

Erving Goffman: The Reluctant Apprentice

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The intellectual relationship between Erving Goffman and Everett C. Hughes is explored in the context of an apprenticeship model derived from correspondence between the two sociologists. Goffman is identified as a "reluctant apprentice" because his work and his letters to Hughes display a tension between a striking originality and a fidelity to his "master." Three phases of their ambivalent relationship are described and an explanation for Goffman's reluctant acknowledgment of Hughes's influence is briefly explored.

Among the many differences that divide the sociological profession, one seems most fundamental: some sociologists investigate the social world and others investigate the investigators. The first sort of sociologist often holds the second sort—those who train their sociological eye on sociologists themselves and believe that the personal dimension of ideas demands similar attention as the investigation of the larger world—in a kind of disdain. The critics hold that such a "sociology of sociology" distracts the discipline from its only proper role: understanding the social world. Nothing good can come from prying into people's private lives, reading their correspondence, and interviewing their friends. Indeed, sociology advances, many investigators maintain, insofar as it leaves the person behind.

Erving Goffman was decidedly of the first sort of sociologist. A consummate investigator of the social world, he discouraged others from studying his own life and urged them instead to read his books and advance the understanding of society in their own way. Consistent with this stance, he granted few interviews and preferred questions about his ideas to those about his life (Verhoeven 1993; Winkin 1984). Furthermore, the executor of Goffman's estate, abiding by his wishes, has closed his personal records to those who would investigate his life (Winkin 1999:19). All this has made it very difficult for those who are inclined to study Goffman's biography along with his ideas. They have had to compensate for the lack of access to personal documents by finding other sources of information. Winkin's (1988a, 1988b, 1992, 1993, 1999) efforts to reconstruct Goffman's intellectual biography, for example, have relied heavily on interviews with friends and colleagues, along with field trips

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to Goffman's research sites and attempts to track down the subjects of his study. And Lemert's (1997) recent attempt to reconstruct "Goffman" turns on the interpretive device of broad contextual analysis. My own work (Jaworski 1997: chap. 2), linking ideas to deeper personal relations and the intellectual and moral traditions they represent, accepts these methods as basic to good research. But it also tries to ground arguments in primary data provided by archival sources, such as correspondence and other unpublished documents.

This article studies Goffman's relationship to Everett C. Hughes using archival resources now available to researchers. It provides a framework derived from primary data that has the potential to shed light both on the details of their particular intellectual relationship and on intellectual relationships more generally.¹ The Goffman-Hughes relation is largely underappreciated in Goffman studies, a situation that results mainly from a dearth of reliable documents. What we do know is sketchy, composed of isolated bits of information: Goffman was a student of Hughes at the University of Chicago in the late 1940s and early 1950s; he took Hughes's course on institutions, from which he borrowed the term "total institutions" (Burns 1992:142); his dissertation was not well received by Hughes and other committee members (Winkin 1988b:81); Hughes considered the young Goffman a "smart aleck" (Winkin 1988b:35). The following framework advances our understanding of their relationship beyond these isolated facts. It situates Goffman's approach to sociology in the context of a particular type of intellectual relationship, what I am calling a "reluctant apprenticeship."²

Apprenticeships are a form of work in which one learns a trade or practice from close association with a master. Reciprocal obligations define the relationship: the master has a duty to teach the craft, and the apprentice, in turn, is obligated to show fealty to the master. As the history of the human sciences shows, the dynamics of such relationships often depend on the degree of equality and independence within them. There have been admiring and supportive relationships, as with Engels's relationship with Marx. Or, like Comte and Saint-Simon, helpful and subservient partners later rebel in fiery rejection. There are exploitive relationships, team collaborations, father-son apprenticeships, and sycophantic alliances, among many others. Robert K. Merton (1985) once wrote of himself as an "unruly apprentice" to Harvard's George Sarton. Goffman's relationship to Hughes was unlike any of these. He started by acknowledging and even cataloging his debt to Hughes, only later to hide or mask it, then, finally, during intellectual maturity, to acknowledge it yet again.

PHASE ONE: ANNOUNCING THE APPRENTICESHIP

The first phase of this "reluctant apprenticeship" is represented by an early article, "On Cooling the Mark Out." Goffman (1952:451) includes this sentence in a note: "The approach that this paper attempts to utilize is taken from Everett C. Hughes of the University of Chicago." He goes on to cite Hughes and his lectures three additional times in the paper, more than in any other publication.³ Clearly, Goffman is

announcing his apprenticeship and his intellectual debt to his teacher. He is still at this time a graduate student, with master's degree in hand but no Ph.D.

Goffman not only adopts the theme "adaptation to loss" from Hughes. He assimilates other elements as well. Among them is Hughes's tendency to approach his topic through what Burke (1936) called a "perspective by incongruity." Hughes ([1951] 1971b) describes his approach in these now-famous words, published a year before Goffman's own essay: "The comparative student of man's work learns about doctors by studying plumbers; and about prostitutes by studying psychiatrists." Hughes believed that the prestige of the subject had little bearing on the sociological value of the research. The work of plumbers and doctors is revealing because both "practice esoteric techniques for the benefit of people in distress" (Hughes [1951] 1971b:88). And prostitutes and psychiatrists share the problem of becoming personally involved with their clients. Moreover, studying the plumber to understand the doctor had a strategic value. Plumbers are less likely to shield themselves from scrutiny and, thus, more likely to reveal their conduct than the more protective physician.

In this approach, Hughes was following not so much Burke—although he gave the method a name—as his own teacher, Robert Park. Park showed Hughes the importance of examining things that belong in the same series. And this may involve showing how socially distant things, such as occupations or races of differing status, are united on a higher intellectual plane. Hughes's work is replete with examples of this principle. To cite only two examples, he showed that "dirty work" is a feature of both totalitarian and democratic regimes, and he revealed that whites and blacks alike face "dilemmas and contradictions of status" (Hughes 1971d).

Park's methodological dictate merged nicely with Hughes's father's equalitarianism. The Rev. Charles A. Hughes was a Methodist minister in southern Ohio with strong convictions on racial equality. His sermons on racial brotherhood during the troubled decade of the 1920s once provoked the Ku Klux Klan to burn a cross on his front lawn (Thompson and Hughes 1958:3). Hughes inherited his father's passionate attachment to the human race—all of it. But he traded his father's pulpit and passionate sermons for the scholarly lectern. By following Park's principle, Hughes was able to demonstrate intellectually how we are all one under the skin.

In addition to bringing together "the humble and proud" (Hughes 1971d:417-27) in a sort of intellectual ecumenism, Hughes's work exhibits a naturalistic or phenomenological preference for lived experience. As others have indicated (Coser 1994), many of his keenest insights derived from his own experience and from stories told by the worldly Robert Park. His attunement to language expresses this deep commitment to living developments that bubble up from the people, as opposed to those—like neologisms—that are imposed from above.

Finally, Hughes had his eye trained on universal themes. For all his emphasis on the details of people's lives, those data held value only insofar as they contributed to more generalized knowledge. It is in this sense that Becker and his colleagues (1968:x) wrote of Hughes when they describe his "peculiar double vision, which

sees the specific and the general almost at once." What Hughes wrote of Park might apply, with small modification, to himself as well.

He was interested in current goings on, but never content until he could put a news story into some universal theme of human interaction. Thus came the apparent anomaly, that the man who wanted to make sociology deal with the news was also the one who based his scheme on the work of the most abstract of all sociologists, Georg Simmel. (Hughes [1964] 1971c:549)

In sum, the perspective by incongruity, the naturalism, the goal of generalization—each of these Hughesian elements found its way into Goffman's early work. One sees Goffman's assimilation of Hughes's approach in "On Cooling the Mark Out," when he learns about psychotherapists by studying con men, when he draws on the argot of the criminal underworld and the idiom of his day, and when he generalizes the process of "cooling the mark out" from criminal fraud to everyday life. Burns (1992:16) contended that "On Cooling the Mark Out" was one of Goffman's most "Goffmanesque" works. By incorporating all the above features, it may also be his most "Hughesian."⁴

PHASE TWO: CONCEALING THE APPRENTICESHIP

The second phase of Goffman's apprenticeship began soon after the first. In his report "The Service Station Dealer" (1953b), written for Lloyd Warner, Goffman takes his central theoretical structure from Hughes, but without citing him or his work. In the 1940s Hughes turned to issues of social stratification, exploring inconsistencies in the American class structure. His central contribution to this field was the concept "dilemma of status," an extension of role theory into controversial territory. Published in 1945, "Dilemmas and Contradictions of Status" became an almost instant classic. There Hughes examined the difficulties faced by the entrance of "new people"—blacks, women, and others—into the ranks of postwar industry. He carefully analyzed the experience of high-status professionals from low-status race or gender categories, as well as the irreconcilable expectations—the dilemmas—faced by workers in mixed industries.

Goffman makes this latter concept central to his study of the service station dealer. Based on interviews with some 204 dealers in the Chicago area, the study explores the complex attitudes of dealers toward their work, customers, and company suppliers. In this respect, Goffman's study probably resembles hundreds of other studies of the era. But Goffman (1953b:72) also identifies service dealers as a "dilemma-ridden" occupation. For example, this occupation frees the dealer from direct supervision by a boss but requires strict dependence on a supplier. In addition, dealers may engage in expressive displays of masculine behavior but also must cater to middle-class standards of, for example, cleanliness and courtesy. And so on. Caught in these multiple contradictions, the service station dealer experiences a high degree of frustration, from which he adjusts either well or not.

This analytic focus marks Goffman's study as Hughesian in nature. And, as

Hughes ([1945] 1971a:141–42) notes, to the extent that "dilemmas of status" was an updated and elaborated version of Park's notion of "marginal man," Goffman's own early study falls squarely into this Chicago tradition.

During this long middle phase, Goffman's published writings occasionally give Hughes a respectful citation, but they contain no hint of the extent of his intellectual debt, or of the continuing "behind-the-scenes" relationship. A good contrast in this respect is Lewis A. Coser, who consistently records his intellectual debt to Merton throughout his long and prolific career. Goffman, by contrast, seldom cites Hughes, let alone publicly praises him; yet they regularly corresponded and met at meetings and other occasions from the 1950s up to Goffman's death in 1982. The extant correspondence reads as always mutually respectful, often intellectually stimulating, and sometimes intimate. On at least one occasion, Goffman called Hughes his "father" and on another his "master." Hughes took no offense at either title.⁵ Goffman also sent him copies of his books and drafts of his papers, to which Hughes would respond in his usual fashion of sending notes stimulated by the reading, along with references to related publications. For his part, Hughes sent Goffman personal stories or ideas and encouraged him to develop the sociological ideas implicit in them.

In November 1961 Hughes wrote to tell Goffman that he was reading *Asylums* and taking notes on it, and to offer a comment on a single line from the book (Hughes 1961). Writing a quick letter to record some spur-of-the-moment thoughts on reading an essay or book was typical of Hughes. Goffman's response was also typical: warm and personal. He wrote, thanking Hughes for the note about *Asylums*, and commented: "To have as one's teacher someone better than oneself, who reads what one writes and likes it, is rather a special experience, in fact, I'm afraid, a family feeling" (Goffman 1961a). Such intimations of paternal regard are revealed only behind the scenes. In his publications, his apprenticeship to Hughes is barely evident, and sometimes even struck from the record.

One such case of deliberate omission appeared in Goffman's "Role Distance" (1961b). The published version omits two concluding paragraphs found in the first draft that disclosed the essay's Hughesian provenance.

In his 1980 interview with Yves Winkin, Goffman described his understanding of the Hughesian tradition as a kind of "structural social psychology" (Winkin 1988b:236). This line of inquiry studied human commonalities that derived, not from a universal human nature, but—as he explained elsewhere—from "the basic structural principles by which societies are built up" (Goffman 1959:35). Clearly, Goffman considered his own work a contribution to this tradition. He told Winkin as much when he said, "I was formed by Hughes and *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* is really in the Hughesian tradition of structural social psychology" (Winkin 1988b:236). The draft of "Role Distance" (Goffman 1959), written twenty-one years before this interview, contains a similar admission. In the two concluding paragraphs struck from the published version, he used the same term "structural social psychology" to draw the connection between his work and that of others. By elimi-

nating those lines from the published version of "Role Distance," Goffman erased his relation to the Hughesian tradition of inquiry, and the myth of Goffman as *sui generis* was created.

If Goffman publicly avoided acknowledging Hughes's importance, Hughes himself obliquely hinted at it. In his review of Goffman's *Interaction Ritual*, Hughes (1969b) praises the book—he calls Goffman a sociological Konrad Lorenz. He also signals his kinship with his former student by identifying the book's theme of risk as a subject that he, Hughes, sought to study. He writes:

Early in my career I kept notes for a general sociology which I might write. One of the themes was to have been that of risk; men create risks for each other, then build institutions to standardize, exploit, and spread them by various devices, some of which are called "insurance," others "manners," "law," "kinship," etc. Goffman has dealt with risk in a number of ingenious analyses in these essays. (1969b:425)

After identifying a convergence of interest on a similar theme, he points to a significant departure in the subject area of study. Goffman, Hughes notes, takes "his material from various kinds of gambling and from conduct that is called deviant," whereas Hughes finds interesting the analysis of "standard, ongoing, and approved enterprises and activities of society," such as risk in medical, economic, and other central institutions. Always the teacher, Hughes (1969b:426) suggested that while Goffman may never take up the study of such institutions, "others should try it." Hughes did not realize, or, perhaps, care to admit, that Goffman's focus on the "neglected situation" (Goffman [1964] 1968) deliberately departed from Hughes's institutional frame of analysis (see Helmes-Hayes 1998). In this respect, and as Greg Smith (1989, [1989] 1994) has shown, Goffman, not Hughes, faithfully followed Simmel's microsociological method.

PHASE THREE: REAFFIRMING THE APPRENTICESHIP

In the final phase of the apprenticeship, Goffman both publicly and privately reaffirmed his debt to the master. The private acknowledgment came in a 1969 letter in which Goffman responds to a long letter from Hughes that was occasioned, in part, by Goffman's *Time* magazine profile earlier that year. Hughes's (1969a) brilliant letter offers a series of reflections on lessons from his teacher, Robert Park, on left-handedness and other "smaller peculiarities," as well as on his relation to his own former students. Goffman clearly was moved by the letter, and moved to write a paean to his former teacher. Given its value to our story, I quote the letter in full.

That was a very nice letter on *Time*, time, and left handedness. It made me feel what I do when I read one of your book reviews. There is the command through memory of one's past, something that must come from what a novelist has and from having respect for past events because they were events. I have none of it, and still at my late age look only forward. And more important, there is that commitment to the jointly lived life of one's discipline that leads you to write

book reviews. ~~They~~ **start in the first place. No one** insists on it; you can't put the pieces in a bibliography. They are something extra, something that won't get paid for, something to show that even when an official occasion is not in progress, a man should be involving himself in the life that exists between himself and others. They always tell me, those pieces of yours, what I am not that I should be. They do what your seminars did for us (besides, that is, giving us the conceptual framework we would later live off), they do what you may not think you did and what the *Festschrift* fails maybe to show that you did; they provide, to put it simply, a sense that sociological inquiry is real. Underneath it all, I think that is the task teachers are really involved in: to demonstrate that what they do is substantial and real. The point about yourself is that you did the job for so many of us—not because you had many students but because you had that effect on so many of the ones you had. And you do it still. And that is the lesson of the master. Thanks. (Goffman 1969)

Public acknowledgment would have to wait another decade, until 1980, when Goffman granted interviews first to Winkin (1984), then to Verhoeven (1993). In both interviews, Goffman speaks of Hughes as a significant early influence. Tom Burns, who knew both Hughes and Goffman personally, goes even further. He says that Hughes was "undoubtedly" the "most influential of his teachers" (Burns 1992:11).

CONCLUSION: APPRENTICESHIPS AND CREATIVE ORIGINALITY

If this pattern of reluctant acknowledgment holds true, what explains the relationship? Why was Goffman reluctant to acknowledge in print his debt to Hughes, in particular, and to the Chicago tradition, in general? The answer can be found, perhaps, in the requirements of genius. Genius always has a social location, but it must clear a path for creativity. As Rousseau notes somewhere, the prime mark of genius is refusal to imitate. In this respect, Winkin (1988b:60) is fundamentally correct in arguing that Goffman conducted his dissertation research on a tiny island in the Shetlands in order to escape from the influence of his teachers and give full play to his own natural talent. That early geographic escape symbolizes his lifelong efforts to escape the influence of his past. As he confided to Hughes in that long letter just quoted, Goffman looked "only forward."

In a sense, Goffman's first book was a metaphor for his own career: his work became a stage on which he could invent himself. Still, his self-creation was aided by a number of role models. In addition to Hughes and Warner, there was Birdwhistell, Bateson, and Parsons. All were talented men, brilliant even, and all appreciated their respective intellectual traditions while advancing unique creative projects. But it was from Hughes, his "father figure," that he publicly concealed his indebtedness, to make room for his own creative genius. Such is the way of the "reluctant apprentice": neither parricide nor partner, but radical innovator with respect for one's roots.

Goffman's creative originality, then, grew within a tradition, a heritage to which his work pays tribute. Goffman was of the Chicago school without being derivative (see Jaworski 1997:chap. 2). His originality worked within a tradition—how else could it be? If we can appreciate this fertile tension in Goffman's work—the tension be-

tween originality and tradition—then we will be able both to understand and to build on his legacy.

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NOTES

1. Like all intellectual constructs, the framework presented here should be considered provisional and open to revision once new material becomes available. One possible line of revision is suggested by a reviewer, who reports anecdotal information suggesting that rather than Goffman being a reluctant apprentice, Hughes was a reluctant mentor. While there may be a measure of hesitation at the beginning of all such relationships, the reviewer's strong version of this argument is not supported by the archival data now available.
2. It goes without saying that the present focus on the Goffman-Hughes relationship does not imply that this was the only significant relationship in Goffman's intellectual life. Several reviewers, for example, have emphasized the important role that Lloyd Warner played in Goffman's early career. Warner was admittedly an influential teacher, and nothing here is meant to deny his importance. I do think it is significant, however, that Goffman himself noted, in an early biographical statement, that Warner himself must be seen in relation to Hughes. Goffman wrote: "I was trained at the University of Chicago by Lloyd Warner, who was a student of Everett Hughes" (Schaffner 1957:12).
3. Reprints of Goffman's 1952 article, such as the one in Lemert and Branaman 1997, often omit the notes found in the original article, published in *Psychiatry: Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Processes*.
4. Additional research may, indeed, uncover other connections between the work of these two sociologists. One reviewer points out, for example, that Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* is stylistically similar to Hughes's Ph.D. dissertation, "Study of a Secular Institution" (1928). There may be more than a casual connection between the two works. Goffman had read Hughes's dissertation, and he cites it in his own (Goffman 1953a).
5. "I do not mind your calling me father," Hughes wrote to Goffman on November 25, 1958. Box 26, Everett C. Hughes Papers, Department of Special Collections, University of Chicago Library.

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BOOK REVIEW

A Watched Pot: How We Experience Time

By Michael G. Flaherty

New York: New York University Press

230 pp. cloth

Reviewed by Michael A. Katovich, Texas Christian University

Woody Allen once offered an appraisal of life as miserable, heartbreaking—and over much too quickly. This sums up one of the paradoxes of lived experiential time that Michael Flaherty describes in *A Watched Pot: How We Experience Time*. Flaherty sets out to explicate several ironic twists that inform an individual's experience of time passing. He examines these twists and experiences to "formulate a general theory of lived time" (p. 12) that can provide us with a coherent summary of "the full extent of variation in our lived experience of time" (p. 33).

A Watched Pot includes revisions of several previously published papers turned into distinct chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 acknowledge contributors to a sociology of time, with references to Goffman, Mead, Durkheim, and Zerubavel most prevalent. Although he is impressed with their contributions, Flaherty notes that most sociologists of time have either ignored or attenuated "the subjective experiences of the people who manage and perceive time in various situations" (p. 14). Drawing on James, Schutz, Denzin, and Berger, Flaherty emphasizes the subjective individual who acts with agency and actively perceives the world according to his or her own internal dynamics.

Like Cooley, Flaherty keys on the self as interpreter, evaluator, and judge of one's own experience in time, but, unlike Cooley, Flaherty avoids a solipsistic approach. The active perceiving individual who experiences time and evaluates this experience draws on the markers and organizational referents that people in specific cultures use to separate and distinguish events. As individualistic as we are in Flaherty's terms, we still know about seconds and minutes and calendars and clocks.

Although Flaherty provides a subjective alternative to Mead's social standpoint and Durkheim's emphasis on socialization, he draws heavily on both. Lived experiences take on formal properties that connect individuals to broader patterns of generalized experiences. Researchers can detect such patterns through systematic inquiry for the purpose of discovering subjective "principles that make for 'generic' social processes" (p. 11).