

The Open Mind: A Method and Project

"The Open Mind" is a project of self-directed experiments, designed to be undertaken virtually or actually and evaluated individually, to escape the stalemates/foreclosures of ideology, cliché, or mental impasse imposed by personal experience or mental states. The Open Mind employs specific ideas and literatures as examples and demonstrations, but recognizes no official canon of approved sources. Rather, the project emphasizes the role of experiment in the context of incremental mental liberation in the context of increasingly demanding self-imposed mental discipline. The method borrows from meditation the renunciation of content, but it distances itself from the ideal of emptiness as such. Rather, the open mind aims at a state of optimized "polysemy," the tolerance of opposition, contradiction, and paradox in the act of opening thought to what has before resisted realization.

1 / Definitions and Intentions

The expression "open mind" is a metaphor revealing how "the open," as a category of uncertainty towards the future, can be personalized and inscribed as a process of intellectual curiosity. Usually the phrase means something simpler — that one suspend judgment on a particular issue at hand, that one not rely on a standard viewpoint. It even suggests that one not take too seriously the way metaphors build a convincing picture that is "more complete than it should be," allowing us to silently consent to ideological or cultural ideas planted inside them.

The open mind is ultimately the condition for any and all real thought. It specifies that movement is the essence of thought, and that closure equals stillness, which is an end to thought. Yet, the open mind cannot afford to abandon the principle of closure altogether. It must somehow combine its strategies for continuation with strategies that accumulate, compare, and identify the common points along which ideas align.

The two strategies, one of continuation and the other of closure, seem to compete, but in fact they constitute a tension that (1) movement requires as its energy, and (2) closure requires for its system of "reticular lines" needed for orientation. The analogy is that of travel, where a minimum knowledge of direction affords the traveler the freedom to extend curiosity further. Without curiosity, there is no real travel; but without accumulation and guidance, movement is not travel but simply self-cancelling motion, like circling back to the same point is an indication of being "truly lost."

The Open Mind is a common metaphorical expression, but I wish to suggest that it can be the basis for a method for expanding awareness. Like meditation, which this method resembles, it has three components: (1) an "inner attitude" that maintains the ideal of motion powered by curiosity, (2) an "outer attitude," which is the awareness of the future's relation to the past and, (3) a *method* for determining the relative operations of accumulation and closure. The Open Mind requires all three, as well as a cumulative knowledge about how and why the three are related. This proposal for a method to strengthen awareness and facility with these three components is based on the hope that some methods may allow an "objectification" of the issues. Typically, objectification chooses topics, objects, and conditions that are familiar to some, alien to others. These external points of reference can have the

negative effect of disorienting or alienating the learner, mischaracterizing the nature of the project, and over-specifying the terms and topics of discourse.

The project for developing an Open Mind is nearly identical that that experienced by visitors to a historic site — a city or landscape that has figured prominently in literature, history, cultural development, or some other famous process or set of events that provide mental or literal captions for every possible experience the visitor has. One obvious solution is to combine the open-mind project with a visit to such a site in order to magnify and accentuate the issues common to both, and to use the physical travel experience as a means of gauging progress in the Open Mind Project.

Two distinctions have to be made. (1) Such a merger has little or nothing to do with the usual touristic goal of “learning something about history or nature” by visiting a key site. This keeps the place and knowledge separate, and does nothing for either the skills of traveling or the meditative patience required for learning. (2) The project of learning does not have the goal of “self-improvement,” the resolution of conflicts, coming to terms with traumas, etc. It is the nature of human experience to be confronted with challenges and sometimes overwhelmed or destroyed. Only the subjective attitude remains within the possible control of the subject, but even here external events threaten to destroy it. The maintenance of a what is usually called a “positive attitude” seems to invite destruction by “negative events.” The open mind project cannot afford to have or even endorse a positive, *versus* a negative, attitude. The issues of positivity and negativity are of equal interest. Trauma and suffering are negative but they cannot be placed out of bounds of any serious attempt to make progress subjectively.

Even the terms subjective and objective present a false currency that cannot be used to pay for any improvements in opening the mind. Such concepts as “dialog” or “dialectic” can be damaging if they give the false hope that one can in advance specify initial terms *between which* such exchanges take place. If there are “subjects” and “objects,” it is because we need temporary place-holders to designate things in a completely ordinary way that allows conversation to develop. The ability to talk about experience in terms of subjects and objects gives no basis for assuming that permanent “objects” and “subjects” have an existence outside of our experiences and thoughts about them.

Yet, this is not an argument for an idealistic, relativistic, or imaginary basis of experience. What is evident and unavoidable is that “stuff happens” — and not all of it is pleasant. The ultimate case is death, which is both inevitable and unknowable for everyone, but in different ways that, in addition to the incommunicability of the individual’s actual experience of death we could say that this unknown and unknowable margin of life as a whole penetrates, as a “fractal,” into every scale and condition of the parts of life. Death is not just a symbol for the challenges to any project of the open mind, it is an active and present barrier that, in varied ways, is present materially as a resistance to open learning. We had better deal with death in all its forms, even though we are forced to deal with the *effects* of death’s un-knowability — effects which, as *pure resistance*, have to be approached negatively and not symbolically.

This condition imposed on the project of the open mind calls for methodology. This is not something that can be proved, but traditions of thought, meditation, and speculation have come to nearly identical conclusions. Only a procedure which allows the learner to abstract him/herself from the substance of the project; only a method that allows the learner to "see him/herself as standing *outside*"; affords options of moving past what seem to be insurmountable barriers. "Method" is, thus, nearly synonymous with the project of the open mind; and method is, in its extreme form, a kind of automatism or mechanism that keeps the learner moving despite the dire conditions he or she is encountering. An example would be the checklist used by surgeons or airline pilots in emergencies. Because they have been tested in a variety of situations, these protocols for automating responses have two important benefits. First, they use past experiences and studies, which have identified "best practices" to bear on the unknowns of the present. Second (and possibly more important), they create a sense of alliance and cooperation among the "team" that faces the crisis. In the case of the project for the open mind, the team may be an abstract concept covering all those who have undertaken a similar challenge. This includes long-dead thinkers and scientists; but it could also involve a group of contemporaries who share the results of their experiences — "fellow travelers."

Because the project and methodology are nearly synonymous; because "the project" is personal and, for the most part, a private matter; and, while methodology is not only public, but the cumulative and collective result of many trial-and-error experiences; the guidelines formalizing the project for the open mind are almost entirely about method. The situation is that there are many methods. Some of them can be grouped, as "traditions" or "protocols" that have been used in the past and documented. Some methods have been developed and practiced in secret. A part of some of these can be discovered accidentally and tested. Other methods have been developed but not tested; or, the tests have exaggerated the successes and ignored the failures. Some methods have claimed to aim at the goal of mind-opening but instead over-valued the process of closure, which produces what appear at first to be "successful findings."

Doubt and failure are negative terms in the vocabulary of closure, since the search for the "one best answer" seems to succeed only when the answer is found. However, this one best answer forecloses the other possibilities, only some of which might have been considered. If the one best answer is wrong, both it and the alternatives have been lost. Psychologically, this is a disaster, since all energy has been invested in the search for and discovery of the "one" solution. The one solution has eliminated the need for any further search, so its failure leaves nothing behind it.

Doubt and failure are positive terms in the vocabulary of pursuit and openness, which take them as motives for forward movement. What appears to be an obstacle might well be an excuse for taking a detour. The shortest distance between two points may be not just a curve but a circle or squiggly line that doubles over itself. The truth that all travel must accept is this:

The metric by which we measure travel's direction and progress is unknown, since it is *created in the process of moving*, which is not simply the physical motion through space, involving time, but the thought and response to the *resistance to motion*, the

alternatives conceived and taken, and the entire history of movement, including all wrong turns and reversals of direction. The journey's correctness can be judged only in retrospect, only at a point in travel where, just after a destination has been reached, the conditions determining that point as a destination are known as happening "just before."

In the longest-ever scientific experiment, begun in 1927, a blob of tar pitch was placed in a funnel. (See Nick Paumgarten, "Countdown," Dept. of Predictions, *The New Yorker*, January 2, 2012: 20–21.) The extreme viscosity of the tar meant that, over fifty years, the blob would produce around five drops. Those observing the drops have had no guidelines about how to actually observe a drop, each of which takes about a tenth of a second. No one has actually seen a drop fall, even though it would not be impossible to do this. John Mainstone, who has overseen the project since 1961, notes that "Unpredictability is one of the great things about nature ... It's the spice of life ... I've been around long enough that I just see time before and time after. *It's only when the drop has happened that what has gone before makes sense in the flow of time.*" [emphasis mine]

This connection of "one of the great things about nature" and an unpredictable event provides a key. Mainstone's conclusion is:

"I don't become aware of what was going on just before the drop until after the drop occurs."

This condition of "just after" illuminating a "just before" will be the foundation of our method of mind-opening. It specifies a point, an unknown and unknowable point, which, when it happens, reveals itself as an event that, though it seems to be disconnected from any determining conditions surrounding it, pulls together everything. The "observing subject" becomes a key part of this event. The "observed object" is both independent of (as unknowable) and dependent on subjective experience to pull together the future-facing and past-retuning forms of time that make the event what it is.

2 / Outcomes

Most projects that promise the subject the possibility of self-improvement focus on problems to be overcome: stress, trauma, dysfunctional social or family relationships, psychological health problems, anxiety, depression, etc. There is one error common to all such approaches, and that is that they search for the solution in the problem's nature or cause. To correct someone's relation to his or her family, one looks to the problems of the family's structure or past behavior. To alleviate the suffering caused by the memory of a trauma, one goes back to the trauma to set it within other contexts. To relieve anxiety, the sources of fear are sought and compared to the subject's disproportional or destructive responses to them.

There may be benefits to these approaches, but without exception they accept the actual or imaginary reality of the problem as a source that is both a cause and a determinant of the response. This places the subject in an "objective" world, where he/she is cast in the role of the recipient/respondent of

something that may have been imposed or in part caused by the subject. The result is a complex web of forces that move back and forth over a field, etching pathways that will be difficult to remove.

Even where self-improvement is entirely positive — such is the case with education, “appreciation,” and leisure enjoyment — the same logic, which attributes cause and structure to the object rather than the subject, is used. A student in school has *subjects* to study, and these subjects are about “real things” that have happened or been discovered or created: history, social studies, mathematics, languages. Only in subjects such as art, music, or sports does the structure of events take precedent. Even though these draw extensively from models from the past, learning takes place for the most part through engagement and lived experience. Performance is the dominant outcome, but in most cases performance serves an ulterior motive. It affirms the learner and confers a status of mastery — or failure — as if to say that the point of such performative learning experiences is to sort individuals out, identifying who is superior or inferior — the experience itself counts for nothing apart from this sorting-out goal.

So, even where learning experiences naturally depend on performative methodologies, their value is imposed by the model used by the study of externalized objective sources of truth. Here, too, the goal seems to be the conferral of (false) senses of mastery rather than the intrinsic pleasure felt in the process of study.

The foundation stone of the method of experiential study, of discovering “the time just before” through the “time just after,” finds value *primarily if not exclusively* in the process of study. It mistrusts and advises the learner to hold at a distance the seemingly positive outcomes of discovery. It uses the concept of *delay* and *starting over* to open thought to continued motion, to the condition of openness.

There are good reasons for thinking that this practice is valid and valuable. In the study of wheel-thrown pottery, the beginner is instructed to throw only the basic forms: the cone, the cylinder, the bottle. The objectives are: to manage balance of the body of clay, to develop a thin but structurally sound “section” by gradually raising the clay, and to create standard shapes that are graceful, interesting, and balanced. After each attempt, the student is required, after inspecting the result, to throw it away. There can be no attachment to the object as a possession or trophy. Only through this “disavowal” can the false judgment that overlooks or forgives the imperfect result (“denial”) be overcome.

What has been happening all along this successive rejection of work has been the real goal. Gradually, conscious direction of the hands and fingers has given way to the direct tactile sense of good form. Only when the conscious awareness has given itself over completely to this “bodily” awareness can the potter act spontaneously. Such a state is described metaphorically as a “thinking without thinking,” or a “thinking through the body.” All artists who use physical skills must develop to this point, where a conscious critical awareness is forced to “stand outside” of a process where the mus-

cles, nerves, eyes, and other senses work in close coordination. Consciousness is not asleep, but it is forced to stand at the edge of the field of action. It can attempt to yell advice or instruction, but the players *on* this field are in control of the temporal dynamic by which the moment of “just before and just after” are brought together.

The aim of this process is not so much to “hit the target in the bull’s eye” as it is to achieve an awareness of the reality of this possibility in terms of the subject’s relation to it. This includes the earlier states of denial and disavowal. It is a situation of “foreclosure,” which is a state allowing contradiction, paradox, and absurdity. A more positive way of putting this is that the subject aims to achieve a state of ideal polysemy (“many meanings”) where any specific meaning, or set of specific meanings, is removed or contracted; and where the resulting semantic emptiness allows for an optimized fullness — the ultimate freedom of thought to “go anywhere it likes,” without having to go anywhere.

This goal is not original or new. It was the well-advertised aspiration of, in comparatively recent times, Dada-ists, Situationists, Action Artists, and Fluxus collaborators. It is easy to spot in the work of most strong artists, poets, authors, and architects of other ages: Picasso, Michaelangelo, Leonardo, to name only a few. It is not useful to assemble a “canon” of works to consider in the Open Mind Project. A canon is simply another form of a premature closure, an agreement on what to include and what to exclude in a “final collection” of “correct” examples.

The key to the example of the experiment with the indeterminate, infrequent drop is that the actual moment of dropping is something that exists, but its effect is primarily based on the fact that, for most viewers, it *does not exist*. Yet, the “time after” and its retroactive generation of the “time before” exist in the way that penetrates all events, not just the infrequent drop experiment. In the example of the pottery student, awareness of this time before and time after — condensed as the phenomenon of retroaction — is strengthened through repetition. Pot after pot is thrown away until “throwing away” and “throwing onto the wheel” are realized in a bodily way. The denial of the error, overcome by a renunciation (throwing away of the results), are both thrown away in favor of the *foreclosure* of the difference between the two kinds of throwing, and the two forms of negation, denial and reinitiation. Both are “taken up into” the process of foreclosure and its optimization of openness.

John Cage, the composer who used chance and imposed arbitrary limitations on his performances, used to tell the story about the two famous Zen archers. One was able to hit the bull’s eye even when blindfolded. His master, regarded as the superior archer, *had never actually hit the target*. The “successful” target-hitting archer had achieved only the state of disavowal. By giving up visual access to the target, he was able to hit the bull’s eye every time. The superior archer, however, had achieved the level of foreclosure, which found perfection in disavowing even this disavowal, in foreclosing the *difference* by which hitting the target or not hitting it “had been allowed” to structure the meaning of the performance. The apparent “bad performance” of the superior archer “completed the picture” without compromising the future. It stepped out of the temporal and spatial determinates of the target-and-archer to construct its own space and time.

In negating the “negations” of denial and disavowal, the subject is externally psychotic. In technical, psychological terms, a psychotic is dysfunctional in the extreme. Just as the superior Zen archer would never make the university archery team, he/she is deemed useless. It is, however, the resistance in the matter that we should take into account. In the well known neural phenomenon known as the \emptyset (phi) or β (beta) function, a circle of green spots is seemingly traversed by a purple dot. The effect is created by, simply, taking away each of the green spots in quick succession. There is no actual purple spot — the purple is created by the subject’s brain and imagined as a visual presence. But, we cannot say that this presence is not real. It is “created,” and the technique for creating it works for every subject who can look at the green dots while one after another is being removed and restored. The thing that “doesn’t exist” in one sense “does exist” in another sense. The non-existence *in fact is the cause of the existence*.

This example helps get at the effect of the non-performing (in some sense) Zen Archer, whose foreclosure affords the “negation of negations” in a retroactive way. These somewhat abstract comparisons sound tentative and somewhat unbelievable, but they demonstrate what happens when an effective and true method is externalized, when we attempt to “explain” it in symbolic form. The *resistance* that made it true and effective “sticks with it,” and in the expansion this *resistance resists* our attempt and desire to believe. What is true and real in the method of learning pottery can be demonstrated: this method and no other works. When used, it leads to a “successful” transfer of judgment from the conscious mind to the body’s senses and organs, where quick adjustments must be made without the delays imposed by conscious consideration, and where doubt must be integrated at the finest grain of experience to allow for experiment, opportunity, and quick adjustment. Without this transfer, pottery cannot be mastered. With this transfer, the “false mastery” of conscious intervention, which carries doubt forward but disguised, so that it can never be eliminated, continually intervenes and halts all further progress.

History provides examples of how the Open Mind method has been used in the past. The remarkable thing to note is that despite differences in the cultures, technical means, personal and cultural beliefs, and conscious intensions of those who have employed them, the methods are remarkable consistent. When the method has been described — and every description can be no more than an approximation — the descriptions refer to the same limits, the same necessary precautions, the same goal of openness. Incomplete and flawed descriptions nonetheless seem to follow a single internal rule, a common language, a shared respect for chance and necessity. Particular terms may change, but the intention is evident; and so each articulation of the method must taken into account and respect its past.

Given the wide historical, cultural, and geographical distribution of examples, there can be no one definitive “bibliography of sources.” Each practitioner must assemble a personally useful list, but each list must be alert to false leads that, instead of openness, pride themselves in closure. In these cases, the final aim of foreclosure is disastrous and literally psychotic. “Anything goes,” because the systems produced are self-referential and circular. Errors are invisible, the scheme requires “true believers” who defend it against skeptics and fools who fail to see the light. This foreclosure forecloses on any

future experiment that puts the rule to a true test. As a result, foreclosure contaminates every insight, every finding, no matter what the scale. Corruption is extensive, thorough, and catastrophic. It does little good to find some part of an approach that “might prove to be useful,” since even small fragments have been structured by the false closure they supported. The only use we may find in such train wrecks is the spectacle of the crash itself, an understanding of how the temptation of closure led to false foreclosure, “psychotic” and compulsive rather than polysemous and open/empty.

3 / Practices

Because of the possibility of a “false foreclosure,” the approach to Open Mind can be negative (studying cases of failure) as well as positive (attempting to follow trusted and tested techniques). There is no guarantee, however, that a positive approach might not be subverted; that its terms and methods might not be converted into strategies to close down the project and avoid the “absurdities” of the empty goal of the Zen archer. This undermines all trust one has in the validity of the Open Mind, and makes impossible any experience of the events that are the productive aims of experiment. The possibility of delusional enjoyment of the positive approach, in fact, suggests that a negative approach is, while it fails to give any direct access to the “positive” experience (in scare quotes because the “positive” looks “negative” from the outside), more reliable because it resists the “false positives” of this direct experience.

One could say that any positive approach has to cultivate its own internal negative attitude. Theory, which is traditionally a form of discourse that develops resistance *per se*, is one source of such an attitude. *What* theory is a complicated question; a useful answer would depend on choosing a meaningful set of sources specific to certain practices — art, architecture, philosophy, etc. These require patient study, a knowledge of how to employ and understand special terminologies, a sense of the history of the field, etc. Outside of the groups of specialists able to devote most of their lives to the study of these restricted resources, the resources of theory are out of reach.

Experiments. Given the limitations of a theoretical approach and the permanent finitude of the negative approach, only the positive approach is left. But, how can the illusion of false success be avoided? How can those who seek an Open Mind know when they are on the right track without being infected with a false sense of mastery? And, given the “empty” nature of the “non-existent” source of something that, although it exists, resists all symbolization and explanation, how can they know when they have achieved what they seek?

The only answer seems to lie in the undertaking of a series of “experiments” that optimize the possibility that the experimenter will discover something essential about the process of the Open Mind. The analogy is to the situation of a journey, whose destination is not known in advance. Some destination point has to be chosen, but it must be considered in advance that this point’s real usefulness will be in shifting the point of view so that a new context can be discovered. For this to happen, the destination must fail. What is sought is not found, or is found to be unsatisfactory or incomplete. A “knight’s move” shifts the goal laterally, so to speak. The first intentional movement is to a “false goal,” re-

quired to discover another path. This is the simplest description of the general process that characterizes all Open Mind projects.

Aristotle, as is well known, defined causes in terms of four types: “effective cause,” which includes all the processes required to complete a full effect; “material cause,” the physical conditions required for the effect; “final cause,” the intentions and aims that guided the process; and “formal cause,” the imagined appearance or symbolic outcome of the process. In addition to these *intentional* causes, Aristotle mentioned the importance of natural accident (*automaton*) and human vicissitude (affordance, opportunism, ambiguity). Either or both of these could intervene in the cause-and-effect process and change its nature. In some cases, the intervention made for improvements; in other cases, disaster. Automaton could, in addition to being completely random, work as a fatalistic “unseen hand” guiding events from behind the scenes. Such is the case with the famous Oedipus, whose every conscious intention produces an unintended result, delayed but all the more effective for that delay. This is what fate really is — not the meddling of invisible gods or demons but the unrealized by-products, the unintended and overlooked consequences, of what we think we do. We mean to help someone, say, by loaning them money, but they use the money to buy something that hurts them. We conclude that “no good deed goes unpunished” or to fear what may happen if “what we wish for may come true.” Popular culture realizes the complexities of *automaton*, even if they have never read Aristotle.

Human chance, *tuchē* in Aristotle’s Greek, is even more understandable in popular culture terms. We plan to visit a museum but when we get there it is closed. Across the street however is a nice coffee shop. We go in for refreshment. We meet someone and have a conversation; we are invited to a lecture; we discover at the lecture some new things we did not realize we wished to discover. *Tuchē* works whenever we fail to do what we plan to do, or when we discover the need to change our intentions. *Tuchē* depends on failure and mistakes.

Both *tuchē* and *automaton* are key components in the Open Mind project. They could be regarded as the two fundamental categories by which particular methods can be distinguished in relation to travel experience. In travel, too much control as well as too little leads to disaster. An over-controlled journey is the paid-up guided tour, where all travelers stay on a cruise-ship. The tour company provides all lodgings and meals and releases its clients only for highly scripted land excursions. Saturation, the opposite kind of danger in comparison to control, is the over-exposure to the dangers of travel. Without some exposure, however, travel is dull and produces no good stories worth remembering. Curiosity takes advantage of *tuchē*, by systematically re-strategizing what lies close-at-hand to offer new opportunities. But, at some point the traveler stops completely to listen and read the signs. The travel experiment is “turned off” and travel is allowed to drift. Automaton is what keeps this drift moving; it is the momentum of fate that creates, in the traveler, a state of ideal receptivity and acceptance.

A return to the “outcomes” considerations made earlier: if the result of efforts to open the mind are not self-improving in the usual sense, why endure the trouble and discomfort of any method? Why learn terms and distinctions that promise — if and only if they are *successful* — to lead to an ideal emptiness? And, given the necessary alienation of the negative approach or the possible delusions of

the positive approach, isn't the chance of any "desirable" outcome extremely small? The answer to these challenges must be realistically set at the lowest possible denominator. "Success" is not the right word to use when seeking an open mind. If one is reveling in the feeling of success, it is almost a sure sign that foreclosure has become, literally, foreclosure. Only delusion is possible from this point.

This is hardly comforting news. The only real support for undertaking a positive Open Mind project lies in considering the alternative. It is no exaggeration to say that all of us suffer continuously from the negative effects of a closed mind, in which even happiness is an illusion because it can be supplied only through fantasies that distort and postpone realities. These are dominated by political and corporate manipulation in service of undisclosed ends. Every e-mail message sent from Google's gmail results in *automated* marketing offers; every product registration sets in motion computerized sorting that connects consumers with corporate schemes that optimize messages based on social and personal information on file. For those few who resist the clichés and ideology (organized to effect a mass-culture dominance of ideas that are concealed within truisms), independent thought may seem to be an impossible goal. Even those who intensely resist political, corporate, and intellectual domination may realize that opening one's mind will receive only punishment, disappointment, and inconclusiveness. At the same time, social alienation and isolation from prevailing ideological comforts promise a disproportionate punishment for the minor infraction of free thinking.

Any rational cost-benefit analysis must conclude that an Open Mind is not worth it. The results cannot be valued by any system, since valuation systems are precisely what the Open Mind attempts to get past. The costs, in contrast, are quantifiable and quantifiably large. One could say that "only a fool" would choose the Open Mind option, but herein lies a clue. The traditions of the joke and, more generally, comedy, provide an encyclopedia of subversive ploys that undermine the prevailing practices of exploitation and suppression.

The "high personal costs" of an Open Mind project are ameliorated by undertaking experiments where costs are controlled by limiting scale. Physical, material, temporal, and spatial investments can be controlled; the outcomes can be projected into their most cost-effective, communicable forms. Each experiment constitutes a step, a component in a larger "journey" whose ultimate destination is revealed by the experiments themselves. In fact, we have the famous example of Ulysses/Odysseus, the first "official traveler" in Western literature to employ travel as a mode of thought experimentation. We can be confident that this general strategy has the best, the most time-honored pedigree.

4 / Guides

Johnstone's Categories of Travel. Although the Open Mind Project distances itself from canonical authority, it does not reject the idea of authority itself. Every traveler requires, from time to time, a guide. Although a guide can fail and ultimately reaches a limit of usefulness, the traveler cannot simply assert a knowledge of the unfamiliar without risking over-confidence and disaster. The central guide of this project is Henry Johnstone's analysis of the Greek Odysseus's travels. In his distinction of "authentic travel" from other forms of human movement, Johnstone sets of "categories" of elements required for success. In some cases, elements must be present; their absence results in failure. In

other cases, the elements must be present in some degree — not too much or too little, following the logic of Little Goldilocks in her visit to the house of the Three Bears. Some elements work in combination with other elements: for example, a traveler must exercise some, but not too much, control. Control balances out curiosity, which itself can be dangerous if excessive or disastrous if too weak. Johnstone's system is quick to comprehend and easy to learn. While it involves nine principal components, their interrelations are intuitively logical, and it is easy to evaluate travel conditions, their successes and failures, in terms of their system.

Jacques Lacan's Theories of the Subject. Any full understanding of Jacques Lacan's work, which was itself a transformation/correction of Freud's system of psychoanalysis, requires a lifetime of persistent study and lucky insights. Still, Lacan's systematic and "topological" approach creates many litmus-tests that check the use of psychological clichés and inaccurate terminology. His formal distinction of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real is readily understandable, even if its consequences are not. His formulæ for fantasy makes sense in terms both of the "resistances" put up by dreams we attempt but fail to recall as well as the fantasies subjects construct when faced with the traumas of the Real. His seemingly impossible theory of sexualization makes sense when we discover, in historic examples, *necessary* relationship between gender, negation, language, and custom. Finally, it is the centrality of the phenomenon of the uncanny to both Freud's and Lacan's work that offers the newcomer the most insights into both popular culture and clinical examples of human subjectivity at its most paradoxical. While Lacan's works can never be "required reading" for audiences unprepared to do extensive, lengthy study, there are points of access that can be used without abusing either the source or the learner.

Popular Culture. The inclusion of consumer culture objects, events, and practices may seem to be the easiest available resource for any project, but familiarity effectively conceals the ideological formations that make popular culture the principal mode of social control, employed by governments, multinational corporations, organized religions, and so on. The factor of enjoyment creates an obscuring cloud that must be penetrated, for the intended result of consumer culture is to close minds and close them permanently, so that the real manipulations of those in control of the capital economy can use them with precision and impunity. This is not a thesis or speculative theory — it is the published strategy of those who have designed the systems that consumers must endure under the anesthesia of enjoyment. Where the obligation to enjoy has increasingly dominated the obligations of responsibility to civic and family order, the individual has become the sole unit of defining success, happiness, and desirability. This is not any individual; it is an individual whose mind has been expertly and effectively closed to other realizations at any other "levels" of thinking. The Open Mind is set up in opposition to this global project, but is not in the business of detailing its opposition's modes or methods. The point is that it would be ineffective to fight one form of closing mind with another form — and this is what "arguments" tend to argue *for*: conclusions and closure. The point of studying popular culture is to witness, as spectacle, the process of closure promoted for ideological and religious reasons — the sum total of meaning compressed in the word "police." The Open Mind project is, thus, technically, an "outlaw" idea that supports the survival of an authentic ethical stance. This is not just a form of "Robin

Hood insurgency,” but an internal variation of the *vita contemplativa* practiced in the Middle Ages. Even its active, outward stance of experimentation aims to the ideals of contemplation and private awareness. A *vita activa* is still possible, and possibly *only* possible as a result of an Open Mind. But, the aim of the Open Mind Project is to avoid the kind of self-confidence and mastery that is virtually a prerequisite for social-political action. Good thinkers make poor fighters, as the history of philosophy will affirm.

The Analogy of the Anthology. A story that contains multiple shorter stories is the perfect analogy for the Open Mind Project. And, the methods used by such anthologies — where a “linking tale” maintains order and thematic unity allowing the shorter stories greater freedom to vary their content and tone — offer the Project clues about what works to maximize the variety of experiments while retaining an ability to return to central themes and concerns. An anthology in literature is like a necklace. The string provides structure and order, while the individual ornaments provide beauty and fascination. The two elements are on different levels, but the string itself can be made into a kind of jewel in addition to creating the overall order that gives the individual jewels their role within the whole. The Open Mind is comparable to the string, the “linking story,” and consequently it is primarily structural and philosophical. The jewels or individual stories are primarily event-based, experiential, and performative. Each contributes a value to the other, but an even greater benefit comes about through the creation of *levels* that allow performance and structural/philosophical discourse to run in parallel. This independence gives performance its autonomy. Event-based experiments do not need to demonstrate or persuade. They explore and provoke. Their outcomes are a mystery until they reach the point of the drop in the pitch experiment, where the “just before” is not known until the “just after.” This autonomy corresponds to the idea of objectivity in scientific experiments, where the investigators’ intentions and hopes are prevented from coercing a particular result. The anthology idea maintains the coherence of the “science” as experiments carry along an independent train of thought.

5 / Materials and Projects

The Project requires a handbook of suggested exercises; a resource book for guiding the planning and evaluation of exercises; and a means of communicating results with “colleagues” at the same stage of study. Social networking has made possible the decentralization of communication, so no attempt will be made to support or guide the sharing of projects, methods, ideas, reflections, etc. A handbook is available through private web-based publishing sources, in printed book form or electronic files that can be printed out as needed. The resource book is available as an on-line hypertext version or as a set of essays in print form.

An overview of ongoing work will support the Projects at the largest scale and both draw from and contribute to personalized (social media) networks set up among colleagues. As interest groups specialize, new forums can open to discuss the special impacts of “discipline directed” projects. The point of the Open Mind projects is, however, to skip or ignore disciplinary concerns and maximize the localization of initiatives and innovations. While group coordination might at some point be useful, the emphasis remains individual and atomistic: a kind of “slow food” for the brain. Like slow food, which is

actually a fast and efficient use of local networks and intensification of patterns of desire, slow food for the brain emphasizes the realization of things that are already and always present. Desire is a structure that guides slow thinkers to construct its "sites of exception" and their future-anterior performative structures.

The benefits of an Open Mind is realized primarily on the level of the individual. Social affirmation should not be allowed to supplant this. The creation of a public face for individual work is inevitably instructive but potentially deluding in that it substitutes a symbolic order in the place of actual achievement.

Open Mind Project Components

1. Call (and response) for walking, mapping, documenting exercises.
2. Collation and web/paper publication of projects, with commentary.
3. Open Mind Handbook
4. Project promotion: to supplant the idea of "methods"
5. Events and demonstrations: workshops and experiments
6. Collaborations: films, books, studios, directed therapies
7. Collectives: seminars, small-scale discussions, symposia