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Remembering Erving Goffman

Marvin Scott

Dr. Marvin B. Scott, Professor Emeritus at Hunter College, wrote this memoir at the request of Jackie Wiseman.

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Dmitri wants to know what kind of recordings did Goffman listen to? Here is the answer:

Goffman invited me to live in his house on Hilgard during the period he was on sabbatical at Harvard. Much of the *Sociology of the Absurd* was written in Goffman's study on Goffman's typewriter. Now, when I checked his record collection I was surprised to find the absence of music! All his recordings were comic albums: Radio Bloopers, Bob Newhardt, Don Rickles, Jonathan Winters, and other jesters. Goffman was particularly high on Rickles' insult comedy (and told me to visit Vegas to see him perform). Lenny Bruce was also very important to Erving, and so was Mort Sahl. To me, Goffman was a Shakespearean figure, the Fool who spoke the wisdom of the play and who had consensual clearance to honestly speak his mind, like Feste (*Twelfth Night*), Thersites (*Troilus and Cressida*), and of course, Lear's Fool.