

THE INSTITUTE OF SOCIOLOGY

IT WAS 1995 AND PETER BERGMAN WAS WORKING ON AN ART PROJECT THAT INVOLVED TAGGING, THE PRACTICE OF WRITING ONE'S GRAFFITI NAME ON OBJECTS. HIS TAG CONSISTED OF HIS FUZZ NAME AND SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER. HE INTENDED TO PHOTOGRAPH HIS TAGGING ACTIVITIES AND PUT IT IN THE FORM OF A BOOK, BUT HE NEEDED A PUBLISHER. HE DECIDED TO START HIS OWN ORGANIZATION TO PUBLISH THE BOOK AND AFTER CONSULTING THE DICTIONARY SETTLED ON THE INSTITUTE OF SOCIOLOGY, OR THE IS. THE GENERAL IDEA OF THE TERM IS THE STUDY OF INDIVIDUALS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS TO GROUPS. THIS SEEMED TO BE CUSTOM-MADE FOR HIS NEEDS.

PETER FOUNDED THE SOCIETY AS AN OUTLET FOR HIS INTEREST IN CONTEMPORARY ART WITHOUT THE STIGMATISM OF THE WORK BEING ART. MOST OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE SOCIETY GENERALLY FLOW IN THE DIRECTION OF CONTEMPORARY ART, HE SAYS, WHEN EXPLAINED AS ART TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC, HOWEVER, THE ACTIVITIES ARE IMMEDIATELY SUBJECT TO THE 'IS IT REALLY ART' DEBATE. HE GOES ON TO EXPLAIN HOW BY CALLING THE ACTIVITIES GUERRILLA SOCIOLOGY THE AGENTS OF THE IS CAN CIRCUMVENT THIS PROBLEM. THE FACT THAT ALMOST NO ONE HAS A PRE-FORMED OPINION ABOUT SOCIOLOGY ALSO AIDS IN PEOPLE TAKING THE ACTIVITIES AT FACE VALUE.

ALTHOUGH THE INSTITUTE OF SOCIOLOGY IS CURRENTLY BASED IN PETER'S HOUSE IN DENVER, IT BOASTS A MEMBERSHIP OF ABOUT THREE HUNDRED AGENTS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD. WHEN ASKED WHO CAN JOIN THE IS, PETER ANSWERED "WELL, I SUPPOSE IT'S LIKE THE ROTARY CLUB; ANYONE CAN BE A MEMBER, BUT WOULD JUST ANYONE WANT TO?" THESE MEMBERS CONVENE EVERY FOUR YEARS IN A DIFFERENT CITY AT THE SOCIOLOGY FAIR. PETER DESCRIBES THE FAIR AS PART CONVENTION, PART HIGH-SCHOOL REUNION, AND PART MIDDLE-SCHOOL SCIENCE FAIR. THE FAIR OFFERS THE AGENTS OF IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO GET TOGETHER AND PUT UP DISPLAYS THAT TELL OF THEIR ACTIVITIES. THIS IS COMBINED WITH FILM SCREENINGS, IMPROMPTU GUERRILLA PARADES, MERCHANDISE BARTERING, ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION, AND FRATERNIZATION.

PETER SAYS HE GETS IDEAS FOR HIS PROJECTS FROM THE RESULT OF TAKING SIMPLE, BANAL, OR REPETITIVE SOCIAL SITUATIONS AND THINKING OF A WAY TO INVERT THEM OR STRIP AWAY THE INHERENT MOTIVATION REQUIRED FOR CARRYING THEM OUT. AN EXAMPLE OF THIS WAS WHAT WAS CALLED THE NO PARKING PROJECT. THIS CAME ABOUT DUE TO THE FACT THAT PETER'S HOUSE IS OFF OF FEDERAL BLVD., WHICH IS IN A PRIME LOCATION TO PARK FOR DENVER BRONCOS FOOTBALL GAMES. RESIDENTS OF THE AREA BEGAN CHARGING PEOPLE TO PARK THERE AND WERE INFORMED BY POLICE THAT IT WAS ILLEGAL TO DO THIS BECAUSE OF ZONING LAWS. PETER THEN PUT SIGNS BY HIS HOUSE ADVERTISING FREE PARKING AND WAS ONCE AGAIN INFORMED THAT THIS ALSO WAS AGAINST THE LAW. THE RESULT OF THIS WAS THE CREATION OF A METICULOUS PARKING LOT WITH NO PARKING SIGNS HUNG ALL OVER IT. PETER AND FELLOW IS MEMBER JIM HANSEN THEN DONNED ORANGE ROAD WORKER VESTS AND BEGAN FLAGGING DOWN CARS TO INFORM PEOPLE THAT THERE WAS NO PARKING THERE.

SO, WHY DO THIS? WHEN ASKED, PETER RESPONDED, "GENERALLY, I LIKE TO SUBVERT THE VISUAL AND SOCIAL CUES THAT PEOPLE USE TO NAVIGATE THEIR SURROUNDINGS AND INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS. I THINK IT FACILITATES CRITICAL THINKING."

PETER DOESN'T MAKE ANY MONEY OFF OF THE IS. IN FACT IT IS QUITE THE OPPOSITE. SINCE ITS START IN 1995, THE IS INCURRED NET LOSSES RANGING FROM 630.53 TO 1481.15 DOLLARS. HE IS OBVIOUSLY NOT IN IT TO GET RICH. HIS ONLY GOAL IS TO OFFER A LITTLE STRANGENESS INTO AN ORDINARY ROUTINE WORLD. HE ALSO STRESSES NONE OF THESE ACTIVITIES ARE TO MAKE FUN OF OR LAUGH AT ANYONE; HE TAKES THE EXPERIMENTS SERIOUSLY. ALL ACTIVITIES ARE FUZZY DOCUMENTED WITH PHOTOS, VIDEO, AND WRITTEN REPORTS, WHICH ARE ALL VIEWED AT THE SOCIOLOGY FAIR. MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE IS CAN BE FOUND ON THEIR WEBSITE, WWW.SOCIOLOGY.COM, WHICH CONTAINS A COMPLETE LIST OF VARIOUS AGENTS ENDEAVORS. SO THE NEXT TIME YOU WITNESS SOMETHING TRUZY OUT OF THE ORDINARY, REALIZE THAT YOU MAY BE PART OF AN IS EXPERIMENT.