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Goffman Converted His Personal Neurosis or Inferiority Complex into a Very Productive and Creative Solution

Kurt Lang
University of Washington

Gladys Lang
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Repository Citation

Lang, K., Lang, G. (2009). Goffman Converted His Personal Neurosis or Inferiority Complex into a Very Productive and Creative Solution. In Dmitri N. Shalin, *Bios Sociologicus: The Erving Goffman Archives* 1-49.

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Remembering Erving Goffman

Kurt Lang and Gladys Lang: Goffman Converted His Personal Neurosis or Inferiority Complex into a Very Productive and Creative Solution

This interview with Kurt Lang, professor emeritus at the University of Washington, and Gladys Lang, professor emeritus at the University of Washington, was recorded over the phone on January 6, 2009. Dmitri Shalin transcribed the interview, after which Drs. Kurt Lang and Gladys Lang edited the transcript and gave their approval for posting the present version in the Erving Goffman Archives. 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 "[?]".

[Posted 07-13-09]

Kurt Lang: Hello?

Shalin: Greetings, this is Dmitri Shalin from the University of Nevada. Is this Kurt?

Kurt Lang: Yes, it is indeed. How are you?

Shalin: I am fine. How are you?

Kurt Lang: Good, good.

Shalin: I am grateful you found time to talk to me.

Kurt Lang: I don't know if we have anything interesting to say that other people haven't said already.

Shalin: You will be surprised. One unexpected payoff from this project is discovering how contributors remember the past encounters and those involved in them. Individual perspectives on what has transpired can differ markedly.

Kurt Lang: That, I am sure, is true of somebody like Erving.

Shalin: Yes, he is a prime example of the Rashomon effect. But first, may I ask you, Kurt, if I can record our conversation, then send it to you for editing, redacting, revisions and so on?

Kurt Lang: Sure [**laughing**].

Shalin: Wonderful.

Kurt Lang: Gladys is on.

Shalin: Gladys, I am glad you can join us! How are you?

Gladys Lang: Oh, I am fine. We've been away for quite a while.

Shalin: I hope you had a nice sojourn.

Gladys Lang: We did. We didn't have good weather but . . . Seattle, which is a wonderful weather town, evidently [had terrible weather] when we were gone.

Shalin: I hear that there were many planes that couldn't take off.

Gladys Lang: Yes, right. Well, we went early, so we were lucky on that.

Shalin: Gladys, a few days ago I spoke to Joe Gusfield.

Gladys Lang: Oh, yes!

Shalin: He told me to make sure to include Gladys when I speak to Kurt. So I am happy you can join us. And I want to relate to both of you regards from Joe Gusfield.

Kurt Lang: Glad to hear that he is well. You know, we don't always stay in touch with everybody.

Shalin: I think he is well. Don't know how old you are, but . . .

Gladys Lang: [?]

Shalin: I wouldn't press the issue, but he is 90. His hearing is not very good. Other than that, he is sharp and agile. He offered an excellent memoir, which I very much appreciate.

Gladys Lang: At one time we had long conversations by mail, especially related to the history that he was writing. We were really close to each other, and . . . Why don't you go ahead?

Shalin: I don't know if you had time to look at any of the conversations posted so far, but we can move in any directions you like. I have learned not to presume I know which questions to ask, for people bring up things I wouldn't have wits even to ask. Maybe you can start with how far back your memory takes you, when did you first meet Erving, and then we can talk about his personality, scholarship, and so on.

Gladys Lang: OK. If you don't mind, I'll start, and then, I am sure, Kurt will enrich on anything I have to say and use his own material if he likes to.

Shalin: Wonderful. Let's do that. And you don't have to worry about the chronological sequence. We can jump back and forth. Asides and digressions may turn out particularly valuable. Please go ahead.

Gladys Lang: What I have done while waiting for [our talk], I had actually jotted down some notes. I remember that we both got our degrees, our Ph.D.'s, the same year. I might have done mine a year later. When I arrived in Chicago in 1949, I had been away from the university for almost seven years. I was not in the army but in a wartime organization – the Office of Strategic Services – known as OSS – therefore I was a veteran. In September 1949, when I arrived at the university, it seemed that everybody who was anybody in the sociology group had been overseas and was a veteran. . . . Erving had followed quite a different route into Chicago. He'd come from Toronto, he hadn't really been very much touched by the war at all, so far as I can make out. He was not there the year that I arrived in '49, he was in Shetland – the Shetland Islands, I think that is where he was. What impressed me is that I got to know about Erving [who] wasn't there, yet he was always there.

Shalin: How do you mean it?

Gladys Lang: In a sense that everybody . . . not everybody, but people around Gusfield, people in our crowd [some of whom] knew Erving and some of whom didn't were very aware of Erving, even though he wasn't there. In other words, his name came up all the time, people talked about him. He already had a reputation; he had a presence there, even though he wasn't there. Do I make myself clear?

Shalin: Very much so. I don't want to interrupt you, just to make clear that Erving was already enrolled in the University of Chicago when you arrived there.

Gladys Lang: In 1949 he was over in Scotland. . . . What I am trying to say is that even though he wasn't there, his presence was felt.

Shalin: Do you know by any chance when had Erving come to the U.S. and started his graduate work in Chicago?

Gladys Lang: I should know that, but . . . Do you know that, Kurt?

Shalin: I interviewed Erving's sister and other relatives, and they told me it might have been as early as 1946.

Gladys Lang: I do know that he got his B.A. at Toronto in '45. But then he got his M.A. at Chicago in 1949.

Shalin: So 1946 would be the year of his arrival?

Gladys Lang: Yes, I would think so. . . . I don't remember anybody mentioning his publications, those that later would become his most important publications. I don't know if you remember it, Kurt, he hadn't yet published his book. But somehow we had copies of what he was saying. In some way it must have been available to people.

Shalin: The first edition of *Presentation of Self* appeared in 1956. It was published in England by Edinburgh Press. And in 1959 came out a better known Anchor edition of his book.

Gladys Lang: 1959 was the first publication of it, as I remember it. Is that right?

Shalin: Three years earlier it was published in England as a monograph.

Gladys Lang: OK, that's what people knew then.

Shalin: But he already published some important articles like "Symbols of Class Status" that appeared in 1951, and "Cooling the Mark Out" which was published a year later, I believe.

Gladys Lang: As to what people talked about . . . I was a student of Blumer and Shibutani and knew from them things that Erving would become known for later, but it seems to me that Joe Gusfield and Saul Mendlovitz and all the others who were part of that crowd talked about Erving quite personally in terms of his adeptness at gambling. There were all these tales about the fact that he was adept at winning money in gambling at casinos, that sort of thing. . . . In other words, what I am trying to say is that I knew about him, yet I never met him at the time. It was as if he had never left Chicago. He was still there. I don't think that I really met him until . . . I remember meeting him at a party over a year later or so it seems to me. I met Kurt at Chicago that year and we married in June 1950. And I think Erving passed through Chicago around that time, as I recall it, when we were at a party with a lot of these people, but I may be wrong. At any rate, I didn't meet Erving until later.

I am trying to get through the main points that I had been thinking of before you called. The second point – and Kurt can tell you more about it – Erving liked to be a little bit off-putting. I know he and Kurt had lots of interchanges after they really got to know each other. . . . Erving was never nasty to me the way he could be to many people. What did happen was that in later years

Kurt and I were in New York teaching and then went out to Berkeley [for a semester] which was in 1962. At that time [there were a number of] assistant professors [in sociology] who didn't even have offices and things of that sort. Kurt was a visiting associate professor but he had not yet received an office assignment. They were trying to figure out whose office they could put him in. I walked in and Erving was there. He saw me and he said, "You have a key to an office." And I said, "No, I was just tugging along." He said, "Oh, OK." And as soon as he got the keys for his office, he handed over them to me, saying, "Use my office. I can work at home." I was luckier than Kurt was, because from the beginning of our stay there I had an office [which] I was sharing with somebody. Everybody did, but he [Kurt] early on didn't have an office. And that was Erving, you know. I had those keys and was settled in right away . .

Kurt Lang: Of course I got an office.

Gladys Lang: OK, he got an office. I meant when he was just there, getting started on this and that. But that was the way Erving was.

Shalin: Which year was that?

Gladys Lang: When did we go to Berkeley?

Kurt Lang: '63.

Shalin: Erving joined the faculty in 1958, and he left for Penn in 1968.

Gladys Lang: We saw quite a bit of him during our visits.

Kurt Lang: He had a beautiful home.

Gladys Lang: He had a beautiful home. . . . That was the beginning of knowing him for himself, and not just by his writing. I don't think he ever teased me the way he liked to tease many people. I can't tell you why.

Shalin: Do you have any explanation of that? People say he could be quite abrasive.

Gladys Lang: I know, but he never was that way with me after I met him. Maybe I don't remember [unpleasant] things of that sort. I don't know why. I should say one thing about his reputation. When we got [to Chicago], when he was still in the Shetland Islands. . . . what struck me at the time was that there was the whole generation that served in World War II. Almost everyone was a veteran. I was part of that because I was really a veteran as well; not quite the same but nevertheless. These were older than usual

students, they had more experiences than other people had, they were more skeptical. They could appreciate people like Blumer and Shibutani and the rest of them, but on the other hand they weren't worshippers. At Chicago there were also a lot of very young students. Wirth had his daughter there, she was 15 [an undergraduate].

Shalin: What is the name of that person?

Kurt Lang: Louis Wirth.

Kurt Lang: She was at the UC College.

Gladys Lang: You had people there who would also sometimes turn up at various parties, the young students from the undergraduate college. But [ours] was an older group, the group that already had lived a little bit. I won't go into it, but I and Helena [Lopata] and Joe Gusfield – we all sort of partied together . . . well, I don't want to go into that. At any rate, what struck me was that Erving, coming from Toronto, had no worries about money, which was quite different from the rest of us. Most of the others were there on the GI Bill of Rights.

Shalin: So Erving stood out insofar as he was financially more comfortable than most of the others.

Gladys Lang: Yes, he was. I believe that Schuyler whom he married [also had no financial worries].

Shalin: You knew Schuyler?

Gladys Lang: Oh, yes.

Shalin: I would like to hear about her later on. But go ahead.

Gladys Lang: She also had money somehow.

Kurt Lang: She had a great deal of money. . . . Her family owned a newspaper.

Shalin: I understand there was a Choate prep school also.

Kurt Lang: They were Boston Brahmins. I think she sort of looked up to Erving, who had quite a different history and came from a rather different background. We know that even though he was always trying to project some image of himself that he wanted people to accept. Exactly what that self-image was is another question.

Shalin: That is most interesting. One of the issues I am pondering, if you don't mind me interrupting you for a second, is how the person who discovered the life's backstage and wrote about impression management would present himself in public. Some of his abrasiveness, I hypothesize, might have been his way of handling this sticky situation. Any thought you have on this subject are of great interest to me.

Gladys Lang: Yes, I think that is certainly true. He was that way all his life. I mean, even the way he died. I guess people told you that. Once he was ill, suffering from cancer, he really didn't want to see anybody at all.

Shalin: I want to dwell on this more but please continue with your narrative for the moment. Every account I gather adds a dimension to Erving's life.

Gladys Lang: Yes, that's the main thing about those years. What struck me was that there was the Goffman cult. Basically, they doted on him. They always talked about him. In conversations his name so often came up even when he wasn't there. My next impression was in the one year when we came back to Berkeley, and he was at Berkeley. . . . I don't know if he was then part of the department but he was very much part of Berkeley at that time.

Kurt Lang: He was part of the faculty at that time.

Gladys Lang: Was he?

Kurt Lang: Yes, he definitely was part of the faculty!

Shalin: He came to Berkeley in 1958 as an assistant professor, and within three or four years, he became a full professor.

Gladys Lang: That was the point at which he really moved up. . . . He worked at home. People he wanted to see, he would see people he wanted to see at home. They would come over to see him. He really didn't go [to the university], except for teaching. He was not on the scene very often. . . . He really didn't want to be observed.

Shalin: The man who studied the backstage of other people didn't want to expose his own.

Gladys Lang: That's right, absolutely. That's just the way it was. He worked at home; I don't remember whether we ever saw him at home.

Kurt Lang: Yes, we did see him at home.

Gladys Lang: We did?

Kurt Lang: Yes, it was a delightful afternoon. We must have been four or five hours there with him and Schuyler. And a friend of ours was along too.

Shalin: Kurt, please hold on to all your memories, we shall come back to you shortly; let's hear Gladys now.

Kurt Lang: I just want to make sure . . .

Gladys Lang: I'm just trying to get the main points of it. Yes, that's right, we saw him at his home, but . . . I am trying to sort my mind on that. I don't remember when his son was born.

Shalin: He was born in 1953. You are talking about Tom Goffman, right?

Gladys Lang: Yes. I remember talking to Erving when we were in Washington DC. We went to visit [Erving]. This was of course before Schuyler committed suicide.

Shalin: That happened in 1964.

Gladys Lang: Then it must have been just in the late '50s. We were in Washington DC, and we went over to their apartment. At that time they were living in an apartment which wasn't very elegant. . . . They were in Washington DC with Schuyler, and the reason I remember this was because they had this baby. That is why I asked when he was born. They had this baby, and we went over to visit them in their apartment. It was not a very elegant apartment, and they both looked miserable. I don't know how to explain it.

Shalin: The baby and his mother?

Gladys Lang: Goffman and Schuyler. They looked like they . . . He wasn't much at ease being at home. We had something to eat, and we were sitting there, and it was one time when I felt that they were both very ill at ease because they had to listen for the baby, you know. It was one time when I felt that Erving wasn't actually in control of the way he was presenting himself.

Shalin: You mean he was losing temper?

Gladys Lang: No. [He was] moody, very drawn into himself. And so was Schuyler. And that was probably one of the last times I remember seeing him. . . . He died when the American Sociological Association was meeting.

Shalin: He died in 1982 before he was inaugurated as president.

Gladys Lang: Right. We knew Ralph Turner by that time quite well. Ralph really had to take over, and he never got his own full presidency. He was, ah-h . . .

Shalin: Caretaker.

Gladys Lang: Right, caretaker.

[**An inaudible exchange between Gladys and Kurt**].

Gladys Lang: OK, maybe he did. Anyway, the main thing that I wanted to bring out was that we saw him in a completely different light there. He and Schuyler, they struck me as rather unhappy and much out of it. It seemed to me that things weren't going very well.

Shalin: Would you say that meeting was around 1957 or '58? Because that is when Erving worked at the National Institute of Mental Health and conducted his study at the St. Elizabeth's hospital.

Gladys Lang: When did you say his son was born?

Shalin: In 1953.

Gladys Lang: His son was already there.

Shalin: Would you say Tom was no more than one year old when you visited Erving in DC?

Gladys Lang: I don't know. I knew he was there, but I [didn't see him].

Shalin: But he was very young, right?

Gladys Lang: He was an infant.

Shalin: If Tom Goffman was born in 1953 and Erving left for Berkeley in 1958, then you must have visited him between 1954 and 1958. Mel Kohn told me that he knew both Erving and Schuyler at that time, and that Goffman left for Berkeley while his wife and son stayed behind for a while.

Gladys Lang: All I know is that Schuyler and he were both there. We went over to their apartment, and the baby was in another room.

Shalin: Right.

Kurt Lang: Let me butt in for a moment. Those were the years when we [lived] in Canada. We visited Washington just once. It was either 1955 or

56 . . . it was probably in 1955 during the ASA meetings, which were in Washington if I remember correctly.

Shalin: That seems just about right, given the date of Erving's Ph.D. defense and the birth of his son.

Kurt Lang: Yes, I remember that he was there with NIMH or something like that. I remember that quite distinctly. And also remember . . . but anyhow, let me butt out now.

Shalin: This chronology may sound like a trivial matter, but I think it is important. Gladys, please continue, and when you are done, I would like to go back to the Chicago years and ask you a couple more of questions.

Gladys Lang: Why don't we do that? I'll let Kurt to take over for a while. I am really trying to think back to some of these things [that] were so-o-o-o long ago.

Shalin: You mentioned that Erving was not in Chicago when you came there, but he was there in spirit, he had a reputation.

Gladys Lang: Right.

Shalin: Could you sum up what his reputation was?

Gladys Lang: [He was known] first of all, for his brilliance. They talked about what he had to say. It wasn't exactly sitting down and discussing his essence, just that he was unusual.

Shalin: That he was sharp, perceptive, humorous.

Gladys Lang: Well, I wouldn't say "humorous." I wouldn't call him that.

Shalin: Gusfield says Erving's nickname at the time was "little dagger."

Gladys Lang: The little beggar?

Shalin: Dagger, a little knife.

Gladys Lang: I see.

Shalin: Meaning that he was extremely sharp and quick-witted, that he could lash out with his sarcasm.

Gladys Lang: I never heard it at the time, but I think it is a good description.

Shalin: Anything else about his reputation?

Gladys Lang: It was unusual in that he would go to those casinos. I had it [in my memory] that those who knew Erving before me saw him as a genius in terms of card playing or whatever he was doing. People found him interesting, even the fact that he went off to the Shetland Islands. People talked about that, and then he wrote about it. That was very unusual. People might have gone any other place . . . , but somehow he sailed for the Shetland Island.

Shalin: Several people told me they were caught by surprise to learn where Erving went to do his field work, because most others did their dissertations locally. Do you have a hypothesis why he chose that for as a research site?

Gladys Lang: I think that he was unusual.

Shalin: Erving – a cat who walks all by himself.

Kurt Lang: I would think so, yes. He wanted to be noticed.

Shalin: And you base your judgment not just on his reputation but on your personal observations.

Gladys Lang: Right. Yes.

Shalin: So your group at Chicago was comprised by veterans, confident people who were not afraid to speak up. Erving was somewhat different in that he was not a veteran, and he had money. Did that cause any tension?

Gladys Lang: No, it didn't come in. I mean, there were a few other people who had some money [like] Helena.

Shalin: Helena Lopata?

Gladys Lang: Yes. You couldn't tell it [who had money] by appearances, but she married someone who had a good job at that time.

Shalin: You said you often had parties in those days – did Erving attend them?

Gladys Lang: I don't think he was there. Once in a while he would appear at small gatherings. . . . I and Helena and Rhoda Goldstein – I knew a lot of other people there who were ahead of us, but that was a different generation. We were the ones who came all at the same time in 1949. We were the ones who made it more of a social [socializing] place than it was. And everybody took us up on that too. Before that, no one [none of the fellows]

ever put on a suit, so far as I know [**laughing**]. Erving was not at the parties in 1949, and we left in – 1953?

Kurt Lang: '53, right.

Shalin: Bob Habenstein . . .

Gladys Lang: Oh, yes, Bob.

Shalin: . . . who must be 90 or older now . . .

Gladys Lang: Older than that.

Shalin: Maybe be even 94-95. He remembers seeing Erving at some of the parties.

Gladys Lang: I knew Bob Habenstein very well. Bob was older than most of the other people. He was sort of like an older brother to many of us].

Shalin: He already had two children, lived in a house; a lot of people kind of looked up to him.

Gladys Lang: Some of the students used to steal spaghetti and take it over to the Habensteins [to feed his family]. . . . Later on, when we were passing through Washington, I remember being at a party, and Erving was also there for just a couple of minutes or whatever it was, long enough for me to say "hello." But at many different parties that we had, I don't remember ever seeing Erving there. Kurt would know that too because by that time we knew each other, we were married. The one year, 1949, he couldn't have been there of course, but after that I never saw him at any parties.

Shalin: Erving defended his dissertation around 1953.

Gladys Lang: He finished in 1953; I finished my doctorate in 1954 and was away by that time. I knew he already had gotten his degree.

Shalin: Gladys, perhaps you can clarify for me something. I understand that Schuyler was a graduate student at Chicago working on her doctorate in anthropology.

Gladys Lang: That's right.

Shalin: I understand that she was an A.B.D., that's to say, she finished everything but the dissertation.

Gladys Lang: Right.

Shalin: Do you know how Erving and Schuyler met?

Gladys Lang: Oh, gee whiz. I don't know that at all. I am thinking who might tell you.

Shalin: A few people who might have known have died, unfortunately.

Gladys Lang: Who else might know about. . . .

Shalin: Let me know if any names come up.

Gladys Lang: We had this association of people who were grad students there. It was called Zeta Phi. I was the president there, one year before it was dissolved. I had the notebooks with all the things that had been in it, and I gave them to the University of Chicago.

Shalin: They must be archived there.

Gladys Lang: Yes, they should be there. I am trying to think who else . . .

Kurt Lang: One name that comes to mind, but I am sure you have contacted him already, is Howard Becker.

Shalin: I had a lively exchange with him over email at the beginning of this project.

Kurt Lang: That's the only one I could think of.

Shalin: Howe told me that he was Erving's confidant and that he didn't think it would be right for him to discuss those issues. Of course, I wouldn't dream of pressing Howard, or anyone else for that matter. Did any of you attend Erving's wedding or heard about it?

Gladys Lang: I certainly didn't. I haven't heard of him lately, but one of the people who knew him is Saul Mendlovitz.

Shalin: I talked to him two days ago. We set up time to speak in the morning today, but he came down with the cold.

Gladys Lang: Oh, dear. Where is he?

Shalin: He is in New Jersey. He worked there in a law school until he retired, I believe.

Gladys Lang: When you talk to him, please tell him I send my regards.

Shalin: I will certainly do that. One more name that came up is, if I got I right, Ruth Rosinger?

Gladys Lang: Kornhauser?

Shalin: No.

Kurt Lang: The maiden name [of that person] was Ruth Rosner.

Shalin: How do you spell it?

Kurt Lang: R-o-s-n-e-r. She was married to William Kornhauser.

Shalin: I think both of them are deceased now.

Kurt Lang: Yes, I have heard that.

Shalin: She never fulfilled any of the promises, she just went to pieces.

Shalin: I recently talked at great length to Frances Bay, Erving's sister, who lived and worked in Canada where she is considered to be a famous Canadian actress who has a brother, a noted American sociologist. . . .

Kurt Lang: If it were the other way around, it would have been Erving who functioned as a sign post leading to his "less famous" sister. A bit irony here.

Shalin: OK, but you did have a chance to observe Angelica Schuyler.

Gladys Lang: Yes.

Shalin: How did she come across, what was her appearance? For instance, was she taller than Erving?

Gladys Lang: She certainly was taller than he was.

Shalin: What was Erving's height, as you recall it?

Gladys Lang: Not very tall.

Shalin: The estimates I have range from 5'1 to 5'8.

Kurt Lang: No, he wasn't 5'8. I would say 5'1 or 5'2. That would be my guess. He was definitely not 5'8. I was 5'6 at the time, and I was definitely a good deal taller than he was.

Shalin: So what impression did Angelica leave on you? As you know, she committed suicide.

Gladys Lang: We knew about that. The news got out very quickly. I don't think I really knew her that well.

Shalin: Any image of her from the Chicago years?

Gladys Lang: . . . She wasn't . . . she was more on the quiet side.

Kurt Lang: I took, I think, two seminars with her, same seminars she did. I wouldn't describe her as retiring, but she always seemed a bit morose, you know. I think that is the word. She didn't seem to be outgoing, happy, and what not. She was quite serious, and she did occasionally speak up. Clearly, she was overwhelmed BEING in the shadow of Erving, especially after they got married. I think I might have taken those seminars with her before they were married. I am not sure, but I think it was before they were married. I didn't know they were married until . . . until later. You know, a couple of years after.

Shalin: So you wouldn't know when the two were actually married

Kurt Lang: I would say sometime between 1951 and about 1954.

Shalin: But their son was born in 1953 when they were already married.

Kurt Lang: Yes.

Shalin: So I would think it must have been around 1951 or 1952.

Kurt Lang: Yes, that's about right.

Gladys Lang: When you talk to Saul, ask him that question. He will be likely to know that. You [wouldn't want to rely] on the memory of my husband or any one of us.

Shalin: Kurt, you mentioned something – are you there Kurt?

Kurt Lang: Yes.

Shalin: You mentioned something no one else did – you actually attended the same class as Schuyler. Do you remember which class it was?

Kurt Lang: The one, I am quite sure of, was the seminar with Ed Shils. I am trying to remember which one it was. A seminar with Ed Shils was not particularly exciting, because he never gave it much time.

Shalin: I want to interject that when I started the project, it was focused exclusively on Goffman, but as I spoke to people like Joe Gusfield and Renee Fox, I realized that they have much of interest to say about Erving's colleagues and people of that era. Now I feel if you want to understand Erving, you should cast your net wider and learn about his colleagues and teachers. Perhaps not right now, but at some point I would like to hear your take on Blumer, Shils, and others.

Kurt Lang: Let's stick to Goffman for the moment.

Shalin: One thing I need to tell you, Kurt, is that if you feel I am overwhelming you, that my questions are getting tiresome, you should let me know. I tend to get carried away.

Kurt Lang: No, no, it's all right. It's a lot to go over, things that happened at Chicago. And then you're talking to [both of us].

Shalin: We'll revisit related tangents at some other point. Going back to Angelica, I thought she was an anthropology student.

Kurt Lang: I am not completely sure about that. Chicago was a place with a lot of cross-disciplinary explorations. I know that the seminar both of us were in was with Ed Shils. I also have a distinct sense that our steps crossed as undergrads. I was a late starter; I was not the graduate student until later, I sort of knew her just a little bit while still an undergraduate in the college where she was as well at the same time as I was. I stood next to her at some political meeting. We had a few exchanges and I have a vague memory about my trying to find out whether politically we were on the same wave length. Even then, while apparently involved, she was not particularly talkative.

Shalin: You used the expression "morose" – do you mean that she was somber, not very communicative?

Kurt Lang: Well, "somber" gets pretty close to it. I mean she always . . . she didn't seem to be particularly cheerful and outgoing. She always seemed to be very serious. She often knitted her brows, and so on. I mean, she was nice. At the seminar she gave her report, and she was certainly articulate and outgoing. I sort of observed her, and she wasn't a great extrovert, at least not in my relations with her. I was not close to her, she was somebody I knew when I would cross paths with her on campus. And even though we took the same seminar, I doubt we did exchange more than twenty words vis-à-vis each other during the entire seminar.

Shalin: Right. I suspect there must be records at the University of Chicago that can shed light on her studies there. Now, she wasn't really active part of your group.

Kurt Lang: If you ask me, I would say, "No." I was quite surprised, since I knew her, after I suddenly found out that she was Erving Goffman's wife. When I took the seminar, I had no idea that there was any connection between her and Erving, although that may have been before they got married. It would have been in 1951.

Shalin: Some people indicated to me that she was bright, that she was involved in Erving's work, and that she used to edit it. It's hard to verify that, but this caught my eye. It seems like she was more than just a wife taking care of her son and the family – she was an intellectual in her own right.

Kurt Lang: She was smart. She was very articulate at the seminar, and very serious. Whether or not she edited Erving's work I have no idea. I wouldn't be surprised if that happened, you know. I don't have any knowledge of my own.

Shalin: Would you mind me asking this question – Gladys, I am sorry bringing this up – do you think Schuyler was attractive? This question is for both of you.

Kurt Lang: Yes, she was, except that she always looked a little bit morose – that's the best word I can apply to her. She didn't seem to be cheerful enough. I remember the afternoon we spent at their house at Berkeley about a year, a year-and-a-half before she committed suicide. . . . Gladys asked her, "What are you doing?" But she made a mistake of calling her "Angelica." She [Schuyler] winced and said, "Please, please – it's Schuyler!" [**Laughing**].

Shalin: Some call her "Sky."

Kurt Lang: I knew her better than Gladys did. I asked her what she was doing, and she sort of shrugged her shoulders, sighed, and said . . . I don't know exactly what," she said, but she didn't really say very much. That was rather different from the way I remembered her at the seminar. Not that she was terribly outgoing; she gave a report, she handled herself quite well, I thought.

Shalin: You said you saw the Goffmans in, what, 1962 or '63?

Kurt Lang: '63.

Shalin: Sometime at Berkeley, the two were separated, but let's not go into that for the moment. You were not in town when Schuyler committed suicide, right?

Kurt Lang: No.

Shalin: The news reached you from afar. Did you hear anything about the possible reasons?

Kurt Lang: I don't know. Maybe Gladys does. As I told you, she just didn't seem to be a very happy person at the time, so when we heard she committed suicide, it's not that I had expected it, but it was, you know, not inconsistent with observations of her that I had made earlier.

Gladys Lang: I am trying to think of who might have called us about it.

Kurt Lang: It might have been Fred Davis.

Gladys Lang: It's likely that it was Fred Davis or [?]. But I have a different idea, Kurt, that it was Bob . . .

Kurt Lang: Bob Clark.

Gladys Lang: Bob Clark or Adele Clark who told us about that.

Kurt Lang: That's very possible. They went to UCLA. Burton R. Clark – were you in touch with him?

Shalin: I don't think his name came up.

Kurt Lang: He was on the Berkeley faculty at the time. His field was sociology of education. And in the late '60s or 1970s he went to UCLA where he had a very good appointment at the School of Education. . . . He and his wife were part of Berkeley circuit, and they all knew one another well. We were there for only about eight months.

Gladys Lang: I believe she was a friend of Schuyler.

Kurt Lang: I think you are right.

Shalin: I missed it – what was her name?

Kurt Lang: Adele Clark.

Shalin: **A**dele and Bob Clark?

Kurt Lang: They call him "Bob Clark," but his actual name is Burton R. Clark.

Shalin: Is he still alive?

Kurt Lang: I don't know. I've not been in touch with him for about 30 years.

Gladys Lang: I think Adele went on to work as a . . . not a librarian, but [she did some work] in the library.

Kurt Lang: Anyhow, UCLA must have his address if you want to track him down. That would be a way to track him down.

Gladys Lang: Adele would really know about it. I am sure she was the one who told me about it. He was for a long time at Yale also.

Shalin: I wonder if David Matza mentioned this name to me.

Gladys Lang: . . . She was the one who really knew Schuyler. We were away from there by that time; I wasn't really following it too well. Anyway, I think she was the one who called us. We talked to them on the phone sometimes.

Shalin: The other person who knew Schuyler rather well, it seems, is a graduate student at Berkeley, Rodney Stark.

Kurt Lang: Yes, we know who he is. He was in the Survey Research Center.

Shalin: OK, the news reached you, and you construed Schuyler's suicide as not inconsistent with how you remembered her.

Gladys Lang: I think so.

Shalin: I will explain why I dwell on it, why it is important for understanding Goffman. But first, if I could go back for a moment to your visit with the Goffmans in Washington DC, anything else comes to mind about that visit? You say they appeared to be out of sorts – was it because of the baby? You know, kids could drive you up the wall.

Gladys Lang: How can I explain it after all these years. . . . They [loved their son very much ?]. But I got the sense that at that time he really didn't want to have a son, you know. I got the impression that he didn't like very much the idea of having a baby around.

Shalin: But Erving was a single parent from 1964 through the '70s, and I gather he was a very committed one.

Kurt Lang: Whenever you are done with the hard part, you know. . . .

Shalin: You mean he might have grown into his role?

Gladys Lang: . . . Just a second, Kurt is saying good bye to somebody.

[**Pause**]

Shalin: Gladys, did I get it right that at that time Erving was not completely comfortable with his role as a father?

Gladys Lang: Yes, right. Absolutely. It could have been my judgment. I did have children of my own by that time.

Shalin: I have a son and a daughter, and I know that some days you want to run away. I can tell you more about myself, but I don't want to lose your train of thought – anything in particular that made you infer about Erving's uneasiness about his parental role?

Gladys Lang: It was the atmosphere in which we were sitting and talking. I just had the impression that he really didn't want this baby to be part of it at all. He wasn't like some fathers who would be [going into the baby's room]. Whatever it was, it wasn't the usual sort of an encounter one would have with the relatively new, young father.

Shalin: Of course he might have been tired, didn't get enough sleep the night before; we need to be careful not to overinterpret the signs.

Gladys Lang: Right.

Shalin: Any memories of how Erving and Schuler interacted?

Gladys Lang: I didn't see much of them together at Chicago, but on that night we are talking about, I was uncomfortable. I didn't see the situation as having good vibes all around. I felt that they invited us over, and I think we called them to say we were there, and I didn't feel quite comfortable with the setting. I sensed that there wasn't a good deal of [rapport] . . . it was almost like the moment we are out of the door, they might immediately turn to their own ways and separate.

Shalin: In other words, there was some tension in the air.

Gladys Lang: Absolutely.

Kurt Lang: I would second that.

Gladys Lang: I felt uncomfortable about the fact that we were there; the vibes weren't there **[laughing**].

Shalin: It might happen when you invite guests and they show up just as you had a row or something.

Gladys Lang: Absolutely.

Shalin: And yet your impressions are to be taken seriously. In 1958 Erving went to Berkeley and Schuyler stayed behind with their son. The two lived separately for months. So it might be meaningful.

Gladys Lang: I agree with you. I really wish that I remembered better what happened, what people said when she died. It's just that people were aghast that this happened, wondering why she threw herself off the bridge.

Shalin: Schuyler was in a psychiatric treatment while Erving was doing his work at St. Elizabeth's. According to some of my sources, Erving was of a poor opinion about psychiatrists and the treatment Schuyler had been getting, and her situation might have spurred his interest in total institutions. If you allow me to digress, I find much of Erving's writing autobiographical. His experience may have informed his research agenda, inspired his theoretical insights. For instance, his first major publication on symbols of class status took shape when he dated or was already married to Schuyler, a high society lady whose background was quite unlike Ervng's. In *Asylums*, Erving constructed mental illness as a social artifact and patients as victims of circumstances sucked into the funnel of betrayal. After his wife committed suicide, however, he extricated "mental illness" from the quotation marks and acknowledges that it may have organic origins. In "The Insanity of Place," a remarkable paper he wrote after Schuyler's death, he intimates what it feels like to live with a disturbed person who threatens to go overboard at any moment. Now the shoe is on the other foot. Of course, he had the firsthand experience of living with a disturbed person – his wife. David Mechanics cites his colleague to the effect that Erving once said that if he had to write *Asylums* again, it would have been a different book. This is only a hypothesis, but you can see which way I am heading.

Gladys Lang: Speaking of the autobiographical [connection] – that's the first thought that comes to my mind when I think about Erving and his writing.

Shalin: Really? Coming from someone who knew Erving and read his work, that is important.

Gladys Lang: I always assumed that he was sort of writing his autobiography.

Shalin: I see in Erving a remarkable capacity for growth, the ability to move in a new direction, even though he seemed hesitant to acknowledge his own evolution. By some accounts he was at first not very sympathetic to women in graduate school, yet he came to supervise the work of remarkable female grad students, he wrote *Gender Advertisements*, he exposed sex typing, and so on. Also, I am curious that someone who studied other people's back stages didn't let others peek into his own. You know that Erving sealed his archives, giving instructions before he died that he prefers to be judged solely on the basis of what he had published. Why do you think he was so protective of his own backstage?

Gladys Lang: It's the whole key to what he did, to what he writes about, how he lived his life. I mean, think of somebody at the end of his life not wanting to see anybody. It struck me as a fact of his autobiography that he didn't want people to sympathize with him.

Shalin: You say he didn't want to see anybody before he died – is this something you encountered personally or you only heard about it?

Gladys Lang: I only heard about that. . . . He wouldn't have visitors, he didn't want any visitors. I talked to somebody who wanted to see him, and the word was, "No, Erving doesn't want any visitors."

Shalin: And that was a third party who told you that.

Gladys Lang: Yes, somebody else told me that, and I was sort of surprised at that. He wanted to write his own biography.

Shalin: Through his writings, not literally, right?

Gladys Lang: Yes.

Shalin: Jackie Wiseman told me in her interview – she wrote her dissertation with Erving – that when she learned about his illness, she called to offer sympathy. Erving told her that he was ready to talk sociology but that he wouldn't engage her in that other stuff. And then he hung up on her. That was the last time she spoke to him.

Kurt are you there? Can you hear what I am saying?

Kurt Lang Yes. I am trying to stay out of the conversation since . . .

Shalin: Sure, I want to come back to you shortly. You mentioned something that I hadn't heard before. There were people who played social poker at Chicago, but you said that Erving was known to be more than a casual player, that he already had a reputation of someone interested in gambling, going to casinos. I know that later on Erving trained to become a dealer in Las Vegas and might have actually obtained a license, but you suggest that his interest in gambling goes back to Chicago.

Kurt Lang: I know about his activity at Berkeley, how they would go to Reno, Las Vegas, or wherever they were going, but I have no personal knowledge that he was playing poker at the University of Chicago.

Shalin: Perhaps I misunderstood you. This would become obvious later on when he visited Reno, and so on. OK, Gladys, any more thoughts on Erving's persona, how he tried to navigate in the world of masks and subterfuge while remaining himself? Dean MacCannell has interesting thoughts on the subject. He discerns in Erving's behavior the desire to dodge the Sartrean bad faith by playing on bad faith rituals.

Gladys Lang: I think Kurt has something to say. . . . Erving's writing is a summation of his whole life, its whole purpose. . . .

Shalin: So what is the core of his existential project as you see it, how is it related to his vision of the world as a stage, an ongoing performance?

Gladys Lang: [To answer that] you would have to know what his real life was like, and I don't know anything about that. I could make up stories.

Shalin: I mean, your general impression as a sociologist, not necessarily based on factual information. Given Erving's propensity to play with rules and put people down, I am tempted to call Erving a "master of unceremony." His entire life, it seems to me, was an ongoing research act where he challenged the conventions to find out what the rules were and how far one can go to skirt them. He was a participant observer who crossed the line separating his private life from his professional self as a student of society. What you are telling me seems to point in the same direction.

Gladys Lang: I think so. Absolutely.

Shalin: Now, Kurt, would you mind telling me how far your memories of Erving stretch, when you met him, and so on?

Kurt Lang: Well, let me begin by saying that I was not part of the inner Goffman circle. I was a late starter; I entered Chicago late, when I was almost 24, as a freshman.

Shalin: Which year was it?

Kurt Lang: In 1947. I was in a college with all those 15-16 year olds – I had to get everything done fast. So I didn't know all the people doing graduate work in sociology. Even in '49 when I started having some contact with the graduate students, it took me some time to know people of my age, most of whom were already finishing their Ph.D.s. They were already much farther along than I was. I had first heard Erving's name [from] Albert J. REISS, Jr. [?], an assistant professor under Ernest Burgess, who had to do all the dirty work like counseling students. He informed me about the Woodrow Wilson fellowships. It was 1950, the first year they were offered nationally. He informed that the Department was recommending three people – myself, Howard Stanton, and Erving Goffman. I did know Howard Stanton, but I did not know Erving Goffman at that time. He told me that Erving Goffman wasn't around at the moment, but that he was doing truly "original research."

Shalin: That was in 1950.

Kurt Lang: I think that was around 1950.

Shalin: So Goffman was already known to be an outstanding student.

Kurt Lang: I mean that Al Reiss was the one who used to advise students and consequently knew just about everyone. He was an assistant professor. By that time he had his degree, and he knew that he had two-three more years to go in Chicago. I got to know Al socially; he had a lot of contact with graduate students. We were all older in those days. Anyhow, that's the first time I heard Erving's name. The first time I met him, it was at a small party in Chicago. I remember we had to go down some steps into a basement apartment, and Erving was carrying on in what I later got to know as the Erving style.

Shalin: What was it like?

Kurt Lang: Well, you know, it was in a manner of somebody who liked attention in terms of what you were talking about with Gladys. On the basis of cumulative experiences, I would describe Erving as somebody who was very short and who didn't want to be overlooked. You know, like Napoleon and people like that. He had found a very creative way, a productive solution to his personal neurosis. He transformed his insecurities into something creative by adopting a perspective on the world as he saw it, as made up of make-

belief and performances. He obviously had a shell around him. I don't think he liked people to penetrate his inner self and see his insecurities. I think there was an element of insecurity there. Short people have that problem. I am not saying that was only because he was short, but that certainly creates difficulties inasmuch [as] people tend to admire tall people, pay more attention to tall people than to short people, and so on. Then, almost ten years later, *The Presentation of Self* came out. I was very impressed with the book. While reading it, I saw Goffman almost on every page. Yes, that's the way Goffman sees the world, and while this is only one perspective on the world, it is a very interesting perspective. It offers insights. It is not the whole of social relationships but it is an important part of it. That's really the way I thought about it. One of the articles that I and Gladys did [not mentioned in his book, but in the reference] has nothing to do with what is in our article. Thus I became aware that he relied on graduate assistants for some of his work.

Shalin: How do you mean it?

Kurt Lang: He makes a reference in the book to our study that received quite a bit of attention, on the homecoming of General MacArthur. Suddenly, and I forgot on which page, there is a reference to the study of Macarthur, and it is just wrong. It has notihng to do with what we actually said. I mean, we all make such mistakes. I felt, you know, that even the genius has clay feet, so to say.

Shalin: The reference to your study was really irrelevant, you think.

Kurt Lang: He made it seem relevant to the point he was making. How should I put it – he cited us as an illustration but it wasn't quite what we had written about.

Shalin: And that was an article written by you . . .

Kurt Lang: And Gladys. It was coauthored.

Shalin: He gave you credit, even though . . .

Kurt Lang: It wasn't an accurate description of what we had found. It was garbled.

Shalin: I am sorry I interrupted you, please continue.

Kurt Lang: That's all right.

Shalin: What other memories you have of Erving in Chicago?

Kurt Lang: Gladys really covered a lot of that. You definitely had the feeling that he was not spontaneous, that he was always acting, in a way, always being deliberately unconventional, doing the unexpected. You and Gladys were discussing the fact that he didn't want to see anybody when he was dying, and my interpretation of his style – and I stress that I was not close to him, [although] we had some contact over the years – that he really did not want anybody to come.

Shalin: Was it that he couldn't stage manage the situation at that point?

Kurt Lang: Yes. People really wanted to see him, but he didn't want to be an object of their pity or sympathy. I don't know if this is true or not, but from what I know of him, it occurs to me that that might have been part of his psychological pattern. I mean, he purposely was paradoxical. I'll give you one little example.

Shalin: Please.

Kurt Lang: When I went out to Berkeley as a visiting professor, he had to teach a course called something like "Society and Personality." It was a basic social psychology course, a mass course. He had to take half of the responsibility for it. When I came out there, I was supposed to take the other half of that course, which would leave me free to teach other things that interested me. In the summer of 1962, at the sociology meetings, he approached me and, because he didn't want to teach his half of the course, said, "Can we arrange it so that you teach the whole course?" And I said, "No, Erving, I don't want to do that. One of the reasons I was coming to Berkeley was the chance to have good students and teach at a level I am really interested in." He said, "Can we do then the other thing?" It was clear to me that he wanted to dump the whole thing on me. Erving didn't want to be bothered by such things as having to teach a mass of undergrads.

Shalin: How big was the class?

Kurt Lang: Oh, I think it had about 400 people. It was one of those mass courses.

Shalin: You probably had some TAs.

Kurt Lang: We had five TAs. It clearly bothered him. By that time he had been at Berkeley for three or four years, but somehow the course, of part of it, was still his responsibility. He didn't like to have anything stand in the way of his research. I understand the pressure coming from the academic side. I remember leaving him [with the words], "Erving, I know you don't want to teach the course, but please whatever you do, don't screw me. I don't want to

be screwed by you. It's your problem if you don't want to teach the course, but you work it out with your department." Well, after we were at Berkeley three or four weeks and Gladys got the gift of his office keys, we went out and the three of us had lunch together at the Golden Bear. We has a nice conversation about all sorts of things, you know, typical Erving. We talked about some of the things he had done. *Total Institutions* might have been out by that time.

Shalin: It came out in 1961.

Kurt Lang: Yes, yes. Other books were still in the making. [We had] the kind of discussion you usually have. And as we left and walked across the plaza, he suddenly turned to me and said, "You know, I tried to screw you." I said, "I know."   [He said], "Blumer was right there sticking up for you, but I really tried to screw you." I said, "I know Erving. I know you tried to screw me." In other words, what he tried to do was to have them dump the whole course on me, which of course I didn't want. It was not completely out of my field, but I wasn't used to teaching large lecture courses in social psychology. That's a lot of work. So he tried to dump it on me, and that would wreck havoc of what I expected to be a morale-boosting stay for me. It would have been except, as Erving said, for "Blumer's being there defending you." The way it actually ended up, Erving obviously managed to get out of the course [when] Blumer decided that he would co-teach the course with me. It was very nice of Blumer, but I had put two and two together, and he [Goffman] was actually taken aback by my being so blunt. I was supposed to say, "Oh, no, Erving, you wouldn't do that!"

Shalin: [**Laughing**]. But you didn't, you played his game. If I could pursue that for a second – and please remember your thought – he was in a way revealing his backstage. It was almost in your face, "Sure, I did try to screw you!"   He was unceremonious, and he wanted you to know what he did.

Kurt Lang: No, he wanted me to deny it.

Shalin: Oh, he expected some remedial work reassuring him that he did nothing wrong.

Kurt Lang: I think he was taken aback by the fact that I said, "Oh, yes, I know!" We were going back and forth negotiating what I would actually be teaching. At least this is my interpretation. I don't know what was going through his mind.

Shalin: In this field of ours what else do we have but interpretations, perspectives on perspectives, and they all have value.

Kurt Lang: My interpretation is that . . . I mean, he had a sophisticated mind. He was quite brilliant, no question about it. He was, as you say, suspecting that I would do something, but I think it was part of his way of shocking. If somebody asks, "How are you?" and you say, "Oh, I feel shitty," right? You do what you are not expected to do. I sort of [used] one of his stratagems. That was my projection of what he was like.

Shalin: You didn't give him face he expected you to offer.

Kurt Lang: Yes, yes.

Shalin: Anything else you can remember? I find these episodes precious.

Kurt Lang: Nothing as concrete as that. It is probably the most concrete incident. There may be others, but it has been so many years.

Shalin: When you read the transcript, it may jog more memories. Anything else you can say about Erving and Schuyler, your take on their relationship, how these two people got attracted to each other and managed to stay together.

Kurt Lang: I really have no idea. The only thing I could do is to second what Gladys said. It was quite clear that there were strains in the marriage. That was quite obvious at Berkeley. As I said, I had been surprised when I first found out that they were married!

Shalin: Any other memories from the Berkeley period? Did you ever see his son, had a chance to observe Tom Goffman?

Kurt Lang: Not really. I saw him but was not able to observe him. Seeing him and observing him are two different things, right?

Shalin: Of course. And so far as Schuyler and Erving – was there any new dynamics between the two you might have noticed?

Kurt Lang: No. Most of the time we saw Erving by himself. He kept to himself; he had everything going for him; he had no financial worries. One of the things I remember . . . oh, this comes back to me but is along a different line. If he got his degree in '53, we got our degrees in the same year. You see, I was in a damn hurry to get it.

Shalin: Good for you [**laughing**]. I have two Ph.D.s, one from Russia and one from Columbia University, so I know how those things weigh on you.

Kurt Lang: Anyhow, there were no jobs. People like Erving were quite peeved about the fact that so few offers had come to him and to Ph.D.s from Chicago. He was among those who could afford waiting for something to come along, a fellowship or something. In the next year or two he got some kind of a fellowship or a grant. He was quite peeved about not getting any offers. But so were many of us.

Shalin: Why was he peeved if he got a grant?

Kurt Lang: It probably did not come until the last minute and, as for many of us, it was a substitute for a real academic position.

Shalin: I think he had difficulty landing a job, and there are indications that he considered quitting sociology altogether.

Kurt Lang: Yes, exactly. It was a hard time. I got a job at the University of Miami that I should have never taken. It was almost the only tenure track job that went to new Chicago Ph.D.s that year. I didn't want to go there, and I quit after a year because I couldn't take it. He was one of the people who told me that if you quit the job, you let somebody else know so he could step into it. I don't remember whether he said it, but there were three or two people who said to me, "Let somebody else know." I said, "Look, I quit, and you wouldn't want to go there."

Shalin: You said it to Erving?

Kurt Lang: I don't know specifically. [I said it] to several of my fellow students. You remember that, Gladys? By the time I quit Miami, he had already had his NIMH fellowship, I forgot exactly what he got.

Shalin: He was in D.C., doing research at St. Elizabeth's hospital by then. Now, it was at Berkeley that it became clear that Erving was seriously studying gambling.

Kurt Lang: Right.

Shalin: What did you hear about that? I understand that both Erving and Schuyler liked to play cards, and she was particularly good at it.

Kurt Lang: No, I don't know about that. But I know that they always were coming back from Las Vegas or Reno, wherever they were going. He actually had a stint as a dealer. But I am not sure about that.

Shalin: Yes, he trained to become one, and he might have obtained a license, but I am not certain he actually worked as a dealer. I heard from Mel Kohn

that he got a letter from Las Vegas sheriff inquiring about "one Erving Goffman" who named Mel as a possible reference.

Kurt Lang: These are my vague recollections. The other thing I remember very distinctly is that some mathematician was alleged to have worked out a system by which you could win at black jacks. He was not the only one who went to the casinos, although he was probably one of the most active among them. There were some rumors or some pretentions of huge winnings or significant winnings at the card table.

Shalin: Was Erving involved in that?

Kurt Lang: The way they talked, and he talked, I assumed that he was.

Shalin: So it was generally known that Erving and Schuyler were frequenting casinos.

Kurt Lang: No, I didn't know specifically that Schuyler was also involved. Just about Erving, and there were others. I personally did not know about Schuyler.

Shalin: If you are tired, please let me know, guys. I have two more questions, one concerning Goffman's Judaism, the other his politics – any light you can shed on that? Some say they had heard Erving use Yiddish expressions in Chicago.

Kurt Lang: Ah-h-h-h!

Shalin: He was not religious, I understand.

Kurt Lang: But none of us were [**laughing**]. It seems to fit the pattern, but I do not specifically remember his coming to the synagogue or talking about it but none of us did. It was neither an issue for a topic. . .

Shalin: So his Judaism was not apparent.

Kurt Lang: [Something left out here. Don't know how we got into this topic; KL] I would also say that they were really way ahead of me, and I tried to catch up.

Shalin: What about Erving's politics. Did he have any political preferences?

Kurt Lang: I don't remember ever discussing politics with him. It was not a topic that came up in my conversations with him, or if it did come up, it was so rare that I don't remember it.

Gladys Lang: If I could interject.

Shalin: Please, please, Gladys.

Gladys Lang : One thing I know was a little game people played. They would try to decide what kind of person someone was – whether he was into Marxism, whether he was a communist or a Trotskyist or . . .

Kurt Lang: . . . or an anarchist.

Gladys Lang: Or an anarchist. But no one ever thought what Goffman might have been. I realized that when he was talking. I never even knew that he was Jewish.

Kurt Lang: If your name is Goffman, you've got to be Jewish, or you have been Jewish, or come from a Jewish family, right [**laughing**]?

Shalin: But the fact that this didn't cross her mind . . .

Gladys Lang: No, it didn't.

Shalin: The same with his politics.

Gladys Lang: I knew a lot of people and their backgrounds, their brand of Marxism, you know. I never thought of Erving in this connection at all.

Kurt Lang: On the other hand, there is an implicit political tendency [in Goffman].

Shalin: Gouldner interprets Goffman and his theories as part of the middle class culture with its desire to keep appearances and move upward. Some people I talked to suggest that Erving left Berkeley in part because he was concerned about the student movement's impact on his son.
Now, I recall the expression you used in reference to Erving – "the Goffman cult."

Gladys Lang: Yes.

Shalin: Could you unpack it a bit?

Kurt Lang: Well, when I came to Berkeley, it was the time when ethnomethodology thrived, which was antiestablishment. I used to have fun dividing, especially graduate students, into the left Goffmanites and the right Goffmanites. The right Goffmanites were more or less rooted in symbolic interactionism, and the left Goffmanites went so far that for them all of reality

was dramaturgical construction, if I may put it that way. This was just within our own personal circle. Coming from outside to Berkeley, I recognized the clear but implicit radicalism and the Goffmanesque critique. I always thought of Goffman right there in the middle with deviations toward the right and the left. That was my personal way of categorizing what was going on.

Shalin: And the difference between the left and right Goffmaniacs, if we can call it that way . . .

Kurt Lang: That's right, we can call them Goffmanaicals.

Shalin: Those on the right, what distinguished them was . . .

Kurt Lang: They were closer to symbolic interaction, the interpretive sociology as opposed to the straight Durkheimean structural analysis. Those on the left would go as far to the extreme as Harold Garfinkel, if not more so. . . . That was radical Goffmanism, that all of society was just a game. It was a little bit like deconstruction.

Shalin: Right. Several people mentioned Harvey Sacks to me – did you ever meet him?

Kurt Lang: No, I never met him personally, but I have heard enough about him. He obviously was a major figure at the core of what I would call the left Goffmanites.

Shalin: Apparently he had a seminar at his home attended by David Sudnow, Manny Schegloff, Sherri Cavan, and others.

Kurt Lang: Right.

Shalin: Did you know Manny Schegloff?

Kurt Lang: Yes, I did know him.

Shalin: By the way, once you get the transcript, you can redact any part of our conversation that you wish to be confidential.

Kurt Lang: Yes, we understand.

Shalin: I want to preserve as much of the disciplinary lore as possible, but there are limits to what should enter the public domain. So any thoughts about Manny?

Kurt Lang: I thought he was a sweet guy. I liked him personally. On the other hand, I felt that his sociology was too far out for me, you know. Not that everything he said was wild, but he had this orientation. We all realize that there is social construction of reality, but I am enough of a Marxist to realize that there is a material basis that underlies social construction. Let's put it that way.

Shalin: I have a somewhat similar sentiment when it comes to the disembodied aspects of Erving's thought, which are most prominent in his *Presentation of Self* where the body is merely a peg for hanging some social construction. But already in *Stigma* we see the corporeal coming to the fore and becoming much more of a factor in social interaction. By the way, *Stigma* was also autobiographical for Goffman, I believe.

Kurt Lang: Right, right.

Shalin: He knew something about it from his personal experience.

Kurt Lang: Yes, but you and Gladys discussed that.

Shalin: Did you know Aaron Cicourel?

Kurt Lang: Yes, slightly, not very well.

Kurt Lang: I have an impression of him, but it is probably not worthwhile to go into it. I personally did like Manny, but Cicourel seemed a hard person to get along with. At least in the situation we encountered him.

Shalin: I don't mean to press you on that.

Gladys Lang: It seems to me that in terms of all the things we are talking about, it wasn't only the student body or the kind of people who were part of Chicago sociology or whatever we call it. We are talking about quite different situations in which people interacted with Goffman. It wasn't only that he might have changed, but the whole academic atmosphere changed. In terms of how we knew him, he probably didn't change very much, but the academic situation changed.

Shalin: This is interesting. I want to make sure I understood you, Gladys. What you are saying is that Goffman was always Goffman, that he might not have changed much personally, but the time has changed, and in the new political, social, and economic situation, the relevance of his ideas might have evolved as well.

Gladys Lang: In other words, he was part of the student body, and there was a mystique about him, even when I first arrived at Chicago. But the people we have been mentioning lately were a slightly younger crowd, and they were reacting to their image of Goffman.

Shalin: By the way, some of the people in that crowd resented Goffman. Manny Schegloff wrote how Erving refused to sign on Harvey Sack's dissertation when the two disagreed about a substantive issue or interpretation. Eventually, Aaron Cicourel was dispatched to persuade Erving to step down from the committee and let the rest of it go ahead with Harvey's defense. Manny wrote about this episode in his preface to Harvey Sacks's lectures. I discuss it in my ASA paper "Goffman's Biography and Interaction Order."

Kurt Lang: Now that you mentioned it, I did hear about it [Harvey's thesis]. I don't know how, through some grapevine.

Shalin: Anything in particular is stuck in your memory?

Kurt Lang: Nothing that you . . . you know much more about it. But there is one comment that all of this evokes. [It has to do] with Erving leaving Berkeley. Erving believed in hierarchical distinctions, theoretically or otherwise. It was part of the inferiority complex or whatever you want not call it. He was concerned about hierarchy, and the left Goffmanites were not. They were out to destroy all hierarchies [**laughing**].

Shalin: In *Frame Analysis*, Goffman grew more structuralist.

Kurt Lang: Yes, but I am talking about his own social and sociological world. He made good in that hierarchy, and he was very much concerned about his position in it. He was concerned about his status as a faculty member. You would think that the person who was so ready to shock the world would refuse to accept the nomination as president of the ASA.

Shalin: I think he wanted it rather badly.

Kurt Lang That's right. That's what I mean when I say that he believed in hierarchy.

Shalin: Sherri Cavan asked Erving why he wanted to be ASA president, and she recalls him say that that would finally validate him.

Kurt Lang: Exactly. That is part of the Goffman paradox. You see, on the one hand, he is absolutely unconventional. On the other hand, he is very much concerned about his position in the conventional hierarchy. That's what

I mean when I say he converted his personal neurosis or special problems or inferiority complex, whatever you want to call it, into something very productive and creative, namely his dramaturgical theory.

Shalin: In other words, he was an establishmentarian nonconformist. His nonconformism allowed him to rise in the established hierarchy as high as possible.

Kurt Lang: Exactly. 'Cause the worst thing you can do to Erving is to ignore him. . . .

Shalin: I meant to ask you if you had noticed any changes in Goffman as his fame grew. Maybe he mellowed a bit.

Kurt Lang: I think we saw very little of him after 1970 or so, when he was in Pennsylvania. I cannot really [speak to that].

Shalin: OK. If you could stay with me a little more – you said you knew Herbert Blumer.

Kurt Lang: Oh, quite well.

Shalin: What impression he left on you as a teacher, and you can be as brief as you wish to be.

Kurt Lang: Well, he had a very loyal following among students who really considered themselves Blumerites. He offered some basic criticism of superficial propositions and theories, and did it extremely well, especially among the student body in Chicago. I would say that close to half of the students there were Blumerites. On the other hand, so far as his courses are concerned, they were too similar – the same criticism, the same assertions given over and over and over again.

Shalin: You mean he taught the same course under a different title?

Kurt Lang: Well, almost. I wouldn't go quite that far, but there was too much overlap. One time Shibutani took over the beginners' course in social psychology. It was in my second year and I was still very uninformed. Some graduate students who were ahead of me would audit the course and say, "What's wrong with him, he goes so fast," because, you know, he covered in two weeks what would take Herb Blumer a quarter to cover. At the same time, Blumer was very sharp, a very astute critic, and sometimes it had the effect of keeping his students from being productive in research. They internalized too much of the criticism without being able to incorporate it productively into their own work. When it came to doing thesis, they would go

to Everett Hughes. And Blumer and Hughes did not like one another. Personally there was bad blood between them, and I don't know why. Joe Gusfield would know all about that. A lot of the Blumerites would go to Hughes for their dissertations because, he would steer them to what they could actually do. Blumer was very kind to students, he was extremely helpful to me; it was through him that I got the invitation to go out to Berkeley, and it was he who rather than have me stuck with the course of 400 students who took over half the course to relieve me He was A real gentleman. Oh, I have to tell you – his daughter who was in Chicago at the time . . .

Gladys Lang: Katie [?].

Kurt Lang: Katie, yes. She was a guitar player, and she made up a little limerick.

Gladys Lang: Oh, It went like this. "There is a rumor that Herbert Blumer is vague, shallow, and ill-defined, he got that way from reading all day in Society, Self, and Mind." [Vague, shallow, and ill-defined were favorite pejoratives in Blumer's critique of sociological theories and research he disapproved of].

Shalin: Let's preserve it for posterity.

Kurt Lang: You couldn't get enough of George Herbert Mead. You know, his problem was that he had a lot in him that he could have written and done, but somehow he got stuck in his critique and was doing other things, such as arbitration of rallabor disputes and later at Berkeley being chair of a developing department.

Shalin: People have different kinds of sociological imagination and writing styles. Blumer wrote tons of book reviews, including one about Goffman, that few people are aware of today, and I find them lucid and insightful. Goffman wrote maybe a couple of reviews in his entire life.

Gladys Lang: I had some reasons to go over his writings recently, and I really was surprised how well they held up. I like them better now than maybe 30 years ago or so.

Shalin: You know Mark Twain once observed that his parents had grown so much smarter by the time he reached his twenties. We may have to grow up to appreciate fully what we missed when we were younger.

Gladys Lang: Right.

[**Laughter**]

Shalin: You said there were Blumerites – anyone of them achieved stature in the field?

Kurt Lang: Someone who was very fond of Blumer was Joe Gusfield.

Shalin: OK. I have a conversation with Joe set up for tomorrow that should focus on Blumer. Anyone else beside Joe Gusfield?

Kurt Lang: Let me try to think who is still around.

Shalin: Even if they are no longer around.

Kurt Lang: Ralph Turner, for sure, but he has been retired for a long time and I don't even low if he is still in this world. Jack London is another but he is no longer around.

Shalin: That's all right. You say he was approachable, easy to talk to.

Gladys Lang: Blumer?

Shalin: Yes, Blumer.

Gladys Lang: Absolutely. In his talk on Goffman he had very interesting things to say. He would not be afraid to say it. I mean, when he left Chicago . . .

Shalin: That was around 1952 [Correction: it must have been 1951 that Blumeer left].

Gladys Lang: . . . the department fell apart at that point.

Kurt Lang: Not alone because he left but because everything else happened at the same time.

Shalin: Could you elaborate?

Gladys Lang: Everybody left at that time.

Kurt Lang: Burgess and Ogburn retired. Louis Wirth died. Promising assistant professors had to go elsewhere. Morris Janowitz left. There wasn't anybody left.

Gladys Lang: People who were writing their theses – their sponsors had left. At that point Columbia really took over from Chicago.

Kurt Lang: But that was later.

Gladys Lang: I know, but not that much later.

Shalin: There is a saying about the Hasidim of, say, Winnitsy, that they are all over the world these days – except for Winnitsy. So Chicago sociology is everywhere, except for Chicago.

Gladys Lang: That's right. Gary Fine had that book on the Second Chicago School where he talks about the changes that have come about.

Shalin: Kurt, you said you took a seminar from Ed Shils.

Kurt Lang: I took two seminars from Ed Shils.

Shalin: What was he like as a teacher? Your memories will disappear, I am afraid, unless we tap into them.

Kurt Lang: Well, there is no question that Shils was a brilliant scholar, he knew a lot, and I recognize all that, but I can't say I was particularly overwhelmed by him. You know, there is someone working on that period now, I don't know if you are familiar with him. His name is Jefferson Pooley [?] who is at Muhlenberg College. He sent me a draft of his thesis that, I believe, is trying to work into a book. It has a lot about the intellectual role of Ed Shils.

Shalin: OK. Anything else about him?

Kurt Lang: Shils was a man full of ideas and thoughts and knowledge, but somehow when he gave a seminar . . . he didn't put his mind into it, or he was too contemptuous of students to give it a great deal of time and effort. Roughly in 1950 [actually 1948 – KL] Shils wrote a short monograph titled something like *The Present State of American* Sociology with an emphasis among others on the Rediscovery of the primary group. In 1950 – Gladys also sat in part of the time – he gave a seminar on "Primary Groups and Social Structure," and it was such a complete bore. People would say, "When I had a job, we formed work groups," and then somebody else would say, "When I went to a camp, we formed little work groups." And Shils would sit there as if these were the greatest of insights. Of course he missed about half the sessions and we would find him in the nearby Social Science tea room talking to whoever it was. So the seminar was a great disappointment. . . . I was doing a study of German generals who participated in a putsch against Hitler during the Second World War, and he said to me, "Why don't you do something on primary groups among German generals?" So I did a paper on German generals, we had some talks, and I was amazed at how much he knew about the topic. But since I was working on it, I knew more about it than he did, but I was amazed at how much he knew. Then he mentioned

some diaries that I had never heard about. I tried to track it down only to find out that they did not exist. That was Shils, also playing games of his own.

Shalin: Games?

Kurt Lang: If I had ever got close to him and worked with him, I think that would have been a very stimulating situation, but I never really got close to him.

Shalin: Was he a fair grader?

Kurt Lang: Well, I don't want to generalize from personal experience. When I went to discuss with him my paper, he threw at me some bibliographic citations, and I was surprised at what he had read. He asked me – in those days we didn't have Xeroxing – if he could keep my paper, and of course, I couldn't say, no to Ed Shils, "you can't keep it." And then he gave me "B" in his seminar. Was that fair? I don't know.

Shalin: Was he delivering [? KL] your paper?

Kurt Lang: No, no. It was a silly combination of circumstances. I gave him my paper, and then went to discuss it with him. There wasn't really much discussion of the paper. He said, "Could I keep the paper?" And I said, "Sure, of course." The Great Ed Shils keeps the paper but gives me a "B." At least he could have given me "B+."

Shalin: He was an influential member of the department?

Kurt Lang: In those days students weren't as much privy to what was going on with the faculty as they have become since. In one sense, Chicago was very democratic, nobody was Doctor or Professor; everybody, including students, was Mr. or Ms., so we didn't know much about [the departmental affairs]. Joe Gusfield, who was a teaching fellow there or instructor, whatever it was, would know more about this. I later got the impression that he [Shils] was a tremendous influence behind the scenes, but at the time, I didn't know about that.

Shalin: Would you care to paint a thumbnail picture of Everett Hughes? Whether from personal impression or lore, what kind of teacher was he?

Kurt Lang: Everett Hughes was very well read, although this didn't come through. He had really interesting insights, but his courses and lectures were totally disorganized, totally disorganized, but he worked extremely well with students. He would suggest dissertation topics to students, and students

would go out and find what he wanted them to find. I don't mean to say that the work was completely biased, that they only confirmed his ideas, that if he fed them a question, as he often did, and he thought the answer to the question was "yes," they would come back with a "yes." But he influenced them in the sense that they adopted the perspective he communicated to them. He did that extremely well. The person who could tell you about that is Howard Becker. He was really close to Hughes. Bob Habenstein is the other one who could tell you about Hughes.

Shalin: He told me things about Hughes that echo what you are saying. He was the best when working with a small group of four or five students, and then he would be completely different in a large class. But if he liked you, he would induce you to work with him.

Kurt Lang: Exactly. He had one office hour on Monday afternoon from three to five.

Shalin: Do you remember the room number of his office by any chance [**laughing**]?

Kurt Lang: No, no. It was on the third – no, fifth floor of the Social Science building on 1126 E. 59 Street. If you got there at ten to three, there would be four or five students ahead of you, and if one of them was doing the thesis or dissertation on the subject that interested him, he would speak with that student for an hour and a half, with three or four students waiting for him each getting two minutes.

[**Laughter**]

Shalin: Gladys, you had something to say.

Gladys Lang: I just wanted to say something interesting about that. I of course was considered a Blumer student, and I considered myself that, but in later life, when he was getting on in years, Hughes always thought of me as his student. He was in poor health, often forgetting things, and Helen, his wife, would turn me around and say, "Go over and talk to Everett Hughes." They had the Canadian connection too.

Kurt Lang: They didn't treat him well. He was an associate professor at Chicago for quite some time.

Shalin: Are you saying he was something of an outsider?

Kurt Lang: That's probably going too far. And again, this is my conjecture looking back on that period. You know, we didn't understand much [then]. In

terms of the seniority you would think that he would have been a full professor earlier. But there were all kinds of divisions at Chicago, personal hostilities about which Joe Gusfield would know a whole lot more.

Shalin: You mentioned Shibutani whose name didn't come up in my previous conversations.

Kurt Lang: Tom Shibutani was a Blumer student.

Gladys Lang: He was a war veteran.

Kurt Lang: Yes, a Japanese American. He was Blumer's understudy, his assistant professor, so to say. Blumer brought him to Berkeley, and Tom devoted his life to studying the self.

Shalin: And did some important work in this area.

Kurt Lang: Yes. He was a great lecturer, superbly organized, covering, God almighty, just about everything relevant to the topic. A lot of graduate students who had to take prelims would attend the undergraduate course with Tom Shibutani because of all the material that he reviewed.

Gladys Lang: He was a great teacher, and he was a great friend, also. We went to his memorial service in California.
.
Kurt Lang: But he didn't get tenure at Berkeley.

Shalin: I didn't know that. Where did he go after that?

Kurt Lang: He went to Santa Barbara.

Shalin: When did he die?

Kurt Lang: About three or four years ago. He was 80 when he died. Let's see, he was born in 1920, so he would have been . . .

Shalin: Students liked him, right?

Gladys Lang: Very much.

Kurt Lang: Oh, he was very popular! In terms of lecturing, he was an excellent lecturer.

Gladys Lang: Very helpful.

Shalin: And a fair grader?

Gladys Lang: Absolutely.

Kurt Lang: Yes, I think so.

Shalin: Those things may loom smaller with time, but they matter.

Gladys Lang: They do matter.

Kurt Lang: I think they appreciated him at Santa Barbara. It took Tom Shibutani a long time to recover after not getting tenure at Berkeley.

Shalin: He was hurt by it.

Kurt Lang: He was. But they came to appreciate him. He was not a star in the sense that he doesn't write things brilliantly new the way Goffman does, but he wrote some very solid stuff, and Tom always was a good teacher. I never had him as a dissertation advisor, but I am sure he was very good [at that].

Shalin: Shibutani moved to Santa Barbara before Blumer left the department?

Kurt Lang: Oh, no, Blumer was still there! Blumer came there in 1951 to reorganize the department at Berkeley. . . . He brought Tom in '52. We kept up with him, exchanged Christmas cards, and then on the way out to Berkeley, we stopped by at Santa Barbara and saw him for the first time after whatever number of years – no, we had seen him at meetings, at one or two meetings, I guess. He was still in a way chafing under the experience he had at Berkeley. He felt that the Columbia crowd took over Berkeley. He thought they were bright but also that "those guys] that played hard ball." He always said, "Stay away from them. They are smart, but you don't want to get into any of that."

Shalin: If he went to Berkeley in '52, he must have had his tenure decision just about the time when Goffman joined the department.

Kurt Lang: It could have been that Goffman was the replacement for him.

Shalin: The timing supports that inference.

Kurt Lang: And they were sufficiently close in their interests. I know Erving wouldn't have liked to be called "social psychologist," but there is something socio-psychological in his [work].

Shalin: Definitely.

Kurt Lang: Both in a way were related to symbolic interaction.

Shalin: Did Blumer support Shibutani's bid for tenure?

Kurt Lang: Tom felt that he didn't work for him hard enough. That was his perception. That's the way Tom felt. I never asked Blumer about that. We purposely stayed away from that topic because we had a warm relationship with both Tom and Blumer. It took some years for the two to reconcile.

Gladys Lang: The other thing is that Shibutani produced really wonderful books. Early on he did an interesting piece on [his experience] in the army . . .

Kurt Lang: It was called "The Derelicts of K-Company."

Gladys Lang: That was a wonderful thing that he did, but all his real writings – he didn't write them up [in time].

Kurt Lang: What about *Improvised News*? That was a great book!

Gladys Lang: Yes, but I think of his other ones that were more theoretical.

Shalin: He had something titled *Self and Society.*

Gladys Lang: Yes, and they all were rather late.

Shalin: Like Blumer, he must have been a late bloomer.

Gladys Lang: Yes. He became more appreciated. His stature grew over time.

Shalin: But Shibutani and Blumer did reconcile.

Gladys Lang: Well, I don't think they ever were really . . .

Kurt Lang: Well, I am sorry, Tom was very embittered.

Shalin: But the old wounds healed with time.

Kurt Lang: Yes, yes, after some time.

Shalin: Santa Barbara was not a bad place to be.

Kurt Lang: No, I think he finally was happy there. He was appreciated there. With people like Tom Scheff who obviously worked closely with Shibutani, I think he felt very much at home there.

Gladys Lang: They appreciated him down there.

Shalin: That means a good deal, because a scholar may feel excluded or isolated. I have more questions but I really feel we should stop for the sake of sanity.

Gladys Lang: I know. I am afraid that . . .

Shalin: It is more than enough, so much more than I hoped for. I want to thank you very very much both of you.

Gladys Lang: I want to know more about your background.

Shalin: I would be glad to give a brief summary. I was born in Russia in 1947.

Gladys Lang: Where?

Shalin: . . . in Leningrad, now St. Petersburg; studied at the University of Leningrad. That's where I discovered Erving Goffman, whose ideas, I thought, fit perfectly the Russian tradition of Potemkin portable villages. You might have heard this expression.

Gladys Lang: Yes.

Shalin: The preoccupation with impression management and maintenance of official impressions is central to this tradition. I recently gave a talk at the Kennan Institute on Vladimir Putin and the presentation of self in Russian culture. The idea was to show how Putin manages his appearances, strategically revealing parts of his backstage while covering up the rest. At the University of Leningrad I worked with Igor Kon who was my mentor. You probably don't know the man

Kurt Lang: No, I don't.

Shalin: My dissertation was about George Mead and pragmatism. When the borders opened up, I emigrated to the U.S. where I contacted Blumer and Merton, whom Igor Kon knew, and maybe a couple of other sociologists, to see if I could study with them. Blumer wrote to me that I can come to work with him but that there is no money to support my education, nor much of a face value of the diploma at the American University (I think that's what it was), where he taught at the time. Meanwhile, Columbia University offered me a fellowship and an apartment for me and my family, so I went there, even though Columbia wasn't exactly a stronghold of interactionism and pragmatism.

Gladys Lang: When was this?

Shalin: I left Russia in August of 1975, and I came to the U.S. in January of 1976.

Kurt Lang: You said you got an apartment. . .

Shalin: It was at the Columbia University housing for graduate students on Broadway and 112th street. I planned to continue my work on pragmatism and Mead, but that didn't come to pass. I happened to take Merton's seminar on the sociology of science where I gave a talk on the institutionalization of sociology in the Soviet Union. Rather inadvertently, my presentation advanced Merton's thesis about middle range theories challenging grand theoretical constructions. In that case it was empirical sociological research in post-Stalinist Russia which, I argued, undermined the Marxist predictions about the disappearance of alienated labor in a socialist economy. At the end of my class presentation, Merton said that he saw a dissertation and a monograph developing from my research. That was quite an encouragement. But I didn't want to become an expert on Russia in the United Sates and told Merton that much. I mean, I felt honored by what seemed like an invitation to work with the great man, but I really wanted to continue my research on pragmatism and sociology. Looking back, I realize that I might have broken an unwritten protocol – when Merton invites you to work with him, you don't tell him you have other plans. If you think there was a cult of Blumer [at the University of Chicago], you can imagine Merton's standing at Columbia.

Kurt Lang: Right.

[**Laughter**]

Shalin: I continued work on my topic, wrote some 300 pages which were supposed to be part one of my dissertation on "Romanticism, Pragmatism, and Interactionism." The idea was to track the evolution of Romantic idealism into pragmatist philosophy and then into the interactionist dialectics of self and society. Merton read the text and was clearly displeased with what he saw. He said the study was too philosophical, too theoretical, or what not. Meanwhile, I got a job at Southern Illinois University on the basis of my publications, A.B.D. from Columbia, and a Ph.D. I earned at the Russian Academy of Science Institute of Sociology. Years later, when I was on a sabbatical leave at Harvard, I ran into Allan Silver, one of my Columbia professors . . .

Kurt Lang: I know him!

Gladys Lang: Yes, Alan Silver.

Shalin: Allan said, "Dmitri, whatever happened to your doctoral thesis? I see you publish all those articles – did you ever submit your thesis?" I told him about my experience with Merton and the fact that he passed me on to his student and colleague, Jonathan Cole, the job I got at SIU, and tenure I earned there. The situation lost its urgency by then, and I didn't think I would get far with my research topic at Columbia. Anyway, that is when Allan told me about the *extra muros* defense option Columbia University has for people like me when . . .

Kurt Lang: Oh, we know that.

Shalin: . . . Ph.D. is awarded to those who finished formal graduate school requirements but instead of writing a thesis submit their publications. Allan Silver told me that the other person awarded a Ph.D. at Columbia in this fashion was Daniel Bell.

Gladys and Kurt Lang: That's right!

[**Laughter**]

Shalin: And so Allan said, "I know your work. Quickly, put together a folder with your publications and send it to me. I will put together a committee, we shall set a defense date, and you will get your Ph.D." I said, "Are you serious? Can this be done?" He said something like, "Try me." I did as he told me, and guess what – Columbia awarded me a doctorate. So I got my second Ph.D. while doing research at Harvard on my sabbatical leave from Southern Illinois University.

Kurt Lang: We know a couple of other people [who did that].

Shalin: And when I came back from my sabbatical, I got a call from UNLV that was looking to hire a theorist and eventually made me an offer I couldn't refuse. Andy Fontana was the one who contacted me initially.

Kurt Lang: Yes.

Shalin: I told them that I had tenure and I couldn't leave SIU without certain guarantees. But that's a long story. I don't want to bore you with the details. This is how I came to UNLV.

Gladys Lang: This is the University of Nevada?

Shalin: University of Nevada in Las Vegas. The sociology department here has a strong presence of interactionists. *Symbolic Interaction* was housed here for a while. When Andy Fontana edited the journal, I served as an associate editor. Later Simon Gottschalk took over the editorship. The department has a notable qualitative orientation. My own research is focused on pragmatist sociology and Russian culture. For some years now I have been trying to articulate a program of pragmatist hermeneutics and conduct biocritical studies which explore the intersection of theoretical, biographical, and behavioral data. One key premise on which this work is based is that sociological imagination feeds on our emotional experience, that talented social scientists like Erving Goffman ride a strong affective impulse rather than simply straddle a discourse, apply a paradigm, and it is some personal embodied experience that allows a scholar to articulate what everybody knows yet no one notices. This applies to artists, writers as much as to humanist scholars. For instance, Anton Chekhov, a famous Russian writer and doctor by profession, has a story titled "Ward No. 6" that depicts an asylum where odd but otherwise sane people find themselves brutalized by the staff. This novella, I am convinced, reflects Chekhov's affective strains, and it also has uncanny resemblance to Goffman's *Asylums*.

Anyway, I embarked on this project, exploring the interfaces of Goffman's scholarship and biography. The web site where the project is housed features Goffman's publications, critical scholarship, media accounts, memoirs and interviews like the one I am conducting with you, which give his students, colleagues, and friends a chance to remember Erving Goffman. I can send you the web links or hard copies of my interviews. Oh, yes, there is also a section on "Comments and Dialogues" where we have a lively exchange on the ethics of fieldwork, problems of interviewing, Goffman's legacy, and so on. If someday you have any comments, I would like to post them in this section.

In a nutshell, that's where I am coming from and where I am heading.

Gladys Lang: I see. Well, that is quite remarkable. You have barely any accent.

Shalin: Well, I have lived in this country longer than in my native Russia.

Gladys Lang: Yes.

Shalin: I will be glad to send you some of my publications on pragmatism, biocritical hermeneutics, and Russia.

Gladys Lang: Well, that was interesting talking to you.

Shalin: Thank you so much Gladys for humoring me and sharing your memories.

Gladys Lang: I'm not humoring you [**laughing**]. It's been interesting to us. [Your concerns] overlap with our questions and interests too. At the moment we are most interested in, and have written on, the sociology of art. That's our main interest at the moment. We did a book on that. At any rate, we are mostly known for our work in the field of public opinion. . . . It doesn't matter. It's just that I see these twist and turns of your work on Goffman . . .

Shalin: Clearly, my interests reflect my Russian experience, which I may share with Goffman, s it turns out. I discovered that his parents emigrated from Russia in the early 20th century.

Gladys Lang: That's interesting. I didn't know that.

Shalin: Now that I am working with Goffman's family – the Averbakhs, with his sister Frances, I see the Russian connection looming larger. Now that I know all eight brothers and sisters in the family from which Erving's mother came, I am beginning to see the origins of Goffman' dramaturgy.

Gladys Lang: The relationship with the family is everything, right?

Shalin: That's what I have discovered in the course of my work, what I am beginning to see clearly. If you think of anyone else I should contact, please bear me in mind.

Gladys Lang: I don't know if Adele Clark is alive or what she is doing. She is the one who might know more about what was going on with Schuyler.

Shalin: Bob Clark might still be around?

Kurt Lang: We don't know. He would be well into his late eighties.

Shalin: I've spoken to people in their mid-nineties. One relative of Goffman's mother was 96, and she shared wonderful stories from the family lore. Someday I might speak to you about other faculty members at Berkeley Neil Smelser and Phil Selznick.

Gladys Lang: We knew him very well because we did a book on the same topic as he about the same time, namely collective behavior.

Shalin: Another person who had an interesting relationship with Goffman was Philip Rieff.

Kurt Lang: I knew him at Chicago.

Shalin: If you read the memoirs I collected, you will see the stories about Goffman and Rieff. Joe Gusfield recently related one of them to me.

Kurt Lang: Joe would know all of that. He was still working on his degree, but he was on the faculty of the college, and so was Rieff. Joe really would be your source on that.

Shalin: The first part of our conversation was on Goffman, but we agreed to touch base again and talk about Blumer, Bennett, and other characters. So any memoires you may share, would be most appreciated.

Kurt Lang: Thank you so much, Kurt. Thank you so much Gladys.

Shalin: Give our regards to Joe Gusfield.

Kurt Lang: I definitely will. I should speak to him tomorrow.

Shalin: Again, I can send you the hard copies of some of the interviews, or if you can access them through the web, that would work too.

Kurt Lang: Whatever is easier for you, we can do both.

Shalin: If you can access the internet, that would be the fastest. Thank you so much.

Kurt Lang: Yes, yes.

Gladys Lang: Good luck. OK, and good night.

Shalin: Bey bye.

Gladys Lang: Bye bye.

[**End of the recording**]