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Erving Goffman and Asymmetric Anonymity

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Remembering Erving Goffman

David Nasatir: Erving Goffman and Asymmetric Anonymity

Dr. David Nasatir, Visiting Professor at the Department of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley, wrote this memoir at the request of Dmitri Shalin and approved positing the present version in the Erving Goffman Archives.

July 9, 2010

I believe it was in 1957; I had a job as a student assistant of some kind and my work consisted of picking up library requests from faculty mailboxes in South Hall, retrieving the books and placing them in or near the mailbox...and returning books to the library.

One day Erving Goffman was standing next to me looking at the mailboxes and we exchanged greetings ("good morning", or something of the sort). He asked me how I generally addressed faculty members. (Note: I was a new student. Although I did have a master's degree from Stanford and a year of research behind me I was still new to the scene). "Herbert Blumer, for example", he prompted and I replied, "Professor Blumer." "How about Hanan Selvin," he probed, and I responded, "Hanan". "What about me?", was his next question, and I guess I didn't address him any way at all by name or title. "That's how it will be with us then", he said, and [he] never called me by name during the several years that we would encounter one another.

David Nasatir