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Dmitri Shalin Interview with Dean MacCannell about Erving Goffman entitled "Some of Goffman's Guardedness and Verbal Toughness Was Simply a Way of Giving Himself the Space and Time That He Needed to Do the Work That He Really Loved"

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Remembering Erving Goffman

Dean MacCannell: Some of Goffman's Guardedness and Verbal Toughness Was Simply a Way of Giving Himself the Space and Time That He Needed to Do the Work That He Really Loved

This conversation with Dean MacCannell, Professor of Environmental Design at the University of California Davis, was recorded over the phone on July 7, 2009. The initial exchange lasting a minute or so is reconstructed from memory. 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 12-05-09]

Shalin: [Greetings, this is Dmitri Shalin. Is this Dean?]

MacCannell: [Yes.]

Shalin: [Dean, is this good time for us to talk? I would like to ask your permission to record our conversation, then send you the transcript.]

MacCannell: [That's fine.]

Shalin: [Perhaps we can start with how you came to Berkeley and discovered Goffman.]

. . .

[Recording begins]

MacCannell: I arrived at Berkeley in 1961 as an undergraduate student, transferring from a year at San Diego State University. I was an anthropology major and did not hold sociology in the highest esteem, even though my father was professor of sociology, or perhaps because of that. I don't know if those events were described to you, but in the early 1960s, before the Berkeley events became so famous, it was a very exciting time. The tuition and fees at Berkeley when I entered in 1961 were sixty two dollars and fifty cents a semester. . . . And as a consequence, Berkeley [students were called] "the Red diaper babies," the second generation from the 1930s [which included] union organizers, communists and the like. So it was a teeming, very exciting place, so far as undergraduate culture was concerned, not necessarily graduate culture. . . . I think that was about the time when Goffman had arrived.

Shalin: He came to Berkley in '58.

MacCannell: No, that's not the case.

Shalin: That's what his resume states. He was there from 1958 and 1968.

MacCannell: Oh, '58! I am sorry, I misunderstood you. That would be correct. I thought you said '68.

Shalin: Maybe I misspoke.

MacCannell: Anyway, the first time I heard of him, I was sitting in the Mediterranean Café on Telegraph Avenue, which was this sort of epicenter of alternative thinking. Some person at my table, and I don't think I knew him, said we should check out Erving Goffman as someone we could learn from. That's what we were concerned about: who were the faculty at Berkeley who could actually teach you something. We weren't impressed with all of them. I queried this character – I wish I knew him, I probably didn't know him at the time – and he said, "You know how most sociologists are shit sociologists?." I kind of nodded, and he said, "Erving Goffman is a no-shit sociologist."

Shalin: You don't remember who it was.

MacCannell: I have no idea. But that was the first time I had heard him mentioned and was aware of his existence. I was too far advanced to [take the intro class]. He co-taught introduction to sociology with Herbert Blumer. Goffman taught half the semester, Blumer taught the other half. I knew Blumer through my father a little bit, and I was too much advanced to take introduction to sociology at that time, but I went and sat in Wheeler auditorium where the course was taught. That's a thousand seat auditorium at the center of Berkeley campus. I just slipped in the back of the room for many of Goffman's lectures and began learning from him at that point. You will find in my autobiography – I don't know whether you've got the [piece] that I wrote for Bennett Berger?

Shalin: Yes, it is in the volume where sociologists reminisce about their lives and work. I recall there was a bit about Goffman.

MacCannell: Yes, there are observations along the way. I chronicled there our first conversation. It occurred when he made a point in the class and I raised my hand and questioned it. He was saying that there was no such thing as a power-symmetrical or status-symmetrical interaction between two people, that someone is always accorded a position of superiority or inferiority. I raised my hand and said, "What about an introductory handshake between status equals?" I was sitting way back in the auditorium and kind of

shouted down to the stage. Goffman stopped called, just peered down into the gloom, and said, "Whoever said this, better see me after class." I went up to him at the end of the class and said I was the one who said that. He said, "That's interesting. You may be right." And then he said, "Walk with me." I walked with him for about a quarter of a mile. He was heading down toward Telegraph Avenue. He didn't ask me or demand from me anything more. The whole conversation was a monologue from him in which he vacillated back and forth for a while. First he would say, "Yes, you are right," and then he would stop talking as we walked on, he would say, "No, you're wrong." And then he would say, "No, you may be right." He went on like this for at least four or five minutes. Finally, he stopped walking, turned to me and sort of said with a glare, "No, you are wro-o-o-ng!" And he turned around and walked off. So that was my first introduction [**laughing**].

Shalin: Sounds like a monologue he carried out with himself.

MacCannell: Exactly. He really wasn't interested in hearing anything more from me. Obviously, it got him thinking. He didn't ask me for any introduction, there was no small talk or anything of the sort. Then later on when we actually began to get to know each other and have fairly regular conversations, he did not give me any indications that he remembered that encounter.

Shalin: And chances are he did not.

MacCannell: Probably not, although I was a fairly distinctive looking [person] – tall, thin and very redheaded guy. There was no reason for him to forget. He either forgot or pretended not to remember, which was fine with me. So that was the beginning [of our relationship]. Then I took an upper level course from Jerry Skolnick, Goffman's colleague in sociology at Berkeley. He wrote a really good book *Justice without Trial*. He did studies of the police and infamously wrote a report for federal government on violence in America. Skolnick used as a textbook in his class on the sociology of control Goffman's *Asylums*. That would have been the first book [of Goffman] that I had read. Basically, I was very attracted to the work on an intellectual level. I fancied myself to be following in the British social anthropology line. I was a very disciplined Durkheimian as a youth, and I was enormously attracted to Goffman for his ability to drive a structural and normative explanatory perspective into the fine grain of interaction and behavior. I loved the fact that he jumped over the psychological or psychologistic explanations and get right down into the nitty-gritty of social forms at that level. I felt that that was unprecedented for sociology. It really chimed with the way I approached human life. Basically, I read and taught his books, especially *Interaction Rituals*. [I should have said *Encounters*].

Next time I corresponded with him was when I was at Cornell [where] I was as a graduate student, and I wrote him a note telling him how well my students I was teaching were taking in his book. I think it was *Role Distance*, the essay I assigned to students. I told him how it was received, and he wrote back very graciously, almost gratefully, that somebody was teaching him. . . . That was the beginning of our correspondence and relationship. Apparently, he felt that I was teaching with understanding. He said that we could meet whenever I happened to be at Berkeley, and we arranged to meet. The first time we arranged to meet he missed it. He simply wasn't there, which could be regarded as symptomatic of his quirky personality, or that he just missed the meeting. I chose not to . . . Basically, I wrote him that I was there and that I am sorry we missed each other. He actually wrote back very apologetic.

Shalin: So you tried to save his face, and he acknowledged that he kind of goofed.

MacCannell: Yes, exactly. And then he said that he was going to be on sabbatical in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and that since I was close enough at Cornell we could probably meet there. And he said, "I'll be there this time."

Shalin: This must have been around 1966.

MacCannell: Yes. I am sure you have the chronology right. My Cornell years were from '63 to '68.

Shalin: And you started there with Masters?

MacCannell: I was doing Ph.D. at Cornell. Skolnick tried to keep me at Berkeley in sociology, but I went to Cornell in rural sociology and anthropology, continuing on in those fields. We did meet in Cambridge at his sabbatical residence. I asked him [Goffman] if I could bring Juliet, my wife, and he said, "Yes, that's fine." It was a holiday, either Christmas or Thanksgiving. It was funny to see the way Debby [Schiffrin in your interview with her] noted that the first time he asked her over was on a holiday. Exactly the same thing happened with me earlier. In my autobiographical essay I do indicate properly which holiday it was. I don't remember it now. He said he worked at home, come by the house, here is the address. It was probably late afternoon around four o'clock. He said, "I might not be there when you arrive but I will leave the door open. Just go on in." And indeed that was the case. When we got there, he wasn't there, the door was open, we went in, and made ourselves comfortable in the living room. In about fifteen minutes later he showed up.

Shalin: Fifteen?

MacCannell: Fifteen minutes later he showed up. We had a very nice conversation. He was quite a bit taken up with Juliet, she is a literary scholar. And without any Goffmanian frou-frou that appears in many people's accounts, we basically had a nice conversation about many things that established the baseline of the future relationship. Quite frankly, I was skeptical about the way other people were receiving Goffman at that time based on my experience with him. Except for the odd initial dialogue when he argued with himself, he had never displayed to us any of the quirks that we eventually came to know were very much a part of this person. But this was not necessarily anything that we were experiencing directly.

Shalin: Erving was straightforward, to the point, no gamesmanship.

MacCannell: Nothing like that at all; just a conversation with a really smart guy who shared a lot of mutual interests in terms of ideas and what have you.

Shalin: This was a conversation with someone Goffman took seriously.

MacCannell: Yes, absolutely. All of our conversations were marked by quite a bit of seriousness, especially when it came to questions of sociology, history of sociology, and to some extent even of Goffman's place in the history of sociology. Neither Juliet nor I ever experienced it. Now, occasionally I witnessed him having very substantial fits about issues with other people, like when we were at a meeting together. I brought it up earlier that if somebody wanted to record his talk, I could see that he could really take out a verbal rapier and do considerable damage to his interlocutor, where he felt that he was not being accorded sufficient respect for his desires.

Shalin: You feel that might have been the trigger; for instance, when he felt his request of no recording or photography wasn't taken seriously enough.

MacCannell: Exactly. That would set him off for sure, and also any indication that somebody was sucking up to him.

Shalin: Aha!

MacCannell: That would set him all the way off, but in an ironical mode when he would just tie the person in knots.

Shalin: No brownnosing or flattering. He would see it right away.

MacCannell: Exactly. I think he even saw it before it happened. He could tell it was coming and he would jump on that. I was strolling with him in a book exhibit at a sociology meeting, we were just chatting, and my father, who is a sociologist, came up and tried to insert himself into the conversation. And my father, you know, has certain character flaws that are pretty well known [**laughing**]. And just as he came up, Goffman said, "Excuse me, I am getting out of here."

[**Laughter**]

Shalin: Did your father know Goffman?

MacCannell: No. He [Goffman] could just see that somebody was trying to meet him.

Shalin: Make a beeline to him.

MacCannell: Exactly.

Shalin: And he didn't know that was your father.

MacCannell: Actually I said, "That's my dad."

Shalin: OK, so he knew who it was.

MacCannell: And he said, "OK, I am out of here."

[**Laughter**]

Shalin: Interesting. By the way, what's the name of your father?

MacCannell: Earl H. MacCannell. He basically was a teaching sociologist. He had some early publications with his faculty advisor, took his Ph.D. at University of Washington in 1956 or 7, I think. He was a returning World War II veteran. I was already well through high school before he finished his Ph.D. No subsequent publications, a reasonably good career at colleges and universities that emphasize teaching. He was apparently a pretty good teacher by everyone's account, but he did not make a contribution that he might have made. He was a very bright guy but he was a classic underachiever and pretty damn lazy, actually. So that was the [encounter] at the meeting.

I have two very close family members who had personalities quite a bit like Erving's, so I was actually very well prepared. They were people in my family whom I was very close to and whom I loved. One of them was my maternal

grandfather, the other my mother-in-law, Juliet's mother. They had very similar kind of intolerance of pettiness and little egos and slightly sleazy motivations that creep in around the edges of human interactions. Both of them, like Goffman, would actually confront that. When they encountered that, they would confront it.

Shalin: Do you think you might be a bit like that yourself?

MacCannell: I am not quite as confrontational as any of them are. I certainly see the world through their eyes, and I confront it when I encounter it in somebody I love. But I don't love everybody enough to do it for all [**laughing**]. Part of my thought is that they actually did. Goffman, my mother-in-law, my grandfather actually cared that much about humanity that they wanted to make corrections when they saw the need for that.

Shalin: They took the world seriously enough to try to improve it.

MacCannell: Exactly. I never once thought when I was with Goffman that what he was doing was being mean, that he had anything but the kindest motivation – "This person needs to be straightened out."

Shalin: That's important to know.

MacCannell: There were times when he was incredibly charming! That was a flip side to all that verbal toughness and confrontation. I remember we once went into a diner in Philadelphia. The people had spread themselves out through the diner . . . most of them were singles, just individuals eating, and they spread themselves evenly throughout the diner. It was a place where you go up and order a sandwich at a counter and then bring it up to a table yourself. So there was basically only one empty seat between every person. The two of us came in, and Goffman told me to order whatever sandwich he wanted. I don't know, he had a preference for a deli. He went into the diner and very very sweetly, in a way that no one had a negative reaction, said to everybody, "Look, this is not the best way to sit here because two or three people may come in who would want to sit together, so please, sir, would you get up and come over here and sit with this woman. And you guys look like you have something to say to each other – would you sit together please?" And he actually moved everyone in that diner.

Shalin: [**Laughing**]. He addressed the entire audience?

MacCannell: No, one at time, quietly, leaning into the space of a person, "Would you mind sitting . . ." So not only was he convincing them that they should move, which is not an easy thing to do; he was also convincing them

that they might be interested in striking up a conversation over here. And he made no mistakes. He wove together the group of strangers that was there into a little temporary society.

Shalin: Convincing everybody they could move for the good of this world.

MacCannell: Yes, exactly. With a lot of people around us and not much space to talk privately, it was a tour de force of social engineering on the spot, which showed me that his knowledge and wisdom of the way interaction worked cut to the very deep and very practical level. It was not just a theory.

Shalin: That story goes against the grain of other accounts that place Erving in restaurants where he terrorizes waitresses with offbeat demands.

MacCannell: Yes, he could be tough.

Shalin: We'll come back to that, but first I want to let you speak so we can get a bird's eye view of the whole domain. I am writing down notes to myself on the tangents we could explore later.

MacCannell: Sure.

Shalin: So please go with the flow. This is really a fresh take on the old themes, a different perspective on Erving.

MacCannell: Well, what happened was that I finished my Ph.D. very quickly, and Juliet was finished or finishing, and that was time to get positions. I was hired at Cornell out of graduate school, but they made it very clear to us, especially in those days, that that was it, that there was no possibility for her also being hired. She was a very serious scholar. She went on to become a chair at UC Irvine.

Shalin: I read her article on Goffman in one of the volumes exploring his scholarship.

MacCannell: Yes, yes. This made her the chair of Derrida and Lyotard [**laughing**]. The thought that only one of us will be joining the faculty was just out of the question. So even though I was secure at Cornell – and people at Cornell are actually still talking about it to these days, "You are the only one who ever left" – I said to Juliet coming out of the Ph.D. program, "If you can find a position in either Boston or Philadelphia, I will go there even if I don't find a position, because these cities are rich in universities, one; and two, I would be perfectly willing to do a post doc with Chomsky in Boston or post doc

with Erving in Philadelphia.” She got a position at Haverford College in Philadelphia, which was wonderful because my great preference was to be with Goffman. And I went to him and I said, “Can I sit on your seminars?” He said, “Absolutely. No problem.” When I sat down in his seminar during the first semester, Goffman looks at some 14 assembled graduate students and me (there was one other fellow graduate student from Cornell sitting in there as well, post doc) and says, “There will be no auditors in his class if you are not fully enrolled in the class. You cannot be here.” I heard it and [I knew] it was directly contradictory to what he had told me earlier. I thought, “Oh, crap! This is Goffman being”

Shalin: Showing his other side.

MacCannell: Showing the other side of himself to me. And then, he looked over at me and said, “Unless, of course, you already hold a Ph.D. degree, in which case you are fully welcome here.” He liked to play with his persona, even with me occasionally. But he never struck out at me in a way I considered to be harmful, or anything of the sort. I do remember him saying there will be no gum chewing in this class [**laughing**], which was hilarious. How long have you been in this country?

Shalin: I came here in 1976, left Russia in 1975.

MacCannell: So you’ve been here a long time. In our grade schools the teachers always famously say at the beginning of the year, like, in the second or third grade, “There would be no gum chewing in this class.” It was a humorous reminder of being a little kid in school, but it was a wonderful seminar. I wrote a paper for him in that seminar on hat-tipping that was eventually published in *Semiotica*. And he actually had cribbed fairly heavily from my paper in *Relations in Public*, without footnoting my paper in the place where he had borrowed from it – a little bit, not everything by any means. I take no credit for what he had to say there, although there was some overlap. [He] lavishly footnoted other interventions I had made at the seminar elsewhere in the book. I actually framed my note on hat-tipping for *Semiotica* as a response to his note on hat-tipping in *Relations in Public*, even though [my paper] was prior. It worked out perfectly, and Goffman had a good laugh at the way it all played out. I got a good publication, we got a good interaction, it worked out fine.

When we were in Philadelphia we were basically in a good visiting mode relationship. One of the things that happened . . . today especially I work a great deal with artists, and at the time I did not. [But let me start with this]. First year at Penn he lived in a rooming house with his son where the ladies served meals and looked after the boy [Tom Goffman] after school;

then he moved to a rented townhouse downtown; and then he built a townhouse on Rittenhouse Square.

Shalin: Three different locations.

MacCannell: Yes. The first year we were there he was already out of the boarding house, although we had talked on the phone in the boarding house a few times. But he was in a rented house downtown. He told us, "Drop by any time you want to come by. I am always working at home. Just drop by." And he said, "If you ever bring anyone else, I will revoke your privileges."

Shalin: It's just for you.

MacCannell: Yes. He said, "You and Juliet, any time you want to, come by, come by. We'll have a drink, we'll have coffee. But you must never bring anyone else." And then he said, "Unless this is an artist." I thought that's strange. Actually today it still [sounds] interesting, not necessarily strange. And I tested him. We were friends at the time with a young British guy, a curator of contemporary material at the Philadelphia Art Museum. His name was Francis Pugh and he was an artist. We were downtown one day with Francis, and said why don't we go and visit Erving, because he said we could bring somebody if it was an artist. Juliet said, "Well, you better be careful. Call him first." So I called him on the phone, saying, "Erving, we are down here, getting an ice cream cone or something, and we would like to drop by." And he said, yes, come on over." I said, "Well, but I have someone with us," and I he just went stone silent, like, "OK, he is disobeying the rule." I said, "He is an artist," and Goffman said, "Bring him over." And three of us went over and Goffman served us nice big tumblers of scotch, we sat around and shot the breeze. There was no tension whatsoever. He was fascinated by what Francis did and asked him a lot of questions. As far as I could tell, he was absolutely true to his word, even if it seemed a little bit quirky.

Shalin: He showed full recall of what he promised, of the quirky rules he made.

MacCannell: Yes, exactly.

Shalin: Your years in Philadelphia – did you move there in 1969 or '70?

MacCannell: It began, yes, '69-'70 was our first year in Philadelphia. Juliet was teaching at Haverford. Then more or less accidentally (I describe it in some detail in my autobiography) I literally walked off the street into the sociology department at Temple University and had a ladder faculty appointment a week later. There was a lot of things that came together that

made it happen. I had no idea that that would happen.

Shalin: But didn't you have a post doc fellowship of some sort? What was your status at the University of Pennsylvania?

MacCannell: No, I simply was a visitor at Penn.

Shalin: A visiting scholar?

MacCannell: No, just a visitor. I was there at Goffman's behest. I had no connection whatsoever. I followed Juliet to Haverford.

Shalin: I thought Erving had something to do with your dissertation.

MacCannell: No.

Shalin: He didn't have any official function.

MacCannell: No, no. It was fascinating, actually. I had proposed my book on tourism as a dissertation topic at Cornell. Goffman had been following that project very closely. I actually submitted my proposal to do the book on tourism to Goffman before I gave it to anybody, be it a potential funder, or a committee, or anybody, and he was very enthusiastic about it. Basically, the way we fit in together intellectually was this. I followed his approach on a theoretical and conceptual level but also sort of brought it up to a more macro plane, dealing not with interactional issues per se but with larger structural issues of the sort that sociology usually dealt with. I was trying to reverse the direction that he had taken in sociology, pull it back into core issues of sociology.

Shalin: And he was sympathetic.

MacCannell: He liked that. . . . He clearly embraced it as potentially more interesting to him than if somebody would simply do a version of what he did.

Shalin: Was there explicit linkage in your study of tourism to the interaction order dimension?

MacCannell: Not to the interaction order dimension of it but to the symbolic and theoretic dimension of it, yes. He was very sympathetic. I remember one day in seminar at Penn, with all of the students crazily trying to write every word like he was an oracle or something, he looked up at the class and said, "Please don't try to write like me, you will sound like an asshole." Which is

beautifully ambiguous. It is either very very humble [**laughing**] – “I [write] like an asshole,” or you will fall so far short and be unable to come up to my standards.

Shalin: You said “fall short”?

MacCannell: If you imitate my writing style, you will sound like an asshole.

Shalin: That is indeed walking on edge between humbleness and imperiousness.

MacCannell: Yes, exactly. Anyway, I was working on the tourism [project] . . . my proposal at Cornell to do work on tourism was rejected by my committee. I was angry at the time and Goffman was even more angry and upset. The grounds that they gave me were very very good, and they probably made the correct decision. They said, “This is unprecedented; nobody ever done anything like that before. It is going to take you probably seven to ten years to do this. We don’t want you hanging around in grad school that long. We have no concern about your ability to do it, certainly you can; but for heaven’s sake, propose something less ambitious and get the hell out of here and make it your tenure book.”

Shalin: [**Laughing**]. Kind of tough love.

MacCannell: Exactly. So I did quick and dirty empirical dissertation and got out.

Shalin: What was your dissertation on?

MacCannell: I did a structural study of the laws in 48 continental United States, especially the laws that had to do with discriminatory practices. There were many states at that time, up till the Supreme Court decision in the early ‘50s, that had laws against mixed races in public housing, mixed marriages, that sort of thing. Basically, I analyzed the legal structure in all 48 states and built models of repressive legislative structures, used them to predict economic development in the states, and showed that that repressive regimes have stultifying impact on other kinds of innovations. I was able to do a good job predicting the number of successful patent application that came out of the states, for example, using the laws that had to do with racial profiling. It was a good dissertation that won a national prize, but I did it in a year and was out of there. After I was hired at Cornell we went to Philadelphia.

He [Goffman] was terribly upset. He said, “It was wrong for someone to write a dissertation that is less than what they are capable of doing.” He was angry

at me, but he was more angry at my committee to permit such a thing to happen. He got a kick out of the fact that I could do high-wire empirical methodology, make regression equations, and things like that. He wasn't used to dealing with students on that side of sociology, but he was also derisive about it. He said, "At Chicago, when I was a student, we let the people who were actually challenged by it to do that empirical stuff. The smart students had to do ethnography."

Shalin: [Laughing]. I am not surprised given the grade he received at Chicago in a course on quantitative methods.

MacCannell: [Laughing]. Anyway. Yes, he was very much interested and concerned about my dissertation, but he was not a principal on it. Later on, after I finished the book manuscript, he took it from me and for one full year he circulated it to publishers.

Shalin: Even though it was something entirely outside his area.

MacCannell: Yes, he sent it out several times, and he got nowhere with it, but he basically was sending it around, saying, "This is a bright young guy, you might want to take a look at it. I think it's good." I don't know exactly how he presented it, because he did not share the correspondence with me, but he said he sent it to people that he had good working relations with. Finally after a year, he handed it back to me, saying, "I am sorry, I've [should be you've] got to take it back. I am unable to do it." He seemed genuinely disappointed, but by that time I got an article in the *American Journal of Sociology* that was a chapter in the book. I kind of indicated in the apparatus of the journal article that there was a bigger manuscript there, and I started to get queries at that point, and fairly quickly on my own I was able to [place the manuscript]. Both Johns Hopkins and Schocken bid on the book. Probably less than six months after Goffman handed it back, I had a book contract.

Shalin: And the book was published by. . .

MacCannell: . . . I don't know if you know the history of Schocken.

Shalin: No, I don't.

MacCannell: Schocken was a German publisher of Kafka, and it was mainly Judaica in Germany in the 1930s. Ted Schocken was still the head of the press when they acquired *The Tourist*. In 1933 or 4, they went down to the docks, got the steamship ticket for every person who worked for the press and every member of their family, packed up the entire press, and then everyone

associated with the press moved to New York. Because he saw what was coming. They opened up in New York, and within three years became probably the most respected trade publisher in the United States.

Shalin: I was not aware of that.

MacCannell: Yes. At the time it was considered a black mark against you if as an academic you went out of the university press system, if you went to a trade publisher. This is a prejudice that has fallen away. But when I asked around of my senior faculty mentors about Schocken, they told me that was the exception, "If you could publish with Schocken, that is as good or better than the best university presses." They were considered to be equal or higher to [[should be higher than]] the standards in terms of the academic quality of their books. So in the end it found its proper home.

Shalin: When you were in Philadelphia, was your book already placed?

MacCannell: This was all happening when I was at Philadelphia.

Shalin: You did some teaching, attended Erving's seminar, and along the way managed to place your book.

MacCannell: Yes. He was delighted that it had a happy ending.

Shalin: So you attended Erving's seminar for about a year and a half.

MacCannell: Just one year.

Shalin: Were there more people with your status in that seminar?

MacCannell: There was one other person, guy named Max. Just a second, let me get his last name. [Addressing Juliet] What was Max's last name? Oh, it was Maxwell. The reason I was forgetting, and Juliet reminds me, his name was Bob Maxwell, Robert Maxell. Max and I had been fellow grad students at Cornell. He was in anthropology and wanted to do exactly the same thing that I wanted to do. He had a job as a resident anthropologist at the Philadelphia Jewish old folks home at the time. Basically, we attended together.

You had questions about Goffman's teaching style. By any means of accounting, I found him to be one of the greatest teachers that I had ever been with in a classroom. He came to class always incredibly full of energy. He had no regard for an actual end time for the seminar; he would just go until he run out of breath. Sometime it was two hours, sometime four hours, but he had really high energy.

Shalin: Where was the seminar held?

MacCannell: On the campus at the University of Pennsylvania, probably in the Annenberg Center for Communication.

Shalin: And students would sit for an extra hour.

MacCannell: Nobody left. The students were extremely . . . they were in awe of him, they said very little. They were afraid to speak. Probably Max and I had most interaction in the seminar. And he occasionally toyed with them in a way that they would never get. One day he came in, and Edward Hall just published his book – what was it called?

Shalin: On the silent dimension?

MacCannell: Anyway, it just came out and was in the bookstore half way through the seminar. Perhaps it was *The Hidden Dimension*. It dovetailed very nicely with what Goffman was talking about. I'd gotten the book and read it the minute it came out, as Goffman had done. Goffman came in and without giving any footnotes to Hall very faithfully, very closely began lecturing from the book. He went on for about 45 minutes. And after about five minutes into this I saw that he was not going to be criticizing it, he was not going to be putting his own gloss to it, he was just saying what Hall said.

Shalin: With no acknowledgment?

MacCannell: No acknowledgment. I caught his eye and just threw my pencil on my notebook. He smiled broadly and just kept going. Students in the class were writing down every word, the table shaking with them writing down every word. At the end of this, after about 45 minutes, he looks up at the class and says, "Don't go publishing any of this before I do."

Shalin: [Laughing]

MacCannell: He didn't go as far as to smile and wink at me, but he did let me know that he knew that I knew.

Shalin: He let you on the joke.

MacCannell: Exactly. And he enjoyed sharing the joke, "Don't go publishing any of this before I do."

Shalin: I interrupted you when you described his teaching style as energetic, devoted to the task – anything else about his style?

MacCannell: There was one interesting quirk. He gave us this assignment to write a paper, and of course I wasn't even obliged to do it because I was just visiting, but I did it. That was the paper that eventually became the hat-tipping paper. He gave us this assignment, and it was very structured assignment, which I appreciated. Unlike a lot of faculty that says go on writing what you want to write, he gave us a passage from Emily Post, he told how he wanted us to handle it – it was a true assignment. They asked, "When is it due?" He said, "What do you mean when it is due? What kind of an ass has a question like that? It is due when you get it done properly. Just turn it in when you got it right."

Shalin: Marvelous! I like it.

MacCannell: I went straight home and said, "OK, I am going to write as strong a paper as I can write and I am going to give it to Erving next week in the seminar." So I did that. I doubled down and produced pretty much the same paper that appeared in *Semiotica*, and I handed it over the following week. Goffman read it and said, "Excellent." He was very happy that I got it, and as I said, he had borrowed some of it for the book he was doing at the time, *Relations in Public*.

Shalin: He did it without telling you.

MacCannell: He did it without saying anything about it. The whole thing didn't play out as problematic. There was no central idea or anything that I would be concerned about. It worked out fine. I don't want to overplay the fact that my paper preceded his footnote, because he assigned the paper after all. In any event, nobody else turned the paper in, and nobody turned in the paper the following week, and the following week, and the following week. They took that as a license to do I don't know what.

Shalin: To do their best!

MacCannell: Yes, to do their best. Exactly [**laughing**]. After some time passed, Goffman said in a very testy way, "OK, where are your papers?" They said, "You told us we can turn it in when we thought it was done!" And he just looked at them like, "Excuse me, but that's not a license for not doing any work." And he was very very angry with them. In a sense he sucked them into revealing potentially poor character.

Shalin: Hello? Are you there?

MacCannell: Yes.

Shalin: I thought I lost you. I understand you took some of his classes at Berkeley.

MacCannell: I only sat on the introductory sociology class.

Shalin: That was the one he split with Blumer.

MacCannell: Yes, he split it with Blumer.

Shalin: Was Erving different in any way in that intro class?

MacCannell: It was lower energy, a lot less affect, very interesting and intriguing material. He was doing fresh material bringing his own work, directly into the classroom, even though it was the freshman class. It had this quality of immediacy. But it was huge – a thousand people were sitting there. He was a tiny man, you know.

Shalin: How tall would you say he was?

MacCannell: I think 5.2 maybe. I didn't belong in there, I sat in the back. He was a much further away figure, and the room was quite different.

Shalin: So you wouldn't have an idea what kind of grader Erving was.

MacCannell: No, under no circumstances he graded a paper of mine. . . . I was never his student.

Shalin: And how many students did you have in that seminar at Penn?

MacCannell: No more than 14.

Shalin: After you were done with the seminar where did your career take you and how did you keep in touch with Erving?

MacCannell: Well, the second year that we were at Penn Juliet's contract at Haverford was not renewed. I was pretty angry about that, because they promised her more, but it was all verbal, nothing actionable. We wouldn't have done anything like that anyway. It was the middle of the Vietnam War, hell-raising all over the place. A lot of our friends were involved in the Harrisburg action. The government failed in its prosecution of Harrisburg activists, but they were talking very aggressively about other unindicted co-conspirators, [promising] to bring them to trial, blah, blah, blah. So we said it

is time to leave the country. Juliet was pregnant; we wanted our child to have a chance at another kind of citizenship. We had no idea how long the war was going on. We packed up and left for Paris and spent the academic years '70-71 at Paris. That's where I was able to finish my book on tourism. I quit my job at Temple.

Shalin: That's very interesting. If you could hold that thought – you left in part because of the Vietnam War?

MacCannell: Yes. Absolutely.

Shalin: Were you facing the draft?

MacCannell: No, no, there was no draft issue. At that point I was beyond draft.

Shalin: The issues were moral and political.

MacCannell: Exactly. The fact that the people we knew very closely, like the Berrigan brothers, were being arrested and put in jail [weighed on us]. We were active but we were not activists, I can say. We didn't know how close it would come to us, and besides the country was a terrible place at that time. So we went to Paris. And Goffman, I have to say, he was a little bit pissed off. He never expressed his reasons for that, but we exchanged letters while we were in Paris, and he would derisively speak . . .

Shalin: Pissed off that you left the United States?

MacCannell: Yes. Basically, because we had decamped from Philadelphia. You know, I had the feeling, although he would never express it in so many words, that he missed us. It was like, "I hope you enjoy your adopted country." Something like that.

Shalin: He would visit France himself now and then.

MacCannell: Yes, yes, yes. That's where he did most of his writing on his dissertation, I believe. He certainly wasn't unsympathetic of our choice of places to exile ourselves to.

Shalin: Once we are on this subject, any thoughts on Erving's politics? And then we'll go back to France.

MacCannell: I don't think that he would ever blatantly express himself politically, but he was definitely on the left. I remember sitting with him one

day at a day-long [gathering] where people were being paraded across the stage, giving talks about the war and the economy and blah, blah, blah. He and I went together to this thing. I believe it was actually held on the Temple University campus. Sort of usual suspects were giving talks; one of the early feminist was there. Erving was not impressed; he was expressing himself quietly as being not impressed, but when Herbert Aptheker gave his talk, Erving said, "This guy is really smart. He has something to say."

Shalin: Do you recall what Aptheker said?

MacCannell: No, but if we were to look at Aptheker's writings, it would be there.

Shalin: And the name of the guy who spoke . . .

MacCannell: Aptheker – A-p-t-h-e-k-e-r, I believe.

Shalin: And the first name?

MacCannell: Herbert. He was the leading intellectual American communist.

Shalin: And Erving sensed some class and quality in his mind.

MacCannell: It was not lost on Erving that he was the leading intellectual American communist. He was willing to turn to me at least and say, "This guy is the one who is speaking the truth."

Shalin: Interesting. But other than that he did not express . . .

MacCannell: No. He was sympathetic to . . . he really liked experimental street demonstrations, street theater that was going on at the time.

Shalin: Some public happenings.

MacCannell: Yes. Well, also the political action, the die-ins and what have you. Whenever he expressed admiration for that stuff, it was always in sociological terms. It was not in sympathy with their political views. It was always like, "It's a very clever disruption of the social order."

Shalin: It was clearly Goffman the sociologist who noted such actions, not Goffman the political man.

MacCannell: Yes.

Shalin: I've heard that Goffman was uneasy about the student movement at

Berkeley and the impact it was having on his son. Some cite this fact among the reasons he left for Penn.

MacCannell: That may be possible. He was very devoted to the boy.

Shalin: Did you know Tom Goffman?

MacCannell: I never knew him. I spoke with him on the phone on quite a few occasions, but this was only informational, like, "When will your dad be home?" No, we didn't get to know him.

Shalin: So you don't rule out that the impact the student movement was having on Tom might have influenced Erving's decision to move to Penn.

MacCannell: Yes. But I actually would not have blamed him for that because Berkeley at that time was not a good place for a teenage kid. There was a lot of negative stuff happening, even inside of the movement. If Erving was in sympathy with the overall aims of anti-war movement, the cooptation of it by the hippies and others was not a positive thing even for those of us who were actually active or somewhat active and willing to express ourselves politically. [We] did not regard the conversion of the antiwar movement and the hippy movement as a positive event. I would not have wanted a kid of mine caught up in the middle of that stuff.

Shalin: Your memoirs of Erving's reaction to Aptheker indicate that Erving had a particular way of framing people and situations. He didn't focus on the stated cause so much as on the interactional finesse, on the ability to frame issues, and he could appreciate that regardless of the political quarters where the stance has originated.

MacCannell: I think so. I think what you are saying is fair summary.

Shalin: He would not let himself be cornered in any political program.

MacCannell: He liked a good argument, he liked a coherent and clear reasoning, and he especially liked it when it was not full of itself.

Shalin: He knew right away when someone saw oneself as a gift onto humanity, was getting on a high horse.

MacCannell: Yes. Yes.

Shalin: So you went to Paris and spent there, what, a year or so?

MacCannell: One year.

Shalin: And that's where you wrote your book.

MacCannell: Most of it.

Shalin: Did you have any appointment there?

MacCannell: What we had done was [this]. We had two salaries in previous years, and we saved one of these for the following year.

Shalin: Which let you survive in Paris.

MacCannell: Yes. Once again, it happened accidentally. I was accidentally hired at Temple, and I was accidentally hired at an American College in Paris. I went to their housing bureau to find an apartment, and the person in the bureau rushed to the administration saying, "There is a sociologist looking for an apartment." They came out and said, "Our sociologist has just fallen ill. Can you teach?" So I taught in Paris.

Shalin: Was it an extension program?

MacCannell: Now it is called "American University in Paris." It was a little private school full of expat kids, only about half of them Americans, and the rest of them from all over the world. They were kind of spoiled upper middle class and upper class kids looking for a low pressure private school in Paris. It was not my favorite posting, but it was OK as a way of earning a little extra money while we were there.

Shalin: Did you ever meet Jean Paul Sartre while in France?

MacCannell: We never met. He famously defied [the regime]. There was a great deal going on in Paris at the time. And we had also been living in Paris in '68, so we were familiar with Paris. At that time Sartre was very active in the protest. The Napoleonic law has a principle that the police have the right not to arrest people who break the law. Apparently, in the Anglo-Saxon law that's not a right: if the police see someone breaking the law, they have to pursue it. It is called the right to pursue, and Sartre was the only one because De Gaulle told the police that no matter what Sartre did, under no circumstances, they were to arrest him. So he was immune, and he was able to be quite effective during the events of '68 as a result of that. But we didn't know him or meet him personally, no.

Shalin: You came back in '71?

MacCannell: We came back in '71. Even though I quit and resigned from my old department at Temple, they . . .

Shalin: Sorry I interrupt, was yours a tenure track position?

MacCannell: Mine was a tenure track position at Temple, yes.

Shalin: You just quit.

MacCannell: I just quit cold. I was very upset to what they had done to Juliet at Haverford. Basically, I said this was not a very nice business. It wasn't just Juliet. Temple at the time had revolving door assistant professorships; they would hire ten Ivy League new Ph.D.s, and after one year flush half of them out. They were just ruthless. And then they would hire more and get rid of them. I was disappointed in my senior colleagues at Temple's decisions on who they retained and who they fired. They retained me, but if I were making the decision I would have probably kept the opposite group. I thought if I stay on in this place I would end up with a bunch of people I am not compatible with. So I quit. In 1971 there was a huge freeze coming in the US academic [institutions] because the protests were mainly on university campuses. The federal government was defunding the universities. It was getting virtually impossible to get a position anywhere. So I had no idea what we were going to come back to. I made some inquiries but nothing was forthcoming. About three quarters through the year I got a letter from my old department chair, saying, "We have decided not to accept your resignation."

Shalin: [Laughing]. They were tempting you.

MacCannell: Yes.

Shalin: Did you change your mind and give them second chance?

MacCannell: Absolutely, I had very little choice. And also the fact that they reached out to me in that way seemed somewhat redemptive. He said, "The Dean and I have consulted and decided that rather than accepting your resignation, we awarded you one year leave of absence without pay, and we are expecting you to be back in the classroom in September."

Shalin: They must have liked you as a teacher, you had books out, clearly you were a tenure material.

MacCannell: Exactly. They moved in that way, and given the bleakness of the situation overall – Juliet would actually not find an appointment for

another seven years . . .

Shalin: Where did she get an appointment?

MacCannell: Her first posting was to Irvine where she had her career. So we were back in Philadelphia, back with Goffman.

Shalin: Did you resume your relationship once you came back from Paris?

MacCannell: Yes, it was just the same. We would have lunch or dinner occasionally, visit [with Erving]. I didn't not attend more of his seminars. And that's when he took the book and was trying to place it.

Shalin: Did you notice any changes in Erving over the course of years?

MacCannell: Not particularly. He seemed to be pretty much the same guy all the time. After we came back to California in 1975 our contacts were obviously diminished. The first time I was at Davis, my dean gave me a substantial sum of money to have some speakers to come. I did ask Erving to come, and he did come, spending a substantial amount of time in California on that occasion. There was one other major symposium that I helped to organized a few years later, not long before he passed away, and he came for that as well.

Shalin: Any memories from his visits to California?

MacCannell: Well, it's not very academic, but the person that I mentioned earlier who had a similar personality, Juliet's mother, was going to be babysitting for us when we were going to be hosting Erving on his first visit. He said that before his talk he would come from San Francisco to our house in the afternoon. We were sitting there thinking about these two people who had almost identical personalities, who were known to be quite difficult, especially when meeting new people, who were going to meet each other. Her mother was there to look after the boys. Juliet and I were saying, "God, what is going to happen when your mother is going to meet Erving Goffman." It occasioned quite a bit of concern on our part. The moment came, he comes through the door. You know, we hadn't seen him for year, less than a year probably, but for some time. He comes to our living room and there is Mrs. Flower, Juliet's mother, and we introduce them, "This is Erving Goffman. This is Juliet's mother." And we had no idea what was going to happen next, because both were famous for these moments. And they recognized each other immediately as kindred spirits in this regard. They actually circled each other as two dogs. They stood face to face and walked around in a half

circled. Who would be the first to speak? It was Juliet's mother. And she said to him, "Why Mr. Goffman? You are so much more handsome than I would have ever imagined from reading your books!"

Shalin: [**Laughing**]. What a wonderful line! How did he respond?

MacCannell: It was the end. He had had it. That was it. There was no response. She actually won. There was a normal response [from him], "Thank you."

Shalin: He recognized a top dog in her.

MacCannell: Exactly. It was hilarious.

Shalin: He just accepted that he met his match.

MacCannell: Absolutely. He considered it to be tone-perfect right from the beginning. And we left immediately for the university. That was the whole interaction.

Shalin: And how was his talk?

MacCannell: Oh, it was wonderful. It was quintessential Goffman. He spoke for two or three hours, and I think what we saw was *Gender Advertisements* in the making. He warned us in advance that it would be a long long time. He was famous for negotiating good honoraria. I had offered him a decent honorarium for the time. It certainly was not grand. I think it was something like \$500, plus expenses.

Shalin: That was in '75.

MacCannell: Seventy five, seventy six.

Shalin: It would be like \$2000 nowadays.

MacCannell: About that. And he said, "Fine. For you I'll come and do that for that. It is not my usual fee." But he said, "You can't have more than 50 people in the room."

Shalin: Fifty?

MacCannell: Fifty. Five-zero. I complied, and he complied. No problem. It was an excellent moment. You know, I was in the College of Agriculture the whole time I was at Davis. Of course I was very friendly with sociologists in

the sociology department, but they were astounded and amazed that Goffman would come to the College of Agriculture.

Shalin: It probably wasn't lost on Erving. He must have appreciated the irony.

MacCannell: Very much, very much.

Shalin: And he was well received.

MacCannell: It was a grand occasion. Knowing Goffman and the pitfalls in that sort of thing, I suggested that everyone who wanted to would come out to the pizza parlor and we would have pizza and beer with Erving afterwards. He was delighted that that was the way it played out.

Shalin: He wasn't fond of receptions.

MacCannell: No, not at all. But this was fine. This was the way to do it, and the sociologists really enjoyed it. Bennett Berger came from San Diego for it. We had a great time.

Shalin: And the second time you saw him at a symposium.

MacCannell: Yes, it was on space. He came and gave a talk. I don't recall the exact year, but it was several years later. At the time Sebeok came. Sebeok and Goffman got along very well.

Shalin: How do you spell that name?

MacCannell: S-e-b-e-o-k. He is one of the world's leading linguists.

Shalin: Oh, he is a famous semiotician.

MacCannell: Yes.

Shalin: You know, when I came to this country, I had to deal with the names I'd known from literature but never heard pronounced in a live setting, so I couldn't recognize the name when I heard it for the first time.

MacCannell: That's most understandable. But that's the way he pronounces it. Sebeok is the editor in chief of the journal *Semiotica*. They just got Goffman's *Frame Analysis* for review. Sebeok came up to Goffman and said, "Who could possibly review that book?" And Goffman called me and said, "He can do it." I knew Sebeok independently, and he said, "That's great. If he

could do it, that would be great." Goffman said, "Yes, let's do it." And then I began the review but sadly my review eventually became the piece on Goffman that I published in *Semiotica* extended to cover the whole matter of his life because he passed away.

Shalin: The symposium was held in the late '70s.

MacCannell: That would have been, yes.

Shalin: Erving passed away in November of 1982. Your article on Goffman where you analyze him through the prism of Heidegger and Sartre came soon after, and it started as a review of *Frame Analysis*.

MacCannell: That's what happened. I was doing the review and Goffman was dying, then he passed away and Sebeok said, "Look, you have to expand it into homage to all of his work."

Shalin: Any other memories from that symposium?

MacCannell: I do recall that people who came down from . . . it was bizarre, but some students from Berkeley were trying to heckle Goffman.

Shalin: Really? What was that about?

MacCannell: I never . . . it didn't amount to much, it went almost unnoticed.

Shalin: Was it political, personal?

MacCannell: I didn't understand it. There was quite a bit of jealousy of Goffman and his achievements. I remember my chair at Temple when Goffman was hired at Penn came to me, not knowing my relationship to Goffman at all, and said, "I can't believe what's going on in sociology here in the Delaware Valley." That is how people regarded all the universities around Pennsylvania. He says, "Penn just hired that spoiled brat." . . . I said, "Who are you talking about? What do you mean?" I had no idea. He said, "You know, that Erving Goffman."

Shalin: Clearly he had no idea who he was talking to.

MacCannell: No, and I told him immediately, "I am sorry but if you don't know Goffman personally, you might consider not talking about him like that. This is not a fair characterization of the man." And my chair, who was really a decent guy, said, "Oh, thank you. I really appreciate that. I'll see [about that]."

Shalin: That's gracious of him. He didn't try to wiggle out of it. But Berkeley people were actually heckling Goffman at that conference?

MacCannell: Yes.

Shalin: That happened to be on campus.

MacCannell: Yes, on the campus of UC Davis.

Shalin: After that gathering Erving had two or three more years to live. You didn't see much of him, right?

MacCannell: No, not at all. I was expecting to see him at the sociology meeting in Mexico City, and he was on the program, but at that point he was so ill that he couldn't travel and he cancelled. That would have been the last opportunity for us to meet.

Shalin: Among Erving's letters posted on our site is one he wrote to Horst Helle, a German sociologist, apologizing that he was missing a panel and expressing his hopes to be back in the saddle shortly. It's a poignant document. I can send you the link.

How did you find out about Erving's illness? Or was it only after the fact that you learned about it?

MacCannell: No, no, I knew he was ill. I actually don't remember who told me. I think it was in connection with his absence at the Mexico City meeting. I think I made inquiries and was told, but I don't remember who told me. Close to the end I did call him over the phone. I got Gillian and she said she didn't know if he could speak to me. She went and talked with him, came back and told me no, that he couldn't.

Shalin: That must have been late summer of '82.

MacCannell: Probably. It was the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association. It wouldn't have been in Mexico City. Oh, no, maybe it was the International Sociological Association's meeting.

Shalin: I think so, because ASA had its meeting in August. That's when Erving missed his presidential address.

MacCannell: It would be easy to research. Now that you have mentioned it, I think it was the International Sociological Association.

Shalin: The ISA meeting must have been in the summer. That's where you learned about Erving's illness, called him, but he wasn't able to speak.

MacCannell: Right.

Shalin: So your last contact with Erving must have been a few years before he died.

MacCannell: Yes, at the Davis symposium on space. When we correspond I can give you the exact dates of those things because I would have them in my notes.

Shalin: Let me mention that on our site we have a section containing Goffman's letters, his correspondence with Everett Hughes, for instance.

MacCannell: Hughes was a wonderful guy.

Shalin: Plus other exchanges between Goffman and his students. I don't know if you have anything that you feel might be appropriate to share with Goffman scholars. I don't mean to lean on you, but if . . .

MacCannell: No, there is very little here that isn't of the order of "Yes, we can meet at two o'clock on Friday afternoon." It's all that. No extended intellectual exchange.

Shalin: OK. If you can get a couple of such notes, even that would be interesting.

MacCannell: Yes.

Shalin: Do you happen to have any syllabi for Erving's classes, lecture notes?

MacCannell: I probably have the syllabus for the Pennsylvania seminar, although it hasn't passed my eyes in years. It isn't a sort of thing I would throw away.

Shalin: If someday you come across any mementos you care to share, please bear in mind this project.

MacCannell: Yes, yes. OK, I will have this in mind.

Shalin: We have several syllabi and reading lists for Erving's classes going

back to the early '60s. Sherri Cavan provided an exam she wrote for one of Erving's classes . . .

MacCannell: Aha!

Shalin: . . . and it is decidedly offbeat. He would play 15 minutes of John Cage's music and then ask students to analyze what they have heard.

MacCannell: [Laughing]

Shalin: I was happy to hear Sherri's story, and then she discovered the exam she wrote for that class. It's now posted in our archives, which is conceived as a large database that crossreferences Erving's works, documents, memoirs, critical assessments, and news media mentions. We have memoirs of Erving's childhood friends, relatives, students, and colleagues, some of those still waiting to be transcribed. Learning about Erving's childhood gave me a different perspective on his scholarship.

If I may ask you, what is your sense of Erving's Jewishness?

MacCannell: He was perfectly open that he was Jewish. He was a kind of character we know very well in American academia – a nonobservant Jew who would probably be a little bit proud of his Jewish heritage. But that's it, nothing beyond that. He would mention it in passing, he would say, "This is offensive to the Jewish part of me." Something like that.

Shalin: Did you hear him use Jewish expressions?

MacCannell: Not that I recall, interestingly enough. I don't think he ever said "Oy, weh" in my presence.

Shalin: But he would acknowledge this part of his self.

MacCannell: Yes.

Shalin: I've collected fascinating perspectives on Erving's Judaism. Saul Mendlovitz who was particularly close to Erving during their studies at the University of Chicago offered some insights. Sam Heilman wrote his dissertation with Erving at Penn, and he had interesting thoughts on the subject.

Are you aware about the story of Erving's election as ASA president?

MacCannell: No, by that time I was not at all involved in ASA, reflecting my drift away from the field of sociology into more practical matters. I was what they call “professor of applied behavioral sciences” at UC Davis for many years, and then I shifted to environmental design. I held a courtesy appointment in sociology through those years, but not very active, maybe giving one or two seminars and few lectures over in the sociology department, but basically, I was pretty much estranged from the sociology by the time Goffman was elected. I do remember that at the time when we were close, Goffman was very very derisive about sociology and sociologists. He held them in very low esteem, always saying that he preferred to be identified as involved in ethnography and anthropology more so than sociology. He was fairly outspoken about it, he was very angry at sociologists. Quite frankly, when I heard that he was elected president of ASA, I was a bit surprised.

Shalin: A number of people report a similar reaction after all they have heard Erving say about sociology. How do you read Erving’s tendency to distance himself from the discipline – did he suffer in this field, did he get a rough treatment, or was it intellectual?

MacCannell: I think that – and these are difficult things to call – that there were no questions in his or anyone else’s mind that he made huge contributions to some things, I think, but the field was taking off in a rather opposite direction at the time in its emphasis on large scale empirical studies. He really didn’t think there was a great deal to be learned from doing that. It was kind of a mutual aversion. He was impossible to accommodate properly in that context by any other means than by maybe electing him president. I don’t think he would run away from the honor, but . . .

Shalin: Actually, he was drafted. There was a movement to place him on the ballot.

MacCannell: I know nothing about it. The field certainly did not turn in his direction. For me, I saw that happening, and my response was to go do something else for the rest of my life.

Shalin: You found a refuge in the College of Agriculture doing social geography.

MacCannell: Exactly. A great place to be, actually.

Shalin: You chose wisely.

MacCannell: Yes, yes.

Shalin: You mentioned Gillian, did you meet her?

MacCannell: I haven't met her; I never met her socially. I know her work, I have seen her presentations; I was very well aware of her reputation before the marriage [to Erving], but by then we were on the opposite coasts. We never really met, not socially.

Shalin: You mentioned Bennett Berger, did you know him personally?

MacCannell: Yes, quite well.

Shalin: Maybe not today – and I find what you have to say fresh and insightful – we could talk about people like Blumer, Shibutani, Berger and others with whom you crossed your path.

MacCannell: . . . There were people whom Erving rubbed the wrong way and there was no possibility of a good relationship, and there were people that got along fine with Erving. Bennett was one of those who got along fine with Erving.

Shalin: He wrote a fine piece that he subtitled "A letter from a Fan" or something like that.

MacCannell: Yes.

Shalin: To wrap it up, I wonder if you can elaborate on what you wrote about Erving and the persona he adopted in life, on his life's project. I have this pet idea which I tend to overplay. It has to do with Erving as a discover of life's backstage. He found himself in a curious situation where he saw other people's tricks and chicanery yet he had to insulate from others his own backstage. This is where your thesis on what it means to be authentic in the world of inauthenticity comes into play. I am fascinated with your Sartrean take on Goffman as a man who used bad faith to expose the bad faith inundating the world around him. I feel that Erving navigated between honoring social conventions and challenging them, exposing their cultural provenance while subtly, or not so subtly, undermining them. It could be the manner in which society fostered women's self-presentation, imposed an identity on mentally ill – he saw the "contrivance," as Viktor Shklovsky would say, and worked to render obvious. What I have learned about Erving's cultural roots, his family and childhood, his teaching and research practices, makes me think that his life and work intersected in some crucial ways.

MacCannell: I think that quite a bit of his public persona was protective. It was his way of protecting himself from unwanted . . . you know, he was the most famous sociologist of his day. He certainly could have been run over by sycophants if he had not protected himself in some way. I think some of his guardedness and some of his verbal toughness was simply a way of giving himself the space and time that he needed to do the work which he really loved. I would say part of it was that, and half of it was his understanding that if he stage-managed that correctly it would only add to the intrigue that surrounded his fame. In a sense, it was almost a perfect formula for Erving and his self-promotion. No one did a better job of that. I don't know anyone, I don't know any so-called "star" who did a better job of protecting himself and promoting himself at the same time in a seemingly contradictory yet masterly [fashion] as accomplished by Goffman.

Shalin: You feel that was conscious stagecraft.

MacCannell: I think it was delicately constructed and entirely intentional.

Shalin: Did you ever encounter his first wife?

MacCannell: No. I heard from my friends back at Berkeley when I was still at Cornell about her suicide. And I heard reports coming from my friends at Berkeley when I was a graduate student at Cornell that he was apparently and very visibly devastated by that. But I did not know her, I never met her.

Shalin: Do you recall the sense people were making of that tragic event?

MacCannell: I had heard that she had had some problem with mental illness. I don't know if this is true, but this was in the wind, this was something that I had heard. After Goffman's experience at St. Elizabeth's he was hesitant to seek the kind of institutional assistance that she might have needed. All of this must be taken with a grain of salt as complete hearsay. I never made any effort to verify it with Erving. It could be totally bogus, but this is the kind of things that I heard.

Shalin: I stumbled on a letter to the editor by someone who knew Erving during his years at St. Elizabeth's, Jordan Scher is the name of the guy, where he wrote that Schuyler tried to commit suicide at the time. And someone even mentioned that she might have been a patient at St. Elizabeth's when Erving was there. I find hard to believe. What interests me, and I've just discovered a stash of her letters, is that Schuyler was involved with Erving's work. She wrote a master's thesis at the University of Chicago where the two met. The thesis was on the class distinction among American women.

MacCannell: Aha!

Shalin: I am trying to get a hold of her thesis. It seems aligned with Erving's early work . . .

MacCannell: On class status.

Shalin: . . . on symbols of class status. Some people indicated to me that she was involved with Erving's writing, did some editing, and so on.

MacCannell: Well, that will have to be done very carefully, textually. Erving was not the sort of person who collaborated easily.

Shalin: No, no, he is truly *sui generis*.

MacCannell: I heard a report about an assistant professor at Berkeley, and I don't remember the name, about her suicide note. Did you hear anything about it?

Shalin: Yes. In fact I tracked a reference to it in a newspaper published at the time. I think it was in *Oakland Tribune*. There was a standard police report, parts of which the media got a hold of. There was a reference in it to a red car with the motor running and a suicide note found inside.

MacCannell: I was told – and again this is totally, possibly completely, wrong – that she said, "Jesus Christ, Erving, I am sorry about this."

Shalin: Yes, I had similar indications.

MacCannell: That is interesting, for I got a decent report.

Shalin: It's amazing how much stuff there is in the public domain. I have made several discoveries, including papers Erving wrote in 1948 for Ernest Burgess's seminar on class in America, a clear precursor of his subsequent publication.

MacCannell: Yes.

Shalin: Also, some exchanges Erving had with the University of Chicago faculty. Probate court records are in the public domain, which reproduce Sky's will written two and half months before she died. I wouldn't want to place it on the web, but researchers doing serious work on Goffman can access those documents.

MacCannell: Yes, indeed.

Shalin: I have more questions, but I feel I have overtaxed you already.

MacCannell: We can talk.

Shalin: Really? Are you holding all right?

MacCannell: Yes, but we can take a breath, and you if want it, we can speak at a later date.

Shalin: Sure. I understand that you also knew Blumer.

MacCannell: Yes.

Shalin: Did you know Shibutani?

MacCannell: Not Shibutani, no.

Shalin: He must have left when you came to Berkeley.

MacCannell: I did make acquaintance and had some correspondence with Hughes after I met Goffman, because he was Goffman's teacher. Hughes was very generous with me.

Shalin: All the teachers who made an impression on you – I would like to collect your memoirs on that. I don't know if you met Greg Stone.

MacCannell: We met but we were not friends.

Shalin: Anyhow, I think I should give you rest, and after I transcribe our conversation, perhaps we'll have a follow-up.

MacCannell: Yes, there may be some things that occur to me when I see it.

Shalin: And if you come across anything related to Erving's classes or anything he wrote to you or you wrote to him – that would be valuable. Thank you so much, Dean. This is invaluable.

MacCannell: Excellent. OK, and thank you for the project. It's an odd-ball thing to do, but it is probably appropriate, given who you are dealing with.

Shalin: You must understand the ambivalence I felt starting this study. Erving was a private man who chose to seal his archives, and here I am trying to assemble from bits and pieces some kind of an equivalent.

MacCannell: I think he would have enjoyed the irony of that.

Shalin: You think so?

MacCannell: Yes.

Shalin: This is very important to me, especially coming from someone Erving trusted. You think he wouldn't be distraught by our digging into his past, his impression management techniques, and such?

MacCannell: Not at all [**laughing**]. I don't think he would be distraught in the least.

Shalin: The fact that you are talking to me wouldn't faze him.

MacCannell: No, no. But he would be laughing with you and wishing you the best of luck.

Shalin: That's so heartening to know! A couple of people suggested the same. Jackie Wiseman told me Erving might be chuckling somewhere as he watched us musing about his life.

MacCannell: Yes. Given the fact that . . . if my assessment of his persona as being crafted to heal the contradictions between fame and privacy are correct, then obviously he would enjoy the irony of it.

Shalin: I very much like to believe that. I came from Russia, just as Erving's parents did, and I always wondered if Goffman knew the Potemkin portable villages tradition at the heart of Russian culture.

MacCannell: Yes, of course I know that very well.

Shalin: I have a hunch that Erving knew about it.

MacCannell: [**Laughing**]

Shalin: I wrote a paper about Goffman when I did my undergraduate studies at the University of Leningrad, and my buddies agreed that the impression management process fits perfectly the Soviet political system that reproduces this dynamics on the macro level.

MacCannell: [**Laughing**] Wonderful!

Shalin: And then there is a famous short novel by Anton Chekhov, great Russian playwright and short story writer. . . .

MacCannell: Yes, I know.

Shalin: . . . called "Ward Number 6."

MacCannell: Ward?

Shalin: It's about an asylum, a ward filled with normal Russian who found themselves in this dungeon after falling down on their luck. Even the head of this facility eventually finds himself consigned to this asylums through the intrigues of his enemies.

MacCannell: [Laughing].

Shalin: Surely, I thought, Erving must have known this famous novella. But there must be other literary allusions.

MacCannell: You are completely correct following the literary clues because Goffman got as much of his inspiration from great literature as he did from great sociology, so . . .

Shalin: We don't need to go into it, but you brought up your wife Juliet, who is a literary scholar. . .

MacCannell: Yes.

Shalin: She may have a special take on Erving as a literary figure, as well as her own recollections.

MacCannell: She might. I'll ask her.

Shalin: I would be delighted to touch base with her and pick her mind.

MacCannell: He was protective of Juliet. I remember soon after we moved to Philadelphia, he asked about her appointment at Haverford, and I told him that she was teaching. He asked what kind of courses, and I said literature. It came up that she had to teach her classes in French. He said, "It's just outrageous. I can't begin to imagine trying to teach a course in a language that I myself learned." I said, "You know, this is what she was trained to do." And he said, "You're speaking your beautiful wife as if she were a race horse."

[Laughter]

Shalin: You know, there is something about Erving that I don't quite understand. Ancient scholars used to say that biographers need to know three things about their subjects: *vita activa*, *vita contemplativa*, and *vita voluptuosa*. We know a good deal about Erving's actions and conduct; we know his writing and thought; but when it comes to his passions, his desires, food preferences, hobbies – the kind of stuff that falls under the category *vita voluptuous* – that part of Erving's being is something of a mystery to me. To be sure, the life of the flesh is most insulated from observation.

MacCannell: I have some observations about that, but let's save it.

Shalin: Yes, yes.

MacCannell: Make a note.

Shalin: Again, I can't thank you enough, Dean.

MacCannell: Sure.

Shalin: Bye bye

MacCannell: Bye bye

[End of the recording]