Salituro's Sociology
Culture: American Values
Zen and the Art of Sociology; "Don't' Just Do Something, Stand There!" by Bernard McGrane

Your homework is to do nothing. That's right, do absolutely nothing. Be unoccupied and unemployed for 10 minutes and to see what you can see. I prefer that you do this experiment in a relatively busy place and I mean do nothing quite literally. You should stand in an ordinary social setting and do nothing for 10 minutes. You are to stand still. You aren't allowed to pretend that you are waiting for someone. That would be "doing waiting," with all the activity entailed by that particular behavioral pattern: glancing nervously at one's watch, looking around periodically and repeatedly so as to appear to be looking for someone, and so on. You aren't allowed to "do sight-seeing." That is, self-consciously to act the way we think people do when they are sightseeing: scrutinizing and admiring architecture, landscape, and the like. You aren't to sit down and "do relaxing" or "time out" or "people watching." You are, quite simply, to *do nothing*.

Requirements & suggestions for the assignment:

I suggest that you stand because that position would give more opportunity to "do nothing" than sitting or lying down, which have deep associations with time out and rest. The experiment will be more difficult if you sit or lay down.

It will take time for your mind to adjust. If you give up too soon, you will not have seen anything because you won't have allowed enough time for your eyes, or mind, to adjust. Attempt it for at least 10 minutes, but give it longer if you are having trouble.

A further strict requirement for this experiment pertains to the your mind: do not occupy your minds with daydreaming of any kind (being unoccupied, unemployed). Do not engage in remembering your past or in planning your future. You are not to surrender this present moment to the past or the future; you must "be present" and to do this experiment with "beginner's mind."

"Beginner's mind," in a sense, is the opposite of "expert's mind." The expert is so full of knowledge, facts, judgments, and theories, etc. that he can't see anything new or fresh. "Beginner's mind," in contrast, doesn't know in advance what it's going to see and experience. A Beginner's mind is open, hollow, flexible, receptive, and tuned in to what is happening in the present moment. "If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything; it is open to everything. In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's mind there are few."

When you are finished, record what went on within you and without you. Be reflective, analytical and detailed. Write about what you experienced. Use your sociological imagination.

FAQs

"What are we supposed to see?"
See what you can see.

"What if someone approaches you?"
You're on your own.

"What's the purpose of doing this experiment?"
Just do it. Actually do it. See what you can see. See what you see.

"Why can't we just imagine what it would be like to do this?"
We must attempt to 'do' sociology. If you only imagined what it would be like to be unoccupied and to do nothing for 10 minutes, all they would get would be the reports of their own socialized imaginations. It is necessary to actually do the "experiment." Sociology, like other established sciences, is safe to "learn" and safe to "teach"-but dangerous to do. Also, if you don't actually do these "experiments" or "exercises," you won't begin to develop your sociological muscles, your sociological imagination. This way of teaching about society implies that you have to change not what you think about society, but how you think about society, and you can't change the way you think about society simply by thinking about it because you'll just be doing more of the way you think. This way of sociological knowledge is experiential and experimental. It is empirical but not positivistic. You don't get it by first understanding it and then doing it. Only by doing it do you understand it.

Record your findings:
1. Where did you do nothing?
2. When did you do nothing?
3. Reflect on this experience: