that naive, he wasn't as naive as me that night. So, I came in and Bob and Marilyn said, "Well, uh, we generally have a drink before we start the evening, do you want to have our regular with us?" So, I said, "Sure". The bartender gave me a tumbler of something. It tasted chocolatey and I drank it, it tasted good. It turned out it was a shot of creme de cacao which is chocolate tasting and a shot of gin and a shot of vodka, which I didn't taste because of the chocolate. So, I got up on the stand and I was drunk. You know, instantaneously drunk, it was terrible. They were laughing, like that was the joke.

There were a lot of musicians in Kansas City, but it was kind of a close group. It was a small city, so everybody knew everybody, you knew all the other musicians in town.

And fads would run through the musician community, so like one time ... did you ever see those springs with handles on them you're supposed to use for exercise? That was one fad.

Another fad was chess. I don't remember where I learned to play chess, maybe even in Chicago, but anyway, at one point all the musicians in Kansas City learned to play chess. I don't mean everyone, but lots of them. So, people were playing chess all the time and musicians were talking about chess. Chess talk can go on interminably, like you talk about variations on the queen's gambit declined. I mean it was shit like that.

I had started to play chess years earlier, and that got reactivated when some neighbors, Dick and Dotty Marsh moved into the next building and he played chess too. So he and I got into it, and we were playing a lot, night after night sometimes. Dick was a salesman for the Bridgeport Brass Company and he would play with some of his customers too,

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but he took it seriously and wouldn't let them win if he could beat them, same thing with golf. Our families got along well too. Between music and chess, a lot of our time was taken up.

The local chess club used to have tournaments every year, which neither Dick nor I were good enough to belong to. We didn't play in the tournaments, but when you have a tournament, you bring in a master from some place to be the director of the tournament. And so, the year that everybody was into chess they had brought in George Koltanowski who was the chess columnist of the San Francisco Chronicle. He was an old timer. And he came in and supervised the tournament and one of the things these guys do at the end of a tournament is they do a simultaneous exhibition, they play as many people as want to put up ten dollars, or whatever it was, simultaneously.

So, they set up a hollow square of tables and the players are seated around the outside and the master stands inside and walks from board to board. When he gets to your board you're supposed to move and then he replies, and he goes on to the next one. He gets to play white, so he essentially played the same opening with everybody, and it was an unfamiliar opening. Somebody checked it out later and it was actually a very weak opening, but nobody knew the weaknesses and we weren't good enough players to detect that, so it just threw everybody off because it was so unfamiliar.

Anyway, he walked around, and I was one of the people who played against him. I think there were thirty people and fifteen of them were members of the musician's union, that's what it was like.

How I Learned a Few “Foreign” Languages

I imagine that my “background” in languages other than English is like that of most, or at least many, university people of my generation in the United States (and of younger people as well). Forced to choose between German, French and Spanish, the languages taught in my Chicago high school, I chose Spanish because, I unrealistically thought, it was easier (a widespread belief in my age group). Even though one of the Spanish teachers was exceptionally scholarly and reasonable, I was too ignorant to take advantage of the opportunity he presented to actually learn something of the language, and so ended up with just the knowledge I got in the streets: how to curse someone’s mother in appropriately colorful ways and a few similar, more immediately useful things (e.g., how to order in a Mexican restaurant).

My three undergraduate years in the University of Chicago College didn’t require any foreign language study so I didn’t study any more languages. When I entered the graduate program in sociology, the graduate school’s formerly serious language requirement had turned into a formality that students resisted, not believing that kind of knowledge was necessary and relying on professors’ common sense to stop trying to enforce it, which is what they did. You still had to take a written examination set by the Graduate School, and then had to demonstrate to a faculty member that you could use that language for scholarly purposes. I chose French and studied for the written exam with several of my fellow students in a not very serious way, but apparently sufficient to pass the test. Then I asked my mentor, Everett Hughes, with whom I was working closely on my dissertation research, to administer whatever test he had in mind. He must have known that I really didn’t know enough French to order a cup of coffee, but he gave me a document in French, that

seemed to me to be something about the Mafia, to translate at sight. I stumbled around for a while and then he did what all of us were counting on happening: recognized the inevitable and said, disgustedly, that he'd certify me. We never referred to this episode again.

I might—well, actually, almost certainly would—have gone on that way as a monoglot English speaker (complete with a noticeable Chicago accent). But ...

Brazil

My examination to satisfy the university's language requirement took place in 1949 or '50 and the "language problem" might never have come up for me again. But, after twenty-five years, in the mid-1970s, out of the blue, my friend Richard Krasno, a psychologist I had met through our mutual friend, David E. Smith, of the Haight Ashbury Free Medical Clinic in San Francisco called me from Rio de Janeiro, where he was working as the Higher Education Officer for the local Ford Foundation office. He told me that he'd gotten to know a Brazilian anthropologist named Gilberto Velho, who was interested in what I had written on the subject of deviance in my book *Outsiders*. Velho wanted the Foundation to bring me to Rio for a few months to co-teach a course with him. My first reaction was "Richie! I barely know where Brazil is, I don't know a word of Portuguese, all I know is how to play some *bossa novas* on the piano." He dismissed these objections as trivial.

But, in the meantime, I began thinking. "This is one of those messages from who-knows-where that has no connection to anything in your life but seems like a summons that a sensible or, at least, sensitive or superstitious, person should pay attention to." And I thought that if I accepted the invitation, I

would at least get to hear a lot of music that really *did* interest me, because the invitation followed by some years the introduction of *bossa nova* and other Brazilian music to American audiences and I had been playing it professionally for a while by then.

So, I paid attention. After shillyshallying for a while, I agreed to study Portuguese for a year while I continued teaching sociology at Northwestern University, and to visit Rio during the year after that and teach with Velho. Velho would come to Chicago to visit me at Northwestern for a week or two, during his summer vacation which in Brazil, as everywhere in the Southern Hemisphere, came in January and February. In the interim, so that I could see what he had been up to, he sent me two or three books he had written on social life in Copacabana, drug use among well-to-do Brazilians, and other subjects he thought would appeal to me as much as they did to him. From the books' external appearance, I deduced an image of a serious, middle-aged scholar who I would have to treat with great respect.

And I began to study Portuguese seriously, pushed by my Northwestern colleague Janet Lever who had done research in Brazil and understood that I really did have to learn some Portuguese to have the visit be meaningful for Velho and for me. She insisted that I go to the university's language laboratory with her, where she discussed with the people there what book they taught Portuguese from and signed me up for an hour of work every day with the available recorded lessons. These lessons played a "model" saying something, asked you to repeat that utterance, and then played what you said back for you. The difference between me and the model had the intended effect, which was to shock me into being serious about the amount of work I was going to have to do. It was a harsh way to learn what had to be learned but it

worked. In the end, I still didn't have much of a speaking vocabulary. But I had a pretty good *carioca* accent! (*Carioca* refers to people and things from Rio de Janeiro, as opposed to *Paulista*, which refers to the people and things from São Paulo, the other large city in the country.) I worked on vocabulary by painfully reading Professor Velho's books, looking up almost every word on the first page, most of the words on the second page, etc. By the end of the book, I could read! More or less. Good enough for the purpose.

When I met Gilberto at Chicago's O'Hare Airport in January, he got off the plane, saw the snow everywhere (it was winter in Chicago), wondered to himself (as he later told me) "What is this poor *carioca* doing in a place like this?" and wanted to go back on the return flight. But he stayed for a few weeks while we got to know each other and found a lot of common interests. We talked about the course we would teach together. I had never prepared lectures and wasn't going to prepare them for Rio, which suited him perfectly.

I continued my lessons in the language lab and was better prepared for the language ordeal than I had imagined I ever could be. And when my wife and I arrived they had found an apartment for us in Ipanema (the place made famous by "The Girl from Ipanema," a song Stan Getz had introduced to American jazz players, me included), near to where Gilberto lived so that he and I could go to the *Museu Nacional*, where the anthropology department was located, together on working days. As befit a sophisticated person who lived a few short blocks from the Copacabana beach, he saw to it that our apartment was similarly located.

You might be wondering, as I did, why an anthropologist, rather than a sociologist, provided my link to Brazilian social science. In 1976, when I arrived, the country was in the full

flowering of the Brazilian military dictatorship, the *ditadura*. One of its minor features was the banning of sociology as a university discipline. Gilberto did research on drug use among younger members of the social elite, people who belonged to aristocratic families (you could deduce that feature, I soon learned, from the lengthy string of well-known family names that followed their given name, as they did Gilberto's). These families overlapped with the higher ranks of the Army. Gilberto's father was himself a member of the military group which had established the dictatorship. He wasn't a real military dictator type, more of an intellectual, and so his comrades put him in charge of the *Censura* and then asked him to step down when, after a year, he hadn't censored anything. He was that kind of intellectual.

The research Gilberto and his students were doing would have been done by sociologists in other countries but, since sociology was banned, the closest thing that allowed you to do the same thing was anthropology. So, Gilberto created the Museu's program in urban anthropology without interference. And we also taught our course in deviance without interference. The students, fortunately for me, pretty much all understood English. And wrote theses, which were sometimes published as books, which they proudly gave me, on all sorts of "urban" subjects: prostitutes, or homosexuality, or the *escolas da samba* (samba schools), whose gaudily elaborate floats and costumes were the high point of the great parades of *Carnival*. The books, of course, were all in Portuguese, and furnished the nucleus of a small collection I made, so I never lacked for reading material to continue my language studies.

The anthropology students read and spoke French as well as English but, to introduce another complication, they mostly claimed not to understand Spanish, and this was more or less true. They felt that Brazil, as large in area and population as

all the Spanish-speaking countries in South and Central America combined, was just in a different and more important category. Their scientific heritage went back to France—the distinguished anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss had done the major ethnographic studies that resulted in his magnificent *Tristes Tropiques* in Brazil and his stay at the Museu was still spoken of reverentially by the older members of the department, who had come to know him then. The anthropologists had connections at major French research institutions (like the *Centre National de Recherche Scientifique* in Paris) and some of them got their advanced degrees there. Others, like Velho, got their degrees from the anthropology department of the University of São Paulo, which had been created by the “French mission,” a group which had come from France during World War II.

Living in Ipanema, walking its streets, hearing and seeing daily life and understanding more than I ever would have thought possible, having experiences with the legendary and truly impossible Brazilian bureaucracy, I began to realize that learning a language really *did* mean learning a culture. A trivial but telling example was the way I learned the word “*jeito*,” which I heard everywhere, and which meant a “trick” or “knack” of doing things. I often learned this kind of thing from Gilberto, who explained to me (in this case) that the reason I had trouble making calls from the dial phone in our apartment was my failure to master the *jeito* of dialing, certain precise and delicate movements which, he insisted, alone could produce the desired connection. And he would demonstrate the “correct” way of dialing and, sure enough, he would eventually connect to the person I wanted. His explanation was of course nonsense—I finally understood that it was really just the antiquated hit-or-miss Rio phone system of that era—but the concept was part of everyday life, more often applied to interactional problems, especially those that

came up so often with government and business bureaucracies. Getting, for instance, a driver's license (or anything else from a reluctant and lazy civil servant) required the mastery of some subtle and delicate interactional skills, the appropriate *jeito*. *Jeito*, and the attitude it embodied, was an important cultural idea.

My professional experience as a piano player led to one important result of this first stay in Rio, a large collection of recordings and sheet music of the work of the great composers and performers of the bossa nova era: Chico Buarque, Caetano Veloso, João Gilberto, Tom Jobim and many others. Learning this music and its lyrics taught me a lot more about the Brazilian way of life, because the music and its lyrics often referred to current events and to longer lasting features of the (although not so obviously that they didn't need explanation). One day I went into a record store in the center of the city, found a new LP by Chico Buarque and bought it. When I arrived at the Museu and displayed my find, everyone wanted to know exactly which store I had bought it at, because there was a rumor that the government was going to confiscate all copies of it as subversive. I wanted to know what was subversive about it, the songs seemed innocent enough to me. And so, I learned that a song called "*A pesar de voce*" ("In Spite of You"), which seemed to be the boast of a lover whose companion's attempt to make him unhappy were unsuccessful, *really* was political. The singer was *really* boasting that in spite of all the government repression going on, he and his friends were continuing to be happy. Other songs had similarly subversive lyrics if you knew the code. Which was not very esoteric, you just had to know or suspect that it *was* code. And those *double entendres* might have been enough to cause police to seize the discs and prevent their sale. As a result, I learned to suspect simple romantic songs (and graffiti written on walls, for that matter) of containing a

different meaning, a political meaning, than the simple declarations of love they seemed to be.

One lasting result of what I got from going to Brazil and learning some Portuguese, is the book of translations I made later from the work of Antonio Candido, one of the great intellectuals of the country: trained in anthropology, learned in all the social sciences, thoroughly at home in literature in all the major European languages, author of a classic history of Brazilian literature, and more. I became aware of him by accident. I was reading an article about current politics in a social science journal Gilberto had recommended to me. When I finished it, I saw that the next piece was something called "*Cuatro Esperas*" ("Four Waitings") written by someone I had never heard of, Antonio Candido (Candido 1995, 45-74). It turned out to be an account of four literary works, presented as the laments of four groups of people waiting for a group of foreign invaders whose arrival would change *everything*: Kafka's *The Great Wall of China*, Cavafy's poem *Waiting for the Barbarians*, and two other pieces less familiar to me: Julien Gracq's *Le rivage du Syrte* and *Le désert des Tartares* by Dino Buzzati.

I felt that Fate had given me a treasure and, when Gilberto returned to the office, I asked, "Who is this guy Candido?" and whether he had written anything else. Gilberto enjoyed making fun of my provincialism, saying that "this guy" Candido was *only* the Most Famous Critic in Brazil and that he had written a ton of books. I made a collection of them to take back to Chicago and, flushed with enthusiasm and bravado, decided to translate some of the essays most likely to interest other English-speaking sociologists—which meant his interpretations of internationally known authors like Alexandre Dumas (*The Count of Monte Cristo*) and Joseph Conrad (*Lord Jim* and *Victory*), as well as some Brazilian

materials (for instance, an essay on the peculiarly Brazilian concept of *malandro*), an introduction to the novels of Machado de Assis, and a lengthy account of his own childhood tutor in Italian, who came from a revolutionary political background. I decided to skip Candido's magisterial history of Brazilian literature which would require too much of readers who didn't know that material (I didn't know much of it either!), and his thoughtful and sensitive analyses of poetry in Portuguese, which relied so heavily on detailed consideration of the auditory experience they involved (this was their greatest strength) that they would be meaningless if you didn't know what they sounded like when read aloud. I did include his very adept analysis of the problems of writers from countries (like Brazil) whose languages were essentially unknown elsewhere. (Candido 1995, pp. 119–41)

Finishing the book of translations, I looked for an American publisher and met with uniform rejections, all based on the firm belief that no one would buy such a book. I finally found an editor, Mary Murrell at Princeton, who took a chance on it—and we discovered that all the pessimists were right: no one, in the United States, at least, buys translations from Portuguese. It sold less than three hundred copies.

I was and still am glad to have done it. I learned a lot.

Most importantly, that I *could* learn another language.

France

Sometime in the early 'Seventies, I was in Paris and bumped into a former student who had become a professor himself: Malcolm Spector, who had taken his Northwestern Ph. D. degree to Canada, where he was teaching at McGill University in bilingual Montréal. Unlike almost all the anglophone

faculty there, he had learned French and thus become bilingual. When I told him that I'd begun a book on the sociology of art (eventually published as *Art Worlds*), he told me there was a book I *had* to read, and I would have to learn to read French to do it. He wouldn't accept my excuses and foot-dragging and continued nagging me. So, I bought the book—Raymonde Moulin's *Le Marché De La Peinture En France*—and, once I saw what the table of contents promised (there were enough cognates with English to make that possible), I realized he was right, I *did* have to read it. It filled a hole in my thinking—the nature of economic arrangements in the arts—and promised to be helpful in many ways. My work on my own book had already convinced me that one of the major things the sociology of art, as it then stood, lacked was the incorporation of what scholars in the fields of painting, music, and other artistic endeavors had to say about these subjects. And convinced me, too, that I would gain a lot from ignoring disciplinary or, now, linguistic lines.

So, yes, I had to read it, but I couldn't read French. My experience in Brazil, however, had taught me that this was not as irremediable a problem as I used to think (and as pretty much all my North American colleagues still think, so many years later) and wouldn't be now, because the family resemblances among Romance languages meant I got a lot of help from knowing Portuguese. So, I got a French dictionary and read this hefty volume, looking up lots of words at first and finally absorbing the important lesson the book taught: that once a fully functioning art market exists, no one knows how to separate judgments of aesthetic value from judgments of artistic value, a conclusion which ramified through every feature of art markets and the worlds that grew up around them. If experts thought a painting was aesthetically superior, it was by definition rare ("superior" always implies "rare"), and if it was rare, it was economically more valuable. The book

explained how and why art markets worked that way. The theoretical hole was filled. None of my anglophone friends knew this book, which made it suspect to them, but I could use it. In fact, it became a cornerstone of my thinking and of my own book (Becker 1982, 94–123) and an important part of a later book revolved around it as well (Becker 2014, 94–121).

Being an uncontrollable braggart, I began telling everyone I knew about my great discovery (giving full credit to Spector for having led me to it). When I told my old friend and colleague Anselm Strauss, he surprised me by saying that he knew Moulin and was sure that if I wrote her and told her how I was using the book she would be very pleased. I said that I couldn't write her in French, but he said not to worry about that. So, I wrote and soon got a short note back, in very stilted English, thanking me and saying that a longer letter would follow. Which eventually happened, the new one explaining that it was simpler for her to tell her husband, a French pharmacologist with a degree from UC-Berkeley, what she wanted to say and let him say it in English. We began a correspondence, one thing led to another, and she eventually invited me to come to Paris and spend a month in her research center for the sociology of art at the CNRS (*Centre nationale de recherche scientifique*) in Paris. With some trepidation about potential language problems, I accepted. And eventually went and spent the month, mostly in getting acquainted with her and the French sociologists of art she had assembled as her staff, which included such eventually well-known people as Dominique Pasquier, Pierre Michel Menger and Sabine Chalvon-Demersay, all of whom gave me things they had written to read. As I had done in Brazil, I read all this stuff and that improved my ability to read French and simultaneously taught me a lot about a wide variety of French social phenomena.

For example: Pasquier and Chalvon Demersay were collaborating on a book about French television personalities, based on long interviews with many such people, and they asked me to read and discuss their manuscript with them—a common enough academic request, but this was in French and about French personalities I had never heard of. I did it and learned a lot about a lot of things French, large and small.

In addition, they gave me other things they had written: Dominique's master's thesis on Lewis Carroll's photographs of very young girls, and Sabine's book, *Le triangle du XIV^e: des nouveaux habitants dans un vieux quartier de Paris*, a study (as we might say in anglophone sociology) in gentrification.

While I was at Moulin's Center, I met a lot of other people. French sociologists had discovered the so-called "Chicago School," whose current incarnation was thought to involve me, because of my book on deviance, *Outsiders*, and Erving Goffman, because of his book *Asylums*, both of which had been translated into French and were widely read in the sociological community. Two members of this group—Jean-Michel Chapoulie and Jean-Pierre Briand—had translated *Outsiders*, and they took the opportunity of my presence in Paris to introduce me to their extensive network, which included Jean Peneff (who I had already met when he came to Chicago and visited some of my classes), Henri Peretz and others. I became, unwittingly and unintentionally, the mascot and poster boy for these groups who were in opposition to other factions embedded in other *laboratoires* at the CNRS and elsewhere.

Some other groups invited me to speak and so I met many more French sociologists. I spoke, for example, to Alain Touraine's group CADIS (*Centre d'Analyse et d'Intervention Sociologiques*) and so met Michel Wieviorka, at the time finishing

a dissertation based on fieldwork done with politically active Basque, Italian and Middle Eastern groups. I read the manuscript and learned a lot I wouldn't have otherwise known anything about and was able to help him find a publisher for an English translation.

I ran into some characteristic misunderstandings. Alain Touraine, the internationally literate director of CADIS, asked me, after I had made a presentation to his group (in English), who my favorite American author of fiction was. I immediately told the truth: Mark Twain. He was surprised and said so. When I asked who he thought I might have named, he said Faulkner. As I learned later, French readers knew Twain from what they mistakenly thought of as his books for children, like *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*.

As I got more involved in sociological activity in France, my linguistic abilities got pushed beyond what I was comfortable doing, but people were very insistent and I wanted to do what they wanted me to do, so ... here are two examples, which exemplify my habitual response to such invitations: to accept those that push me to do something I know will help me learn more about how to do sociology.

In 1999, the Université Pierre Mendes-France in Grenoble invited me to receive an honorary doctorate. The invitation came from Alain Pessin, a senior professor there who had read and liked my work. But he attached a condition: an informal but quite real requirement that I participate, by giving a paper, in two *colloques*, one at each end of a ten-day period surrounding the convocation during which I would get the degree.

One meeting focused on the sociology of art, an interest Pessin and I shared, and the other on the work of Erving

Goffman, my graduate school contemporary and friend, whose work interested a lot of French sociologists. Well, no problem, I could write those. But Pessin also insisted that I deliver the papers in French. I knew I couldn't possibly write them in French, let alone deliver them orally. He said I could write the papers in English, and he would translate them but offered no such relaxation of the oral delivery requirement. He also insisted that I play the piano as part of the festivities, and I agreed to do it if he found a suitable bass player for me to perform with. Which he did, in the person of a terrific bassist named Benoit Cancoin, who became "my" bassist when need for one arose in any French venue.

So, I agreed to these requirements and, when he delivered the translations, all our French friends rehearsed me until I could deliver them intelligibly. And I did it.

But, of course, having done it let everyone know that I could, if pushed hard enough, do it again. I don't mean that I was buried in invitations and demands to deliver papers and talks in French, but it did mean that now and then our friends and acquaintances occasionally spoke in French to others in the room, assuming that I would understand them. And that assumption became increasingly true, though it took quite a while. Friends began teaching us slang you would never hear in academic discourse, or in formal language lessons. I remember vividly someone deciding, as we were about to leave a café with them, that we were ready to learn to say "on se casse" which could be the equivalent of an English "Let's go" or the more slangy American "Let's get out of here" or, slanger yet, "Let's split." And learning about regional accents—that people from the south of the country pronounced "t's" in a way Parisians didn't: In the word *maintenant*, for instance, they would pronounce the first "t". Parisians didn't.

Neither of those is of any real importance, but they signal how you learn to recognize the way, in these two cases, regional variations in speech or variations in formality signaled variations in the kind of relationship you now had with people who spoke that way to you and in front of you.

I didn't suddenly find myself filled with a grand knowledge of French social structure and social practices, large and small. But I did begin to notice distinctions—between kinds of people and places and situations—I hadn't noticed before. I began to learn what children learn as events show them social differences they don't recognize yet, but soon enough will, have names for and appropriate ways to respond to. People, after all, don't usually announce the full social meaning of such gestures, they just do them and you make your inferences and check them out as time goes on. I had had a taste of such an experience in Brazil, but this was more intensive and continued much longer, in fact continues to the present.

You learn linguistic details and social distinctions together and, with a little imagination, can pluck a lot of sociological ideas from small events. One day I was walking down a street near several important academic institutions with a senior social scientist when he suddenly and without explanation said that we had to cross the street. I followed him but once we were on the other side, I asked him *why* we had had to cross the street and he said only that there was someone there he didn't wish to acknowledge. I figured out who he meant and why he might not have wanted to "acknowledge" that person. And so, added a number of details to my growing understanding of how France and America differed in more than language. I learned, for instance, that French social science was a very small world and Paris was in that respect a surprisingly small town. Two American sociologists who didn't want to cross paths accidentally could avoid each other

indefinitely—it's a big country and academic institutions are scattered everywhere—but not in Paris, which is The Center for a large number of local groups and organizations. And *everyone* comes through Paris now and then.

In addition to these small increments of learning from daily life, I learned a lot from more standard scholarly activities. I went to meetings and classes where business was conducted in French. Probably more importantly, as I met more people, they inevitably gave me both published and unpublished papers, on all kinds of topics. I met people who worked on subjects I had never thought about before, not because I was actively disinterested in them but because—well, there were so many things to be interested in and you couldn't learn about all of them, could you? Now that someone I'd met casually had written about one of these topics and wanted to give me a paper to look at—why not? And these topics were not the same as the ones dealt with in the papers Americans gave me. Which was another important lesson. Sociology dealt with somewhat different empirical fields and examples in different countries.

One consequential result of such a meeting was that I read some books and papers my new friend Alain Pessin had written. He was a smart and interesting guy, and we had collaborated on a dialogue, eventually published, in which we discussed the similarities and differences between Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *champ* (field) and my idea of *monde* (world) as they applied to the activities of artists and the people with whom they did their artistic work.

But that wasn't Alain's only, or even his principal, area of scholarly interest. He had written a lot about and done serious field research on utopian movements and organizations and, in the time-honored practice of professors everywhere

had given me, just as Gilberto Velho had in Brazil, copies of the books he had written on his topics.

This was yet another case in which serendipity threw me into the path of something I would never have sought out independently. The books fascinated me, with their mixture of historical depth and ethnographic detail. But I was, no surprise, most struck by the way he had used the idea of a “social world,” as I had elaborated it for the case of art and artists, to analyze the development of *utopias*, idealized communities intended to overcome the political and moral deficiencies of real-world social groupings.

Unlike more conventional treatments of utopian thought and communities, Pessin’s books (1999 and 2001) adopted the idea of “art world,” which emphasized the work and activity of *everyone* involved—not just the thinkers and philosophers who outlined the basic visions and ideas, which ordinarily was what interested almost all investigators—to make sense of what he knew about utopian communities. He began by listing all the people actually involved in creating and maintaining such a community. First of all, to be sure, the philosopher or political thinker who had written the founding document, the text which outlined the principles on which he wanted to base his new community. But that was just the beginning. The thinkers were followed by the planners, who organized the spaces the utopia’s founding members would occupy, and the architects who designed the buildings that would be built in those spaces, and the rest of a lengthy list. I don’t know of any work in English that makes that kind of use of my notions.

Sadly, Alain died, unexpectedly, before we had had time to talk about this very much. But I wrote, as my contribution to an event dedicated to his memory, a paper about all I had

learned from him, and wrote it in French, from the start.

French began to be forced on me from other directions. Alain Garrigou, a political scientist, had come across my book *Outsiders* and invited me to participate in the *Entretiens Franklin*, a bilingual French/English series of yearly meetings he had found the money for and ran in an informal partnership with some people at the University of Leicester (in Great Britain) who were devoted to the estimable work of Norbert Elias and (some of them) to the study of “football hooliganism,” an oddly British specialty. Garrigou was from Bordeaux, had good connections with the wine people there, and the annual meetings of the group were always well-supplied with good wine.

One consequence of my connection with Garrigou was to be invited, with him and his good friend Jack Goody, the distinguished British anthropologist, to appear on Sylvain Bourmeau’s “La Suite des Idées,” a program on Radio France Culture. I tried to get out of it by saying I couldn’t keep up with Bourmeau’s rapid-fire radio French. But he and Garrigou insisted, and I wasn’t sure that Goody’s French was any better than mine ... so what the hell! And I somehow got through the program. And that turned me into someone Bourmeau decided he could count on. Which led to a solo appearance for a half hour in which he kept his promise to help me through a half hour more or less all in French, which did just a little to convince me that I really could do such a thing.

A couple of years later, he called me and wanted me to do something else, and considerably more ambitious: five half-hour programs that we would record in two afternoons to be broadcast over five days. And they had to be *all* in French. I once again insisted I wasn’t capable of such a thing, but he ignored that. We did it and when I listened to the results

later, I decided it wasn't *too* bad.

I don't tell these stories to brag, though it does read that way now that I look it over, but to demonstrate the obvious truth that anyone can do such "impossible" things if they are led into them as casually, gradually, simply and unavoidably, as I was. And the point of all this bragging is not that everyone should do such things, but rather that everyone should accept such serendipitous intrusions into their plans and recognize the desirability of accepting their consequences.

Afterthoughts

These stories are my stories, they won't be anyone else's. The stories from my life aren't meant to convince you that you should go forth and do the same, but rather that you should see what the linguistic possibilities in your own life are and recognize that learning languages can not only be fun and enrich your life, but that it can also enrich your sociological practice in unpredictable ways. My conclusion from all this is simply that chance often gives us better results than the most careful planning.

The major, and surely the most important, gift chance can offer any researcher is escape from the inevitably truncated idea of what the possibilities of any situation are. Knowing only the one version of sociology and its problems currently the object of intense concentrated research and thinking among your colleagues in your own country limits your thinking in ways you can't see, ways that cut you off from ideas that have grown out of other national situations and histories. The more you expose your mind to alternatives, the more you will be able to test your ideas and guesses against new materials that almost surely won't be just like what you've seen back home, and the better your results will be.

How I Learned a Few "Foreign" Languages

Social scientists can't, for many reasons, do true experiments, but they can search the world for places where society and history have tried out different combinations of situations and people and events to see what those have to tell us.

And to do that you will probably have to learn some new languages. Sometimes, the language of a different society in a different part of the world. But perhaps just as often the language of an esoteric profession or trade in your own country. If you want to study how musicians make music you really have to become, at least in a rudimentary way, musically literate. Music is *their* language, it's what they use to do the thing you want to understand and explain, and you'll do a better job, and it will be easier, if you learn the language they do it in. Robert Faulkner and I (2014) took advantage of the way another part of our lives had taught us the language working musicians conducted that business in to write a book that explained some interesting social processes to be found in their work world. You can find the same thing in any kind of work world—all of which have specific phenomena that don't occur elsewhere, and you can't study those things if you don't know the language people talk about them in. If you accept Everett Hughes' suggestion that everything in society is *somebody's* work, then every study, it could just as easily be carpenters or plumbers, will probably involve learning some new language.

Foi por Acaso: Conceptualizing Coincidence

I became interested in the problem discussed here in a way that embodies that problem. Here's what happened.

In April of 1990, I went to Rio de Janeiro as a Fulbright Scholar, to teach in the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Antropologia Social at the Museu Nacional. It was my third visit to Rio, my second experience teaching in that program. I got there the first time through an odd conjuncture of circumstances. A friend, who I had met through our mutual connection to the Haight Ashbury Free Medical Clinic (a story in itself) was now in charge of higher education for the Ford Foundation's Brazilian operation. He had met Gilberto Velho, who taught in this graduate program and whose specialty was urban anthropology. Gilberto had read my book *Outsiders*, and many of his students were studying the phenomenon of deviance. So, Richie Krasno called me and suggested that I come to Rio as part of the Ford-supported program at the Museu.

This came out of the blue. The only thing I knew about Brazil was bossa nova, and that because of my participation in the music business. But, for some reason which I never understood or tried to explain to myself, I decided that this was something I should do. I spent a year studying Portuguese, read (with enormous difficulty) the two books of his own Gilberto sent me, and went there in the fall of 1976. I had a wonderful time and maintained the connection, reading work the people I had met there sent me, sending my own work there for them to read, visiting one other time, seeing Brazilians who came to the United States, and working with several Brazilian students who came for advanced degrees or just for a year's study abroad.

I went to Rio again in 1990 for what felt to me like a long overdue return. I taught a course with Gilberto on, roughly, the “Chicago School of sociology,” a topic he had long been interested in and which, having become fashionable in Paris, was becoming more interesting to others in Rio. Using Gilberto’s office as my headquarters, I had plenty of time to explore the debris on his worktable, an enormous pile of magazines, journals, newspapers, books, and papers. I had been reading a lot of Portuguese since I arrived, and one of the things I read was an article by Antonio Cândido (Cândido 1990), who I had never heard of but who was in fact one of the most important literary figures in Brazil. The sophistication and literary grace of the article impressed me greatly and I wanted to know more about its author.

Cândido, it turned out, had been trained in sociology and had in fact taught sociology for many years before becoming a professor of comparative literature; his dissertation (Cândido 1964/1987) was a study of the way of life of rural villagers in the state of São Paulo. And, in consequence, Mariza Peirano, an anthropologist interested in the development of Brazilian anthropology, had interviewed him for her thesis. Nurturing my developing interest in Cândido, Gilberto gave me an article Peirano had written about him, based on that interview (Peirano 1991, pp. 25–49), and another article which discussed an interesting phenomenon she had discovered during her research (Peirano 1992).

I found that article interesting, from the very first paragraph, which went like this:

Eleven years ago, while doing a series of interviews with social scientists, I noticed a curious phenomenon. My objective then was to clarify matters which had until then remained

cloudy to me, even after having read the works and studied the intellectual careers of these authors, who I considered fundamental for understanding the development of social science in Brazil. Most of them had been born during the Twenties and were, therefore, in their fifties and sixties. They included Florestan Fernandes, Antonio Cândido, Darcy Ribeiro and, the youngest, Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira. In these interviews, each of which lasted about two hours, I was surprised to hear, again and again, the expression “It was by chance” or “It’s a matter of a chance phenomenon” [in Portuguese, “foi por acaso”] offered as an explanation of a change of course at a specific moment in their careers. They all used the explanation of “chance” or “coincidence” in our conversations. (Peirano 1992)

Peirano was surprised because, she says, the work of all of these authors was utterly committed to highly deterministic models of social causation. It was only in discussing their own lives that the deterministic theories were not adequate explanations; when they talked about other people, more conventional social science talk worked just fine.

She gave a series of examples of how the lives of these scholars reflected chance events. One of them dealt with the way Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira, a leader in the development of professional anthropology in Brazil, became an anthropologist:

At the end of 1953, Darcy Ribeiro [a pioneer in Brazilian anthropology] gave a talk at the Municipal Library in São Paulo. He was looking for an assistant for a course he was going to

teach at the Museum of the Indian, and thought that Roberto, who was introduced to him by a mutual acquaintance, looked like the most capable and intelligent person for the job. Roberto was reluctant, since his training was in philosophy and sociology, but this did not convince Darcy, who argued that since Levi-Strauss had learned ethnology after his formal education was finished, why not Roberto? Thus, owing to this “purely accidental” beginning, a meeting in the Municipal Library, Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira made the transition from sociology to anthropology, learning from Darcy the lesson of “indigenism,” keeping from his sociological training with Florestan [Fernandez] the ambition to be theoretical as well. Thus, was born a sociological anthropology in which the concept of “interethnic friction” gave evidence that Roberto Cardoso had created an “Eve” from a rib taken from the distinctive sociology taught at the University of São Paulo. (Peirano 1992)

I myself was, by another set of circumstances which had led to my recent marriage, peculiarly open to the recognition of what I thought of as the “chance” elements in social life. Like so many people, I was tremendously aware of the many things that, had they happened differently, would have sent me somewhere other than Columbia, Missouri, on the day I met Dianne Hagaman. I could deliver an endless lecture on how easily it might have happened that we would not have met. So, I read Peirano’s paper with great interest and attention.

I delivered the lecture on how Dianne and I met, as much as Gilberto would listen to, to him one day, and we ended up

discussing the topic for the remaining weeks of my stay in Rio. In other words, to bring this self-exemplifying digression to an end, I became interested in the problem of the role of chance and coincidence in social life quite by accident.

As I thought about it, the chief problem seemed to be that, while everyone recognizes that stories like these are “really the way things happen,” there is no conceptual language for discussing this thing that everyone knows. When we talk as professional social scientists, we talk about “causes” in a way we don’t recognize in daily life. That disparity would not bother a lot of sociologists, but it bothers me. And I think it ought to bother all of us. Herbert Blumer used to give his students (of whom I was one) the following exercise: Apply any of the current theories of social psychology to any ten minutes of your own experience. What we found out doing this exercise was that the theories we learned in other courses were totally useless for this mundane purpose. We were left with the question: if these theories couldn’t deal with something as simple as how I make breakfast, how could they deal with the nature of urbanism, class conflict, and the rest of it?

To be applicable to the details of daily life is a tough criterion for any theory to meet. But it is the criterion I want to invoke in discussing the ubiquitous phenomenon of chance. Can we find a language that will do justice to our common-sense understanding of its role in what happens to us? And, when we find that language, will it lead us to discoveries about the nature of social life we would not have reached otherwise?

The Phenomenology of Coincidence

Gilberto and I made some progress discussing the problem. For one thing, it’s notable that “chance” comes up as the explanation of major events in one’s life—how I chose my

career, how I chose my mate—seldom as an explanation of the kind I made above, of how someone got interested in a theoretical topic. Diaconis and Mosteller introduce their discussion of the subject with these examples: “Coincidences ... can alter the course of our lives; where we work and at what, whom we live with, and other basic features of daily existence often seem to rest on coincidence.” (Diaconis and Mosteller 1989, p. 853) Events like careers and marriages are important. They give shape to our lives. We care about their results. We know that had they not occurred our lives would have been completely different. And so, not surprisingly, we want to know the exact explanation of how these important events happened. We are willing to follow long, complex chains of contingencies wherever they take us. The more complex and detailed the story, the more adequate we think the explanation. The complexity of the story testifies to the importance of the event.

But every event, not just the ones that seem important to us, has an equally long chain of events leading up to it. The events that led up to me meeting my wife seem especially important to me. But I had, after all, met many other people I might have become interested in sufficiently for marriage to become a possibility. Since I didn’t become interested in those other people, I don’t look for an explanation of why I met them. I chose, for purposes of this discussion, to treat the discovery of the intellectual problem of coincidence as an event that required this kind of detailed explanation. But I think of all sorts of things all the time. I have a lot of ideas about the nature of social life and social process. Every one of them has an equally complex story leading up to it. Every one of them came from somewhere and is dependent on coincidence just as this one was. Since those thoughts haven’t led to me write anything, their explanation doesn’t interest me.

In other words, we insist on a better explanation for things we think important than we are willing to accept for things that make less difference to us. If we had a more generous notion of what was important, if we insisted on the same detailed level of explanation for a large number of events or (in the limiting case) all events, we would think of society differently than we do.

“Chance” and Chance

But this is not the same as insisting on the “amazing” nature of coincidence or denying the possibility of rational explanation for such events. It is, rather, to say that there must be some underlying structure of social events that makes this way of looking at things reasonable, that makes it possible for people to ground explanations of this kind in empirical observation. It is, in other words, the nature of the rational explanation that is in question.

Diaconis and Mosteller (1989, pp. 859–860), in their illuminating article, list four mundane and rational explanations of what might, uninspected, look like amazing coincidences.

1. *Hidden causes*: there are determinable causes, we just haven’t discovered them, and probably have not looked for them.
2. *Psychology*: “What we perceive as coincidences and what we neglect as not notable depends on what we are sensitive to.”
3. *Multiple Endpoints and the Cost of “Close.”* If we are sufficiently loose in our definition of what constitutes a coincidence, many things that might seem amazing are in fact statistically quite probable. In a group of 23

people, for instance, it is even odds that at least two have the same birthday. But it only takes fourteen people to make it even odds that two have a birthday within a day. And with just seven people it is about 50-50 that two have a birthday within a week of each other.

4. *The Law of Truly Large Numbers:* If you have enough cases, even the rarest things happen fairly often. “If a coincidence occurs to one person in a million each day, then [in the U.S., with a population of 250 million] we expect 250 occurrences a day and close to 100,000 such occurrences a year.”

Their analysis leads to the conclusion that coincidence probably does not require any novel kinds of explanation. The explanations we are already familiar with will, properly applied, be all we need.

But their explanations did not solve my problem, although they helped me to specify it more clearly. I was not interested in explaining unusual co-occurrences. I wanted to be able to talk about all the elements that *had* to be present for some event to occur as it did. That made me keenly aware that many of those elements need *not* have been there at all. It was not their presence I wanted explained, but the way events depended on the copresence of all these elements, however likely or unlikely that might be.

Determinisms and Causes

I was led, after thinking about these problems for a while, to seek professional help. I seemed to be drifting into a kind of philosophical tangle about the nature of explanation, a topic I know little about. So, I consulted an expert: Stephen Toulmin,

a philosopher who had a deep understanding not only of epistemological issues but also of the problems and potential of social science.

I presented my results to him and he had a number of things to say, mostly about determinism as a mode of explanation. He first made a necessary distinction between the explanations we accept for simple physical events and those required for understanding human events. The conventional notion of scientific explanation, he said, rests on a peculiar case, Newton's explanation of planetary motion, in which it was possible to know the few things necessary to explain, to a degree of accuracy that allowed for predictions near enough as makes no difference, the observed motions of the known planetary bodies.

Toulmin pointed out to me that the generalization of that procedure—the idea that if you just know all the initial conditions of the system under investigation and the laws that govern its operation, you could predict the resulting configuration at any given moment—required an amount of information, when you dealt with complicated systems, that it was not, and never would be, practical to collect and collate, no matter how big or fast the computer. And that is just what is being talked about in the problem as I posed it.

If we look at the amount of information implied in the descriptions I was giving, and that Peirano was alluding to, it is an amount that is clearly beyond gathering prospectively. We can pick out what was important for the occurrence of an event afterward, but we can't specify all those conditions in advance. That means that the conventional notion of scientific explanation, which takes the ability to predict as the sign of an adequate explanation, is faulty. Or, to put it as Toulmin did to me, determinism may be formally correct but it can

only be an empty formalism, since the required degree of knowledge can't be achieved.

The second step in his analysis was to point to the Aristotelian distinction between necessary and sufficient causes, a corollary of which is that the most detailed and complex statement of the preconditions of an event does not entail that the thing in question should happen. Take the example I gave earlier, discussing the nature of art worlds, of all the things that must be in place if a symphony concert is to happen in just the way it happens. (Becker 1982, pp. 2 ff.) Toulmin pointed out, quite correctly, that if all those events, all those necessary preconditions, are realized, this in no way makes it necessary that the concert take place. The musicians can be there, with their instruments in working order, the music to be played (and already rehearsed) open on the stands in front of them, the audience in its place, the conductor on the podium—all those conditions can be satisfied and the concert still might not happen. Necessary conditions, no matter how exhaustively described, aren't sufficient to explain an event's occurrence.

This analysis discredits any kind of old-fashioned full determinism. Well, for lots of people this is old news. But not, I'm afraid, for many in the sociological trade. Most sociologists, most social scientists, still think of determinism, perhaps with a kind of desperation, as the way it's done; if you can't think this way, what else is there? I confess to more than a touch of this myself, although I know better. The kind of analysis called for by the view of social life I'm putting forward here demands something beyond the simple causal determinism my generation grew up with. If this view is correct, you can never produce laws of the "If A, then B" type, no matter how complicated you make A, B, and all their kin.

But it won't do—at least it won't do for me—to substitute a woolly language of “process,” “emergence,” and indeterminacy. I'd like to find a general language for talking about the view of social life I'm talking about here. Toulmin warned that any general statement of even so wonderful a conception as I am pushing will surely be just as vacuous and useless as complete determinism. He thought, and is probably right, that the best we can do is tell a good, intelligible, plausible story about how things have happened that is in line with everything we know and with our experience. I might put what I'm looking for less grandly, and more reasonably, by saying that I'd like a language I can teach to students so that they would know how to construct stories up to that standard.

Georg von Wright (von Wright 1971) has given a helpful, though complicated, formal analysis of the complexities involved in constructing such a language. His most useful contribution is to distinguish two kinds of explanations. One shows “*why* something was or became *necessary*; the other shows “*how* something was or became *possible*.” When we know how something became possible we still do not know enough for prediction, only for what he and others have called “retrodiction.” (p. 58)

From the fact that a phenomenon is known to have occurred, we can infer back in time that its antecedent necessary conditions must also have occurred, in the past. And by “looking into the past” we may find traces of them (in the present). (pp. 58–59)

So, what we'd like, what I'd like, is a way to talk about how things became possible, how a variety of conditions had to be met in order that the phenomenon I care enough about to want to explain actually happened. But this way of talking has to preserve the chancy character of what happened, the

sense that it might not have happened after all.

Process and Contingency

The above analysis surely leads, practically speaking (and in spite of my complaint about such woolly notions), to the idea that things don't just happen, but rather occur in a series of steps, which we social scientists are inclined to call "processes," but which could just as well be called "stories." A well-constructed story can satisfy us as an explanation of an event. The story tells how something happened—how this happened first and led, in a way that is reasonable to see, to that happening, and then those things led to the next thing ... and right on to the end. And how, if all that hadn't happened, the event we're interested in wouldn't have happened either. We could describe the necessary conditions for an event (call it *It*) to occur as the story of how one thing after another happened until it was almost certain that *It* would happen. To recur to an earlier example, if we get all the musicians assembled to play a symphony concert ... and if the audience shows up ... and if there is no fire or tornado or other unexpected natural obstacle... then it is hard to see what would prevent the concert from taking place.

If two people meet, however, it is not as certain as that that they will fall in love. Far from it. Mostly people do not fall in love with people they meet casually. Friends are always scheming, bringing likely pairs together, only to have their plans fall through. So having all the preconditions in place doesn't mean that *It* will happen. The anthropologist Lloyd Warner used to tell the story of investigating an Australian aboriginal society whose members were alleged not to understand the physiological basis of pregnancy. When he asked them where babies come from, they told him just what they had told earlier investigators: babies wait in the clan's spirit

well until a woman has a special dream; then one baby's spirit leaves the spirit well and enters her stomach. He pursued it. "What about when men and women, you know, make *jig-jig* [have intercourse]? Doesn't that have something to do with it?" They looked at him pityingly, as if at a stupid child, and said that, of course, that's what made the baby. But, they reminded him, men and women do that all the time, but women only get pregnant once in a while, only, they pointed out triumphantly, when the mother dreamed of the spirit well.

I learned, largely through the influence of Everett C. Hughes, to think of these dependencies of one event on another as "contingencies." When event A happens, the people involved are now in a situation where any of several things could happen next. If I graduate high school I can go to college, to the Army, to trade school, to jail ... those are among the possible next steps. There are a large number of possible next steps, but not an infinite number, and usually only a relatively small number are more or less likely (though the unlikely ones can happen too). Which path is taken at such a juncture depends on many things. We can call the things that next step depends on "contingencies," and say that event A being followed by B, rather than C or D, is contingent on something else, X. My going to college is contingent on my getting sufficiently high test scores to be admitted to the college I want, on my having enough money, on having a sufficient desire to go to college to put up with some of the associated inconveniences, and so on.

So, the pathway that leads to any event can be seen as a succession of events that are contingent on each other in this way. You might envision it as a tree diagram in which, instead of the probability of getting to a particular end point getting smaller the farther you get from the starting point, the probability of reaching point X increases the nearer you get to it. I will return to this problem. (von Wright 1971 uses tree

diagrams effectively in his analysis.)

Intercontingency

The chain of events that leads up to the event that is important to me, the one for which I want a detailed explanation, involves many other people. So the chain of events that led to me being interested in this problem required, among many other things, not the least of which is that I ever have gone to Brazil in the first place, that Mariza Peirano have interviewed a number of Brazilian social scientists, that they all have used this form of explanation, that she have written a paper about it, that the paper be on Gilberto Velho's desk where I could find it (which in turn requires that he know Peirano, that she send him this then unpublished work), etc., etc. Any one of these other people might have done something different such that my interest would not, or could not, have been aroused in the way it was.

The Swiss playwright Max Frisch, in his play "Biography: A Game," embodied this thought in an interesting dramatic situation. A mysterious stranger ("The Recorder") appears to the main character, Hannes Kürmann, one day, offering him the opportunity to go back over his life, the details of which are available to him through a computer terminal and operator located stage right throughout the action (in the staging I saw in Minneapolis, though not in the published script (Frisch 1969)), and change anything he likes. The hero relives a number of crucial moments in his life. The play begins with him trying to change the episode in which he first meets and sleeps with Antoinette Stein who, as he knows, he will marry and eventually kill. When the taxi driver who was called to take her home rings the bell, they both ignore it. Now, looking back, he wants, instead of getting involved with her, to send her away politely, but finds that he cannot change his

actions —his character apparently does not have the will to do it—in such a way as to change the eventual outcome. Finally, when the Recorder asks if he wants to change the murder itself, they have this exchange:

KÜRMANN. I know how it happened.

RECORDER. By chance?

KÜRMANN. It wasn't inevitable.

Which expresses nicely my first point, about the nature of this sort of explanation, which conceives events as neither random nor determined.

But, having chosen not to commit the murder, Kürmann learns that, instead of spending at least twelve years in prison, he now gets cancer, and is on his way to a mean death, with his wife, to whom he had meant to give a new life by making this new choice, now condemned to visit him religiously.

So far, contingency. But now the Recorder turns to Kürmann's wife, Antoinette:

RECORDER. Frau Kürmann.

ANTOINETTE. Yes?

RECORDER. Do you regret the seven years with him? [ANTOINETTE *stares at the RECORDER.*] If I told you that you too have the choice, you too can start all over again, would you know what you would do differently in your life?

ANTOINETTE. Yes.

RECORDER. Yes?

ANTOINETTE. Yes.

RECORDER. Then go ahead ... You too can choose all over again.

They then play the opening scene, in which she meets Kürmann for the first time, again. But this time, when the taxi driver rings, she says goodbye, and walks out of Kürmann's apartment, and his life, for good.

KÜRMANN. What now?

RECORDER. Now she has gone.

KÜRMANN. What now?

RECORDER. And now you're free.

KÜRMANN. Free ...

And so, we are reminded that everything that happened in Kürmann's life, of course, depended not only on his actions and choices, but also on what all the other people he was involved with did. If Antoinette changes her life, his will necessarily change as well. He cannot marry and murder someone who walked out of his life so definitively. I want to call the dependence of his actions on hers *intercontingency*.

Peirano quotes Norbert Elias along these lines:

In contrast [to "determinism"], when the indeterminacy, the "freedom" of the individual is stressed, it is usually forgotten that there are simul-

taneously many mutually dependent individuals ... More subtle tools of thought than the usual antithesis of "determinism" and "freedom" are needed if such problems are to be solved. (Elias, 1970, p. 167)

It is just such tools that I am looking for.

Details

To make analyses that take into account this kind of interdependency requires that the analyst know a great deal about the people and events being analyzed. Another story is in order here. While I was thinking about these problems I made a trip to New Orleans for a meeting of the Society for Photographic Education and arranged to meet a friend for dinner at a small theatre where a symposium was being held on the work of Charles Bukowski, a poet who had spent considerable time in New Orleans. His biographer and a few local people who had known him constituted a panel who were answering questions from the audience when we walked in. The questions were mostly like this: "Didn't Bukowski live at 724 Royal Street in April of 1943?" And the answers were mostly like this: "No, he didn't get to New Orleans until May 12 of 1943 and then he lived across the street, at 727 Royal Street. He didn't live at 724 until the following year." (The biography being discussed was that of Cherkovski 1991)

The amount of detailed knowledge the biographer had about Bukowski's movements and activities was staggering, far more than sociologists ever know about the people whose activities they propose to analyze and understand. William Foote Whyte (1943), perhaps, had such detailed knowledge of the activities of Doc and the Nortons, and Chick and the college boys in Cornerville, but no other sociologists I can think

of have known that much about the people they studied. And even Whyte largely lost track of these men after the several years in which he was in close contact with them, so that he could not construct the elaborate, years-long chains of contingency and intercontingency I have been discussing.

Literary biographers, attempting to explain the works produced by their subjects, routinely amass this kind of knowledge. Richard Ellman's infinitely detailed biography of James Joyce (Ellmann 1959), an almost day-by-day account of his comings and goings, set the contemporary standard. Writers are perhaps more inclined than most people to keep written records of their doings—journals and daybooks, letters, and drafts of writing-in-progress—and when writers become well-known their relatives, friends, acquaintances and business associates are also more apt than those of ordinary people to keep memorabilia and to be available for extensive interviewing.

It is, however, neither impossible nor inconceivable that similarly detailed information could be gathered for research purposes, about "ordinary people." Roger Barker did just that in his study of a day in the life of a Kansas boy (Barker, Wright, and Barker 1966). Still, that was just one day, and one boy, and the contingencies of the lives of all the people that boy came in contact with were not inquired into. There were other days, too, and other boys, of different races and classes, not to mention girls, whose lives would have been as interesting as his.

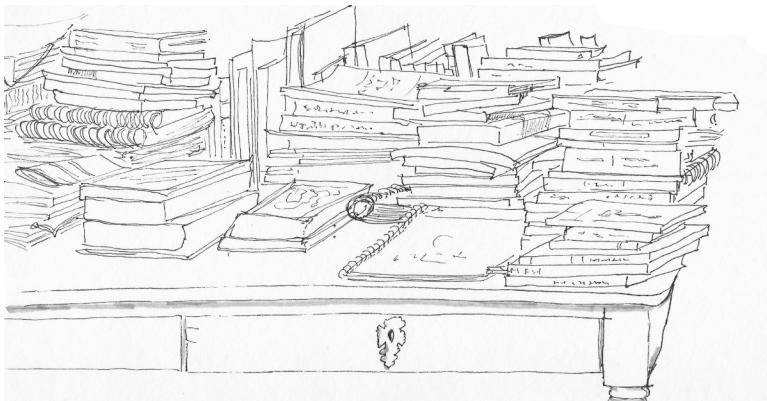
It is important to keep in mind that the decision not to gather material in such detail is not, nor do I see how it could be, based in any scientific principle, but is rather founded on the impracticality of such an endeavor. Impracticality can be usefully conceptualized as a budgetary matter, a judgment that

it is not worth investing the time, effort, and money required to gather the material in question. Steven Dedijer once called my attention to a newspaper report of a study of meteors, based on films made by cameras placed in remote mountain areas, where ambient light from nearby cities and towns would not interfere with filming the meteors' trajectories. "How do you think they got those films?" he asked me. Meteors falling near enough to earth to be filmed are, after all, a rare occurrence. The answer was that the scientists just filmed in many locations, all night, every night, and waited for the rare occurrences to show up. (A similar strategy is followed in filming bank lobbies so as to have film of the rare occurrence of a robbery, and in studies of nuclear fission, similarly based on the inspection of enormous numbers of photographs for evidence of rare interactions.) What, Dedijer wanted to know, would sociological studies be like if we were able to gather data in a similar fashion? But, of course, no one would pay for such an enormous "fishing expedition." We must content ourselves, for the foreseeable future, with less than perfect data. But these examples might serve as touchstones, reminding us of what we are missing in precision of data.

Footnote: "*Foi por acaso*" is a Brazilian expression meaning, roughly, "it happened by chance." It is pronounced, in Portuguese, "foy por ah-KA-zoo."

Gilberto's Desk

Written for a memorial event after Gilberto's death



I came to Rio de Janeiro in 1990, as a Fulbright professor in the Programa da Antropologia Social at the Museu Nacional, under the wing (as during my first visit in 1976) of Gilberto Velho. By this time, we knew each other well, had read large amounts of each other's work, and had shared a number of wonderful students.

I worked out of Gilberto's office in the Museu and at times, when he was busy with students or meetings, he left me free to root around on the large table which served as his storage space, covered with paper perhaps as much as a foot deep: books, journals, manuscripts, xeroxed copies of manuscripts, letters, photographs, handwritten pages about who knows what or by whom written (if the page was in his handwriting it wasn't readable).

Some scholars keep their materials in an orderly way. They arrange their books on the shelves alphabetically. Or by subject matter. Or by geographical area. Or language. The journals sit on the shelves in alphabetical order, the individual

numbers of each in numerical order. That kind of arrangement makes it easy to find what you are looking for. But when you need something you don't know you need, something you aren't looking for, order is your enemy. It hides the hard to find where you will never look if you follow your standard routine. You have to run across it by accident.

Some people seek the unexpected deliberately and have routines for accelerating the arrival of that kind of accident.

Anselm Strauss would go looking for a book in the library. But, when he had found what he wanted, he routinely turned 180° and looked at the shelves on the other side of the aisle. In a library arranged according to some standard bibliographic system—North American libraries use the Dewey Decimal System, which categorizes subjects in a sort of Linnean system and gives them all numbers—turning 180° almost always confronts you with a subject that has nothing to do with what you came there for: a different part of the world, a different language, a different scholarly subject. You came looking for information on rainfall in Argentina and the opposite wall has books on German philosophy. Something like that.

Gilberto's worktable brought this system (or lack of it) into his office. All these materials were first arranged, perhaps, by the date they arrived there. But then he would lend this book to you and that book to someone else, and when you returned them, they went into whatever place was convenient, magnifying the disorder. I found many wonderful things there. Some he recommended to me. Others I found by chance, when a word or a name caught my eye. And some of the things had the wonderful, unpredictable quality of changing my life. Not necessarily in large momentous ways, often just in a small way, suggesting a new idea, which led to another idea or a new thought about possible research, or suggesting a new action, like reading a book you came across

accidentally.

The lack of order facilitated random discoveries. So, one day Gilberto told me to read an article he had just published in *Novos Estudos* on then-president Collor. The same issue contained, by chance, Antonio Candido's brilliant essay "Quatro esperas." ["Four Waitings"] I had no idea who Antonio Candido was, but the article followed Gilberto's so I looked at it, saw that it started out with an analysis of Constantine Cavafy's unforgettable poem "Waiting for the Barbarians," and started to read it. If I had followed any conventional scholarly procedure to organize what I read in Portuguese during my 1990 visit, I would never have found this article. But Gilberto's disorder led me to it. And I was struck by its brilliance, its humanism and all the other qualities Candido was known for.

When I asked Gilberto, naively, if "this guy had written anything else," his legendary capacity for gentle sarcasm produced a few choice remarks and a list of books. I learned that Candido had been trained in social anthropology by the members of the French scholarly community who had fled Vichy France and somehow ended up in São Paulo. So Candido learned anthropology and did a community study of a fishing village, which was interesting, but much less interesting than his remarks about Cavafy and the others who had written about the theme of waiting. So, I read a number of his shorter books on literature, pretty much everything I could find by Candido, and then decided that it was a scandal that these ideas and analyses and appreciations weren't available to Anglophone readers. Which led me to translate a bookful of his essays and see them through to publication. The ramifications of this unexpected discovery shape my life still. I did not become a translator, though I might have if other interests hadn't immediately claimed my attention.

One side track leads to another. When Gilberto saw, with approval and pleasure, that he had me hooked on Candido, he produced a paper by a colleague in Brasilia who had written her Harvard dissertation on the history of Brazilian anthropology, for which she had interviewed a number of the founders of the field, including Antonio Candido. I read Mariza Peirano's paper on the role of *acaso* ["coincidence" or "chance"] in the occupational choices of this first generation, which focused on the "*artimanhas do acaso*,"[the tricks of coincidence] and that idea became the germ of a paper I wrote on coincidence which in turn became an important part of my later book *Tricks of the Trade*.

Looking at Karina Kuschnir's evocative drawing of Gilberto's worktable reminds me of the creative disorder that filled his life and thought and work, and of the pleasure, joy and profit it brought to so many, turning us from what convention and familiarity and sheer laziness would otherwise have engaged us in. We were all his students in this great lesson of life.

An afterthought. Many people have asked me, over the years for the story of the rubber stamp of the capybara that Gilberto used so often and so freely and so mysteriously. He stamped all sorts of official documents, letters to important officials, etc. with this design and never explained it. I am the only one who can clear up the mystery, because *I was there!*



When my first wife, Nan, and I came to Brazil in 1976 we prepared for our trip only by going to the Chicago Zoo that we lived near where we saw a capybara. The sign said that it came from Brazil. So, when we arrived in Rio de Janeiro that was the only thing we knew about the country: bossa nova and capybaras. And naturally Nan asked Gilberto if there were any capybaras near Rio that we could see (because we didn't know it was a jungle animal). But Gilberto didn't just say no. He said he would make an investigation. And then he started asking everyone we met if they had seen any capybaras on the beach that day, or in Ipanema, etc. Everyone, of course, thought he was being crazy, as usual, and we soon realized it was a joke.

After that, he and I one day decided that we should make it a bigger joke, so we invented the Veneravel Ordem dos Amigos da Capybara. I said we needed to have something "official" that we could use, and when I returned to Chicago I found the picture in a book somewhere and had a rubber stamp made. I think there were three altogether: one for Gilberto, one for me. There was a third member (but the person involved didn't ask to be and maybe didn't even want to be) and I withhold the name to protect the innocent.

And, of course, Gilberto began stamping all sorts of papers, even official ones, with the capybara. I don't know what people thought it meant but we were both amused by the idea.

Of course, we both pretended that it was a very secret organization and sometimes gave people the idea that maybe it was larger than it was! But it was really just the two of us, because I don't think the third member thought it was funny.

The San Francisco Art Institute and Photography

I've been living, off and on for more than seventy years, in the North Beach neighborhood of San Francisco. When I first moved there, most of my nearby neighbors were, or were one generation from, immigrants from Sicily. The men came to fish, the work they had done at home. Their boats took off daily from Fisherman's Wharf, then a working fishery rather than the tourist attraction it eventually became. They sold their fish to wholesalers in the nearby streets, who distributed them throughout the city to retailers and restaurants, but you could sometimes buy them fresh off the boat.

Many had come from the same Sicilian village, and had brought their Madonna with them, the *Madonna del Lume*, who was said to have miraculously appeared to a boatful of fishermen lost in a storm and led them safely to shore. The painting of the event hung and probably still hangs, in St. Peter and Paul, the local church on Filbert Street. They were almost all related, one way or another, to each other, either by kinship or because they were feuding with each other. Our neighbor, the elderly widow Mrs. Cuneo, confided to us that there were nineteen other Cuneos in the immediate area "and none of them speak to each other." The fishermen dominated the immediate neighborhood. When the fishing season approached the men sat on the front steps of the two and three flat buildings they lived in, mending their fishing nets.

This almost purely Sicilian enclave, embedded in a more cosmopolitan and well-to-do area called Russian Hill, contained a few other outsiders. Several artists on the faculty of the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI), which had been founded in 1871 on Nob Hill and then migrated to North Beach around 1920, lived in apartments scattered among the fishermen. The fishermen and their families didn't like the artists, thought

they were weird, almost surely immoral, in any case a bad influence on the women in their families, especially their young daughters.

None of that deterred the artists, who liked the cheap rents and easy access to where they taught. So, some well-known artists lived near us at 2360 Jones Street, where we found a home away from home (“home” was in Chicago, because I had, in 1965, joined the faculty of Northwestern University). What we found was a very inexpensive (\$50 a month, even then a bargain) five room place. Our downstairs neighbors were the family of Dave van Kriedt, a tenor saxophone player who had been a member of the original Dave Brubeck Octet. Our daughters played flute and violin respectively and we used to get together and play simple chamber music. I stumbled through the piano parts of the easiest to play works for a few instruments by Haydn and others.

The visual artists who lived across the street, so convenient to their teaching work at the SFAI, included Jim Weeks (the Weeks family were friends with the van Kriedts), whose portraits of jazz players became well-known, Al Light, a sculptor, and the more well-known, Richard Diebenkorn.

That’s all background to my unexpected connection to the Art Institute. I had a leave of absence from Northwestern in 1970, and we were living in our inexpensive apartment on Jones Street, just on the corner of Chestnut Street, and diagonally across from what I later came to know as Studio 16, the big studio that housed photography classes, whose large windows we could look into from our kitchen and dining room.

I had started some preliminary fooling around on a growing interest in—that is, desultory reading about—the sociology of art. I had long been a serious consumer of the arts, especially

music, which I'd played professionally since my early teens. But that was only part of my personal experience. Another part had been a peripheral connection to the Second City theatrical group in Chicago, which gave me a certain amount of backstage knowledge about the dramatic arts.

But I had a gaping hole in this kind of personal knowledge and that had to do with the visual arts. The simple truth is that I can't draw and never could. Other kids in my grammar school class sketched houses and dogs and trees and no-matter-what and anyone could immediately see "what" they had drawn. My "sketches" weren't so easy to decipher. So, I acquired an auxiliary skill to replace what I couldn't do. I learned clever ways of avoiding situations that might require any kind of drawing. At least I had it easier than kids who couldn't carry a tune, who were instructed to pretend to sing when our class had to do that in front of an audience, to mime the facial movements with their mouths that made it look like they were singing, but without letting any sound come out. I just had to stay out of the way when drawing might be necessary.

My first wife, a ceramist and a graduate of the School of the Chicago Art Institute, knew my shameful secret, of course, and she thought it was about time I got some personal experience with visual art. And there we were, right across the street from a school that taught it! So, since it was registration week for the fall semester, she told me to get over there and sign up for a course in anything. What could I do? She was right. I crossed the street.

I had somehow convinced myself that printmaking wouldn't require me to draw and I could easily have found a way to make that true. But when I arrived to register the printmaking class was full. Desperate, I asked what was open and they

said, "Photography." And so, I made what turned out to be a fateful decision.

I enrolled in "Introductory Photography," along with fourteen other beginners. History affected my experience in this class. In 1970, many young people who had missed the famous "summer of love" which was 1969 in San Francisco, still wanted to be there, hoping that it hadn't changed into an ordinary place. But they knew that their parents would never pay for them to go to San Francisco to experience that and thought that going to art school might offer a way around that obstacle. And so there they were, in "Introduction to Photography," about which I suppose they reasoned, much as I had, that they wouldn't have to do much.

And it could have worked out that way for me too. I was in a class of fifteen, twelve of whom were as uninterested in school as I had suspected. The other two were serious in the way I was, they were there and wanted to learn what there was to learn. Unfortunately, the teacher (Steve S _____, I don't remember his name, for reasons that will become obvious in a moment) didn't feel like teaching us much of anything. He explained the rudiments. The film was light sensitive. When you opened the shutter light came in and affected the film. Then you had to "develop" it, and then you had to "print" it, whatever those terms meant. Only three of us cared what any of that meant, and the teacher wasn't really interested in teaching us.

But we were lucky. I hadn't known this, but most of the learning that goes on in a beginning photo class takes place in the laboratory. The "lab" contains everything you need for the two basic operations of developing film and printing the images it contained on to paper. First, the tanks, the reels you wound the exposed film onto and the tanks you put them



into, and the chemical solutions you then immersed them in that “developed” them, that is, turned the part of the film that had been “exposed to light” dark, and then the solution that “fixed” the developed film so that no more changes took place.

The lab also held the enlargers, the machines you put the developed film into, so that you could beam light through it on to the paper, which was held on an easel below, for a specific amount of time. And similar solutions to develop the paper you had thus “printed” the picture on, with the help of a developed negative, and the trays to hold the chemical solutions that did that work.

The “lab monitor,” usually a graduate student, taught us to do all these things with these pieces of unfamiliar equipment and taught us, with casual remarks and offhand hints, how to evaluate our results and then do it all again and again, until we learned how to get the result we wanted (or, better put, that we had learned to want).

So, the lab monitor was the key player, and my two fellow students and I had lucked out and gotten a very fine lab monitor, who knew a lot, had sympathy for us and was willing to

teach us what our teacher didn't want to bother with, and in that way really inducted us into the world of photography. She was good at what she did—making photographs—and shortly after teaching us beginners the rudiments of the craft got hired as a photographer by a newish magazine of the burgeoning rock music world, *Rolling Stone*. Yes, our lab monitor was Annie Leibowitz, who soon after I got to know her became very well-known.

She showed us what to do: how to put the film in the enlarger, how to vary exposure times, how to put the exposed paper into the right chemicals in the right order, how to wash and dry it. In short, how to go from the film we took out of the camera to a print ready to display in class or show anyone for any purpose.

I have one memento of that encounter. One day Annie stopped to look in the tray that held the print I was developing. She liked what she saw and offered to trade me a print she had made for a print of that image. I agreed and gave her a copy of the one she liked. I got in return what became a classic Leibowitz photograph—Allen Ginsberg and the Cockettes, smoking a joint together in the stands of some concert venue. Signed and dated too.

That was only the beginning of what I learned at the Art Institute. Thanks to Annie, I had a solid technical foundation and the beginning of an understanding of what others might see in what I had done and how they might evaluate the images I made. Along the way I also learned the appropriate language. For instance, I wasn't “taking pictures,” I was “making photographs” or “images.” Talking that way distinguished people who knew the ropes from those who didn't and were one of the ways members of the photo community (a vaguely defined, but real, entity) distinguished themselves from

ordinary people. When someone said “image,” where an outsider would have said “picture,” you knew you could talk in a different, perhaps more technical, way and be understood.

But there were a lot of other people to learn from in addition to our lazy beginning instructor. SFAI was a major center of photographic education, a stop on the national circuit of places photographers visited, and so hosted, one way or another, a lot of people who had done and were doing interesting photographic work. Larry Clark, for instance, had just published “Tulsa,” a book of photographs of young drug users that was the current talk of the photographic community, and he came to visit SFAI and show slides of his work and look at the work of advanced students and talk to them about it (an art school ritual known as a “class critique” or “class crit”).

Clark’s work gave me an inkling of what a sociological kind of photography might look like and what it could communicate. Ralph Gibson (who had studied at SFAI), another photographer whose name we often heard mentioned, visited too. Some of the people who visited embodied well-known groups which had figured in photographic history: Imogen Cunningham, considerably older than anyone else involved, lived in the neighborhood, and had belonged to the legendary f64 group of ‘Twenties photographers. We soon learned that these visitors varied in how easy they were to talk to, how interested they were in looking at student work, and other important things. It was a quick introduction to contemporary photography, starting with learning that these were names (there were many more to learn) we should take seriously.

We learned a lot of other things: what kinds of objects, people and situations other people found interesting to photograph and therefore what in the world we might find interesting to

look at more closely; what kinds of things you could do in your own photographs and what you might hear said about them when you showed the results to someone else. You heard a lot of gossip about who was worth paying attention to and who not so much. In other words, we were being inducted into a *world* of photography: learning its characteristic activities, its more or less wide-spread canons of judgment, its famous names and landmarks, its everyday gossip.

Among the important visitors were people who came from elsewhere to teach in the summer school, often but not always alumni of the school itself. Phil Perkis, himself an alumnus, came the summer after I'd taken the introductory course and I was ready for him. I'd shot a lot of film and made a lot of prints and had some serious questions to ask and discuss. I was also far and away the oldest student in that summer school class, probably more "serious" than most. So, he and I gravitated to each other as conversational partners.

I learned many things from him, but in some ways the most important things I learned had to do with teaching rather than making photographs and were perfectly applicable, if you used a little imagination, to teaching almost any subject. Here are two examples.

The class met from 9 to 12 in the morning two days a week. One day, after we were all assembled he announced that he was going to lock us in the studio (a large room) and not let us out until noon, other than to go to the bathroom. "What should we do?" He said, "Well, this is a photography class and you all have cameras with you, you figure it out." And he left the room. For the better part of the next hour we chased each other around trying to catch someone off-guard so we could make a "candid" picture, whatever we thought that meant. At ten o'clock Phil appeared, whistled to get our

attention, and said, "I have a suggestion." (Oh, finally he was going to give us a little help?) "Whatever you've been doing up to now, do something different." And then he left again. I knew, immediately, that whatever I might have learned about photography from that remark, I had learned something very important about how to teach.

The second example came toward the end of the term when he asked me to bring a box of prints to him that we could look at and discuss. He took the box, there might have been forty or fifty photographs in it, and went through it slowly and deliberately, spending serious time with each one before putting it down and going on to the next. I was wondering, 'Wow! What is he going to say?' Occasionally he would put one in a second pile, which didn't have very many pictures, and I supposed that this was a judgment of quality and that when he finished we would talk about what distinguished the two piles (in my mind the "good" ones from the "less good" ones). He finished and sat back as though there was nothing more to say. I wasn't going to let him get away with that, I wanted to know what made the "good" ones good. So, I asked him what the difference between the two piles was. And he said, "I don't know. You look at them at your leisure and see what you see that's interesting."

After I got over my disappointment at not getting a conventional teacher's evaluation, I realized what he had done, how he had left it to me to characterize whatever the difference was and, whatever I decided about that, to get me to look more seriously at what I had done. Because every one of those students (at least this is what I thought at the time) had the idea that *he* was the expert and *he* would be able to tell us what was wrong with what we had done and how to improve on it. He had built the situation up so that we would come to that conclusion and he wanted to kill that idea, since

it would take the responsibility for whatever qualities the picture had out of our hands.

Another summer schoolteacher, Saul Warkov, also an alumnus of the school, taught slightly different lessons. What I remember best is the show he put up in the school gallery which consisted of all thirty-six frames on one roll of film, printed in a deliberately non-careful way, as if to say, "fine printing is not what this is about," that is, to force viewers to think more deeply than they otherwise would have about what the picture might contain. The print made from one frame had been dropped on the ground and stepped on with a dirty shoe, as if to say, "It's not about being carefully made on a clean sheet of paper, OK?" That made a different kind of impression on me than Perkis' "critique," but it did make a serious impression. I was ready to learn from hints of that kind rather than from careful, explicit lessons.

Other opportunities, if that's what they were, came up from time to time at SFAI. Living so close by made it easy to walk across the street for a cup of coffee in the school cafeteria and see who else was there to gossip with about the many things we shared an interest in. "Did you see Saul Warkov's show in the Gallery?" "What do you think of Larry Clark's book?" A lot of new people had appeared on the scene and the work they did suggested new possibilities a lot of us thought might be worth exploring but didn't want to pursue without seeing what "people" thought about it. Our discussions were lively and provoked some self-searching: "Do I really like that way of working? Do X's images really interest me? Can I pull off the brash interventions in the world certain styles seem to require?" The cafeteria and similar gathering spots in the school provided the raw material for a running assessment of what people in my new line of work made of the news of the day. What opinions were viable? Which excited ridicule?

I came away from the school with a sense of the seriousness of the enterprise and the way it was *not* about following some rules but rather about looking hard and seeing things in a way that was different. You might say, and I did say this to myself, it was about looking harder at things and then looking again, and again, and not being satisfied with immediate impressions.

I had also met a lot of people, some of whom I found congenial and interested in whatever I had to bring to the ongoing conversation there on the variety of issues and problems serious photographers were dealing with at the time. One of these people, Charles Desmarais, had become editor of *Exposure*, the journal put out by the Society for Photographic Education (SPE), and was looking for some help. I'd had some experience putting out a scholarly journal and I wanted to stay in touch with photography, so I said yes. I can't remember now what I actually did that was helpful, but I was involved with that operation for several years and so got to know a lot of the influential people in photographic education, who were mostly the "art" photographers in the country. How else could an art photographer make a living? And by virtue of this involvement, they got to know me and who I was and what I did. I was getting to be a known quantity in the area, in the same way that the area was getting to be a known quantity to me.

SPE was a familiar social form for me. I'd been involved with sociological organizations, large and small, for quite a few years by then, and had done a lot of the things people in such organizations do, like give talks at national meetings. I had by this time also become familiar with the great photographic analysis contained in *Balinese Character*, the book of photographs made by the anthropologist Gregory Bateson, and written by him and Margaret Mead, and gave a talk about it

at the annual SPE meeting with slides. The slides were a sensation, no one there had ever seen them or anything like them before. One teacher from SFAI came up to me after the session was over and said, accusingly, "How come I never heard of these pictures before?" as though it was my fault she didn't know about it.

There was more to becoming a photographer, as I came to realize after I returned to Chicago and became a teacher, rather than a student, again. Chicago, then and probably still (I haven't been back in a long time), was full of photographic activity. The University of Illinois in Chicago had an active department, as did the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and Columbia College. One day Charles Traub, who taught at Columbia College, called me to ask if he could show me some photographs he'd made in Louisiana, about which he had reached some kind of impasse and thought that being a sociologist, I might be able to help. I said sure, I'd be glad to try.

How could I shy away from a come-on like that? Charlie had been a student of Aaron Siskind, one of the great teachers of photography of the era and a teacher responsible for the careers of many of the next generation of teachers. Charlie and I spent hours talking about the prints he showed me, and I was able to surprise him, I think, by responding in ways that interested him and articulated feelings he'd had but didn't have the language for, things that never came up when he talked with other photographers about his work. Other photographers followed.

At Northwestern, although Gordon Parks had taught photography in the Journalism School at one point, the School no longer offered photo classes. A lot of students wanted to have instruction in that field. So, they came to me, an overly efficient grapevine I had never been aware of before having

alerted them that I could do that. I didn't want to take on an extra course, so I asked my colleagues if I could give a course in documentary photography—which in some of its versions overlapped seriously with anthropology and sociology—and they, in the remarkable way that characterized the university at that time, said “Sure, go ahead,” and I did, for several years.

One day, a young woman I didn't know knocked on my office door and introduced herself as Kathy Foley, the Director of the university's brand-new Block Gallery of Art. She was systematically visiting every academic department, looking for people who might have ideas for something that could involve the gallery, hoping she could in that way avoid having the Gallery become the *de facto* property of the Art Department. I said that I had an idea and told her about what I was teaching and how there was a whole area of photography that would make a fine show for the gallery. She got a calculating look in her eye and said, “I think we could get money for that.”

And she was right. We wrote a proposal, got the money to pay for borrowing the pictures we wanted to fill the gallery with, framing them, and printing a good-looking catalogue. We called the exhibit *Exploring Society Photographically*. I was tickled, my department proudly turned out in force for the opening, the catalogue became a well-known reference in the small world of art photography, and, best of all, the show itself was successful. It traveled extensively and was exhibited in ten or twelve venues, almost all in universities and art schools, and one of those venues was the campus gallery at SFAI.

I can't remember what aspect of this promiscuous mixing in the social life of hip contemporary photography led to me

getting to know Nathan and Joan Lyons, who ran the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, New York. Not incidentally, Rochester was where Eastman Kodak, the largest and most important manufacturer and distributor of film, paper and chemicals for the specialized market of art photographers as well as the general public, had its headquarters. Nathan began his career at Eastman House, a sort of museum and cultural center funded by the company, where he curated shows and produced catalogues which gave a physical presence to a number of developing currents in art photography. These activities finally led him to leave Eastman House and found the Visual Studies Workshop (VSW), a graduate school of visual studies centered on but not restricted to photography. In a very short time, VSW graduates became important players in the very active world of contemporary photography.

Meeting Nathan seemed fated. We knew a lot of people in common, and he soon invited me to teach a weeklong summer course at the Workshop, which I did for several summers. There I met many well-known photographers who had come to teach summer school too, and with whom I'd share meals and spend down time between classes. I remember, for instance, long and mutually interesting discussions with Jerry Uelsman, whose work was distant from anything I knew or could be useful about. But we found a lot to talk about in those hours when our students were off shooting and printing the pictures we would discuss with them later on. And so, I developed some kind of reputation, not as a photographer per se, because I had not done much serious or important photographic work, but as a commentator, someone who could write and talk about photography and people's photographs from the viewpoint of sociology. I had done a lot of writing that some photographers found interesting and helpful to students and practitioners.

And I'd published the several scattered papers I'd written about photography in a book called *Doing Things Together*, which was one of the things that got me involved in a small organization called the International Visual Sociology Association, whose members came from all over Europe and some from the United States too. I was glad to let other people be in charge of this organization. My experiences in academic organizations had led me to think I didn't have what it took to make a success of such an activity.

But an important lesson for me was that these chance events —I might not have gotten into the photo class, I might have acted on my qualms about not being able to draw and never taken those classes, I might never have met Phil Perkis and Charlie Traub might never have asked me to look at his project—changed my life and work in ways I couldn't have planned and might well not have chosen if they hadn't unfolded in the unexpected way things do in real life.

A final consequence of my chance involvement in photography came many years later. I had been widowed and was living alone, in Chicago, teaching at Northwestern. One day in April 1989 I heard from someone teaching photojournalism in the well-known School of Journalism at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri. Dianne Hagaman, a photojournalist who had concluded that she wanted to pursue topics and projects her work at the *Seattle Times* did not give her time for, had gone back to school at the University of Washington and gotten an MFA degree in photography, working with Paul Berger, himself a graduate of the Visual Studies Workshop. Her work in that program gave her the room to explore and experiment that produced a large project that was full of sociological thinking (though at the time she wasn't aware of that).

She has explained what happened, better than I can, in her book *How I Learned Not to Be A Photojournalist*. Briefly, she began by photographing clients at a progressive treatment facility for Native American alcoholics in Seattle called Thunderbird House that was a part of the Seattle Indian Health Board. After several years her work shifted to Seattle's Pioneer Square and the shelters and missions for the homeless various religious groups had created for the Native American homeless and other homeless populations that lived on the streets in Seattle. This in turn led her to the churches whose members staffed, as volunteers, those places. And that led her to a consideration of the larger networks of religious activity that underlay all of this.

Hagaman didn't have the technical language a sociological training might have given her, but she developed a penetrating sociological understanding of what she saw.

One day, after she had graduated, she went to see a friend who was still in the graduate photo program and, waiting for her friend to finish some work, looked at a book on the desk. The book was my collection of essays *Doing Things Together*, which contained pretty much everything I'd written on photography, including a long essay called "Photography and Sociology." She hadn't known that anyone else shared her interest in this intersection. So, my name was in her mind as a potential resource.

That next fall she was at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri teaching photography and through a colleague there met Mary Jo Neitz, a professor of sociology whose specialty was the sociology of religion. Neitz gave Hagaman her book *Charisma and Community: A Study of Religious Commitment Within the Charismatic Renewal* to read. Afterwards, during a discussion of the chapter that described Neitz' own religious

background, Neitz explained that her editor, Howie Becker, had told her to write about that. Hagaman asked if that was the Howard S. Becker who had written the book of essays she'd found so useful. It was and they soon cooked up a plan to get me to come to Columbia to speak to Neitz's students in sociology and Hagaman's in documentary photography.

I accepted the invitation, and one thing led to another. I met Dianne, and ... well, I can't do better than paraphrase Charlotte Brontë: "Reader, I married her."

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