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Dmitri Shalin Interview with Saul Mendlovitz about Erving Goffman entitled "Erving Was a Jew Acting Like a Canadian Acting Like a Britisher"

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Remembering Erving Goffman

Saul Mendlovitz: Erving Was a Jew Acting Like a Canadian Acting Like a Britisher

This interview with Saul Mendlovitz, Dag Hammarskjöld professor at the School of Law, Rutgers University, was recorded over the phone on December 29, 2008, and January 7, 2009. Dmitri Shalin transcribed the interview, after which Professor Mendlovitz read the transcript and gave his approval for adding the present version to the 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 07-28-09].

Mendlovitz: Hello.

Shalin: Greeting, this is Dmitri Shalin. Is this Saul Mendlovitz? Saul, would it be OK if I record our conversation, then send to you the transcript for editing and revisions?

Mendlovitz: Sure.

Shalin: That would be terrific. Your name came up in several conversations . . .

Mendlovitz: Is this the day we were supposed to have the interview?

Shalin: I believe it was December 29, Monday, which is today. It's not a good day?

Mendlovitz: Oh, for some reason I wrote it was next Monday.

Shalin: OK, I'll call you next Monday.

Mendlovitz: OK. Yes, in fact I was just about getting ready to leave. I was walking out when you called me.

Shalin: OK, then . . .

Mendlovitz How did you know Erving? Were you his student or what?

Shalin No, I came from Russia in 1976 when the Jewish emigration started. I was just a student interested in his work. That's the connection.

Mendlovitz: Where did you study his work?

Shalin: First in Russia [during my college years when I wrote a paper on Goffman], then at Columbia University where I did another round of graduate work and wrote my second Ph.D. I taught in Illinois, then came to UNLV.

Mendlovitz: Right.

Shalin: About a year ago I started in earnest working on the Erving Goffman Archives. Then more and more people came in with their memoirs and agreed to talk about Goffman.

Mendlovitz: Did you study him in the Great Soviet motherland? We used to go there quite a bit. Was it in English or Russian?

Shalin: No, I read him in English. Goffman was not translated into Russian in my days.

Mendlovitz: That's right, I didn't think so.

Shalin: My teacher, Igor Kon . . .

Mendlovitz: Yes.

Shalin: . . . gave me his books, and then an American graduate student studying in Russia brought me some more Goffman's works. That's how it started.

Mendlovitz: And who did you study with at Columbia?

Shalin: My official mentor at Columbia University was Robert Merton.

Mendlovitz: Oh, yes.

Shalin: I was in his seminar on sociology of science where I gave a talk on the institutionalization of sociology in the Soviet Union. It was about Marxist sociology, how it acquired an empirical dimension and unearthed the facts that didn't fit neatly into the official schema. Merton suggested that I write a dissertation and a monograph on that, but I was reluctant. It's just that in Russia I studied American sociology, George Mead and pragmatism, and I didn't want to become an expert on Russia in the United State.

Mendlovitz: Right.

Shalin: I wanted to continue along my chosen path. That didn't quite work out.

Mendlovitz: Well, Bob wasn't exactly an admirer of Goffman. He thought he was bright, but I think he didn't really think it was real sociology.

Shalin: I think you are right. I don't know if he put it quite like that. Merton wrote that there were different ways of doing sociology, that Parsons and Goffman – or was it Mead? – can go together like ham and eggs.

Mendlovitz: That's right [**laughing**].

Shalin: But it was really clear that real sociology wasn't . . .

Mendlovitz: It was all middle range theory.

Shalin: Kind of.

Mendlovitz: Did you know Erving?

Shalin: Not personally.

Mendlovitz: Oh, he was quite a guy.

Shalin: That's what I hear. I am fascinated with the intersection between his life and work. I find that a lot of his writing is in some ways autobiographical.

Mendlovitz: Yes. I sort of gave up reading his stuff. . . . Well, we can talk about it

Shalin: That would be great. So it will be January 4th or 5th . . .

Mendlovitz: Whenever next Monday is at 10:30 your time would be great.

Shalin: Very good. I'll call you then.

Mendlovitz: Right.

Shalin: Take care.

January 7, 2009

Mendlovitz: I didn't [get your message].

Shalin: I left it on your answering machine.

Mendlovitz: OK, here I am. What was the message?

Shalin: My message was that I called and no one picked up the phone.

Mendlovitz: Well, then there is something peculiar. All right, you want to start right now?

Shalin: In fact, I called two or three times [**laughing**].

Mendlovitz: I have been having a lot of problems with the phone.
. . .

Shalin: Saul, as long as it is good time for you to talk, if you have a bit of time, we can start today and finish . . .

Mendlovitz: Yes, now I have time.

Shalin: Wonderful.

Mendlovitz: I am just trying to make sure that . . . OK.

Shalin: I want to tell you how my conversations work procedurally and ask your permission to record our talk. Would it be OK if I record our conversation, send you the transcript, and then you can do anything you want with it – redact the text, designate portions of it as confidential – it’s entirely your call.

Mendlovitz: OK.

Shalin: I wonder if you had a chance to look up . . .

Mendlovitz: I did. Let me ask you first. I have several questions, theoretical and methodological. Let me just ask you one question before we go into what I know about Erving.

Shalin: Sure. Please.

Mendlovitz: What is the relationship between your biocritical hermeneutics and something like Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge? Is this only the social interactive world that is important? . . . There is no indication how Mannheim, Weber, Emile Durkheim, or Marx have come to their understanding of society. . . . Have you ever explored that?

Shalin: I have written several pieces on the subject. I will send you the links.

Mendlovitz: I would be delighted because that interests me. OK.

Shalin: I don’t mean to sound flippant. Your question is very much to the point, as one might conclude I am inventing a wheel.

Mendlovitz: No, no, no. Your article is too sophisticated for that. The reason I mention it is that there is no hint of, quote, “the sociology of knowledge.” So I am just saying, what is this, when has this become a separate [research program]. You say a couple

of times that we've been doing this for some time, so I kind of wondered. OK.

Shalin: No, it is a proper question. What is happening here is that when people invent their own wrinkle on the familiar theme, they like to give it a new name . . .

Mendlovitz: Right.

Shalin: It's a kind of verbal dropping to mark the territory. I am not wedded to any title, and certainly mean to draw appropriate connections and acknowledge my predecessors as I work on this project. When you look at it historically, you see how much relevant work has been done before by the likes of Rickert and Dilthey and others. This is not to say that some wrinkle here and there might not be relatively new. Very briefly, classical hermeneutics casts meaning as a differential between two verbal signs, two texts, and so on. Charles Peirce and pragmatists, on the other hand, argue that the ultimate interpretants of a sign must be actions, emotions, or feelings. Peirce looks for meaning on the intersection of verbal and nonverbal signs – symbols, indexes, and icons. I call it the word-body-action nexus, which is where we find pragmatic meaning and not just where the traditional Saussurean linguistics locates it as a differential of two phonemes, two morphemes, and so on. I am trying to link what we are saying with what we are doing, how we are emoting and what our symbols imply. The idea is to triangulate the key signs, the way we talk the talk, walk the walk, and rock the rock. So when we discover that Jimmy Swaggart mounts his crusade against pornography while patronizing prostitutes, we get a different idea of what and how he means. When a U.S. senator is railing in public against homosexuality and then caught tapping meaningfully on someone else's foot in the airport restroom, we get a different perspective on the meaning of his public pronouncements. Tracking how we "sign in the flesh" adds a fresh perspective on the meaning of meaning.

Mendlovitz: Yes, yes.

Shalin: I'll send you my paper where I play with those ideas.

Mendlovitz: I'd appreciate this. For I was a little bit surprised not to find any sense of what I call the "sociology of knowledge" in your paper. . . . A lot is happening in language, in face to face interactions, but . . . OK.

Shalin: I appreciate your observations and critique.

Mendlovitz: It was more of a question than critique. . . .

Shalin: I hope we can continue our exchange. OK, if you have seen any of the interviews, you know what interests me and how the conversations are structured. I start with how people came to know Erving, which impressions he made on them . . .

Mendlovitz: Right.

Shalin: . . . and we take it from there. We can jump back and forth, follow your line of thought wherever it takes you. Would you mind telling me how you discovered Erving?

Mendlovitz: Let me put it this way. I did not follow Erving's career closely, I left sociology. I was everything-but-the-dissertation kind of person. I didn't finish the dissertation. I got my degree in law, moved into law, teaching full time, and for some ten years I was teaching law and social science. But I kept in touch with him. Our closest contact was when we were both graduate students at the University of Chicago in the period of '48 till '51 perhaps. Now, our closest contact was maybe in '47, certainly in that time period.

Shalin: Erving was there as early as '47?

Mendlovitz: No later than '48.

Shalin: Then yours is the earliest account of Erving I've had so far.

Mendlovitz: He was introduced to the whole group of [people like] Gusfield, Becker, and Kornhauser through me. . . . I don't know how Erving and I first met. However we first met, I used to meet him minimum two or three times a week, in a restaurant someplace

near the university. It could be either the 61st street, which would already be moving into the black section, or we would go down to the 57th street, which was the hub of the campus, of the graduate students. We would meet two or three times a week, and we would discuss life and love and what was going on. One article that I know a little bit about he was writing was his famous "Cooling the Mark Out."

Shalin: It came out in 1952.

Mendlovitz: Right, '52. My impression is that he actually gave me a footnote [acknowledging my observation] that sometimes you cool the mark out by simply beating up on the guy. And I think he wrote a little wry footnote [saying], "In a conversation with Saul," but I don't really remember it. We would meet two or three times a week, we would discuss what went on in class, we would gossip and all that. We had really terrific time. I'd say we were friends, although he very rarely exchanged, nor did I, what I would call. . . . Well, that's not true. Like all universities at this time, [the University of Chicago] had a huge influx of veterans. The veterans were anywhere from three to ten years older than most ordinary college or even graduate students. It was a kind of swinging time at the university, not that they are any less swinging now, I suppose. And so everybody was going with everybody else. We all would go to Walgreens on Sunday mornings on the corner of 57th and Kenwood to find out who slept with whom the night before.

[Laughter]

Mendlovitz: It was that kind of [an atmosphere]. Erving didn't participate in that swinging part but he did participate in parties. I was struck by the fact . . . I just happened to read in the *New York Times*, in the book review section, about memory and the beginning of Alzheimer's. They sent a bunch of social scientists into a room, and after they sat there for two hours, they asked them what they have seen there. And according to the reporter, nobody could remember more than 8% of what have occurred while they were in there. I don't know what this means. . . .

Shalin: This means that our memories are very much suspect.

Mendlovitz: . . . and they just came from there. Erving and I used to go to parties and agree that we would exchange [thoughts on] what we had seen. He especially was interested in what we had seen and then he would take copious notes on that. I have no idea of whether he ever used those notes or not, but he was very much into that observational stuff very early on. And we would then go over very carefully what the girl said to him, who was going off into another room, what was the content, how come there were no paintings on the wall, but it was a full range of ethnography and that kind of stuff.

Shalin: He was very much a participant observer even then.

Mendlovitz: Very much the participant observer, and he actually began to [?] He would giggle even. Now let me go back just for a minute. I don't know whether anybody indicated to you the sort of epigrammatic Erving that we knew, that we characterized as. . .
. Erving was a Canadian Jew. [The expression we had for him was] "Erving was a Jew, acting like a Canadian, acting like a Britisher" [**laughing**]. He was this little Jewish boy from Canada who . . .
. And incidentally, I am a little bit struck by the fact that there isn't much about his background of growing up in Canada, about his family. . . You indicated that. I didn't know much about that, except that I have had a sense that he [grew up] in a kind of upper middle class haberdashery place, but I have no idea. We didn't discuss that much, but he felt that he was Jewish yet didn't want to be Jewish. He wanted to be something else. He really wanted to be an English gentleman [in line with] the picture of him that he had in his head.

Shalin: There was also Philip Rieff . . .

Mendlovitz: He felt that way too, but Philip didn't have the same – what do you call it – the panache [**laughing**]. Philip came across more like a sixty ton tank [whereas] Erving came across like a rapier while making his little jabs. Incidentally, we never jabbed at one another, except for what I call YMHA – "Young Men's Hebrew Association." We'd needle each other. I never recall a serious argument with him. He and I got along. We met minimum of three times a week at some place, just the two of us. I had introduced

him to the whole group of Habenstein, Gregory Stone, Howie Becker. That was not his only close friendship group but he was very close to it. And we would discuss Louie[Wirth] and Herb [Blumer], the people who were running the department at the time. That was the quintessential high level graduate student interaction with the tremendous amount of fun. It was, "How you are doing with [?]" or "How you are doing with . . ." in regard to women, that kind of stuff. And occasionally – more than occasionally – we'd exchange [thoughts] on what we had seen. And that went on for some time until I moved over to the law school. At that point we lost our regime . . . Where did he go to? He went someplace in London.

Shalin: You mean to Shetland Islands where he did fieldwork for his dissertation?

Mendlovitz: Right. When did he go there?

Shalin: That was around 1949, I think.

Mendlovitz: When did he come back?

Shalin: A year later, probably.

Mendlovitz: That's when it was. OK, then I picked up with him again in 1950. We kept up. What happened then was that he married Schuyler.

Shalin: Did you know her?

Mendlovitz: Yes.

Shalin: Would love to hear about her.

Mendlovitz: I think he married her because, again, she was an upper class WASP.

Shalin: You think that's what attracted Erving.

Mendlovitz: Yes. Yes. She was a troubled person, but she had a stiff upper New England lip. I don't know whether she came from New York or Boston but she certainly was . . .

Shalin: She came from a prominent Massachusetts family of the Choates.

Mendlovitz: I didn't know which branch it was.

Shalin: There is a famous Choate prep school, I am told.

Mendlovitz: Yes, yes, absolutely. She came from money, she had that background, and all of that. I have the feeling that partially he was attracted to. . . . Actually, she was a fairly attractive woman, but partially [he was attracted] because she was a WASP, an upper class WASP, which is, as I said, this Jew acting like a Canadian acting like a Britisher. She was always very civil and courteous and gracious as a hostess. If she was cutting the roast beef, he would say, "Very good" or "Well done" [**laughing**]. That sort of attention to the detail of the household – how well she would do it, or not do it.

Shalin: And it wasn't just tongue-cheek, he really meant it?

Mendlovitz: Oh, yes. I didn't see them together in that kind of a setting more than four or five times.

Shalin: Do you know how they met and did you attend their wedding?

Mendlovitz: No. When did they get married?

Shalin: I am not sure, sometime around 1950, I guess.

Mendlovitz: Did they get married back East?

Shalin: I don't know. The story is shrouded in mystery. Bob Habenstein tells me that he did not attend the wedding but that there was something like a reception where he was horsing around and ribbing Erving. Bob was fuzzy on the details.

Mendlovitz: I thought if there was a wedding, a full-scale wedding, I would have been there.

Shalin: Maybe it was on the East coast.

Mendlovitz: I was wondering if it was back East or whether they'd gotten a license and then had a wedding.

Shalin: None of Erving's relatives I spoke to, including Erving's sister, remember attending Erving's wedding.

Mendlovitz: I am sure that it was not a wedding in the wedding sense. I am absolutely certain. None of us knew her that well. . . . I'll tell you another thing that happened. I have a twin brother who was mentally ill for about thirty years. I ran around the country trying to find treatment for him. When Erving moved to Washington D.C. and got involved with St. Elizabeth – was it St. Elizabeth's? . . .?

Shalin: St. Elizabeth's hospital.

Mendlovitz: Right. When was it?

Shalin: He went there about 1954 and stayed until 1958 when he was offered a position at Berkeley.

Mendlovitz: OK, in that period when he was there, I visited him twice, and – what was her name again?

Shalin: Schuyler.

Mendlovitz: Schuyler. And they put me up, because I was looking for treatment for my brother. [We couldn't become] a part of the twins' study, unfortunately, for I was a fraternal twin and they wanted identicals. Then we began looking for people, and I was running all over the country, and he [Erving] was trying to help me. So I would come to visit them, and it seemed like very normal household, but who the hell knows what, quote, "the normal" household is.

Shalin: Erving's son was born in 1953.

Mendlovitz: Yes, he was this young man. I mean, the infant in the house. The peculiar thing is I never saw them in Berkeley.

Shalin: Did you visit them in Berkeley? Did you see their house?

Mendlovitz: No, I never went there at all.

Shalin: If we could stay with Schuyler and Erving for a while – I understand that she was an anthropology student at the University of Chicago. She did everything but defend her dissertation.

Mendlovitz: When you talked to her, it was clear that she was familiar with the concepts, understood them, was bright and all that. I did not catch any of the – what should I call it – dementia or psychotic behavior.

Shalin: No bipolar symptoms.

Mendlovitz: That's right. And that was before we had all those bipolar pills, although who knows what she was taking. I never sensed that at all at any time.

Shalin: Was she part of your grad student group, an insider?

Mendlovitz: No, she was not an insider. Now, "Erving" was [spelled] with an "E." Everybody loved that, "Here is Erving with an 'E'" we would introduce him. Erving had another group in the anthropology department. There was a girl by the name Elizabeth Bott.

Shalin: Oh, I've heard about her. Did you know her?

Mendlovitz: Yes.

Shalin: I understand they were dating.

Mendlovitz: Well, it was interesting. I didn't know her well. She was the one that went to Tavestock [?]. . . . Erving lived in the basement of a large house, and he worked – boy, did he work – he worked not sitting at a table (although he did move the table), but at a kind of a chair you have in classrooms that has a big flap, you

know, [the one] you can put a book on. That's what he would work at. I would come frequently at 10-11 o'clock at night and we would go out, or he would come over. There was a rather upper class prestigious bohemian place called the 'Goff House" at the corner of 57th and Kenwood. I had one of the most prestigious rooms in this prestigious house [**laughing**]. So he would come to pick me up or I would go to take him out, and we would either go out to Jimmy's on 56th street or to the University Tavern, or we would go to the place on 63rd street, and we would just schmoos along.

Now, when he moved to Berkeley, I lost that because I got stuck at the University of Chicago Law School until, I guess, '56. And I did lose track of them. We saw each other . . . I occasionally would go to the annual sociology conventions. The woman I am still with, we met with him [Erving] in Montreal. I forgot when that convention was.

Shalin: He died in 82, so that must have been . . .

Mendlovitz: That was in the 70s. . . . And he treated her like she didn't exist.

Shalin: Your current wife?

Mendlovitz: Well, she is my companion.

Shalin: I am sorry, your companion.

Mendlovitz: That's all right. She would be pissed to be called wife. . . . I kept in touch with Erving, and when I knew he was going to Montreal, I had some gescheft I could do something with. I went to the convention I was paid for, and I brought with me Sybil. I thought since Sybil is from the upper class – she comes straight from the John Jay family and is going all the way back to the founders of the government – but he treated her like she didn't exist. So every time his name comes up, oh, God, she gets so upset. He just dismissed her; it was extraordinary. And that was the only time I had seen him Now, I had seen him rude, but it was like the rudeness of saying, "If I don't meet anybody more

important, I will come back to you." So, it was both real and unreal. He meant it, but you know. . .

Shalin: As they say in Russia, "In every joke there is a little bit of a joke."

Mendlovitz: Right. But I never knew . . . I didn't realize how sharp he was to other people. Well, I did in a way because I saw other people sort of stand back almost shriveling when he turned toward them. But I never suffered it, literally never suffered it at all, and if it hasn't been for what he did to my companion Sibyl, I would have never even noticed it in the same sense.

Shalin: How did you read Erving's behavior? Was he just oblivious to your companion, was he intentionally ignoring her? What was his agenda?

Mendlovitz: It was not an agenda. We hadn't seen each other in a long time. He didn't do that. . . Ok, he found that her job was taking people throughout the world to listen to concerts, go to the theater. She was a tour director. Now, what the hell is a tour director? He doesn't need to talk to her. He wasn't interested to find out what that was.

Shalin: I see. He just lost interest.

Mendlovitz: He wasn't experimenting with how badly she would feel, it wasn't worth his effort. He and I had our schmooze. We would sometimes talk about what it was like to be Jewish at the University of Chicago. The notion that you would suffer for being Jewish at the University of Chicago was hilarious, for Christ sake. Everybody was Jewish. It's clear to me that . . . I had the feeling that his mother must have been a social climber, but we never discussed that.

Shalin: Erving's mother was one of eight siblings in the Averbakh family that came from Russia. She was a backbone of the family in her generation.

Mendlovitz: Really?

Shalin: She was about 5'1. How tall Erving was in your estimate?

Mendlovitz: I would say 5'4 or 5'5.

Shalin: I am sorry I interrupted you. Every time you touch upon a fresh tangent, I have an urge to jump in, and then regret it. Could you expound a bit more on Erving's attitude toward his Jewishness? He was not religious, wasn't he?

Mendlovitz: Oh, no. He definitely wasn't religious. Here is my [assessment which] I am making up spontaneously. He knew he was culturally Jewish, even though he was trying to become a Britisher. It wasn't the Yom Kippur part of Jewishness. He was sort of an intellectual Jew, cultural Jew.

Shalin: Woody Alan type?

Mendlovitz: Not Woody Alan. Let's see – he wasn't that jokey. He was very serious about it because he saw it as a hindrance. He really wanted to be that upper class WASP. Yet at the same time he didn't want to – not that he could have – he didn't deny his Judaism. He didn't want to say, "I am not a Jew." He really didn't want to say that, but he definitely wanted to . . . he was a Disraeli type. He wanted to make it but not to become labelled a Jewish intellectual.

[Telephone connection lost].

Shalin: Hello? It looks like I have lost you. Let me call you again

[Pause]

Shalin: Saul, it looks like your telephone doesn't pick my calls. Maybe you can call me back.

[Pause]

Shalin: Saul?

Mendlovitz: Yes.

Shalin: Something happened. I called you and, again, no one picked up the phone. Your observations on Erving's Yiddishkeit are very interesting. So he was an intellectual Jew not much interested in religion, but he understood his origins and didn't try to hide them.

Mendlovitz: He didn't try to run away from it, but he knew what some people would say about [someone like] Mendlovitz . . . I grew up in a Hasidic orthodox background.

Shalin: Is it Bobover or Lubavitch Hasidim?

Mendlovitz: It was the Polish [group]. My father came from Galicia – not Galicia in Spain. He was a Galicianer. My mother was a Hungarian Jew.

Shalin: My wife wrote her dissertation about Bobover Hasidim. But go ahead, I don't want to interrupt you.

Mendlovitz: Oh! Send me the citation.

Shalin: Also, I have an interview with Sam Heilman, who wrote his dissertation with Goffman.

Mendlovitz: Who was it?

Shalin: Sam Heilman.

Mendlovitz: Oh, yes. Erving understood that I was a Jew, a cultural Jew. It was clear that I was bright, that I was going to make it in some way . . . I am the only one of my family who has not become a rabbi.

Shalin: Oh-h-h!

Mendlovitz: My brothers, my cousins [became rabbis]. One of my cousins ran the largest orthodox Yeshiva. It was called Torah Vdas. The name "Mendlovitz" is [well known in Brooklyn]. When I came to visit there, I was a big *macherh* because of that. Erving knew that about me. There was another name, a person who was not a sociologist, who is now a professor in the philosophy

department at Princeton. His name was Richard Jeffrey – J-e-f-f-r-e-y. And the three of us were close friends . . . Jeffrey and I actually lived together, so Erving would visit us in our apartment at the University of Chicago, and the three of us would go out quite a bit too.

Shalin: Is Richard still at Princeton?

Mendlovitz: Yes.

Shalin: And he knew Goffman?

Mendlovitz: Yes, very well, very well. He labeled Goffman “Motka the thief” [?]. I forgot which

Shalin: Was that vodka . . . ?

Mendlovitz: “Motka the thief.” There was a character in some Canadian Jewish author called “Motka the thief.” Chipper, which was the nickname for Richard Jeffrey, began calling Erving “Motka,” so when he was around, we would call him “Motka.”

Shalin: I understand that Erving used some Yiddish expressions.

Mendlovitz: Yes, culturally he was [a Jew]. Incidentally, did his parents run a haberdashery in Canada?

Shalin: Erving’s father was a merchant who ran a dry goods store at Dauphin. He was well to do.

Mendlovitz: I see. He was [well off ?] in terms of wealth.

Shalin: He was what we would call today an upper middle class person. His family was comfortable through the Depression.

Mendlovitz: Yes, I would put them even above that. They were upper-lower, somewhere on the cusp between those two. Whereas I had little money and was living off the GI Bill of Rights and doing babysitting, Erving never worried about money. He wasn’t extraordinarily generous about it, but he never worried about it, and he [floated along ?].

Shalin: Yesterday I spoke to Kurt and Gladys Lang.

Mendlovitz: Oh-h! [**laughing**].

Shalin: They asked me to send their greetings to you.

Mendlovitz: If you talk to them, please send them my greetings.

Shalin: The same is with Joe Gusfield, you might remember him too.

Mendlovitz: Joe was part of the group to which I introduced Erving. Joe and I keep in touch with each other. When he comes to New York, I see him.

Shalin: The reason I brought up Kurt and Gladys – they pointed out that Erving was unusual because most people were veterans without much money, while Erving was quite comfortable.

Mendlovitz: Yes, that's exactly the point I was making. Although he didn't flash it, there was no question that [he had money]. The rest of us were scraping along. The question of whether we would go to the [Tea Hut?], which was the upper hamburger place, or go to Gordon's, which was the middle hamburger – he didn't have to worry about that.

Shalin: Other people might have been self-conscious about money but . .

Mendlovitz: Well, it wasn't the question of being self-conscious but whether you had the money, whether you can afford or not.

Shalin: Apparently, Erving was completely comfortable with your rabbinical pedigree.

Mendlovitz: Yes,

Shalin: He might have been even attracted to it.

Mendlovitz: Absolutely. . . .

Shalin: That's important. And he knew some Yiddish expressions.

Mendlovitz: Yes. He wouldn't overdo it.

Shalin: Did he observe any Jewish holidays like Rosh Hashanah?"

Mendlovitz: Not even Yom Kippur, no. He didn't kid me about it if I did it. He would take it as a matter of fact, as part of the scene that couldn't be changed.

Shalin: The other thing – and this stuff is golden, Saul – you said Erving attended some parties. Did you observe him in merry making?

Mendlovitz: We weren't just observing, we would actually hold parties. I can remember two in particular – we may have held more – we had two parties where we literally agreed that when we went there, we would both observe what was going on, and when we finished we would . . .

Shalin: Compare notes.

Mendlovitz: Yes. I wasn't into . . . Well, I was a George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley interactionist, and Herbert Blumer was my hero. So I knew the *Mind, Self and Society mishigas* and all that business, and Erving was into . . . he knew all that stuff, but he was really beginning to understand what you could do about finding one of the – if this is the right word –units of interaction to observe, what rules people followed. And there is no question that embarrassment, stigma of any sort [are important], and most of life is presenting yourself so that you wouldn't be embarrassed. That's what life is about [**laughing**], right?

Shalin: Keep up the decorum and try not to fall of the stratification ladder.

Mendlovitz: That's exactly right. All of life is making certain that there is no embarrassment.

Shalin: Now, did you ever see Erving dancing?

Mendlovitz: No.

Shalin: How did he behave at the parties? Was he staying apart and observing for the most part?

Mendlovitz: No, he would participate. He would get into a group and talk about things. In most of those parties there were graduate students, maybe occasionally one or two younger instructors. People were coming together to schmooze. You may be discussing Weber and Marx; you might be discussing some book. And as I said, he had this whole other relationship with the anthropology people.

Shalin: Lloyd Warner?

Mendlovitz: Well, Warner was actually playing both sides. It was Redford [?], a full professor, very well known.

Shalin: Would Erving drink at the parties?

Mendlovitz: A little bit.

Shalin: Beer, wine?

Mendlovitz: I don't recall, one or the other, but not a lot so far as I could ascertain.

Shalin: Did he smoke?

Mendlovitz: No, he never smoked.

Shalin: You said he dated, that he had a relationship with Elizabeth Bott, for instance.

Mendlovitz: Yes.

Shalin: So he was aware of that part of life.

Mendlovitz: Oh, yes. There was no question about that. He would observe . . . I was dating, not heavily but moderately heavily, and he would wonder who I was going out with, who I was sleeping

with, and who was sleeping with me. We didn't have that term [then] – who I was hitting on, who was hitting on me. He was very much aware of that.

Shalin: Was he forthcoming about his own experiences?

Mendlovitz: No, he wasn't.

Shalin: He was into debriefing.

Mendlovitz: He would not be debriefed.

Shalin: This is one thing that puzzles me about Erving. He studied other people's backstage but was very protective of his own. And before he died, he sealed his archives.

Mendlovitz: I'll tell you this. When Jeffrey, he and I went out, I wouldn't say he revealed himself, but he certainly was relaxed and would talk in a way that – what should I say – exhibited camaraderie. It wasn't exactly taking us backstage. My sense is that Jeffrey knows more about him in those terms than I do. I think he talked a fair amount to Richard at some point, but I could be wrong.

Shalin: You don't know any particulars of the story about Erving and Elizabeth Bott.

Mendlovitz: . . . She went off to London. I just happened to be in his apartment, that basement apartment. It was late afternoon, she came back, and they hugged each other. I saw they wanted to talk, so I left. That was the only time I'd ever seen them together.

Shalin: You wouldn't happen to know if that was before Schuyler came into the picture?

Mendlovitz: I think it was before. Well, I think Schuyler [appeared] on the scene when Elizabeth came back, but I am not certain.

Shalin: OK, so far as you could tell, Erving did some dating and was comfortable with the subject.

Mendlovitz: Yes.

Shalin: Do you know anything about Erving's dissertation and his defense?

Mendlovitz: No, because by then I had left. When did he get his degree?

Shalin: In 1953, I believe.

Mendlovitz: Actually, I hadn't left yet, but I was tied up at the law school. I was part of something called the Law and Behavioral Science project. When I was a student at the law school, I was both getting the law degree and working in the field, so I really lost contact with Erving.

Shalin: After he left Chicago, you ran into him occasionally.

Mendlovitz: Rarely. I would occasionally see him at a sociology convention. . . . He married – what's her name – Gillian?

Shalin: Gillian Sankoff.

Mendlovitz: OK.

Shalin: They married around 1980 and had a daughter.

Mendlovitz: That's peculiar. I don't even know that.

Shalin: Her daughter studies at Princeton.

Mendlovitz: Really? What's her name?

Shalin: Alice Goffman.

Mendlovitz: Really?!

Shalin: I understand that she is the first rate ethnographer.

Mendlovitz: When he went to Philadelphia, he married . . .

Shalin: He went to Philadelphia in 1968 and married around 1980, I suppose.

Mendlovitz: So he lived in Philadelphia about 10 years before he was married.

Shalin: Yes.

Mendlovitz: I saw him only a few times in this period, mostly at conventions and things of that sort. When he was married to Gillian, I visited him in Philadelphia twice, bringing my companion along. On the second occasion, she would not go because he treated her in almost the same way [**laughing**]. . . . He was less discourteous because now there were the four of us and we were eating at Gillian's house. So he had to talk around. These were pleasant evenings. I actually would like to get some insight into why he married Gillian. Let me give you my impression. . . . I am under the impression, without knowing enough, that she was a linguist, semiotic type.

Shalin: And she is also a Canadian.

Mendlovitz: Yes, she is a Canadian too. I feel if you can't get a Britisher, you might as well get a bright intellectual. I think that's what he decided, "OK, I had my bitter chichi jump off the f---ing bridge. Here is this Jewish girl from my own background, let me see what it is all about. [She is] high-powered. Let's do it."

Shalin: I didn't know she was Jewish.

Mendlovitz: I thought she was Jewish. . . . At any rate, we had the same kind of Jewihness when we went to see them, although my woman said, "That's the *shanda* for the goyim," with the rest of the people in the room not realizing what she was saying. People assimilate words without . . .

Shalin: How did she mean it?

Mendlovitz: . . . My companion and I live in a WASP neighborhood, and she has assimilated some Yiddish phrases. In Chicago they pretend like [they understand ?].

Shalin: Do you have a rough idea when you visited Erving in Philadelphia? That must have been not long before he died.

Mendlovitz: Oh, yes. My last telephone conversation with Erving – and I hadn't thought of it until this moment . . . Jeffrey told me, "Erving got cancer and it doesn't look well." I said, "Jesus! Give me his home phone number." I called and said, "Motke, this is Schmiel." And we had about a 15 minute conversation.

Shalin: Fifty?

Mendlovitz: Fifteen maybe. I said, "Erving, am I going to see you again?" "Yes, I'm gonna be around. Let's set something up. Give me a call sometime and we'll get together." That must have been two or three months before he died.

Shalin: He died in November of 1982.

Mendlovitz: That sounds right. Or maybe it was even late spring that I called him. Then summer came. I probably went on my summer vacation, and when I came back, I couldn't get to see him because he was too ill. And then we had this peculiar business – this fellow Richard Jeffrey and his wife and I and one other person were brought together by his son, the doctor.

Shalin: Tom Goffman?

Mendlovitz: Yes, Tom Goffman.

Shalin: He is an oncologist.

Mendlovitz: Yes, I know he is oncologist. At that point he was [. . .].

Shalin: Tom?

Mendlovitz: Yes. I don't know whether we want to put this in or not.

Shalin: Sure, it is your call. You can designate any part as confidential.

Mendlovitz: Yes, I'll have a chance to review. He brings together no more than six or eight people in Princeton because that's where Richard Jeffrey is. It's easy to those of us who were in the area to get to Princeton. And he says to us, "I called you people together because you were his closest friends." We all looked at each other and . . . even Jeffrey had seen him only sporadically over the years. When we were friends, we had been really friends. The notion that we were his closest friends and that Tom Goffman was bringing us together for the purpose of memorializing his father who was dead was just sort of eerie. Incidentally, I would not use the word "eerie" to describe Erving Goffman [**laughing**], whoever that was as who called him eerie. . . . I forgot who said it.

Shalin: I think it was Robert Erwin, a Harvard University publisher.

Mendlovitz: Yes. I didn't find him eerie at all. Anyway, the hour we spent together at that meeting seemed very strange.

Shalin: Do you remember when it took place?

Mendlovitz: I would guess that it was in the mid-'80s.

Shalin: OK, well after Erving's death. He died in late 1982.

Mendlovitz: It could have been '83 or '84. . . . Is Tom married now?

Shalin: I know he was married, but he might be separated right now. I am not sure.

Mendlovitz: Have you been in touch with Tom?

Shalin: Not yet. I have been talking to Erving's sister, Frances Goffman Bay, who mentioned Tom.

Mendlovitz: I see.

Shalin: I understand that he has been told about this project, and I plan to contact him soon. Frances Bay invited me to her 90th birthday celebration later this month.

Mendlovitz: Oh!

Shalin: Maybe Tom will be there.

Mendlovitz: Would Erving be 90 now?

Shalin: Frances is three-and-a-half years older than her brother, and Erving was born in 1922. He died in 1982. He was 60 years old when he died.

Mendlovitz: I see. I didn't realize that he was older than I.

Shalin: It would be interesting to know who else attended that gathering at Princeton, since these were people Erving considered close friends.

Mendlovitz: I am desperately trying to recall who other people there were.

Shalin: Was Gillian there?

Mendlovitz: I do not remember Gillian being there, actually.

Shalin: There were three or four more people beside you and Jeffrey.

Mendlovitz: Yes.

Shalin: If this memory comes back, please let me know.

Mendlovitz: Not more than four. It was a very small group.

Shalin: It was four people including you and Jeffrey?

Mendlovitz: Jeffrey and his wife Edith were there. She would probably remember.

Shalin: She is also living.

Mendlovitz: Well, I haven't spoken to them in three or four years.

Shalin: I'll try to get in touch with them.

Mendlovitz: Edith might be better remembering that stuff.

Shalin: But besides Tom, you, and the Jeffreys, there were two or three more people.

Mendlovitz: Yes.

Shalin: How did that meeting go?

Mendlovitz: We were having difficulty trying to say things about him. Nobody felt they should get up and talk. It was a little awkward.

Shalin: And where did the meeting take place – at the restaurant?

Mendlovitz: I almost feel like it was in a room at Princeton University. It was not at the restaurant. It could have been in a club or something. Maybe Gillian was there, I really don't remember.

Shalin: Right.

Mendlovitz: Is Gillian a prominent intellectual academic at this point?

Shalin: Who?

Mendlovitz: Gillian.

Shalin: Well, she is not exactly a sociologist, but from what I know, she is a well respected figure in linguistics. So the memorial meeting you attended was kind of awkward.

Mendlovitz: It wasn't very awkward because we all knew each other.

Shalin: Was there some sort of a reception?

Mendlovitz: No, no. That was the point [**laughing**]. All I recall is Tom saying, "I called you guys together because you were his best friends, and I thought it might be nice to talk about that," or something like that. . . . When we sat around, nobody wanted to raise their hand and start. It was an interesting [situation].

Shalin: How long did the meeting last?

Mendlovitz: About an hour.

Shalin: Did Tom speak?

Mendlovitz: A little bit. He spoke more than anybody else, but I don't remember what he said other than, "You were his best friends." Now, I must have gone to Erving's . . . No, I probably didn't. I was thinking of Erving's presidential address.

Shalin: He never delivered it. It was read by someone else.

Mendlovitz: . . . Wait, didn't he give a speech at the plenary session at some point?

Shalin: It could be.

Mendlovitz: That might be why I went to Montreal. . . . We had this little relationship. By that point he became very well known, he kept putting out articles and books. I would say, "What would it be already, Erving with an "E," if you had ten books out? What would it be if you had 15 books out?" I would be constantly jabbing at him.

Shalin: You didn't just think this to yourself, you would tell this to him.

Mendlovitz: No, I told this to him.

Shalin: And how did he respond?

Mendlovitz: He'd say . . . he would shrug his shoulders.

Shalin: OK. I don't want to lose the tread – did you notice any changes in Erving when he'd become more famous?

Mendlovitz: With me – I saw no difference. It reverted back to the friendship we had as graduate students. He'd find a little bit what I was doing. The group I was part of was doing some jury taping in Wichita, Kansas. We were on the national radio right-wing broadcasts that [said ?], "For the little swarthy men," meaning Jews, at the University of Chicago Law School, "doing jury taping." We had been given permission by the judge, and the only people who didn't give us permission were the jurors. We were running experimental juries. He [Erving] knew about my activities.

Shalin: It was in the 70s that Erving emerged as a major figure in the field of sociology. He is, by the way, considered the most cited American sociologist of the second half of the 20th century.

Mendlovitz: Really?

Shalin: That's what I've read. People do report changes in his demeanor at this time. Some say he grew mellower.

Mendlovitz: It may have been. I just didn't see him over long enough periods to be able to see that. At that point [we saw each other] in social situations when he had invited me or I had called to tell him that I am coming to Philadelphia and it would be nice to get together. It was not any kind of a professional relationship.

Shalin: You remained on those old-buddies terms.

Mendlovitz: Yes, it's like people I'd had known for 50 years. You know, Joe Gusfield is the same kind of guy. I knew him very well. If he comes to New York, he gives me a call; if I come to California, I give him a call. We are close friends in a sense that we know each other, what each other has done, what our children are

doing, and all that. That's the same kind of relationship I had with Erving.

Shalin: I understand. If we could go back in time a little – when you visited Erving and Gillian in Philadelphia, were they married?

Mendlovitz: Yes.

Shalin: It's hard to pinpoint the time, though.

Mendlovitz: I wouldn't know. My companion who had been disdained, she would know exactly [**laughing**].

Shalin: Maybe she could shed light on the dates. Would be interesting to have her recollections of Erving.

Mendlovitz: I don't know if she would be . . . Well, I'll ask her. It just so happen – I'll tell you how it was. She likes Alan Bennett.

Shalin: Alan Bennett or Bennett Berger?

Mendlovitz: Alan Bennett. He is a playwright and an essayist. I know that she liked him, so I gave her what he had written in the *London Literary Review* or *Times Literary Supplement*, I can't remember. For some reason, he is talking about how Goffman changed his life. . . .

Shalin: I'd like to see that piece.

Mendlovitz: Now I will ask her.

Shalin: But continue with your story.

Mendlovitz: At any rate, I gave it to Sibyl to read, and she said, "Jesus, Erving must have been really something!" I said, "I am telling you – he was a real *macherh*."

Shalin: Now, if you don't mind backtracking a bit – do you have any memories of Schuyler's suicide, how you learned about her death?

Mendlovitz: I [learned] about it in an almost casual, offhand fashion. Whoever told me about it said something that indicated she had jumped off [the bridge]. . . . Somebody was talking about her jumping off the bridge. That was the first time I heard about it, and I don't know who did it, where or when.

Shalin: It happened in 1964. She jumped off the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, which was very unusual.

Mendlovitz: Oh!

Shalin: Her red Jaguar's engine was still running when the police came to the scene. What was your reaction to the news, do you remember?

Mendlovitz: [**Sighing**]. I think I am making it up, but I'll make it up. . . . I could see that happening. Somehow Erving and she got on each other's nerves so much. Even though they never appeared that way, I could see that happening.

Shalin: This is interesting.

Mendlovitz: I am making this up.

Shalin: Of course. You indicated that you sensed some tension between the two, some undertow of resentment.

Mendlovitz: No, I never saw any tension.

Shalin: OK, ok.

Mendlovitz: On the other hand, it always looked too civil, too presentational [**laughing**], too much presentation of self, too much putting forward . . . But again, I am overstating the case. If you asked me at the time, I wouldn't [have noticed it]. When you ask me now, I honestly feel, "Oh, I could see that happening." At the same time, I had been totally taken aback. I didn't know her well, but Holy Christ! – I didn't see her jumping off the f---ing bridge! And I certainly didn't want this [to happen], that's for sure.

Shalin: Of course. What is your sense of Erving's politics? Did he have any political leanings, so far as you could tell?

Mendlovitz: I honestly didn't. I was a well known lefty on the campus, and I was [asked?] to join the communist party. But they decided, "We are not going to invite him. He was unreliable. [He] wouldn't follow the line" [**laughing**].

Shalin: You didn't try to initiate Erving into the joys of left-wing politics.

Mendlovitz: No, the only reason I am saying this is that he knew I was very much involved in politics.

Shalin: And that didn't bother him.

Mendlovitz: He knew that's the kind of guy I am. On occasion we had Alger Hiss stories, the McCarthy hearings. . . . He seemed to have the same sentiments I had, but I never heard him say that. The way we talked about this, I could take for granted that that's the way he felt, but he never discussed it.

Shalin: So when it comes to McCarthyism and witch hunt, he would see an eye-to-eye with you on that.

Mendlovitz: Oh, yes, although we never discussed this substantively. It never occurred to me that he wouldn't oppose something like that.

Shalin: Right. Anything else comes to your mind? One thing I want to run by you is that Erving's writing seems to be autobiographical, or rather crypto-autobiographical. "Symbols of Class Status" is about the way people are trying to look better off than they are as they are struggling to move upward, and that paper was written when Erving was marrying Schuyler. From what you are telling me, I gather that that might have been Erving's personal agenda as well.

Mendlovitz: Yes. I forgot who said that [he was] “a Jew acting like a Canadian acting like a Britisher,” but it was well known by the small group of ours that that was what he aspired to be.

Shalin: Was Erving admired by others? How was he perceived on campus?

Mendlovitz: Well, that group that I was with, they admired him all.

Shalin: Joe Gusfield told me his nickname was the “little dagger.”

Mendlovitz: No, I didn’t know that. It’s possible.

Shalin: Basically, your group admired his wits.

Mendlovitz: Oh, yes, yes. He may have been a little dagger, but the fact is that everybody would take pot shots at one another; he was just good at it [**laughing**]. He was good at it, that’s all. I think he actually used to come to some of the social science teas. We used to have teas in the afternoon at four o’clock. He didn’t show up regularly, a lot of people did, but he would show up. He was relatively well liked

Shalin: Would you say Erving was self-conscious about his height?

Mendlovitz: Until I read about it, I wouldn’t have said so. No, I never thought of it.

Shalin: I don’t want to tax you too much, but you mentioned a few more people like Herbert Blumer.

Mendlovitz: Yes.

Shalin: You also mentioned Philip Rieff, Greg Stone. People I speak to bring up those names, and I’ve realized that they are relevant not only because they were involved with Goffman but also because they were at the heart of that era.

Mendlovitz: I didn’t know Phil Rieff. I knew him on campus, he was a very stuffed-shirt appearing guy.

Shalin: He became an Anglophile himself.

Mendlovitz: Yes. And he was going out with Susan [Sontag] when she was still a student.

Shalin: I understand that Susan was his assistant.

Mendlovitz: Was she? Yes. Well, Blumer I knew because . . . First of all, I took all of his courses.

Shalin: How was he as a teacher?

Mendlovitz: He was an interesting guy. He was a professional a football player, and he taught courses on George Herbert Mead. He would come to class without any books or notes, sit down. . . . He was a big fellow, physically constructed in a way that made him look handsome, and he would begin to talk. And he would talk for the full 50 minutes, occasionally asking for questions from people, and then he would stop. He would come next day and start it again. Now, when Mead was teaching, as the apocrypha has it, he came and talked, and then he would give two third of the old lecture and start on the new third near the end of the hour. Herb did about one third of the old lecture and then go with the two thirds [of the new one]. This guy was fascinating [**laughing**].

I got to know him in addition because there was this guy by the name Gustav Ichheiser. He was a German Jewish refugee who the University of Chicago brought over. He was a social psychologist who had written an 80 or 90 page monograph. It was about gender. One of his favorite lines about gender was, "They can always fake it, we can't." He was talking about the erectile function, obviously. . . . I used to pick up a lot of strays because I was a kind of stray myself. At any rate, Gustav became one of my strays. One day he wound up in a mental ward downtown. Everett Hughes and Blumer called me because they heard that Mendlovitz knew him. So I told them what I knew about Ichheiser, what I thought we might do to help him. I got to know Blumer and Everett Hughes because they saw me as a kind of a conduit to certain outlying people in the sociology department.

Shalin: You were a *makher* of sort as well.

Mendlovitz: Well, I wasn't a makher. Frances Fox Piven comes in one day and says, "I've decided to quit school." I said to her, "OK, let's grab a cup of coffee. What are you going to do if you quit school?" She says, "I don't know." I said, "Let me tell you something. The reason I don't quit school is that I don't know what I am going to do if I quit school. It's not a good reason to quit school. Just keep going to classes and you may hear something interesting, you may get something out of it. [Do it until you find] something you want to do." She winds up a president of the American Sociological Association [**laughing**]. . . . [She] decided, "Here we are, we are living this way, that's what we are doing." We had a pretty good time around that university.

Shalin: So she stayed put.

Mendlovitz: She stayed there. And she became the president of the American Sociological Association.

Shalin: And her name is . . .

Mendlovitz: Frances Fox Piven.

Shalin: Did you know Greg Stone?

Mendlovitz: Yep. Greg Stone and I, after every Louie Wirth class, would go home, he would open a bottle of scotch – we would each have class notes taken – and he would type up the notes of that class. That class and, I think, Everett Hughes's class. And we sold those notes to the rest of the student body for something or other, for an enormous sum.

Shalin: That's funny.

Mendlovitz: We had the following anecdote [related to those notes]. Louie Wirth is lecturing. One kid is raising his hand and he says, "Are you coming to the story of centipede?" Now Louie had this story about how thought inhibited the act. "Am Anfang war die Tat" – "In the beginning there was the act," and he gives this story

about the centipede who with all these legs, spent so much time trying to decide which leg he has to move first, that he never moved. So the kid is sitting in the class with our notes, and he says, "Are you coming to the story about the centipede?"

[**Laughter**]

Mendlovitz: Well, we did that, Gregory and I did that. Gregory – he died, didn't he?

Shalin: A long time ago. There is the annual Stone symposium named after him where symbolic interactionists assemble to discuss their research.

Mendlovitz: Is there? Well, he and I became friends. He was brilliant, but he was a semi-alcoholic, enormously bright. In the middle of the evening he would stand up and say – I can't remember her name, his wife's – "I'm going out to find myself a piece of ass." He was fun to be around.

Shalin: Do you know if Erving Goffman and Greg Stone interacted?

Mendlovitz: Oh, yes.

Shalin: Both had a similar way of unnerving people by breaching trust and watching them respond.

Mendlovitz: I would have thought of them as being very very different. Maybe they had the same . . . I don't think Gregory had the same consciousness that Erving had. Gregory was this big lumbering man who did what he wanted to do. He was like a sixty pound tank. Erving was a little dagger, a rapier, but he was much more subtle and nuanced than Gregory. Greg wasn't doing it to show how life or interactions were going on in society. He did it because that's what he wanted to do, "I am going out and getting a piece of ass."

Shalin: He was living his life to the full, and he was very much part of the University of Chicago scene.

Mendlovitz: Oh, yes. His wife was an artist. I don't know what happened to her, she was a very good artist. Don't know what happened to her. There was another guy who was part of our inner group – Bill Westley [?]. . . .

Shalin: Is it spelled W-e-s-t-l-e-y?

Mendlovitz: Yes.

Shalin: What happened to him?

Mendlovitz: I think he went off to Canada to some school.

Shalin: Oh, yes. I think somebody mentioned this guy who went to Canada. Now the name comes back.

Mendlovitz: He would remember the group.

Shalin: Wonder if there is a way to locate him.

Mendlovitz: Howie Becker was part of our group too. . . . I don't know how much interaction he had with Erving. Well, he had to because he was part of our inner group. He certainly had a lot of interaction with him. Now, Howe, being a musician, also was off on the [?], and his first wife committed suicide. But he certainly knew Erving well. He probably knew him better after they graduated. Howe went to Berkeley and Erving went to Berkeley.

Shalin: Anything stands out in your memory about Howe Becker?

Mendlovitz: . . . I found him a very pleasant, gracious guy, a bright, talented musician who seemed very much in self-control. I was sort of a close friend of his sister in law – oh, God – an actress whose last name was "Harris" but whose first name I cannot remember. We came together because the actor, who was very well known at the time, and who now may be in the mental institution, I think. She was getting in trouble, and I had to bail her out. . . . I had to call Howe, and Howe would [?].

Shalin: What about Everett Hughes – did you interact with him?

Mendlovitz: Yes. Everett saw me as one of those people in the sociology department who was bright and a kind of semi-leader. He knew that I was part of the [group that included] Gregory Stone, Bob Habenstein. Habenstein was really in some ways a patriarch of that whole group.

Shalin: He tells me he was older than others. He had already had two children.

Mendlovitz: And thoughtful, very thoughtful. He knew music well. He didn't play, but, boy, did he really knew it. . . . I used to live much of the time in Habenstein's household, would babysit the kids when they wanted to go out. God, I've got to call Habi! When did you speak to him?

Shalin: I spoke to him recently; he is kind of old, 94 I think, so you better hurry. He is now editing the transcript of our conversation.

Mendlovitz: Right.

Shalin: He offered interesting observations. Now, you mentioned music – do you know anything about Erving's music taste?

Mendlovitz: No. He listened to a fair amount of late Beethoven's quartets.

Shalin: He was into classical music.

Mendlovitz: No question about that. I never heard him listen to any jazz. When I came in, he would always have some music on, and it was always classical. It was Brandenburg [concerto,] or late Beethoven, that sort of stuff.

Shalin: Bach, Baroque music.

Mendlovitz: Yes, that's right, you got it.

Shalin: Any memories of Hughes as a teacher?

Mendlovitz: God, what was he like as a teacher. . . . He was insightful but uninspiring. He obviously had an insight into the way society works, the institutions and social processes and interactions. He really understood all that. For example, he knew so much more than Warner, without getting into all those classifications that Warner had. He knew so much more about the richness of social life, I would say.

[Pause]

Shalin: Are you there?

Mendlovitz: Yes.

Shalin: Sorry, for a moment I thought I'd lost you. Hughes helped several students with their dissertations, I understand.

Mendlovitz: Oh, yes. He did. But the person who knows more about him would be Howe Becker.

Shalin: Right. Did you intersect with Ed Shils?

Mendlovitz: I not only took a class from him, I sort of became a friend of his. When I was in the law school, I became part of the Law and Behavioral Science Project. We got a million dollars from the Ford Foundation. Back then, in '52 or '53 . . .

Shalin: That was big money.

Mendlovitz: That was big money, right. And they didn't think that was enough.

Shalin: I mean, even now it's big money [laughing].

Mendlovitz: I know, but then it was really big money. So every week, Ed Levy, who was then dean of the law school, Harry kalvin, and maybe Fred – no, not Fred [?]. Let's see, Ed Shils, myself, and one other law faculty member would meet to discuss how the project was going. For the first bit of empirical work that was ever done for this project they asked me to go down to the Superior Court . . . well, the lowest level above the magistrate. I went to

Chicago Superior Court, and I observed the empanelling of a jury. I come back, type a 20 page empanelment [report], and suddenly I become the hero of the Law and Behavioral Science Project [laughing]. It looks like this kid knows what he is doing – what this lawyer was doing and that lawyer was doing, and I had never read any of the materials. So for about six months I had lived off the benefits of doing nothing. I would go back to Chicago, meet with Ed Shils, and he and I would go to China Town together. I took his courses sometimes for credit, sometimes not for credit. When Derrida came to Chicago, I went to see him. [Ed Shils] asked me, “What’s it about?” So I had relatively close relationship with him. I knew those guys.

Shalin: In a few words, what was he like as a teacher?

Mendlovitz: He was brilliant. He was difficult. You didn’t get away with much, I’ll tell you that. But he was brilliant, all right. Boy, he really knew a lot! Now, he was a right-wing social democrat long before it was popular. He was so much opposed to the lefties on campus. We stood out as being . . . And he knew I was a lefty.

Shalin: Still, the two of you got along.

Mendlovitz: Oh, yes, yes. Well, first of all, there was this faculty-student relationship. And secondly, I knew people on campus who were racists that I interacted with.

Shalin: Maybe I could ask you about one more person, Robert Merton.

Mendlovitz: He wasn’t on campus.

Shalin: Yes, I know, he was at Columbia, but you mentioned him early on.

Mendlovitz: He came to evaluate the Law and Behavioral Science project on a couple of occasions, and there was this student of Merton, Alan Barton, who came to. . . . Incidentally, let me go back to Hughes for a moment.

Shalin: Sure.

Mendlovitz: I misrepresented something. Hughes's real contribution was the study of professions.

Shalin: Right, occupations.

Mendlovitz: Occupations and professions, and it is within this context that he did his work. I did a master's thesis on the role of the rabbi.

Shalin: For Hughes?

Mendlovitz: Yes. He was one of my mentors of that study.

Shalin: That's an occupation, all right, and it runs in your family.

Mendlovitz: [**Laughing**]. I am the old [?].

Shalin: Sam Heilman comes to mind – he wrote a dissertation with Goffman on synagogue life. I call him an "observant participant" because he was an observant Jew doing participant observation in a synagogue.

Mendlovitz: Is that right?

Shalin: Yes, he wrote a book *Synagogue Life*.

Mendlovitz: I should look at it. I might have made a good sociologist [**laughing**].

Shalin: From what I hear, you certainly would have.

Shalin: I mean, a certain kind of qualitative sociology, not the mainstream. . . .

Mendlovitz: I can tell.

Shalin: The last question, if I may. If you look at Goffman as a scholar, how would you evaluate his contribution to the field? Not necessarily in the disciplinary sense. To the extent that you are

familiar with his ideas, how do you value them? Are they important in your own work? Have your views of his scholarship changed over time?

Mendlovitz: [**Sighing**]. This is a spontaneous response. . . .

Shalin: Those are valuable.

Mendlovitz: OK. In some ways I am flabbergasted that he made the mark that he's made. And the reason for that is that his scholarship was based in the anthropology rather than on the received tradition of [sociological] scholarship. Boas, Ruth Benedict – I am surprised that [this tradition] became such a major component of modern sociology.

Shalin: Interesting.

Mendlovitz: Even Mead and Cooley were much more theoretical. Very rarely did they dip their hand into the empirical [world] other than the selves. . . . Here is Erving, going on his own, deciding, "For Christ's sake, people don't like to be embarrassed, they don't like to be stigmatized." Are there any footnotes there to anybody who had written about that before? Not that I know of. Is he concerned about . . . does he take the notion of shame and guilt? So I am sort of flabbergasted that he made the impact, other than to say that he was an extraordinary ethnomethodologist.

Shalin: He never left behind a school like Harold Garfinkel.

Mendlovitz: Yes. Now, I knew Harold very well. Harold and I worked together in Wichitaw.

Shalin: You did? That's a separate conversation.

Mendlovitz: I know Harvey Sacks.

Shalin: You did know Harvey?

Mendlovitz: I knew a lot of those people. Harold, he was some kind of a mentor at some point. . . . We worked together in Kansas during the hottest summer in history.

Shalin: There was a Harvey Sacks seminar that met at his home in Berkeley.

Mendlovitz: Is that right?

Shalin: It included Manny Schegloff, David Sudnow, Sherri Cavan, a number of people associated with this circle. But please continue with your thought about Erving's scholarship.

Mendlovitz: Let me just make one footnote on Harvey Sacks. He was the first cousin of Leo Goodman, the statistician at Berkley.

Shalin: I didn't know this.

Mendlovitz: Yes, I knew that whole group of ethnomethodologists. I knew them all well, for Christ's sake, and they thought I was pretty perceptive if not bright. Now, what was the question you asked? OK, I was just flabbergasted given the way sociology was going. Ethnomethodologists who didn't use any of the received traditions suddenly burst on the scene and become [?]. Everybody admires them . . . was there anyone doing what he did?

Shalin: Do you sympathize with this approach?

Mendlovitz: Well, I never thought sociology amounted to much. On the other hand, I've changed somewhat on that. Just to make clear what everybody knows and says is worth doing. Somebody should say, "Look, this is what we do when we get up in the morning." Yes, I know you know, everybody knows about that. What you call subjective is really objective because everybody has the same feelings. That kind of statement of the world is worthwhile to give to people when they grow up. So I disagree with my younger self on that.

Shalin: Well, Sigmund Freud also started with everyday life, observed it closely and came up with *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*.

Mendlovitz: That's right.

Shalin: Goffman did his *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

Mendlovitz: There is no question about it.

Shalin: And both turned this trivial stuff into something amazing.

Mendlovitz: Yes.

Shalin: Even if this was completely speculative and maybe pseudo-scientific, if you wish.

Mendlovitz: Right.

Shalin: One last thing – any regrets about switching the fields, even though you’ve kind of straddled both fields?

Mendlovitz: Well, the lawyers say I am a sociologist, and sociologists say I am a lawyer.

Shalin: [Laughing]

Mendlovitz: . . . [which is] pejorative in both cases. The real thing I regret is that I am lazy. I find it excruciating to write. As it turns out, I have a relatively moderate bibliography in the field of international law, especially in what I call “the just world order.” I wish I hadn’t . . . I am still lazy . . . The reason my bibliography is [modest] is that most of my articles are from speeches I had given six or seven times, then gotten the tapes, and written by listening to them. But I worked for a long time with Richard Falk, we put together a lot of readers, and they became crucial to establishing the field of world order.

Shalin: That’s another way of making an impact.

Mendlovitz: See, I feel good about that. We introduced the notion without calling it “peace studies.” We introduced the notion of not only limiting but also eliminating large scale armed conflicts. We were part of that group in the 60s that decided to do that.

Shalin: I listen to you and wonder if your pedigree shaped up your interests in peace studies and conflict resolution. That would be

another example of how our sociological imagination, our professional imagination, feeds on our biography.

Mendlovitz: Let me just say something about Orthodox Judaism.

Shalin: Please.

Mendlovitz: It's not very peaceful.

Shalin: Orthodox Judaism? Yes, I agree, but there is also the tradition of peace making, mediation, and reasoning that evolved along different lines.

Mendlovitz: You don't find there many people who talk about shalom. . . .

Shalin: Maybe not among Hassidim.

Mendlovitz: I mean, the rest of the world . . . I think that Jewish intellectuals of the 19th century who broke from Orthodox Judaism and picked up on the Enlightenment – I am still in the Enlightenment. I believe in the emotions, I believe in the Freudian hu-la-la-la, but, God damn it, you can use the rational mind to make the world a better place! I am for that.

Shalin: OK. This was just terrific. I am so grateful.

Mendlovitz: This was very nice of you to take this psychoanalytic to our street.

[Laughter]

Shalin: I try to avoid labels. What's important to me is not the terms we use but the kind of emotions our exchange is steeped in. It is affective memoires that matter, emotional intelligence.

Mendlovitz: Right.

Shalin: I will send you the transcript of our conversation once it is ready. Please fill free to add whatever comes to mind.

Mendlovitz: Let me say that I was really delighted to think about Erving. We really had many good hours, many good evenings together.

Shalin: Thanks a lot.

Mendlovitz: Thank you very much.

Shalin: Bye bye.

Mendlovitz: Bye bye.

[End of the recording]