

1-4-2009

Erving Goffman Was a Brilliantly Imaginative, Original Sociologist and a Pathmaking Ethnographer, Who Had a Deep and Lasting Influence on the Students Who He Mentored in his Distinctively Challenging Way, and on the Discipline of Sociology to Whose Development He Was Ferribly Committed

Renee C. Fox
University of Pennsylvania

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/goffman_archives



Part of the [Politics and Social Change Commons](#), and the [Social Psychology and Interaction Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Fox, R. C. (2009). Erving Goffman Was a Brilliantly Imaginative, Original Sociologist and a Pathmaking Ethnographer, Who Had a Deep and Lasting Influence on the Students Who He Mentored in his Distinctively Challenging Way, and on the Discipline of Sociology to Whose Development He Was Ferribly Committed. In Dmitri N. Shalin, *Bios Sociologicus: The Erving Goffman Archives* 1-28. Available at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/goffman_archives/22

This Interview is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Scholarship@UNLV with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Interview in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Interview has been accepted for inclusion in Bios Sociologicus: The Erving Goffman Archives by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.

Remembering Erving Goffman

Renée C. Fox:

Erving Goffman Was a Brilliantly Imaginative, Original Sociologist and a Pathmaking Ethnographer, Who Had a Deep and Lasting Influence on the Students Who He Mentored in his Distinctively Challenging Way, and on the Discipline of Sociology to Whose Development He Was Fervently Committed

This interview with Renée Fox, Annenberg Professor Emerita of the Social Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania, was recorded over the phone on November 28, 2008. After Dmitri Shalin transcribed the interview, Dr. Fox edited the transcript and approved posting the present version on the web. Breaks in the conversation flow are indicated by ellipses. Supplementary information and additional materials inserted during the editing process appear in square brackets. Undecipherable words and unclear passages are identified in the text as “[?]”. The interviewer’s questions are shortened in several places.

[Posted 01-04-09]

Shalin: Greetings, this is Dmitri Shalin. Is this Renée?

Fox: Yes it is. I’m happy we’ve connected. I think this is going to be very interesting.

Shalin: First of all, do you mind if I record our conversation and then send you the transcripts, so you can edit them?

Fox: That’s good. I understood that would be the case.

Shalin: Good. Let me very briefly outline a few tangents that are of particular interest to me. . . . After that you can take the conversation in any direction you want. I would like to find out how Goffman ended up at Penn, how you helped integrate Goffman in the department, and how he got along with his colleagues. Then we can move to Goffman as a teacher, advisor, mentor, Erving as a human being. I understand that you had a chance to observe Erving. And if you can touch upon Eviatar Zerubavel’s dissertation, Sam Heilman, or anyone else involved with Erving, that would be great as well. But please feel free to start anywhere you wish and take it in any direction you want.

Fox: It’s fine. That’s pretty much the way I was going to [proceed].

Shalin: Wonderful.

Fox: To begin with, although Erving Goffman was a sociologist, when he was recruited to assume the chair of a Benjamin Franklin Professorship at the University of Pennsylvania, his primary appointment was in the Anthropology

Department, and his secondary appointment in the Sociology Department. The reason for this is integrally related to the ethos of the Penn Sociology Department at that time, which antedated my own recruitment to the Penn faculty.

Shalin: When did you join the department?

Fox: Let me look at my CV – I think it was in 1968. When did Erving come, do you know?

Shalin: Erving went there in 1968, I believe.

Fox: According to my CV, I came to Penn in 1969. So he arrived at Penn a year before me. Benjamin Franklin Professorships (which don't exist anymore) were very prestigious appointments for especially distinguished scholars. Those appointed to one had complete autonomy with regard to the teaching that they did or did not undertake. They were not obliged to teach certain courses, or to carry a specified teaching load.

As I understand it, when Goffman's name was proposed as a candidate for this professorship, the Sociology Department was not particularly enthusiastic about it. I assume this emanated in part from the fact that until I became Chair of the department [in 1972] its faculty consisted predominantly of persons whose work was primarily centered in demography or criminology, defined in quite narrow, highly quantitative, and in a sense, rather asociological ways.

Sociology, as you, or I, or Erving would have understood it, was almost a residual category in the department – a kind of a stepchild. In addition, the department was highly ingrown. A critical mass of its faculty had done their graduate work at Penn and/or taught there since the inception of their professional careers. Anthropology, I suppose, expressed more enthusiasm about Erving's prospective appointment than the Sociology Department did, and that is why and how he became defined as a Professor of Anthropology and Sociology instead of the reverse.

Among my early acts in the office of chairperson was to give Erving voting rights in the Sociology Department, which he didn't have, and to involve him in departmental affairs to the extent that I could. Incidentally, at the same time I also [arranged] for the renowned anthropologist and ethnolinguist, Dell Hymes, who had a joint appointment in the Anthropology and in the Folklore and Folk Life Departments at Penn, to have a secondary appointment, with voting rights, in the Sociology Department. Erving and he felt there were affinities in their professional work.

I chaired the Sociology Department from 1972 to 1978. (One of those years I was on sabbatical leave in the Democratic Republic of the Congo doing sociological research.) What I tried to do as Chair was turn the department into a "real" sociology department without undermining demography or criminology. I was determined not to recreate the sociology department in my own image by making the sociology of medicine its center. This is what all the Chairs before me had done. They had all been demographers or criminologists. And incidentally, they had all been men. I was the first woman to chair the department. I was also the first woman to chair any department at the University of Pennsylvania.

One of the situations I encountered in the department that I had inherited, was that a junior faculty member had been blocked from teaching a course in field methods of social research by the senior faculty. They simply never agreed to let him teach such a course, and there was none in the curriculum. Most of my own research over the years was qualitative and ethnographic in nature. I was, and still am, what I sometimes refer to as an incurable participant observer. However, that was not my primary reason for wanting to legitimate the teaching of qualitative methods of social research in the department. I am a firm believer that students should be trained in both qualitative and quantitative methods of research and taught about the assets and limitations of each method, as well as how to combine them whenever possible. And so I didn't find it acceptable that the young faculty member in question was prevented from teaching field methods. I didn't want to rock the boat too much at the very beginning of my chairmanship, because I knew that eventually I was going to rock it in many ways through my attempts to change the status quo, and I'd have to retain some modicum of good will and credit to do so. What I did was quietly assign this course to myself, and then I more or less turned it over to the junior faculty member with input from me. Gradually, with the passage of time, I became the chief person in the department who taught the field methods course. . . .

Shalin: That's very interesting, it's living history.

Fox: The reason that I'm recounting this is because Erving Goffman was gratified by the steps I had taken to legitimize the teaching of field methods – especially ethnography – in the department. This, in turn, contributed to the fact that he became a really good citizen in the Sociology Department who helped me in various things I tried to do as a chairman, most especially in the recruitment of new faculty members. He almost always came to their presentations, agreed to accompany those of us who took the candidates out to dinner, and the like. He showed his appreciation for my having introduced and institutionalized qualitative methods into the department in this way. In addition, there was one memorable time when he came to my field methods

seminar, which met for three hours once a week, and lectured to the class for the entire three hours **[Laughing]**. On this occasion, he was dressed resplendently (for him) in blue denim from head to toe. He was wearing a blue denim cap, a blue denim jacket, and blue denim trousers. It was an excellent class presentation, and to my great pleasure it coincided with many of the insights that I had about the role of the participant observer and its microdynamics.

As Eviatar Zerubavel implied in the interview you did with him, Erving belonged to a strong and distinguished interdepartmental and interdisciplinary ethnographic and ethnolinguistic subcultural group that existed at Penn at this time. It spanned the Anthropology, Linguistics, and Folklore/Folklife Departments, and the Annenberg School for Communication. Included in it were Dell Hymes, sociolinguist William Labov, and anthropologist Sol Worth (a protégé of Margaret Mead, well known for his research among the Navaho Indians).

Eviatar saw Erving as never teaching anybody except himself, Sam Heilman, Carol Gardner, and Yael – Eviatar’s wife. That may be accurate with regard to the students he taught in the Sociology Department – although Yael Zerubavel was not in sociology but in the Folklore Department. However, he probably underestimates how many other people Erving taught through courses, tutorials, or in other ways in connection with this larger ethnolinguistic/ethnographic network.

Let me go back to the theme of Erving as a good citizen – he was a good citizen of the sociology profession, as well as in his own peculiar way, of the Department of Sociology. When I say he was a good citizen of the sociology profession, I mean that he was very faithful, as I remember it, in attending annual meetings of the American Sociological Association. I don’t know how many papers he gave, but he considered it his responsibility to be present at these annual meetings and participate in them.

Characterizing Erving as a good citizen of the sociology profession calls to mind a memory **[Laughter]**. He once accused me of thinking too well of him. So, when I say these commendable things about him I can hear him retorting, “Your problem is that you think too well of me.”

Shalin: So, he could be self-deflating.

Fox: Yes, he could be. He would “act out” at other times. For example, it was always somewhat of a drama to have him come to dinner with candidates who the sociology department was considering for recruitment. He would arrive in a restaurant and have really something like an anxiety attack. He

would say, "This place is too expensive," or some other critical and rather dramatically delivered remark, and create a kind of agitation around him until we finally got quietly seated at the table and he calmed down, and then he was as normal in his interaction with us and the candidate as Erving could ever be. I think that his "acting out" behavior was more an expression of his initial anxiety than of a desire to draw attention to himself. He had his special peculiarities. There was a Rumpelstilzkin-like quality to him in certain regards – a gnome-like mischievousness and provocativeness. He also was a counterculture dresser. One of the things that was always amusing to see was the haberdashery juxtaposition of Erving and Philip Rieff, another Benjamin Franklin Professor in the Sociology Department (who, as you know, was one of the major teachers of some of Erving's key sociology students – most particularly Sam Heilman and Eviatar Zerubavel). Philip Rieff was always dressed very formally in a morning coat sort of jacket, with a vest, a pocket watch on a gold chain, and a fedora – he looked like a Fellow of All Souls' College at Oxford in another century. (He did in fact have an affiliation with All Soul's). And Erving was always dressed – well, I don't know . . .

Shalin: Casually?

Fox: . . . very casually. He usually didn't wear a jacket or a tie. . . .

Shalin: Would he wear jeans?

Fox: So far as I remember, he usually wore khaki trousers. That is why when he came to my field methods of social research class dressed in beautifully pressed denim from head to toe, I considered that to be an epitome of his being dressed up for the occasion. They had a very interesting relationship, Philip Rieff and Erving Goffman, but I am not sure that is what you . . .

Shalin: Every bit is of interest. If you could briefly comment on that . . .

Fox: One thing that they shared was that they were both emanations of Jewish intellectuality. But one was a kind of antithesis of the other, and so were their mannerisms. They recognized each other as major intellectual figures. I think that they also recognized one another as fellow Jews, although neither was practicing religion in a conventional sense of the term. Though they often disagreed with one another, their relationship was not an antagonistic one.

Shalin: There was a measure of respect.

Fox: Yes, I think there was even a sense in which they were drawn to each other tropistically. Their common, relatively humble Jewish backgrounds may have had something to do with that. Speaking of social backgrounds,

Erving was a good American citizen, but he was always very grateful and loyal to his Canadian homeland [?].

Shalin: I believe he never officially became an American citizen. I thought he remained a Canadian.

Fox: I believe you are right about that. He remained a quiet Canadian. But he was also a "good American," in a sense – which doesn't mean that he never made negative comments about American society.

Shalin: It's part of being a good American that you can be critical of your own society.

Fox: He was a loyal person in many respects. You could even say that he was loyal to me just because of the intellectual and symbolic acts in which I had engaged in connection with field methods of social research, and it also because he wanted to see the sociology department become a sociology department, and to help me accomplish that goal when I was its Chair.

Shalin: This is so important, Renee. Goffman's idiosyncrasies are stuck in many heads, but his loyalty, his generosity tends to be overlooked. That's why I am glad to hear you elaborate on Erving's good citizenship.

Fox: To give you another instance of these more beneficent aspects of his character. . . . I don't know whether you remember what happened when sociologist Robert Bellah was a visitor for a year in the School of Social Science of the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton (I believe it was in 1973), soon after anthropologist Clifford Geertz became the first member of this school and its director. (Incidentally, Bob and Cliff and I were fellow graduate students in the Harvard Department of Social Relations . . .).

Shalin: I didn't know that.

Fox: . . . In any case, Cliff wanted to persuade Bob, a brilliant sociologist of religion, to leave Berkeley where he was a professor in the sociology department, to accept a permanent position at the Institute's School of Social Science. He invited Bob to spend a year there as a visitor so that he could see what it would be like to make the Institute his base. That year turned out to be a tragic one for several reasons. To begin with, two members of the Institute for Advanced Studies – mathematician André Weil, in the Institute's School of Mathematics, and philosopher and historian of ideas Morton White, in the Institute's School of Historical Studies, – rose up in fierce opposition to Bob's appointment. White played a role in publicizing what he considered to be the inadequate scholarship of Bellah by leaking some of the contents in letters of recommendation written about him to the press – notably to the

columnist Israel Shenker at the *New York Times*. The issues surrounding Bob's appointment thus became a public cause célèbre that extended beyond the walls of the Institute.

Why Weil and White took such strong stands against Bob's appointment seemed to have had some relationship to their adverse attitudes toward religion and religious thought. In André Weil's case, this was probably connected with the fact that he was the brother of the famed French philosopher, Simone Weil, who in her early 30s, out of her political idealism, social protest, and religious mysticism virtually committed suicide by ceasing to eat. In the case of Morton White, it seems to have been associated with his judgment that religious thought was intellectually inferior to the rigorous thought of analytic philosophy. Weil and White waged an ugly campaign against Bellah. (If I remember correctly, Bob was eventually offered an appointment to the Institute nonetheless, but he turned it down.)

To go on with this terrible story, the Bellahs had four daughters; and in the course of this year of travail that Bob and his wife Melanie spent in Princeton at the Institute, their eldest daughter, a college freshman who had just begun her studies at the University of California, Berkeley, committed suicide. The perpetrators of the campaign against Bob's appointment to the Institute were relentless in their attacks even in the face of the tragedy that had befallen the Bellah family. I don't even think that they had the decency to offer their condolences.

Shalin: That's amazing.

Fox: However, I remember that Erving invited Bob and Melanie to his house after their daughter's death occurred. I joined them on that particular day. It was a normal thing for any decent person to do. But underlying the hospitality that he extended to them was the fact that his [Goffman's] first wife had committed suicide. In the course of the visit, he made no explicit reference to that. But it was tacitly understood that his reaching out to them had some connection with his personal experience of suicide in his own family.

And speaking of Erving's style of life, although his clothing might not have been very stylish, he had a beautiful modern townhouse right here in my neighborhood. . . .

Shalin: Do you remember where it was?

Fox: Let's see now – it was behind the Dorchester Apartments building, right off Rittenhouse Square, on 21st Street.

Erving wasn't always kind about certain aspects of sociology. I remember, for example, an incident that occurred when Clifford Geertz was invited by the anthropology department to give some lectures at the University of Pennsylvania. One of these guest lectures took place in the auditorium of the University Museum. Along with me, a number of the members of the sociology faculty attended the lecture, including Victor Lidz and Willy De Craemer, both of whom had Ph.D.s in Sociology from Harvard where Talcott Parsons had been their mentor-teacher, as he had been for me. (Parsons had been one of Geertz's and Bellah's major teachers in graduate school as well). I remember Erving coming up to us in the auditorium, addressing us as "Parsonians," and asking us in a rather accusatory and sarcastic tone of voice, albeit with a tinge of humor, "What are you Parsonians doing here?" or something to that effect. Suspiciousness about my intentions of "packing" the sociology department with so-called Parsonians was one of the more unpleasant things with which I had to deal throughout my chairmanship.

Shalin: Even though Parsons taught there at the time.

Fox: He wasn't teaching at Penn when Clifford Geertz gave this lecture. But yes, I did invite him to be a visiting professor at Penn for three consecutive years (1973-1976) immediately following his mandatory retirement from his professorship at Harvard. I had help in arranging this visiting appointment from Martin Meyerson who was then the President of the University of Pennsylvania, so I did not have to put this invitation to a vote by the sociology faculty. Talcott commuted to Philadelphia from his home in Belmont, Massachusetts, and spent the third week of every month at Penn. He was accompanied by his wife Helen. They lived in what had once been a faculty suite in one of Penn's college dormitories – Van Pelt House. It was much too shabby to merit being called a suite, but the Parsons were very content with these living quarters. They were also very hospitable to the students who lived there. Helen even cooked meals for some of them.

The fact that Erving accused us of being Parsonians coming over in to hear Clifford Geertz was not only, or even primarily, attributable to the sociology department's apprehensions about the ways that they feared I intended to alter the department. I think that he, and also Philip Reiff, were more than a little envious of the generations of students whom Talcott had taught who felt connected and devoted to him. And I don't just mean to his work. Talcott was a very gifted teacher. He was not especially eloquent in the classroom, and he was personally shy, and very modest. But he taught us how to think as sociologists; he involved us in the creative process of arriving at new, conceptual ways of thinking sociologically, and linking that thought with cultural and psychological insights; and he conveyed to us a strong sense of sociology as a vocation. There was one generation after another of students

whose intellectual lives and personal lives were profoundly and permanently touched by him as a teacher. He remained closely connected with us, and he connected us with each other. [He saw] each one of us as an individual, and had a different, non-invidious relationship with each of us. For numerous of us, this also involved a relationship to his wife and his three children – his two daughters, Anne and Susan, and his son Charles. There are teachers who teach without necessarily becoming or remaining so connected with their students in these ways. Erving might have been one of those people. Anyway, these are side comments.

Shalin: Such observations are precious; it's hard to make history come alive without them.

Fox: Now, turning to Eviatar's relationship to Erving, I didn't know about some of the episodes that he shared with you. But the way he remembered how he came to study the hospital and time, and what relationship he had with Erving and me isn't quite the way I recall it. It maybe that he is more accurate than I am . . .

Shalin: It is important to triangulate your perspective and Eviatar's perspective on the same events, so that we can compare them.

Fox: [My view] does not contradict his; it's just that some of the nuances are a little different. Eviatar was adamantly, passionately interested in time. No question about that. I think Erving's position was not that time was not a viable entity for study but that he wouldn't be enthusiastic about a dissertation that was purely theoretical and not grounded in some kind of empirical data. As a matter of fact, there is a misconception of how theorists work anyway. To these days, for example, Talcott Parsons is seen by people as someone who had no relationship to empirical reality but simply made four boxes, you know, . . . constructed endless series of larger and larger diagrams of four-celled boxes

Shalin: Two by two tables.

Fox: Yes, or four by four and so on. He was completely misunderstood. We as graduate students and sometimes even as his coauthors who were able to watch him work were very much aware of how grounded he was in, if not his own empirical research, then empirical research done by others, including by us, which he always acknowledged in the footnotes of everything he published. [His theories were also grounded] in everyday reality. I mean, he would drive his car to the Department of Social Relations at eleven o'clock in the morning after working in his home study for a couple of hours, and he would notice certain things on route, or he would read his *Boston*

Globe or *New York Times* before coming to the office, and by the time he got there, he would be full of anecdotes about stories he had read in the papers, or things he had noticed while driving, in which he was interested for their own sake, and some of which he felt had implications for the development of certain aspects of his theory – sometimes even contributing to what he termed “breakthroughs” in it. In a very homely, as well as scholarly way, he drew on lots of data.

Shalin: This is so interesting. So, it is a misconception that he was this abstract theoretician who had his head in the cloud.

Fox: In this regard, I hope you won’t think it too egocentric of me if I refer you to an essay that I published about him, entitled “Talcott Parsons My Teacher.”

Shalin: I would love to see it.

Fox: It was published in an *American Scholar*. . . . [Vol. 66, No. 3 (Summer 1997), 395-410]

Shalin: It might be available on line.

Fox: Not only Erving, but even Talcott might have sent Eviatar to do first-hand empirical research to produce theory [**Laughing**]. That’s why it might be relevant, but it also might be interesting to you in other ways.

Shalin: Eviatar’s prospectus was very theoretical, right?

Fox: Yes, yes. I don’t think he had any original intention of making an empirical study of time.

Shalin: Are you saying that Goffman’s concerns about Eviatar’s dissertation were not entirely misplaced?

Fox: I don’t think they were entirely misplaced. I remember telling Eviatar that in my view, Erving was not telling him that writing a theoretical dissertation about time was unacceptable, but rather that he was challenging Eviatar to find a feasible and fruitful way to combine empirical research and theoretical reflection and analysis – to ground his theoretical interests in systematic empirical research. And I think that it might have been I rather than Erving who suggested to Eviatar that the hospital might be a place to study time. According to what Eviatar said in his conversation with you, it appears that he believes that Erving suggested the hospital as a possible research site, and then sent him to me. I am not sure that’s the way it happened.

Shalin: What are your memories?

Fox: I remember we were co-involved in Eviatar's dissertation. Eviatar regarded Erving as the more important intellectual influence on his dissertation and on his overall development as a sociologist. He considered Goffman to be his foremost teacher and mentor. That is apparent in his interview with you. I don't think that Eviatar seriously intended to study with me. He came to Penn primarily to study with Erving Goffman. But Erving referred Eviatar to me, and I played the major role in the supervision of his field research. This does not mean that Erving was detached from Eviatar's process of dissertation-writing; but he had more of an overview, olympian relationship to it than I did. I believe that I was the one who suggested to Eviatar that the hospital was a very intriguing and distinctive social world – a social world unto itself, I said, and partly because of that, it was a very interesting setting in which to study time. The clock of the hospital was autonomous, in a sense. The time in the hospital was the time that was on the clock [hanging] on the wall. It wasn't necessarily the time of the world on the outside. . . . What's more – every conceivable thing was timed in the hospital, including the rounds that the medical staff made, the rotations of the house officers, and also the shifts of the nurses, who operated in a somewhat different time frame than the doctors. . . . There were all kinds of things that had to be timed in the hospital and that were recorded.

Shalin: The intersection of time frames not fully synchronized.

Fox: Yes. But more than that . . . For example, when death occurs in the hospital, it has to be officially and solemnly "pronounced" – usually by a physician – and the time that it occurs has to be recorded legally as well as medically. The hospital is a social universe with a very elaborate, multi-system of timing connected to profound things that have to do with the "vie serieuse" – with birth and suffering and pain and life and death – a universe rife with the existential meaning of time – to say nothing of the urgent rhythm-in-time of the emergency room of a hospital, which was one of the places that eventually served as one of the empirical bases for the study that Eviatar made.

It was an outstanding and ingenious dissertation, out of which came his first published book, *Patterns of Time in Hospital Life: A Sociological Perspective*. But Eviatar wasn't one bit interested in the hospital as a social system, the sociology of medicine, of life and death, or of the profession of medicine. He was only interested in time. I often referred to his study of patterns of time in the hospital in my field methods course as an example of how a theoretically conceived ethnographic study can yield such deep

empirical insights. . . . I don't know if Eviatar himself ever appreciated the insights into hospital life that his dissertation yielded.

Shalin: For him it was an object matter – a means to study time. For you – the hospital was the subject matter.

Fox: That's right, that's right.

Shalin: It was a matter of perspective.

Fox: Both Erving and I read the dissertation, and with great care. I don't remember suggesting that it needed any important conceptual, substantive, or editorial revisions. I don't know whether Erving did. The book comes very close to the original dissertation.

Shalin: Renée, if you allow me to interject – isn't it exactly the way Goffman proceeds in his ethnography? He is also coming with a very strong conceptual perspective that he imposes on mental hospitals, the Islanders, and what not, so much so that you begin to wonder whether he ever wrote a page of field notes.

Fox: I have always been convinced that he did write very full field notes in association with his first-hand study of St. Elizabeth's mental hospital in Washington, DC, from which his book *Asylums* was drawn. You would have to look in his archived papers if they exist. I don't know if they are here at Penn. If they are, you might be able to find his field notes.

Shalin: That would be amazing.

Fox: Incidentally, in the way of a note on the contemporary history of the sociology and the anthropology of medicine, Goffman's study of "Asylums" along with Alfred Stanton and Morris Schwartz's *The Mental Hospital*, William Caudill's *The Psychiatric Hospital As A Small Society*, and I guess my book, *Experiment Perilous*, were among the first ethnographic works in what were then newly emerging fields.

Sociology of medicine did not yet exist when I did my dissertation, which was an ethnographic study of the metabolic research ward (Ward F-Second) at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston, which subsequently became my book *Experiment Perilous*. Talcott Parsons had just written his chapter 10 in *The Social System* – "Social Structure and Dynamic Process: The Case of Modern Medical Practice," in which he first articulated his concept of the "sick role," and laid out a conceptual framework within which health, illness, and the practice of medicine could be analyzed sociologically. Caudill was an anthropologist; Stanton, a psychiatrist, and Schwartz, a sociologist. As was

the case with Erving, their field work was carried out in mental hospital settings in this era when psychoanalytic psychiatry was at its height in the U.S. I was the only social scientist among them doing medicine- and hospital-relevant research in a nonpsychiatric setting (although I, too, had been influenced as a sociologist by psychiatric thought, and had some training in psychiatry). Erving's notion of "total institutions" and his comparison of a mental hospital with a prison and a convent were emanations of his fieldwork. I am not sure that Eviatar would have seen that kind of parallelism. You say that Eviatar Zerubavel's use of ethnography comes closer to Erving's than, let's say, mine. I'm not sure that is the case. Eviatar is exceptionally intelligent; but I don't think that he has the kind of insightfully creative intelligence that would have led him to see the analogies between hospitals, prisons, and convents, or to forge a concept like "total institutions."

Then there is what anthropologist Clifford Geertz called the "literary character" of ethnographic writing, which as he put it in his volume *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*, "tend to look as much like romances as lab reports," and are imprinted with the distinctive authorial styles of the social scientists who write them. Clifford Geertz was a literary artist, as well as a great anthropologist and ethnographer. He wrote extraordinarily well, with literary talent; so did Margaret Mead. In fact, this was true of numerous renowned ethnographer/anthropologists." Eviatar does not have that kind of gift, although he writes well.

Shalin: I think that Goffman had a literary talent. He was very much aware of the turn of the phrase.

Fox: Yes, that is the point I was trying to make. There is literary imagination in some of his concepts, in his rhetorical devices, and his "Goffmanian" style.

Now, let's see where does this get us?

Shalin: I keep track of the issues covered and yet to be addressed. Since we are on the subject of *Asylums*, one reason I am interested in Erving involves a bit of autoethnography. His parents were from Russia. . . .

Fox: Are you a Russian, too?

Shalin: Yes, I emigrated from Russia in 1975, came to the U.S. in 1976.

Fox: Do you know my friend and former student, sociologist Olga Shevchenko?

Shalin: The name sounds familiar.

Fox: She is Russian, of course, as her name indicates, an assistant professor at Williams College, and a wonderful young sociologist. We recently published a coauthored article related to Doctors without Borders / Médecins Sans Frontières, the interactional medical humanitarian organization about which I have been conducting field research for quite a few years. I did some of the fieldwork for this research in Russia – in Moscow and St. Petersburg – with the assistance of Olga. There was no way in which I could have become an instant expert on Russian society and culture in order to do this part of the research; so having Olga as a companion-colleague in the field was invaluable. Many years ago, when I was still a graduate student, I took a year-long course on Russian society with Alex Inkeles, but that certainly was not sufficient to make me a scholar of things Russian. And although my grandparents were Russian Jews who migrated to the United States at the beginning of the 20th century, they did not want to convey their memories of “the old country” to their grandchildren, or encourage us to learn Russian. That did not fit their concept of becoming a 100% American, which is what they aspired to have us be.

Shalin: That is so typical.

Here is the Russian connection that intrigues me. The Russian playwright and short story writer, Anton Chekhov, has a story titled “Ward No. 6,” which has eerie parallels with Goffman’s *Asylums*. . . .

Fox: He [Chekhov] was not the only one. Have you read Thomas Mann’s great novel, *The Magic Mountain*? It has in it many phenomena that are almost identical to those I observed on Ward F-Second at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital.

Shalin: But that wasn’t quite a mental institution, more like a ward for tubercular. . .

Fox: True, it was set in a tuberculosis sanatorium, which closely resembled Davos where Mann’s wife had been a TB patient. And what about the sociological realism of Solzhenitsyn’s *Cancer Ward*? Such master literary artists were brilliant sociological observers. In Mann’s *Magic Mountain*, for example, there was a Half-Lung Club created by the patients who had undergone pneumothoraxes. It paralleled the Adrenalectomy Club and the Mended Hearts Club founded by patients on the metabolic ward that I studied. I think that the similarities you see between Chekhov’s Ward No. 6, and Erving’s “asylums” are more a comment on Chekhov’s sociological genius than on Erving.

Shalin: Those parallels made me wonder if Erving read Chekhov.

Fox: It's possible, but not necessarily a significant influence on Erving's observations. In my own case, incidentally, not only did I observe some of the things that Mann had described in *The Magic Mountain*, but also phenomena that Albert Camus described in his novel *The Plague*. I recognized the parallels, but I did not project them into the ward I was studying. Those phenomena were there independently of Mann and Camus – intrinsic to the social world of the ward and the life within it.

Shalin: Renée there is one more tangent I want to query you about while we are on the subject of *Asylums*. Mel Kohn told me something very interesting . . .

Shalin: Oh, I haven't spoken to him in a long time.

Fox: He knew Goffman well at the time Erving did work at St. Elizabeth's. Mel told me how Goffman might have come to this topic. Angelica, Erving's first wife, was seeing a psychiatrist at the time. According to Mel, Erving was unhappy about the psychiatrists who treated her, and some of his animus that he felt toward the field was reflected in his work. In other words, it might have been autobiographical to some extent. . . .

Shalin: What period we are talking about?

Fox: Erving went to Maryland around 1954, I think, right after he finished his thesis. . . .

Fox: This is very interesting, because, as I've already indicated, this was within the period when many social scientists were influenced by psychoanalytic psychiatry, which had reached a pinnacle in the United States. It was just before the anti-psychiatry movement took hold during the 1960s.

Shalin: The deinstitutionalization movement.

Fox: Right. So his interest in these phenomena would have straddled the triumphal period of psychoanalysis but also its downfall, and before the emptying of [mental hospitals] . . . His portrayal of the mental hospital as a total institution played a very important policy role in opening the doors of the hospitals.

Shalin: The U.S. Supreme Court cites his works in its holdings.

Shalin: I don't know if you had a chance to see my paper on Goffman biography and theory . . .

Fox: I didn't read it as carefully as I intend to.

Shalin: The whole idea of the biocritical study I am conducting is that great minds, great thinkers feed on their emotions and their embodied worldly experience, that they are not afraid to ride an emotion where most of us are content to straddle a discourse. I find in Erving several intriguing interfaces between his life and work. For instance, I see a connection between Erving's first wife, Angelica Schuyler Choate, who was a high society lady, and Erving's first major work "Symbols of Class Status" where he analyzes the way people manipulate class symbols to appear better off than they might really be. I suspect that his own experience as a second generation provincial Jew marrying a high class lady fed his sociological imagination.

Fox: In my perspective, any work that anybody does in any field that has any creative edge to it, even in scientific fields like theoretical physics and biomedicine, has a strong, latent biographical [component]. I think people recoil from that idea because they believe in the supreme importance of objectivity if a work is going to be valid and reliable. There are personal, even biographical wellsprings in all forms of creative work. But this is closer to the surface in the work that social scientists do, especially when research is ethnographic in its form, because your instrument is yourself. It's true especially in participant observation. This is again somewhat of a digression. . .

Shalin: That's fine.

Fox: . . . I'm currently in the midst of writing what I think of as an ethnographic autobiography. I consider it to be other than a memoir because it draws upon the thousands of pages of field notes I have accumulated over a span of 50 years of field work. Ethnography has been a way of life for me as well as method of social research. This has some relationship to what you were saying about the interfaces that you find between Erving's life and his work.

Shalin: I think it is extremely important. I hope you'll bring it to completion, and once it is published, I will add a reference to it in the Intercyberlibrary, which has a special section on biographies and autobiographies. Maybe we can post there a chapter or excerpts from your text.

Fox: What helped me a lot was realizing that I was making myself the subject of an ethnography and thereby joining hands with the persons who have been my informants, respondents, and subjects in the field over the course of the years. Somehow that has made the undertaking feel less self-preoccupied and narcissistic.

Shalin: This is a kind of autoethnography.

Fox: This returns us to the insight that you just verbalized about the latent biographical dimension in Erving Goffman's work. I would say that there is no way of getting completely away from it.

Shalin: Right. Your body is inserted in the hermeneutical circle of knowledge where it becomes an index of social events you take part in. Your very mood registers something in the social being. . .

Fox: For example, you didn't interview him about it, but I suppose you could have asked Eviatar why he is interested in time. I don't know the answer.

Shalin: Now that you've suggested, I will pursue this question with Eviatar.

If I may Renée, now that we are getting off this subject, I would like to ask you about Erving's usage of the term "mental illness." He usually puts the term in quotes when he talks about this phenomenon in *Asylums*, but after his wife committed suicide, he extricates it from quotation marks and even mentions possible "organic" sources of mental illness. Erving's paper "The Insanity of Place" strikes me as a turning point. David Mechanic cites Goffman to the effect that if he had to write the same book over again, it would have been quite different. To my mind, Goffman's work is saturated with his life experience, with his angst, and it reveals a remarkable ability to reframe the situation and reinvent oneself. Erving used to sound rather dismissive about women in graduate school, according to Gary Marx, but later in life he went on to write "Gender Advertisements," exposing sexism in everyday life. Do you sense that this shift might have been autobiographical?

Fox: I have no idea what relationship he had with women in graduate school, but – I don't know how best to say it – it never occurred to me even to think about how Erving felt about women or treated them because it wasn't an issue. He didn't treat me like a man, but . . . it just doesn't fit in with other aspects of his behavior. I was not aware of any situation when my being a woman might have been problematic in any way.

Shalin: The other intriguing fact I discovered was that his wife was an anthropologist, an A.B.D. from the University of Chicago where she met Erving. She had intellectual interests of her own, took great interest in Erving's work, and was somehow involved with his writing, editing it and what not.

Fox: I think it was irrelevant to him whether I was a man or a woman. He respected me, and I think he even liked me. It startles me even to think about this dimension – it just was never there.

Shalin: You were a chair of the department, which might have been a factor too. Can you give me a sense of what Erving was like at common gathering, at parties?

Fox: I don't think I ever saw him in other than professional contexts.

Incidentally, regarding Eviatar's allegation that Goffman had only two or three students – that doesn't make too much sense to me. For instance, Yves Winkin was one of his students at Penn. . . .

Shalin: What was the name of that person?

Fox: Yves Winkin, a Belgian social scientist who was a graduate student in the Annenberg School for Communication at Penn, studying for his Master's degree while he was at Penn and in the States. You mentioned him to me, and the book that he wrote in French about Erving's thought and work.

Shalin: Oh, Winkin! I heard his name pronounced differently.

Fox: Not only did Yves study with him; he also had access to him.

Shalin: Did Yves finish his dissertation with Erving?

Fox: No. He did his Master's thesis on students living in International House at Penn; and I don't think that Erving supervised it. Later, after completing his doctoral studies at the University of Liège in Belgium, Yves became a member of that university faculty. Now he is a professor at the University of Lyons in France, and lives in Paris.

Although I'm sure that Erving did not teach either large classes or large numbers of students, he was part of a Folklore/Anthropology/Linguistic/Social Communications subculture on campus, and probably had more meaningful student contacts than Eviatar has accounted for.

Shalin: What Eviatar had in mind, I believe, is that Erving didn't have many Ph.D. students from the sociology department. He mentions three people from that department who wrote dissertations with Goffman – Sam Heilman, himself, and Carol Gardner. Is this correct?

Fox: That may very well be.

Fox: Carol Gardner worked very closely and rather exclusively with Erving – I believe partly in an assistant capacity. It took her quite a long time to complete her graduate work and her dissertation.

One of the reasons Erving did not have more graduate students was that many were kind of intimidated, awed by him. The people who approached him to be on their dissertation committee were among the brightest people we had, most formidable intellectually.

Shalin: Who were not afraid . . .

Fox: Yes, who were not afraid. It works both ways, obviously. Erving wasn't that inviting, but on the other hand, it was also a question of whether people were bold enough to ask Goffman to be on their dissertation committee. I was on the dissertation committees of several students who had the temerity to approach him.

Shalin: Including Sam Heilman?

Fox: Oh, yes. Definitely.

Shalin: Any memories of how things worked out with Heilman's dissertation? Any complications, or everything went smoothly?

Fox: I don't remember any major complications. Sam Heilman's dissertation was a first-hand study of a synagogue, carried out within the framework of the sociology of religion and of Judaism in particular. A vague memory comes back to me concerning the questions that Erving might have raised about problems of doing participant observation in a synagogue, and about the observer being a believing and practicing member of the congregation. But I don't remember more than that.

Shalin: I didn't have a chance to query him, but according to Eviatar, you helped Sam survive his dissertation ordeal as well.

Fox: One of the roles that I played with regard to Sam Heilman's thesis, as I did in connection with Eviatar's was that of an intermediary between him and Erving. I legitimized for both of these men what they were doing. . . . And Erving accepted my role as a legitimizer. Erving never gave me any trouble . . . I never had a confrontation with Erving regarding my mentorship, my encouraging students to go forward. That's why I thought that the challenges they experienced did not just, or even primarily, constitute his being "ornery." Rather, I think that he felt that challenging them as he did was the way he should be mentoring students.

Shalin: So you feel that Eviatar might have misperceived the nature of the doubt that Goffman raised about his thesis.

Fox: What I told Eviatar was that professor Goffman was challenging him to do the dissertation he had in mind, rather than *not* to do it.

Shalin: Eviatar laments that Erving didn't read his paper on the calendar change in the French Republic, and that he didn't read the last chapter of his dissertation.

Fox: I was the one who read it most carefully. . . . That may have something to do with being a woman. There is a Mother Hen in me – a role that I played in relation to some of my male colleagues too. For instance, I had my own way of coaxing without nagging them to write letters of recommendation for students in a timely fashion. How many hours I spent, diplomatically, getting my male colleagues to be timely!

[Laughter]

I think that Erving was reasonably, if not more than reasonably, attentive to the dissertations of the students whose dissertations he undertook to direct. It strikes me as peculiar that neither Eviatar nor Sam recognized the challenging way that Erving was mentoring them, because it was compatible, it seems to me, with the way that Talmudic training takes place – in an atmosphere of challenge, questioning, and debate. And both Sam and Eviatar had experienced that kind of traditional Jewish learning situation. But they seemed to need some kind of female intermediary **[Laughing]**.

Shalin: Right, a Jewish mother.

Renée, with your keen eye for ethnographic detail, I want to know your take on Erving's Judaism, on his Jewishness. Did the subject ever come out in your interactions with him?

Fox: It never came up. Again, these are my observations of him and free associations about him . . . I saw him as . . . I guess a kindred spirit of Woody Allen **[Laughing]**. Well, not exactly, but he was profoundly Jewish in some ways, without being a practicing Jew. I'm not exactly certain why I say that. That's the way I experienced him, though I'm not sure how I would unpack that sense of him. Even some of the ways in which he was difficult I am familiar with from my own upbringing, including the meaning of arguing, [hinted at his Jewish roots]. I was raised in a completely nouveau riche middle class Jewish neighborhood in New York City on West End Avenue. It was a golden ghetto. There were no "gentiles" for miles around, except on Amsterdam and Columbus Avenues where there were enclaves of Irish Catholics. My family was secularized, and I wasn't raised as a practicing and

learned Jew. But from the vantage point of this background, I cannot imagine how Erving could have been anything but Jewish **[Laughing]**.

Shalin: Dell Hymes recalls that Erving once told him: "You have no idea what it was like to grow up in a little Canadian town and being overheard speaking Yiddish. They considered you to be a homosexual or something."

[Laughter]

Shalin: Renée, you mentioned something I want to clarify. You said that Carol Gardner was Erving's assistant?

Fox: I thought she was not just a graduate student. Now it comes back to me – she transferred from the Sociology Department to the Annenberg School for Communication. . . . She became disaffected from sociology, though not from me, and she transferred to the Annenberg School of Communication not only for cognitive and intellectual reasons, but also because she was influenced by her relationship with Erving. Maybe I considered her somewhat difficult partly because she was basically very critical of sociology. I believe that she did get her Ph.D. eventually. It might have been a joint one.

Shalin: She is a professor now.

Fox: I am glad to hear that I think, and you will have to pursue this with her, Erving was very generous with her. She may have also been somebody who rendered him great intellectual services that he appreciated, too. She was certainly very smart, although at the time that she was a student at Penn, I didn't consider her to be of the same caliber as Eviatar Zerubavel or Sam Heilman.

Shalin: Eviatar mentions that Goffman once said in his class that he had only one real student – Sherri Cavan. Do you know anything about that?

Fox: No, I don't, but that's interesting. . . . Did anything come out in your interviews about how connected Erving was with the Chicago School of Sociology? I thought that he was both intellectually and sentimentally tied to that School.

Shalin: Yes, he was, but he also felt ambivalent about it.

He had hard time with his thesis defense. The dissertation committee members thought he submitted a thesis that had little to do with the proposal, that it was not based on traditional ethnography. It was brilliant, but it didn't look like anything you'd normally expect. Anselm Strauss, who was a committee member, I believe, describes how Erving was literally sweating it

out during the defense. Remember Erving's description of what we are like underneath our masks – anxious, overdetermined, with the eyes glued to the target? That's Erving in the survival mode during his Ph.D. defense. It was Everett Hughes who insisted on cutting Erving some slack. So when I was listening to Eviatar's story of his work with Goffman, I couldn't help thinking about this episode from Erving's own past. Another biographical tangent, it seems.

Fox: Yes. Nevertheless, I think his work is profoundly imprinted with University of Chicago sociology. . . .

Shalin: The connection is obvious. In 1952 Blumer left Chicago for Berkeley where he proceeded to build the department of sociology; in 1958 he hired Goffman, who stayed there until he left for Penn in 1968. Before Blumer invited him to join his faculty, Erving considered dropping out of sociology.

Fox: Everything in my encounters with Erving indicated that he wanted to be a sociologist and not an anthropologist. He hung out with anthropologists. But the fact that he was so faithful in going to the ASA meetings, . . . the fact that he was so constructive about building the sociology department – a "real" sociology department – at Penn, were both indicators of that.

As I listen to myself talking about Erving, everything suggests that I had quite a positive relationship with him, and vice versa. In terms of our mutual directorship of dissertations and how we related to one another – it was all very positive.

Shalin: Renée, did you have a chance to meet Tom, Erving's son?

Fox: Oh, one time I did. When his son got interested in going to medical school . . . You mean literally see him . . . ? I am trying to think if I actually met him in a face-to-face way. I don't think so. But the one time that I visited Erving in his house, other than when Bob Bellah was there during that tragic interlude that I recounted to you, was when Erving wanted to consult me, like any father, on how his son could get into medical school. . . .

Shalin: That's what good Jewish mothers and fathers do.

[Laughter]

Fox: That's right. I spent many years as a participant observer watching the educational and socialization process through which medical students progressively become physicians at Cornell University Medical College. This was in connection with the Columbia University Medical School project that

was conducted by Robert K. Merton, out of which the volume *The Student-Physician* came, among other publications. I did all the field research for that project that was conducted at Cornell, while Samuel Bloom who was my counterpart on the project did parallel fieldwork at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine that was also one of the sites of the study. Working under the aegis of Everett Hughes, Howard Becker, Blanche Geer, and Anselm Strauss, all of whom were at the University of Chicago then, were carrying out a study of the socialization of medical students at the University of Kansas Medical School at the same time that our Columbia group was conducting our research through the medium of a panel-type survey questionnaire, as well as field research. Out of the Chicago group's study came a major book entitled *Boys in White*. The Columbia and Chicago groups had contact with one another, although our perspectives were quite different in certain ways, as the titles of our respective books suggest.

So Erving [consulted] me about his son, not just because I was a sociologist of medicine but also because I had knowledge of medical schools and medical education from my research experience, and because along with my primary appointment in Penn's Sociology Department, I had secondary professorial appointments in the Departments of Medicine and Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School. As a matter of fact, it was the Department of Psychiatry that recruited me to Penn rather than the Sociology Department. At the outset, my secondary appointment was in the Sociology Department, which was not enthused about my joining them. They weren't against it, but they wouldn't have recruited me. I guess, this has some comparability to Erving's experience. My primary appointment was switched to sociology when I became Chair of the department.

I think Erving may have supposed that I was someone who had inside information on how to optimize Tom's chances of getting into medical school. I didn't have any particularly sagacious things to say, but it was very touching. . . . What is he doing these days, do you know?

Shalin: I think Tom is an oncologist.

Fox: Ah-h-h, really?

Shalin: Yes, I am mulling over the wisdom of sharing with Tom the results of my study once it has sufficiently evolved, but I don't want to be intrusive. I am not sure he would want to know what people thought about his father or what his mother's situation was. Perhaps you can offer an advice as someone familiar with the ethical issues this project raises.

Fox: You could give him the choice and tell him what motivates you, tell him about your high esteem for Goffman, and all the time you spent engaged in research about his father. Many of the things you have collected are very interesting and positive, but inevitably there will be things he might think are hurtful. This is the analog of informed consent, basically. He can decide whether he wants to see it. On the other hand, there is a parallel here to the question of whether to show your field notes to the people who gave you their informed consent to make a study, or whether you simply show them what you produced from it.

Shalin: Carolyn Ellis had such experience with her Fishneck community informants. Once they discovered the book she published, some wanted to sue her. No real names were used, yet everybody figured out who said what.

Fox: You can actually tell Tom that you don't know how best to handle the situation. . . . I mean, that's being perfectly up front. . . . You can tell him that you would like to offer him the opportunity to see these materials but you don't know whether that is the best or the right thing to do.

Shalin: Do you know Erving's second wife?

Fox: No. I don't even know whether I have a visual image of her.

Shalin: I was wondering about her as well.

Fox: I want to add one thing about Erving – the fact that he was very brave about his death. He was not melodramatic about it. There was nothing theatrical about the way that he behaved publicly in reacting to it; he was really dignified. I don't know how he was in private, but I was very impressed with how he simply went on with his life. He didn't engage in any of his characteristic antics. He was very private about it. I was impressed.

Shalin: Here you touch upon something that goes to the heart of my inquiry. When Goffman discovered the backstage-frontstage division and the conartistry at the heart of social life, he faced a personal dilemma of how to present himself in public. Some of his actions that are reported in the Goffman archives and that suggest in-your-face demeanor maybe seen as a response to this dilemma. He refused to wear masks just as he was exposing other people's interactional gambits. Dean MacCannell believes that Goffman took Jean Paul Sartre close to heart, and that in his effort to expose bad faith, he took up a persona of someone who was acting in bad faith as a way to mock and expose all pretenses. In this reckoning, Erving's intent was to turn the double negative into a positive. A basic dilemma that Goffman faced was how to present oneself without putting the show on.

Fox: There is a certain paradox here. For example, the way he might have [avoided] putting the show on was by dressing down.

Shalin: You feel his strategy was conspicuous.

Fox: That was quite conspicuous. But when it came to the quiet way in which he exited from this world, that was . . . classy. One thing you didn't bring up with me, although I don't have any insight into it, is his fascination with gambling. He was after all a croupier, wasn't he?

Shalin: He trained in Vegas to get a dealer's license, I know that. Mel Kohn told me how one day he had received a letter from the Las Vegas sheriff asking him about one Erving Goffman who wants to be a dealer and requesting a reference.

Fox: Didn't he also play a role of croupier in Monte Carlo?

Shalin: That I didn't know.

Fox: I think so. I wrote an essay about training for uncertainty, and Erving with his attitude toward chance and risk taking [reminds me of that]. . . . I am thinking of the chance element in life, what is aleatory. There were certain themes in his work that you could have said had existential significance. Some of these are also issues [you encounter] in medicine, such as uncertainty and risk and chance. They take you into a realm of causality and meaning, how things come to pass, and why.

Shalin: There was this existential dimension to his existence.

Fox: That's what I am groping for.

Shalin: Staring in the abyss, daring the devil, knowing how transient our chance to be around or play a professor is. I sense that there is some deeper narrative here and am trying to collect evidence on that. Tom Scheff points to Erving's essay "Where the Action Is" that revolves around gambling and chance taking, and he feels there was something about Goffman in it that he calls "hypermasculinity." That was the way men expressed their strength at the time by going to the biggest guy in the room and hitting him right on the nose – if not literally, then symbolically. [Michael Schwalbe posted an interesting comment on masculinity and authenticity in the Goffman archives that bears on this issue].

Fox: Again, this may come from my experience, and not necessarily from him. I wrote in my book *Experiment Perilous* about physicians who were at once clinical researchers and who were taking care of the patients in the ward

that I studied, doing very trailblazing, sometimes even audacious, experiments on their gravely ill patients with their informed voluntary consent. I sat with them in their conference room at night when they went over their cases and their research findings and clinical findings of the day. They had a game that they often played, which I came to call "the game of chance," in which they took bets on how their experiments would turn out. I wrote a very elaborate analysis of that. I never interviewed them because I thought that no matter how carefully I might phrase my questions, it would sound as if I were asking them how they could have possibly be doing that when they were supposed to be rigorous scientists, and compassionate physicians. But their ritualistic "game" was basically a way of acting out the chance elements in their research, in the face of what they didn't know, the medical uncertainty and limitations with which they were confronted, and the risks to which they were subjecting their patient-subjects. They recorded their bets on the lab paper, and there was a gallows humor component in that – equating bets with laboratory findings. Then, if you "won," by guessing correctly what the ketosteroid or eosinophile counts, for example, would turn out to be, you didn't exactly get a munificent material reward. Maybe the group would take you out for a beer or something. But it was a kind of protest against the fact that [they had to deal] with these questions in a supposedly scientifically manner, questions involving real lives and real deaths, in a world that ideally shouldn't be ordered in such a capricious, unpredictable, and tragic way. Winning provided some reassurance that the day would come when there would be a closer relationship – more of a coincidence – between what they knew, hypothesized, and predicted and how things actually turned out, so that through their research and their care they could more greatly benefit their patients. It was a poignant, as well as ironic and counterphobic game. I don't know whether Erving ever thought in ways like this about risk and chance and uncertainty.

Shalin: Speaking about that, I wonder if you know anything about Erving's decision to seal his archives. Apparently, his field notes, his correspondence, his unfinished manuscripts are inaccessible. There is probably a will somewhere, but I never could find out what exactly his instructions were.

Fox: You should talk to Yves Winkin about this – and we should probably stop soon.

Shalin: Sure. It is indeed time for us to stop.

Eviatar mentioned that once you were at Erving's house, and he pulled from the shelf Eviatar's book, showed it to his guests, and said something like, "Here, this is the book by my student." Do you have any recollections about that?

Fox: None.

Shalin: If you reread Eviatar's interview, you will see that he remembers you telling him about this episode.

Fox: That doesn't sound right, I cannot imagine him saying, "**my**" student" in my presence when Eviatar was "our" student.

Shalin: Take a look at Eviatar's interview. This is an interesting example of which memories are deposited in different minds, and how they can be checked against each other. Maybe Eviatar misremembers it, maybe you have forgotten about it, maybe something altogether different happened.

Fox: Eviatar is also implying, isn't he, that he hadn't sent me a copy of his book. He had. It is here on a shelf of the bookcases in my home study, and it is personally and warmly inscribed to me.

Shalin: He doesn't mention that. What he says is that he mailed the book to Goffman, Erving didn't respond, but later on you told Eviatar that you had seen Goffman pull out the book and show it to those present in his house.

Fox: If it comes back to memory, I will let you know. I am drawing a blank on that.

Shalin: Renée, I cannot thank you enough. This is terrific stuff.

Fox: I want to give you Yves Winkin's email. You said you've been trying to reach him.

Shalin: I did, and I am not sure he didn't receive my inquiry. Perhaps he is busy.

Fox: He has a complicated life, partly because he commutes back and forth between Lyons where he teaches and where he lives with his wife and children. Now, according to what I have here his email is < . . . >. If you write to him again, say that I urged you to get in touch with him, that you tried before without success, and that his response is very important to you. I have an old and deep enough relationship to him, to think that this would help.

Shalin: Renée, I wrote to him three times, although the last time my message bounced, and I feel it would be rude to persist. But if you ever hear from Yves or communicate with him, please mention to him this project.

Fox: I think you should do that also and say that we had a long discussion, and that I personally urged you to get in touch with him, that you tried but couldn't be sure he received the message.

Shalin: One way of doing this would be to wait till I transcribe your interview, and once you edit it, post it in the Goffman archives, and then I can bring his attention to your interview. Perhaps that would get his attention.

Fox: You could, but try both.

Shalin: I use his work extensively. He is a very important source for students of Goffman. If you read my paper on Goffman, you will see my tribute to Yves there.

Fox: He has not written everything that he had intended.

Shalin: I understand he was writing a book.

Fox: Well, that might have been one of the reasons why he didn't answer. . . . He may feel frustrated about that. One of the things that he can fill you in on is Erving's relationship to the Penn Annenberg School for Communication.

Shalin: Perhaps there will be another chance to talk, but I don't want to tax you anymore.

Fox: This is good. I enjoyed this enormously. Until the next time, then.

Shalin: Thank you so much. I will send you the transcript.

Fox: OK, by by.