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Dmitri Shalin Interview with Victor Lidz about Erving Goffman entitled "Remembering Erving Goffman"

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Remembering Erving Goffman

Victor Lidz

Dr. Victor Lidz has given his permission to post this communication on the EGA site.

[Posted 01-06-09]

From: Lidz, Victor M

Sent: Tuesday, January 06, 2009 2:20 PM

To: 'Renee C. Fox'

Subject: RE: [Fwd: Re: Remembering Erving Goffman]

Renee,

Thank you for the link to your interview with Shalin. I found it very interesting and insightful as well as telling me specific things that I had not known.

I have a few comments. One is that there are no real Goffman papers at Penn. The Demography Library in the McNeil Building has a file cabinet of reprints he had collected from other people. There is some interesting material there, such as, a file of Garfinkel's papers. With a few of the reprints, there are brief notes exchanged with the authors. But not anything that sheds very deep light on Erving. I learned of that file cabinet from Winkin when I met him in France. When my Japanese colleague was coming to Philadelphia with his student, Nanako Hayami, who works on Goffman, I spoke with Gillian Sankoff briefly to find out what papers there might be and where. She said that Erving's instructions to her were that he had published "everything he wanted to say" and did not want to give scholars access to anything else. I guess that implies that there are papers that were not destroyed, but that she is not allowing anyone to examine them.

Second, I think someone should mention his daughter, Alice, in the Shalin commentaries. She was, of course, very young when he died and couldn't directly have absorbed the ethnographic tradition from him. However, I have heard her present at two of Eli's conferences. She has been doing outstanding and very brave fieldwork with a nearly total dedication to it. Her talks have also been extraordinarily good for a graduate student's presentations. She is carrying on a tradition, although I haven't perceived the kind of focus on concepts that Erving's work had.

Third, I have a clear memory of what Eviatar told me at the time about Erving's complaints about his plans for his dissertation study. At the point

where he had already taken your suggestion to study time in the hospital setting – and that seemed a reasonable way of proceeding to me – he came to me to talk about the situation and ask for advice. He said then that Erving was claiming that it was not possible to do the kind of study he was planning, abstracting the time-related phenomena from the institutional arrangements at the hospital, without first conducting a conventional general ethnography of the setting. I don't, of course, know whether that is what Erving was actually saying at the stage of the exchanges, as I wasn't present in the discussion of Eviatar's proposal. But I do have a very clear memory that Eviatar articulated that as the issue Erving was then raising as an objection. Eviatar was convinced that Erving was wrong and was planning to proceed as he had planned, but clearly he was worried both that Erving had raised such a strong objection to his proposal and that there was a possibility that Erving would prove right and the project would fail.

Victor