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Dmitri Shalin Interview with Gino Segre about Erving Goffman entitled "As We Were Leaving the Tennis Court, Erving Told Me, "You Were Wrong. Nothing in life is casual"

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Remembering Erving Goffman

Gino Segre:

**As We Were Leaving the Tennis Court, Erving Told Me,
"You Were Wrong. Nothing in life is casual"**

This conversation with Professor Gino Segre, University of Pennsylvania, was recorded over the phone on February 23, 2010. After Dmitri Shalin transcribed the interview, Dr. Segre edited the transcript and approved posting the present version on the web. 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 03-04-10]

Segre: Hello.

Shalin: Greetings, this is Dmitri Shalin. Is this Gino?

Segre: This is Gino. Hello there.

Shalin: Good to hear you. How are you?

Segre: Fine, thank you.

Shalin: I am glad you are able to join our cause and help us resurrect the ways of Erving Goffman.

Segre: I am very pleased to be in the company!

Shalin: Terrific. First, let me ask you if it would be OK for me to record our conversation and then send you the transcript for your review and revision?

Segre: Yes, that would be absolutely fine.

Shalin: Wonderful! Did you have a chance to look up any of the materials collected so far?

Segre: I did! I didn't read them all, but I read several of them.

Shalin: So you probably have an idea what we are up to, how we are creating a fractal picture of Erving the scholar, the person, the friend.

Segre: Right, absolutely. And of course every person you talk to will suggest one or two more people for you to talk to you.

Shalin: Yes, and I hope you will have suggestions of your own.

Segre: Yes. So do you want me just talk or do you want to ask questions?

Shalin: Why don't you start with yourself, how you met Erving, and then you can pursue any tangent that comes to mind. I will listen, take notes, and later we can have a back-and-forth. I will raise a few questions of my own.

Segre: Of course. I came to Philadelphia in 1967 as an assistant professor of physics. I had received my Ph.D. a few years earlier and then spent two years as a research associate in Geneva, two years as a research associate in Berkley. By profession I am what they call high energy or elementary particles theoretical physicist. So clearly, I am not part of Erving's natural crowd. I met him in 1968, and there were two reasons. We were almost neighbors, probably 50 or 100 feet apart. We lived in the same part of Philadelphia. The second reason was that I had been an undergraduate at Harvard and then a graduate student at MIT. I had a good friend from Harvard who had been a history major and then had received a Ph.D. in German history. But in 1968, that being the radical time, he felt that teaching history in a university was a waste of time, even though he was quite successful and had an offer of assistant professorship, I think, at Brandeis. He decided he would change careers. His name is Jonathan Rubenstein. What John did, he decided that he would come to Philadelphia, go to Police academy, and write a book as a participant observer about what it was like to be in an urban police force.

Shalin: Ah-h, I might have heard about him!

Segre: And he did eventually write a book called *City Police*. He is the person you might be interested in talking to. In fact, the only person in Philadelphia who was interested in him was Erving.

Shalin: Is he still in Philadelphia?

Segre: No, he is not. He lives in New York City now. So he spent a great deal of time with Erving during the late '60s and early '70s. The three of us, then, since John was a good friend of mine and Erving lived across the street, we wound up spending a fair amount of time together, often with my first wife and John's first wife and Erving who was then a bachelor. My contact with Erving was social, that is, we would go to dinner, we would go to the movies, occasionally, we would go to buy wine. I liked Erving a lot. Clearly, we were very different, but I liked Erving because he was different from everybody else I knew [**laughing**]. He talked differently, and he was both interesting and challenging. He was quite original. He had ways of insulting people that were different from anything I ever heard.

[**Laughter**]

Segre: And that included myself, of course. So we spent a certain amount of time together, basically until his death. I knew some of the women he dated in between (nothing seemed very serious). I knew his son Tom, and I knew when he met Gillian. Gillian had been married to a mathematician named "Sankoff." And then she met Erving and moved to Philadelphia. She got an appointment in the linguistics department, and they lived together for a number of years, and got married basically as Erving was dying. In fact, I think they got married when Erving was in bed; Erving was basically terminal at that point. I am not quite sure why they got married. That may have been for tax purposes.

Shalin: They had a child!?

Segre: They had a child, also, Alice. Well, stories about

Erving. We used to talk about going to dinner in Philadelphia. He called me up one day and said, "Finally, a real restaurant has opened in Philadelphia." It was the place called "Black Banana," which was the first so-called "modern chic" restaurant.

I remember going with Erving to see a movie "I am Curious (Yellow)," which was the first of those sort of soft pornographic movies.

Shalin: I don't think I have seen it but I read about it.

Segre: It is a Swedish movie. I remember as we walked out, in a typical Erving fashion . . . we walked out while the movie was going on. We walked up the aisle and Erving turned to various people and said in somewhat audible voice, "Perverts, perverts!"

[**Laughter**]

Segre: Which was his way of making fun of people. I remember another time going to the movies in the '70s. I think the movie was called something like "Super Fly" which was one of the first movies about a black hero. I remember Erving saying, "No sociologist ten years ago would have predicted that whites and blacks would be sitting together watching 'Super Fly.' That's why sociology is different from physics."

Other characteristic Erving Stories. There was a summer when he was going to France. His son Tom was going to be living in the house for the summer. So Erving, who prided himself on being a wine connoisseur, moved all the wine out of the house. I think he was afraid that Tom would drink it.

Shalin: [**Laughing**]

Segre: But the evening before he was supposed to leave for France, while riding his unicycle in the basement, Erving fell and broke his leg.

Shalin: Oh, no! When did it happen?

Segre: I think probably the late '70s. So Erving then had to spend the summer in the house with his broken leg. He was intensely annoyed, his son was intensely annoyed at him, and the wine, which was moved to the friend's house (the friend sublet his house), wound up being drunk at a party in the sublet.

Shalin: [Laughing]

Segre: This was the only time I remember that Erving, when I tried to poke fun at him, really seemed annoyed.

Shalin: It was too raw. It cut too close to the bone.

Segre: It was too raw [laughing].

He liked to go buy furniture and things like that. So he had lots of extra furniture, and once he sold me a table.

He was an interesting man. I even read a couple of his books such as *Presentation of Self* and *Asylums*. I knew a few sociologists at that time, but none were like Erving. And I think, as it certainly comes across, Erving had an uneasy relationship with the sociology department at Penn.

You know, I can't think of two more different people, both of whom came from Chicago and both of whom were Benjamin Franklin Professors at Penn, than him and Philip Rieff.

Shalin: Did you know Philip Rieff?

Serge: Very slightly.

Shalin: His name comes in several interviews. We might come back to him later, but please go ahead.

Segre: OK, Philip Rieff (he is now dead) was the same age as Erving. Philip was pompous. It is reported that Philip and his wife dressed for dinner and sat carefully at the ends of the table . . .

Shalin: Was it Susan Sontag who sat across?

Segre: No, no, no. He got divorced. Susan Sontag was 19 when they met, and I think they had a child and they divorced a few years later. It was his second wife. They also lived nearby in downtown of Philadelphia. Erving lived on a street called Rittenhouse Square Street. He lived right next to a restaurant called "Thursday, Friday, Saturday."

You haven't talked to Gillian yet.

Shalin: I met her at Frances Goffman Bay's 90th birthday (she is Erving's sister). We chatted; she told me she was aware of this project. I didn't try to strike a conversation about Erving, however, knowing that she politely declined such inquiries in the past.

Segre: Fine. I saw the discussion in one of the [interviews] on how tall Erving was. I don't think he was 5'6 or 5'7. I would say he was 5'3 or so. I would imagine life was quite hard growing up north of Winnipeg while being very smart, Jewish, and short. He never talked about his . . . about his . . .

Shalin: His childhood, his life in Canada?

Serge: Right. He never talked about his first wife either, with me anyway. The only time it came up, I once read a book about a man named Harry Crosby who was married to a woman named Caresse Crosby, a Boston socialite who committed suicide. E. E. Cummings wrote a poem about her. So I was just talking to Erving about the book, and Erving said, "Careful, that's family." And I don't know quite what he meant, whether she was related to his first wife or whether the idea of suicide meant talking about family.

Shalin: He didn't explain.

Segre: No, he didn't explain.

He and Tom, had a very curious but warm relationship where they sort of made fun of each other. Again, it was a different father-son relationship than I was used to. They had little code words; it was quite nice; I think, there was a real affection there.

Shalin: Mutual affection.

Segre: Yes. And I think in his own way, Erving was a very good father.

Shalin: He was a single parent from 1964.

Segre: He raised Tom. I think after his first wife died, he didn't travel very much because he wanted to stay close to Tom. I admired that. I thought that was very impressive. He didn't fall apart, he took his responsibility very seriously, and I think did a good job there.

Shalin: That's my feeling as well. He seemed to be a committed single parent. The fact that the affection was mutual is an indicator that he had done something right.

Segre: Yes. I would think it would be very hard to be Erving's student because he clearly was very critical and enjoyed that. This was fine with me because that never touched me to the bone.

Shalin: You didn't have to take his classes or write your thesis with Erving.

Segre: Yes, he is not going to tell me that my theoretical physics is bad or that I am dumb. I think I had a very easy and very nice relationship with him that way. There was no competition, no critique really, critiques that would really get to me.

He was very scruffy looking. A lot of the time I knew him, he only shaved every three or four days and he tended to walk around, certainly in the summer, in flip-flops and shirts, and he looked like a vagrant. I think he enjoyed that.

Shalin: You think it was deliberate.

Serge: Yes, there was a lot of things that were deliberate that way, as opposed to Philip Rieff who would wear, you know, a straw boater and dress in winged-tipped colors.

Shalin: Equally deliberate but in a different way.

Serge: That's right. I mean, Philip Rieff would dress up and try to look like an Oxford don. Erving Goffman was trying to look like a homeless bum.

Shalin: [Laughing]

Segre: And then Erving would go to the market and buy those three tomatoes (I saw it in one of those things about Erving buying tomatoes), but then he would want to pay with a hundred dollar bill.

[Laughter]

Segre: There were a lot of little oddities about him. He was very good, I found, at spotting things that were fake, whether people or behaviors. Obviously, he was a very good observer that way. I have no experience with observers, but we would be eating in a place and he would say, "Look, that woman is trying to brush her hair on the guy's arm [or ?] neck. You know, at the table." He liked to make these little observations, and I certainly found that interesting, having no experience in that. And he particularly liked poking fun at people who were . . .

Shalin: Full of themselves.

Segre: Yes, who were being pretentious or were affected. This would really drive him wild. He would then turn his cannons on them. And of course that was the end of the '60s and the beginning of the '70s, and it was the time of change in society. I certainly liked to think of myself as being somewhat of a young rebel, and it was fun to be with Erving who was critical of the wise older people.

There are other minor stories, but I think that gives the gist of my memory of Erving.

Shalin: You fill some gaps in other accounts, which is very important. Do you mind if I track back and ask you a few questions?

Segre: No, no, no!

Shalin: Could you focus a bit more on Erving's appearance, the way he dressed up, his athleticism? You said he was about 5'3.

Segre: I think so. And I am about 6'2, so there is a height difference. OK---appearance. I don't think I ever saw Erving dressed up wearing a jacket and tie. Most of the times I saw him he looked what we called "scruffy." Unshaven, and rather sloppy – not sloppily but deliberately dressed poorly, and I might say, he liked that. He liked to be inconspicuous that way.

Shalin: Although if you go to the department or a function, you may be achieving the opposite effect.

Serge: Well, I guess so, I never saw him there. I don't know if he went to the department or taught, whether he would wear a jacket and tie or shaved. I never saw him in an academic [environment].

You asked how he was [athletically]. We played a certain amount of tennis, and he was a pretty good tennis player. There was a privately owned tennis court at the corner of the house where we lived. People who owned the house let the neighbors play on the court, which was very nice of them.

Shalin: For free?

Serge: For free. They had an arrangement that when they wanted to reserve the court for a purpose, they would put a sign out saying, "Court is reserved for four o'clock," you know. I remember once playing with Erving, it was 3:30 and there was a sign saying, "Reserved for four o'clock." Four o'clock came and we were still

playing. Erving said, I think we should leave." I said, "No, Erving, we don't need to. They are very nice, very casual about these things. When they want to play, they will come and tell us to leave." So we played for a few more minutes, and the owner came and said, "We had a sign out. Why didn't you leave as asked?" I said, "I am very sorry. I thought you would just come and tell us to leave." We left, and Erving told me, "You were wrong. Nothing in life is casual."

[Laughter]

Shalin: You would think Erving is the one to flout conventions, but here he is insisting on decorum.

Segre: That's right. I was the one who was wrong, you know. I think he could be bourgeois about those things, "There are certain rules, and you obey certain rules, and don't just assume that you can break certain rules." That was the lesson I took from that.

Shalin: You said you played him a couple of times?

Segre: Yes, I played him; he was pretty good. And I think he went skiing too. He was not an exceptional but certainly a very reasonable athlete.

Shalin: Some say he was a wrestler in high school.

Segre: He could have been. I think he was fairly strong, and of course, being quite short and quite light, he would have been . . .

Shalin: Competitive in his weight category.

Segre: Yes. I would not be surprised to hear that he was a wrestler in high school.

Shalin: Did you keep score or just rally when you played tennis?

Segre: We played sets.

Shalin: How would you describe his court manners? I know it is hard to look back and recall, but was he eager to win?

Segre: I don't remember. I think I would have remembered if he was particularly intent on winning or if it didn't matter one way or another. I think he was probably average that way. He certainly wasn't over intent on winning.

Shalin: Were your skills roughly on par?

Segre: Yes, comparable.

Shalin: And Erving really enjoyed playing tennis. It was more than just going through the motions.

Segre: Yes. He certainly enjoyed it, and he enjoyed skiing. Erving was very fit. A little bit like, not quite like, but, have you ever seen movies with Jimmy Cagney?

Shalin: Yes.

Segre: OK, he was short and scrappy, you know. You told me he was a wrestler, and I wouldn't be surprised if you told me he was a boxer in his youth.

Shalin: You know, when Erving did his research for *Asylums*, he was serving as a tennis instructor at St Elizabeth's.

Segre: I don't know if that was tennis, I think it was an athletic instructor.

Shalin: I have heard it from someone.

Segre: I asked him once about that, "Why were you an athletic instructor there?" He said, "Well, I didn't want to be an inmate, and I didn't want to be associated with the doctors." He wanted to pick an intermediate role where he was neither one nor the other. You probably also know that he knew Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeth's.

Shalin: Yes, I've heard about that.

Segre: They were friends.

Shalin: I didn't know that. I knew the two interacted.

Segre: They did interact, and Erving said he enjoyed that. I don't know how profound their interaction was. . . . I don't know if they talked about anything more than, you know, lifting weights or something like that. I can imagine Erving being an athletic instructor in a place like St. Elizabeth's. He could certainly do that, just like he could be a croupier in gambling casinos. He could pass for all of those things quite easily.

Shalin: How would you describe the level of Erving's tennis skills? Could he keep a rally, did he have a good backhand?

Segre: Yes, absolutely. I am not a superb tennis player but I was on a high school tennis team. I am a reasonably good tennis player, and it was fun playing with Erving.

Shalin: He could keep up; he could win just as often as lose.

Segre: Absolutely. Yes, yes. He was more tenacious than a super-powerful payer. Also, let me see, at the time we played Erving was 15 years older than I was.

Shalin: He was born in 1922, so . . .

Serge: And I am born in 1938.

Shalin: He was quite a few years older. The photos I have seen show Erving compact and trim.

Segre: Absolutely, yes. There is nothing particularly distinguishing about Erving that I would say. You see some people and say, "Oh, he looks like a famous someone or other." Erving could pass. You saw him in ragged clothes and unshaven, you could believe he was a bum. On the other hand, if he dressed up, although I never saw

him that way, I am sure he would look perfectly fine. I think Erving enjoyed a certain kind of anonymity.

Shalin: One of the hypotheses I play with is that with Erving, there was no sharp line separating his scholarly endeavors from his private life. He was always on the lookout, searching for patterns. He couldn't help but notice, just as you describe him. He was a participant observer, and blending with the world and being a fly on the wall was an asset.

Segre: Yes, and I think in that sense, you might find it interesting to talk to Jonathan Rubinstein.

Shalin: I'd love to. Do you know how he can be reached?

Segre: I haven't talked to him in many years. He is somewhere in the New York City now. He didn't want to be associated with the university. In fact, he never was. After the book on *City Police*, he continued his interest in the underworld. One of the things he was trying to learn from Erving was what is called "urban ethnography."

Shalin: Was he younger than Erving?

Segre: Yes, 20 years younger.

Shalin: OK, he was looking up to Erving.

Segre: Absolutely.

Shalin: What kind of a relationship they had? Was it informal, did it have a student-teacher element?

Serge: I saw them as having an informal relationship. But there clearly was a more formal part to it too, not in an official sense, since Johnny had gotten a Ph.D. in history and was not looking for an academic career. He didn't want academic attachment.

Shalin: It was more of a mentoring relationship.

Segre: That is what he was looking for.

Shalin: Did they get along?

Segre: They got along well. Every time I was there, they got along very well. Johnny tried to model himself a little bit on Erving, talk like Erving, see things like Erving.

Shalin: And Erving approved of his interest.

Segre: Absolutely. I imagine you can obtain a copy of his book *City Police*.

Shalin: I didn't read it, but I have seen references to it. His name comes up in one of the newspaper accounts that are posted in the "Goffman in the News" section of our website.

Segre: As I said, they had a particularly free relationship because Johnny was not dependent in any way on Erving for career advancement. I had other friends who knew Erving as well – Frank Furstenberg who was in the sociology department, and a couple of people who were at the Annenberg School – Sol Worth and Larry Gross. Dell Hymes was there too. There was a group there that Erving interacted with somewhat. Dell was more of a linguist; Sol was Erving's age.

Shalin: What was Sol's last name?

Segre: Worth – W-o-r-t-h. He had been a painter, and then he went to advertising, and then at 40 he quit commercial life and became a professor and started making anthropology movies. Sol is dead now.

Shalin: Dell Hymes also recently died.

Serge: I know, I know.

Shalin: But Larry Gross is alive.

Serge: Larry Gross is alive. He is now at the Annenberg School at the University of Southern California. He would have a lot to say about Erving too. I think you might want to talk to him and to Furstenberg.

Shalin: Maybe when your interview is transcribed and ready to be posted on the web, I will try to contact him and see if he can join forces with us.

Segre: What kind of a relationship Larry and Erving has?

Shalin: I think not that close.

Segre: I don't really know what Erving's professional relationships really were with sociology and anthropology.

Shalin: Those might have been complicated. He was a Benjamin Franklin Professor.

Segre: Yes, he was officially in the anthropology department but he was more of a sociologist than an anthropologist. But he was wary of the sociology department, I think.

Shalin: Did he indicate the nature of his wariness? Was it that he liked to be marginal or that he didn't fit into any institution?

Segre: I think, more of the latter.

Shalin: Your sense is that he was not particularly comfortable there.

Segre: I know he worked very hard, but I don't know how he fit into the university at all.

Shalin: He had that special appointment along with Rieff, which gave him a lot of freedom. He could choose whatever he wanted to teach or teach nothing at all. He had quite a ride there.

Segre: He did. At that time there were, I think, 8 or 9 Benjamin Franklin professors. There was one in the law too, one at the economics department, you know. But there was a very small number.

Shalin: You mentioned a few things related to wine and food, I am trying to see if there are any patterns there. Anything you have noticed in regard to Erving's food and wine preferences, restaurant behavior, and so on?

Segre: I don't remember any particularly terrible behaviors in restaurants [**laughing**]. My experience was that he knew quite a bit about food and wine. There were certain things that he knew, or he liked to think that he knew about wine, food and furniture. I remember going to New York with him to buy wine. He wasn't obsessed by it, he never gave the impression of being [**fanatic**] about it, but I think he knew quite a bit about it.

Shalin: Do you recall any of Erving's preferences?

Segre: You mean Burgundy over . . . [**laughing**]

Shalin: Whatever, I am quite ignorant about those things. I was born in Russia where drinking is a pastime, but they don't usually drink wine there. It is vodka and such.

Segre: [**Laughing**]

Shalin: This is one of the reasons I couldn't stand being there and had to leave.

Segre: Well, I don't think they drink too much wine in Canada either. But Berkeley became quite a gourmet place. And I think he went along with that. He kept talking about his wine collection. I think he had quite a fine wine collection in the basement.

Shalin: Did Erving have any parties?

Segre: Not that I know of.

Shalin: Have you ever visited his house?

Segre: Yes, I went to his house fairly often, but I don't remember ever being there at a dinner party.

Shalin: Not for any social occasion.

Segre: Not for social occasions. I was never at his house when there were more than six people there, let's say.

Shalin: It wouldn't be a formal dinner.

Segre: We would usually be sitting around and then going out.

Shalin: Perhaps he didn't like to entertain when he was a bachelor.

Segre: In fact, I can't remember ever eating anything that Erving cooked. I probably did, but I can't remember.

Shalin: Anything you recall about Erving's house? I understand he had some artwork.

Segre: Yes. When I first knew him, he lived across the street. And then he rented a very beautiful house in Philadelphia on 4th street, which was really a remarkable 18th century house. I think he was given an option to buy it, but he refused to buy it because, he said, it cost too much. I would tease him sometimes, saying that I thought he had been stupid for not buying it. And I think he might have felt that. Then he moved to this place near Rittenhouse Square, which was also quite beautiful, and I think that's where he was living with Gillian. It was quite nice, but not as beautiful as this 4th street house. But he had very good taste. He had a good taste in furniture and in decorations. Again, it wasn't strongly bourgeois, it wasn't strongly eclectic; it was just nice pieces that he collected.

Shalin: Did you sense any pride in . . .

Segre: No.

Shalin: It was a place to live rather than to showcase.

Segre: Yes. I never saw Erving expressing any pride in anything. He didn't like to express emotions that way, either a pride or a sorrow or intimacy.

Shalin: Any other emotions you noticed in Erving?

Segre: No.

Shalin: He was not much into signing in the flesh.

Segre: Yes, he was lively; he was a good company; he was interesting, a little sarcastic, but you didn't go beyond that with Erving, or at least I didn't go beyond that with Erving.

Shalin: You said Erving had a unique way of insulting people in an interesting way.

Segre: Yes. Um-m-m, it would usually be, and I am trying to remember, it would usually be a one line comment. For instance, somebody would be wearing a turquoise ring and Erving would say, "Aha, trying to pass for being an Indian Chief?"

Shalin: Quite benign, in other words.

Segre: Quite benign.

Shalin: He could be more cutting than that.

Serge: I don't think I was ever present at one of these episodes when Erving would say something and somebody would break out crying. I never saw that kind of things.

Shalin: It could be that those involved in such episodes acted in a way Erving saw as phony.

Segre: If you were in a vulnerable state, Erving wouldn't take that into account and say, "Well, you really did pretty well," you know. I think Erving would say the same thing whether you were feeling scared, fearful, secure, or vulnerable.

Shalin: He was himself and didn't adjust for a particular person.

Segre: Yes.

Shalin: Between 1964 and until his death Erving was a single parent. It wasn't that common in those days, particularly for a father.

Segre: No, it wasn't. Most people remarried.

Shalin: Do you think it was because of Tom?

Segre: I don't know! I don't know how much he was hurt in his first marriage, how much he wanted to maintain independence and detachment. I think Gillian was very good; Gillian is a very nice person.

Shalin: She seemed to be down to earth, sober-minded.

Segre: And she is a Canadian too.

[Laughter]

Segre: She was very good at dealing with Erving. I think, let's see, when they met . . . I am trying to think, I guess around 1974. So Erving would be in his 50s, early 50s, and I think she was in her late 30s. I do remember him once saying, which would be kind of rare for him to say, that women were at their most beautiful in their late 30s. And I think this was because he felt that they weren't all that young. . . . Gillian was very good at rolling with the punches, teasing Erving if he needed to be teased.

Shalin: She could stand up to him.

Segre: Yes, yes. And I think she also felt secure professionally, and she was close enough to him to have some contact there, but removed enough that she didn't feel in any sense that she would be judged either as a disciple or an associate. She did different kinds of things. I think she studied Creole languages and things like that.

Shalin: She has graces that are not easy to cultivate.

Segre: He was not an easy man to live with. She did very well.

Shalin: Was she divorced at the time?

Segre: I believe so.

Shalin: You said that Erving was a bachelor and that he dated – was he active on that front?

Segre: I think so, yes. I mean, I never knew in all that time about any long-term relationships. By long-term I mean a week or two [?] [**laughing**].

Shalin: There was no one steady date.

Serge: A few times I met women he was with, but it was never more than once.

Shalin: I always ask those who knew Erving about things he felt passionate about, that he longed for – food, drink, music, entertainment, relationships, and so on. This is the third dimension in the portrait that ancient biographers felt we need to understand a person, in addition to the person's thoughts and deeds. This is what is known as *vita voluptuosa*, which complements *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa*. Any thoughts about that side of Erving's personality? Again, you may not have anything to say about that, or not care to share, and this is fine. But if you feel you can shed any light, please do.

Segre: I don't have any.

Shalin: For instance, was there any pattern when it came to Erving's dates, anything that stood out about them?

Segre: No. No. I only remember . . . I mean most of the time, almost all of the time, I saw Erving, there were no women. He was not with a woman. I think I only remember twice seeing him with a woman, you know. He wasn't particularly warm or affectionate with them.

Shalin: Anything you recall Erving was passionate about? And I mean it broadly – any kind of things that animated him.

Segre: No, I never saw any. He wasn't cold, but I never saw any sense of passion in him. He was engaged, but I never sensed that there were things that he cared deeply about. I read one interview where somebody remembered [how Erving responded] when Kennedy was shot. He said, "What happened to the stock market?"

Shalin: [Laughing]

Segre: It's the kind of Erving's remarks that one remembers, clearly.

Shalin: They are not out of character, so far as you are concerned.

Segre: It is not out of character. It does not mean he was cold. We didn't talk about politics or things like that. I never quite understood why he left Berkeley.

Shalin: I meant to ask you about that. Do you have any hypothesis? You were at Berkeley yourself.

Segre: Ye-e-s.

Shalin: You didn't know Erving at Berkeley.

Segre: No, I didn't. I knew a lot of people who left Berkeley because of the political scene and so on. So far as I can tell, Erving left Berkeley because he wanted a place where he could work and do whatever he wanted to without being tied to a department and teaching and all those kinds of things. And I don't know whether he thought that would be an easier place to raise a child in Philadelphia. That may be. I know a lot of people from that period who had difficulty raising children in Berkeley. It was such a wild place at the time. He may have felt it would be easier to do so in Philadelphia.

Shalin: You feel it might have entered his mind.

Segre: There was a lot of drugs and a lot of wild behavior. It was a hard place to raise children. On the other hand, it was very beautiful, very interesting. But as far as I can tell the main reason Erving left was because he just wanted freedom. And he might have wanted more anonymity. Philadelphia is a more anonymous place.

Shalin: You mentioned that movie where Erving made a bit of a spectacle of himself.

Segre: Yes, "I am Curious (Yellow)." I don't even remember what that movie was about.

Shalin: It's a kind of coming of age, sexual exploration movie.

Segre: Yes.

Shalin: How did you interpret Erving's remark? I want to make sure I understood the context – you had already finished watching the movie and were leaving the place.

Segre: Yes, he was just making fun of people who were there.

Shalin: And on the way out, Erving said . . .

Segre: I remember him saying, "Perverts."

Shalin: That they would come to see such flick.

Segre: Yes. And I think he was just making fun of them. But it wasn't in any way that would have gotten us into trouble. I am not even sure anybody heard it, you know.

Shalin: It was probably a joke he made for your sake.

Segre: That's right.

Shalin: Did you go to any other movies with Erving?

Segre: You also mentioned another movie, "Super Fly" when Erving said that you wouldn't see this mixed audience 10 years earlier.

Serge: Do you remember when you saw it?

Shalin: That is also in the '70s. . . . He said you wouldn't see the crowd mixing and no sociologist would have predicted that an interracial audience would be seeing this.

Segre: Yes.

Shalin: You saw it in the 70s, but 10 years earlier, in the '60s, I would think that the racial mixing was already common. Maybe I am not that familiar with this country's history.

Segre: Maybe not.

Shalin: It was the Civil Rights movement.

Segre: That's later, sort of late '60s.

Shalin: So you wouldn't be able to say which movies Erving liked.

Segre: No, I wouldn't.

Shalin: The same is with art.

Segre: No, I don't remember him being all that interested in art and music. He liked to go to France, he liked the Riviera, but I don't remember him wanting to go to see museums or anything like that.

Shalin: You know there are stories about Erving studying casinos, learning to be a dealer, and so on.

Segre: I know that.

Shalin: Here in Vegas I spoke about Erving to people in the know, but they say the record wouldn't go that far back. This topic didn't come up in your conversations.

Segre: No it didn't.

Shalin: You said you never spoke to Erving about politics.

Segre: No.

Shalin: Several people told me they had no idea what were Erving's political views. Do you have any thoughts about that? Perhaps he was outside that mode of being, outside of politics altogether.

Segre: Yes that's what I would think. It's curious that with all the agitation of the '60s and the '70s, I don't remember him ever expressing any interest, any feelings about it.

Shalin: There is no way of locating Erving in a traditional political geography of the "left" and the "right."

Segre: I would guess him to be sort of middle of the road, but I have no way of knowing that.

Shalin: What about Erving's Jewishness?

Serge: It never came up.

Shalin: You didn't notice anything in particular.

Segre: No, I didn't. I don't even know if he had a Bar Mitzvah.

Shalin: From my conversations with Erving's sister and cousins, I know that he had a Bar Mitzvah, that he spoke movingly about his mother on that occasion, even though the household he grew up in was not particularly religious. It must have rubbed off on him culturally.

Segre: I would imagine.

Shalin: Going back to Erving as a single parent, you noticed that the relationship he had with Tom was affectionate. Anything you recall in particular?

Serge: They would call each other [?]. Certain people they knew, they would give them nicknames. Tom adapted very well to Erving's manners. My sense was that it was a very good relationship.

Shalin: Did Tom resemble his father?

Segre: No! No. Tom was more conventionally handsome.

Shalin: Was he taller?

Segre: Yes, he was a good bit taller. You know, it was hard to say, because he was 30 years younger, but he seemed to be quite a handsome young man.

Dmitri, I think I have to go now.

Shalin: Oh, Gino, I am sorry I am dragging it out.

Segre: No!

Shalin: This is terrific stuff. I will transcribe the interview and send you the text.

Segre: Sure. And feel free to call me if you have any other questions, but I just realized it is 6:15 in Philadelphia.

Shalin: Yes, I lose track of time when I am talking about Erving. Thank you so much. I may call on you again.

Segre: That would be great. And the people you might also want to talk to are Jonathan Rubinstein, Larry Gross and maybe Fran Furstenberg.

Shalin: If you find a way to track Jonathan . . .

Segre: I will try to do that.

Shalin: It is a bit difficult to do so from Las Vegas.

Segre: I did try to look him up. Jonathan Rubinstein is not that rare of a name, but I will try again, and if I find him, I will email you, OK?

Shalin: Thank you so much.

Segre: OK, Dmitri.

Shalin: Bye-bye.

Segre: Bye-bye.

[End of the Recording]