

Marvin Scott – Dmitri Shalin
Correspondence, 2015-2017

December 4, 2015
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Greetings Marvin:

I write to you at the suggestion of Sherri Cavan and in connection with my study of Goffman in Las Vegas where I trace his footprints in Nevada casinos and explore implications of his work on gambling and risk taking for understanding capitalism. I tried to fill as many gaps as I could but some still remain. Perhaps you can fill some of those.

With good wishes, Dmitri

December 15, 2015
Dear Dmitri,

I admire your proposed effort to move from the micro to the macro, from casino gambling to capitalism. However, I think you are making a conceptual error by focusing on casino gambling, which involves aleatory risks without considering agon, the principle of fair competition.

Capitalism combines both agon with alea. It is this combination that is the peculiar feature of horse racing. You would make more headway in your project by studying *The Racing Game*.

Nevertheless, here are some items that you might find relevant:

1. When I was a teaching assistant at Berkeley in the early 60's, a student told me she worked as a dealer in casinos in Vegas and Reno, and her boss was looking for a sociologist to do a study of the gaming action. Asked if I were interested, I told her it was impossible for me, but she might want to talk to Professor Goffman. I don't know what happened after that, nor do I have any information about Goffman's activities at the casinos, except that he was enthralled by the jester Don Rickles, with whom he would trade places if he could. Not able to play Touchstone, he settled for the role of Jacques. Goffman said to do what Rickles does requires an iron stomach, which he did not have.

2. In WAI Goffman cites me twice. Without consulting me, he entitled my dissertation, *The Racing Game*, as "Around the Track." In my view his title was a fine pun, but an ineffective title, like Sherri Cavan's *Liquor License*. Goffman also thanked me for providing an example of the special place of "integrity" as a property of character, which is sometimes found in capitalism, but he did not find it in the casino.

3. On p. 40 of your manuscript you quote a key sentence from WAI: "The world that is gambled is, after all, only a world, and the chance-taker can learn to let go (emphasis added) of it." Just before I moved into Goffman's Berkeley home during the period of his sabbatical at Harvard, we spent a long day talking "crazy wisdom" and I asked a big question: "Maestro, what are we going to do about death?" (When others were not

present I always called him “Maestro,” never “Erving.”) He said that death is just a matter of “letting go” and cited the case of David Hume, adding, “As a gambler, letting go should be no problem for you.”

Best,
Marvin Scott

December 21, 2015
Greetings Marvin:

Thank you so much for your letter and generous feedback on my paper.

I agree that the capitalist mix of *alea* and *agon* calls for close analysis. I didn’t undertake it in my paper, nor did I discuss your work on racing game, which shows how entrepreneurship and gambling intertwine in real life. I hope to do so in a book that develops the themes of my paper. If I manage to write it, I will grapple with your study in earnest.

Gaming, gambling, risk taking at large – all leave room for skill, luck, and corner cutting, albeit to a different degree. An urge to tilt the scales is strong in chess, poker, and Wall Street investment. When robber barons bought the Congressmen and set up monopolies, they aimed to stack the deck. The Sherman (Antitrust) Act can be read as an attempt to make room for *alea* and restore *agon* to its rightful place in economic competition. Still, some players were better positioned to take advantage of the opportunities than others, with those at the bottom – immigrants and blacks in particular – facing worst odds.

I did notice EG’s references to your work when I had read *Racing Game*. And I appreciate your recollections about EG – his possible pathway to a casino job, renaming of your book, admiration for Don Rickles, and particularly his attitude toward death. Several contributors to the Goffman Archives (Cicourel, Fox, Tom Goffman) recall how EG faced death when he was diagnosed with cancer. Judged from these recollections, he was ambivalent.

Wish I could follow up on your observations and learn more about your take on EG’s scholarship and persona. Maybe you can share with EGA users the fascinating memories you communicated to me in your letter. Don’t mean to lean on you, just want to mention the possibility.

Howard Becker recites an episode that involves an exchange between you and EG at a Berkeley seminar. You probably saw his account, but just in case here is the text that Howe provided for the EGA:

August 25, 2007

. . . I occasionally use my reminiscences in my own writing, and here’s a Goffman story that will appear in the new book I have coming out next month from Chicago, *Telling About Society*:

Sometime in the early 1960s, when he was teaching at the University of California in Berkeley, Goffman asked me to come to his seminar to hear a student, Marvin Scott, present his research on horse racing. This excellent research (Scott 1968) dealt with the way the social organization of what he called “the racing game” made it reasonable for some trainers, owners, and jockeys to want their horse to lose, rather than win. That might seem counterintuitive, but the organization of horse racing created incentives for people to behave in ways that seemed on the surface irrational. However, in the course of his presentation, Scott suggested in passing that gamblers, including horse players, sometimes had “winning streaks” or “losing streaks.” Goffman, who had been listening appreciatively until that point, interrupted to say that of course Scott meant that they *thought* they had such streaks of good or bad luck. But Scott said no, these were observable “facts.” Goffman, unwilling to accept such apparently supernatural talk, persisted, appealing to the laws of probability to assure Scott that such “streaks” were

natural occurrences in any long run of tries in such a game as blackjack or craps. (I suppose he had been boning up on these topics in preparation for his research in Las Vegas.) He finally exploded in anger at Scott's "unscientific" insistence on gamblers' luck as a natural phenomenon.)

Best,
Howie

I wonder how Becker's memories accord with yours. There has been an upsurge of interest in this issue, with statisticians now offering a more positive account of "hot streaks" than in the past.

Once again, Marvin, I am grateful to you for taking time to read the paper and offering your feedback. I am in your debt.

With kind wishes,
Dmitri

Happy 2016
Dear Dmitri,

You inquired about "Becker incident" reported in *Telling About Society*. Becker's account is essentially accurate. I insisted that it was an "empirical fact" that some race track gamblers had winning streaks, meaning consistent ongoing pattern of positive ROI, return of investment. These players routinely and unknowingly proceeded in terms of a Bayesian statistical model. Here the player assigns a prior probability to each horse in a race (by using facts and figures found in *The Daily Racing Form*, known as the "bible.") Then the player recalculates the probabilities in light of new information, such as the scratches of other horses, the appearance of the horse in the paddock, and the energy displayed in warming up as the horse approaching the starting gate. When the public's odds are significantly greater than the player's odds, one has found a "value" play (or "overplay"). Knowledge of setting prior odds is a skill acquired over time. Conclusion: The probability of an event depends on player's *information*. (Persi Diaconis can flip a fair coin "heads" for an indefinite number of time, thus challenging conventional probability theory.)

I had written a successful paper for Karl Popper's Philosophy of Science seminar when he was visiting professor. My paper was "Fallibilism, Probability Theory, and Horse Race Gambling" (a version of which is in *RG Appendix*). On these matters I was simply ahead of Goffman. Nevertheless, Goffman made a good point, about players *imagining* themselves winning when they weren't. For example, if I set a horse's odds of winning 6-1 and public odds are 20-1, and the horse *loses*, by less than two lengths, I have the subjective sense of winning! Thus the importance of keeping written records.

You also inquired about my take on Goffman scholarship. In my view, the foundation of Goffman's weird brilliance come predominantly from Pirandello, Wittgenstein, and K. Burke.

Pirandello is Goffman's Master, openly revealed in *FA*. The importance of Pirandello was suggested to me at an odd moment in the 60's at Berkely, when Goffman told me. "You will never be a great writer – your wife is too sane." Great writer, he said, like Pirandello and Eliot – have insane wives. In "The Insanity of Place" (*RP*), Goffman wrote a Pirandelloesque account of life with his insane wife. When Goffman asked what I thought of the essay, I told him all the "hes" should have been "shes." Goffman, by the way, is a great writer.

Goffman was neither a "symbolic-interactionist" (as almost everyone proclaimed), nor a "structuralist" (as Rose Coser proclaimed). Like the Master, G was a "humorist," the one who strikes through the mask. (Among big time comics, only Rickle was a "humorist." See the citation to Rickles in *FA*).

In *FA*, Goffman refers to Pirandello as “the master...” and “Here again Pirandello is the master.” In the 1950’s it was not prudent to trumpet Pirandello, a fascist and outspoken supporter of Mussolini.

Here is the bottom line: if you come to PS with a background in Pirandello, Goffman’s work seems less original.

Goffman shares with Pirandello a focus on illusion and reality and the face work that represents the suffering individual in the world of Prufrocks. For P&G, the institutions of society are the means by which masks are created. Life is parsed in terms of precariousness, deception, victimage, and existential despair. “How do you like them applies,” Goffman would say.

Next is Wittgenstein. What Pirandello and Wittgenstein had in common is that both understood the “Rules of the Game” and the nature of social reality. Goffman gestures at Wittgenstein in *PS*, where he compares his theory to a ladder, which, if you climb it, you throw it away. This is straight from *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus*.

What Wittgenstein provided (a version was presented in Ryle’s 1947 classic *The Concept of Mind*) was a behavioral theory of mind, which holds that “mental states” are publicly observable inclinations to behave in a certain way. Goffman preferred Henry James to his brother William (a symbolic interactionist hero), who would work from *inside-out*. Henry from *outside-in*.

Finally, of critical importance, is Kenneth Burke. Lewis Wirth reviewed Burke’s *Permanence and Change* in the *AJS* and pronounced it “the most important book in social psychology.” Goffman expressed to me the same sentiment. Burke’s dictum was: *Doing is Being* (in Sartre’s terms, Existence precedes Essence). Burke said that a theory of knowledge is to a theory of action what an adjective is to a noun. In principle, *FA* (a theory of knowledge) should precede *PS* (a theory of action). Burke called his position “Dramatism,” as compared to Goffman’s “Dramaturgy.” In *FA*, Goffman inclines toward Burke in writing “Society is like a stage.” The structure of drama and the structure of life are identical.

You can take this brief summary of influences – Pirandello, Wittgenstein, and Burke – as a kind of litmus test to evaluate Goffman’s scholarship.

Tavarish (whatever that means),
Marvin Scott

January 13, 2016
Greetings Scott:

Thank you for your meaty, thought-provoking letter of January 6.

The *NYT* article on winning streaks was written by George Johnson. I enclose it here in case you want to check it out. A number of things caught my attention in this piece, including the reference to “the random walk of the stock market.” Goffman refers to “random walk” in the talk he gave in Chicago and elsewhere in the mid 60s where he presented his LV study of gambling. Johnson reviews several biases in his column, including the “gambler’s bias,” “hot-hand-fallacy,” and “selection bias.” His most intriguing conclusion about a fair coin flipped four times is this: “Altogether there are 16 different ways the coins can fall. I know it sounds crazy but when you average the scores together the answer is not 50-50, as most people would expect, but about 40-60 in favor of tails.”

I read your appendix in *RG* but didn’t know it was based on a paper you wrote for Popper’s class. The difference between “He thinks he is on a roll” and “He is on a roll” is instructive. I can see EG’s response to

you stressing the former at the expense of the latter. The terms of the debate must be defined before any conclusion is rendered. If Johnson is right, further complications must be considered.

I agree with the list of Goffman's precursors you propose – Pirandello and Burke, for sure. I would add Whitehead whom Goffman studied closely in his undergraduate years. Late Wittgenstein is a candidate as well. *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty* are linked philosophically and thematically to EG's work, even though this link is harder to document through citations. You suggest that EG saw the LW article in Ryle's 1947 volume *The Concept of Mind*. *Philosophical Investigations* published in 1953 – do you think Goffman read the book in time for the 1956 edition of *PSEL*? Sartre comes up in *PSEL* rather often. Erving must have read him while writing his Ph.D. in Paris or around that time.

I would expand your list of EG precursors further. Apparently, he had a copy of Nicolas Evreinoff's *The Theater in Life* (a better translation from Russian is *Life as Theater*), an early 20th century Russian writer whose text bears striking resemblance to Goffman's *PSEL*. Huizinga might have been an influence as well. Certain labeling theory scholars come to mind. But then EG, a voracious reader, transformed these influences into something distinctly his own.

To be sure, he was ambivalent about Mead, Blumer, and SI, and he refused to join SSSI when it was formed in 1977. Yet his views were not inimical to interactionism. In *Strategic Interaction* he commends Mead and Blumer for their ideas, writing that "Blumer also provides an excellent current statement in 'Society as Symbolic Interaction'" (p. 72). I am sending you my book *Pragmatism and Interactionism* where I trace the origins of interactionism and stress the bond between symbolic interactionism and pragmatism.

Thanks for the fascinating tidbit about "crazy wife" as a prerequisite for becoming a writer of genius. Goffman was that, no doubt, but the role that Schuyler Choate Goffman played in his life cannot be reduced to her idiosyncrasies. Tom Goffman told me that his father considered his (first and only) wife to be smarter than himself. That sounds like an exaggeration, yet Sky's letters I read show her as a witty, elegant writer. Even more impressive is her M.A. Thesis, "The Personality Trends of Upperclass Women," that she defended at the U of Chicago in 1950. You can see the debt he owed to his wife in this text, specifically to her intimate knowledge of the upper crust Bostonians and the differentiation between the old money habitus and the aspirations of *nouveau riches*.

Did you meet Sky in person? She is an enigmatic figure whose role in Goffman's life, and especially in his changing view of mental illness, is yet to be fully explained. I am enclosing a [paper about Erving and Schuyler](#) and the impact that his wife's illness had on his intellectual development. Wonder if my take on the Erving-Schuyler relations makes sense to you.

I need to think through Erving's fascination with comedians and humorists like Rickles and Lenny Bruce. Elizabeth Bott told me that Monty Python and his group were fascinated with Goffman as well. This had something to do with shape shifting and rule/frame breaking. And if your tale about Rickles is any guide, with fatefulness.

Yes, EG's preoccupation with illusion and reality parallel with that of Pirandello. He also made some good use of William James and Alfred Schutz. I believe he was impressed with Harold Garfinkel, too, in particular with his 1956 paper on the ritual degradation ceremony. EG kept up with HG work throughout his life (the reverse is also true). Although not an ethnomethodologist, Goffman was clearly intrigued.

Marvin, your exegesis of Goffman is very helpful. I am in your debt.

Dmitri

January, 2016

Dear Dmitri,

Your book, article, and clipping are much appreciated. Next time, I will share my thoughts on all these “goodies.”

Meanwhile, I’ll try to clarify my thinking on the influences that account specifically for Goffman’s “weird brilliance.” You are thinking in a more general way about “precursors”; so, yes, Huizinga makes the cut. Among literary precursors, I would say that Kafka, T. S. Eliot, and Henry James shaped his “style” and outlook. Pirandello is *sui generis*.

Now, in mentioning Wittgenstein as one of the three major influences, I include Ryle, both providing an extreme analytic behavioral theory of mind. What resulted is Becker’s wry observation that Goffman’s work sometimes had a peculiar whiff of positivism. What we have in *PSEL* is the absence of a self. Under the Wittgenstein-Ryle influence, there is no psychological self that thinks, believes, or feels. This makes the world strange. In sum, Goffman’s weird brilliance is hard for me to conceive without Pirandello, Burke, and Wittgenstein-Ryle.

Blumer and Mead played a problematic role as influencers. For his part, Blumer dispraised Goffman’s work as so many strings of “catchy phrases.” Goffman told me that the only thing he got from Mead was the concept of “communication” whereby the “meaning of a message is the response of the other.” No small matter, since this notion is the foundation of Pragmatic Sociology, which is another way of describing Goffman’s work.

Sartre is also a problematic precursor. To be sure, Sartre and Burke share the same Logos, which can be stated either as a snooty “Existence precedes Essence,” or the plain “Doing is Being.” Sartre’s chapter on “Bad Faith” was on his reading list in his course called “Social Contacts.” But Goffman would seem to reject Sartre on the big stuff. S emphasized Freedom; Goffman, constraints. S was a vocal Communist; G, a political conservative.

Because Merton was your one time dissertation supervisor, you might be interested in the following:

When teaching one summer at Columbia, I get a note from Merton that he wishes to see me. At the appointed hour, he took from his drawer letter from a former student who was disturbed at something I published in *Social Forces* that argued that Merton’s anomie theory was equivalent to staging Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. The point being that the concept of anomie was Durkheimian, Merton’s analysis was Weberian. Merton advised me, for the sake of my career, to write a retraction. The next time I saw Merton (at an ASA convention) I told him that the biggest disappointment in his work was that it showed no evidence of his background as a magician. Meanwhile, G, who was easy to fool, has written a veritable text for magicians studying deception. He acknowledged the absence of “magic” in his work, but maintained that Goffman’s was a sociology of gossip.

One evening Goffman came to my apartment in Berkeley for my wife’s Filet Roast and my demonstration of “frame analysis” using card tricks. I told him that all the tricks involved putting the audience in one frame while operating in another. Without providing any further disclosures, he became increasingly peeved when he was fooled each time. To this day I debate with myself if it were better to have revealed the effects.

Evreinov holds such a special place in my life that I have saved him for last. During the six months I lived in Goffman’s house (“establishment” he called it), I had complete access to his very large library. I searched for Evreinov and it was not to be found, nor did Goffman ever mention him. Evreinov was a serendipitous find in the University of Illinois as an undergraduate. The title (“Theatre in Life”) was irresistible and the content spoke to me. I hand-copied some 20 pages of the book, esp. Oh 3 on “The Passing Show.” I’m familiar with his plays,

the zonkey music he wrote for them, and at my behest one of my students interviewed Madame Evreinov, living in Paris. Evreinov's work left me spiritually open to G's *PSEL*. When Aldous Huxley taught a graduate seminar at Berkeley in the Political Science Department, his students were to write a paper on "The Use of Analogy in Political Theory." Instantly, my analogy would be Evreinov's "Theatrocracy," the rule by theater. All governments, Evreinov said – democracy, socialism, dictatorship – were so ruled. Huxley (who was blind at this time and had a grad student assist him walk and read to him the papers) singled out the paper and said that theatrocracy was not simply an analogy but a homology. He asked me where I got the idea, and since my paper included a lot of Goffman's "catchy phrases," I said "Professor Goffman from the Sociology Department." Huxley turned to his assistant and said "write that down."

I read "Theatre in Life" once a year. In my book (with Lyman) *The Drama of Social Reality*, Evreinov looms large.

Onward,
Marvin Scott

January 31, 2016
Greetings Marvin:

I read your last letter with much pleasure and a bit of amazement. That you hold Evreinov in high esteem and went to trouble to interview his wife is the amazing part. I was excited coming across the reference to Evreinov when I read your book with Lyman, a rare occasion in this part of the world. Other than *Life as Theater*, the book of his that impressed me the most was *The History of Corporeal Punishment in Russia* where Evreinov discusses the Russians' penchant for torture and public execution as a form of cultural spectacle.

Evreinov's book was not on EG's shelf, you say. This is puzzling. When Jane Piliavin and her husband visited EG in his Philadelphia home, the host showed them a roomful of file cabinets filled with archival materials. She didn't mention the library. Judged by what I heard from Tom, his father's library must have been immense. Did you have an impression of what kinds of books Erving collected? And speaking of Erving's house, this must have been a different home than the one he shared with Sky. I am tempted to ask if anything stood out about Erving's home as you recall it, anything that caught your eye.

It is useful to distinguish between "precursors" and "influences." Kafka would qualify given Erving's sensitivity to the macabre in life, although I don't remember seeing references to him in EG's works. One writer whom Erving cites and with whom he felt an affinity is William Sansom. His hyper-perceptive account of Preedy at the beech that EG brings up in *PSEL* is particularly memorable. I need to reread Pirandello to see the full extent of Erving's debt to this writer.

One more early influence that comes across in "Where the Action Is" is Norman Mailer. His novels, Erving writes, "present scenes of fateful duties, character contests, and serious action; his essays expound and extol chance-taking, and apparently in his personal life he has exhibited a certain tendency to define everything from his marriages to his social encounters in terms of the language and structure of the fight game" (WAI:268n). Erving's communication style sometimes resembled that of Mailer, although the two differed greatly in other respects.

You refer to "Becker's wry observation" – is this Howe Becker? I am not familiar with this remark – do you recall where Howe talks about Goffman's positivism?

In *PSEL*, the self is marked by its insubstantiality. As EG put it, the actor's "body merely provide[s] a peg on which something of collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time" (*PSEL*:253). But in *Stigma*, the self has substance; it is pockmarked by fateful blemishes and is uniquely susceptible to embarrassment and

mortification. Erving seems to oscillate between the disembodied and embodied perspective on the self, between “disenselfed body” and “disembodied self.” I sense an unresolved tension here which, as you point out, is consistent with the anti-essentialism of Wittgenstein-Ryle. Pragmatists waged war on essentialism too, but their anti-metaphysical strictures were of a different kind. For all their social constructionist imagination, Peirce, James, Dewey, and Mead had deep respect for the human flesh and obdurate qualities of physical reality.

Sartre must have impressed Goffman, for EG cites him more often than Simmel in *PSEL*. Jean-Paul was an iconic figure at the time when EG was writing his thesis, much of which he penned in Paris, it seems. I am trying to figure out the place of Paris in Goffman’s life. Quietly, he visited the city on numerous occasions and used to send there his son to study French in the summers.

Thank you for your story about Merton. It fits well with what I sensed about him from my encounters with the man, and more importantly, with what I learned from colleagues who knew Merton a lot better than I. Some told me how he tried to derail their careers.

You say EG was “easy to fool.” Smelser reports that EG couldn’t keep poker face and was bad at this game. Wonder if there is a pattern here. Deception was one of Goffman’s major themes, yet he wasn’t good at it. But then, Marx did terribly when he invested his money in the stock market. So much for his knowledge of capitalism. Being a good theorist is no guarantee you can practice what you theorize.

Thanks again for this enlightening exchange.
Dmitri

February, 2016
Dear Dmitri:

In *Telling About Society*, Becker tells us (p.235): “It is not often appreciated to what degree Goffman was a serious empiricist, even perhaps what may be called a *positivist*.”

Goffman presented himself as a serious *empiricist*, engaged in the pursuit of a genuine science. Not everyone was taken in by the act, certainly not Oxford-trained Wittgensteinian philosopher Frank Cioffi.

Here’s the story: One Summer in Berkeley, I noted that the text used in a Philosophy course taught by Cioffi was Goffman’s *Stigma*! I went to see Cioffi and told him that Goffman was my dissertation supervisor and that in my Sociology of Deviance course my text was *Stigma*. He said, “We must have lunch!” In fact we had two lunches where he explained that Goffman was a perfect example of how explanation in the behavioral sciences can go wrong. In short, Goffman’s work was a paradigm of a pseudo-science. The notion of a *pseudo-science* is a *pragmatic* not a syntactic one. A pragmatic is one that works. For example, Homeopaths claim a dose of a certain med will reduce one’s anxiety and stress. Put to the test, it works! It’s a pragmatic success. Nevertheless, Homeopathy is a pseudo-science. Goffman’s *Stigma* may work as a resource to get one to see what otherwise may not be noticed. However, *Stigma*, according to Cioffi, does not make a single empirical claim and, in principle, cannot be disproved. A genuine or syntactic science, in principle, can be disproved.

The only justification for Goffman’s pseudo-science is found in T.S. Eliot (Four Quartets):

“We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started.
And know the place for the first time.”

When Merton called Goffman's work a Sociology of Gossip, he seemingly dismissed it as not a genuine science. In your paper on the *Insanity of Place*, you quite literally presented a Sociology of Gossip. Reading it was a guilty pleasure, and I thank you for that.

I found *Pragmatism and Democracy* very challenging, and your extensive bibliography a tremendous resource. On every page, I found something that interested me. On the negative side, you often write allusively, much like Zizek, jumping from topic to topic, and you have learned to take refuge behind rhetorical questions, which ironically stimulated me to provide a straight answer to them. For example: When you write (p. 84), "If the world is as fluent and indeterminate as James wants us to believe, how do we go about deciding which course of action to follow?" I respond, as a good Jamesian, that the processes of attention, selection, and will converge on a course of action. You don't decide. Action comes first and then you discover what you did. James' theory of consciousness might take us down a slippery slope to solipsism. So what? Evreinov's philosophy of the "Theatre for One's Self" is openly and boldly solipsistic. I enjoy solipsism very much.

More people should try it. Solipsism aside, my Wittgensteinian proclivities take me to another starting point – one stressing differences. (It is a negative sign that "Wittgenstein" does not appear in your name index.) To me the four major Pragmatists – Pierce, James, Mead, and Dewey – have nothing in common except "family resemblances." At first, Pierce thought of "Pragmatism" as a theory of truth, but soon became a "semiologist" who called his work "Pragmaticism" to differentiate from the core Pragmatism of James, a political conservative. Mead is a "symbolic interactionist," and the least interesting thing you can say about him is that his theory contributes to progressive reform. Dewey is the heir of the radical-democratic branch of Young Hegelianism, and shares your well-disguised Marxian morality. Dewey carries the load of what you think of as Pragmatism. You brilliantly improvise explanations to cover differences. Wittgenstein's favorite line from King Lear was "I'll teach you differences," and this is where I would begin.

Wittgenstein also makes one very sensitive to the bewitchment of the mind by use of language. For example, Lukacs bewitched the minds of the Frankfurt School to make them think that "reification" is a pathological symptom of the modern age, which calls for "emancipation." Even you, Dmitri, got stuck in the fly bottle. "Reification" is a normal modality of consciousness, and to make it more so is propaganda.

The *Time* article on "hot streaks" is an example of why conventional probability models should be approached with an attitude of "fallibilism," perhaps the most important idea in the Pragmatic theory of truth. (It is a negative sign that "fallibilism" does not appear in your subject index.)

Before moving into the Erv-Sky mansion, he put in storage his Persian carpet and his centerpiece painting by Paul Klee whose motto was "Make the familiar, unfamiliar," an idea picked up by both Wittgenstein and Goffman. I did not find it particularly strange that Evreinov's *Theatre in Life* was missing. Rather, I found it strange that he had a book on Chinese pigtaileds and a book on Winnie-the-Pooh.

Dimitri, we covered all the bases, and we can now call our correspondence a wrap." I enjoyed our exchanges and I learned from your work. Thank you for all that.

Avanti (whatever that means),
Marvin Scott

March 4, 2016
Greetings Scott:

I write this note with the heavy heart to let you know about the passing of Sherri Cavan. She died on February

20, 2016. The cause is metastatic esophageal cancer diagnosed two months ago. She chose not to have treatment, relying on hospice instead.

I created a page in the Goffman Archives “Remembering Sherri Cavan” where her friends and colleagues post comments about Sherri, http://cdclv.unlv.edu/ega/comments/remembering_cavan.html. If you’d like to write a few lines about Sherri, I would be glad to add them to this page.

There is much to be said in response to your last letter and with regard to our ongoing exchange but I will spare you the trouble as I see you had enough.

Thank you for the intellectual companionship.

Be well,
Dmitri

March 21, 2016
Dear Dmitri,

You are the smartest guy I know (the others are dead), and I am interested in anything you say on any subject! I would especially like to have your full reactions to the points I made in my last letter. The only thing I want to put a “wrap” on is further revealment of Goffman’s life. If you wish to exchange thoughts on his *work*, that’s more than okey.

On Archive Fever: Derrida’s Durkheimian analysis of Archive Fever as death rituals that reaffirm a sense of community around a sacred object (Goffman, for example) is something to study, not something to participate in, at least not for me with my outsider sensibilities. Contributors to the Archive will live forever in your cyber world. I suppose secularism requires such denial of death stratagems. What I have to tell you about Sherri is for you, not for the Archive.

<...>

I haven’t had contact with Sherri for about 40 years, until she wrote to me about how your publisher and Irving Lous Horowitz stole our books, no permission asked. That outraged me was the cover placed on this pirated edition, a cover which featured harness horses, and thus denied the content of the *Racing Game*. Further, instead of asking me to write a new Introduction, the task was given to an unqualified person. In a sense Sherri and I subsidized the publication of your book. Maybe that’s why I was so hard on you in my commentaries.

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Best of luck,
Marvin Scott

March 30, 2016
Greetings Marvin:

I didn’t answer earlier because it’s been difficult time for me and mine. My mother died. She was 97 when this happened, lived with me for 25 years, expired peacefully in her sleep of old age and dementia. That’s right on the heels of Sherri’s death. I am still trying to get out of funk.

Thank you for the vignette about Sherri – funny and well observed. [Now I have to wonder if you skipped the kissing stage while pressing further on or yours was an in intellectual romance to being and end with. None of

my business, to be sure. I understand that your remembrance is not meant for the Sherri's memorial page.]

I didn't mean to cut off our communications, but when you wrote to me that "we covered all the bases, and we can now call our correspondence a 'wrap'", I assumed you had enough. Thank you for your kind words about my musings and our interchange. Here are some thoughts on your thoughts and comments on your comments.

* * *

I looked up the chronology and see that my involvement with Transaction Publishers goes back to early 2009 when I received an unsolicited offer from Irving Louis Horowitz to send me the new edition of Goffman's *Relations in Public*. I wrote to him that I own a copy and don't need another one. I also mentioned the Goffman Archives and asked if Irving might have recollections to share. He replied that he would take a pass on my invitation but threw in a few lines about the epic table tennis battles he and Erving used to wage at Berkley where Goffman invited him on two occasions. I sent Irving a couple of my reprints in gratitude, assuming that was the end of our exchange. A few months later he surprised me with an invitation to consider publishing a collection of my papers with Transaction.

In December of 2010, Sherri and I had a conversation about the book she thought of publishing, and I suggested Transactions. She sounded interested. At that point my book was about to come out. After investigating the publisher, however, she discovered that Horowitz reprinted her book for which she held copyrights and her opinion about this option changed dramatically. Instead, Sherri planned to press legal charges. Not sure whether she followed through. Perhaps there were some legal caveats that muddled the case.

I didn't know Horowitz also appropriated your book. The story is appalling. Wonder what he would have to say in his defense. I heard other stories about I. L. Horowitz that made me wince, but in my case he seemed to have acted honorably. I haven't seen a penny by way of royalties, nor do I know anything about the sales, but then I assumed the book didn't do well (it hadn't garnered a single professional review). Horowitz is dead now and I don't want to press the issue.

Coming back to your earlier letter where you regale a story about Frank Gioffi, I see the distinction he draws between science and pseudo-science as too rigid. Science admits of facts it cannot explain, like how certain drugs work or why the matter in the farthest reaches of the universe accelerates away rather than slows down. Scientists play with systems whose internal workings they can only guess about – it's called the "black box" problem. There is more to scholarly knowledge than verifiability, and falsifiability is not always the best standard to judge the scholarly product's value.

You say that my writing is allusive, that I jump from one argument to the next without nailing my case. True enough. But I am in good company when it comes to essayistic bias. If *Stigma* lets us "see what otherwise may not be noticed" without proving much of anything, that's reason enough to be grateful. I don't hold much stock in epistemology and methodology, or theory for that matter. They all have their place, and I have indulged in such matters myself. But their role is limited, at least in humanistically-grounded social science. Compelling research results may be obtained in spite of questionable methodology just as sound procedures and imposing theory can result in tedious products. Faithfulness to a protocol is not an end in itself. Sociological imagination comes in handy too if it stops theoretical schema from effacing recalcitrant particulars. Should the results turn out to be "allusive" rather than "analytical," "verifiable," or "falsifiable" – so be it. You found something interesting "on every page" of my book – isn't it more important than whether I observed a protocol? I'd trade syntactic rigor for someone's genuine interest any time.

Spelling out what your propositions mean in the world of experience is important, but fallibilism is hardly a philosophical stone to assess scholarship. I once wrote a paper for Merton's seminar on the sociology of science where I riffed on the Popper's maxim: "The class of students capable of falsifying their teacher's work should

never be empty.” The quip was aimed at Merton who used to stare down students skeptical about his pronouncements. Not sure he noticed the passage.

In his old age, Wittgenstein seems to have landed in the same place when he embraced what sounds like a pragmatist creed. You admire Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations* but your scientific strictures are more in line with the author of *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*. And who is better at spotting family resemblances and unveiling elective affinities than Goffman?

Solipsism is fine. Especially if you figured out how to eke out a living and saved enough for retirement. But before you can settle comfortably in your solipsistic solitude, you need to figure out what other people think and do and why, so you can secure a niche in the world that is not entirely of your own making. If your solipsism is enlightening, it will be embraced by others and cease to be such.

Do I have Marxist proclivities? My take on capitalism as gambling with a loaded dice may suggest so, even though orthodox Marxists will frown on my extrapolations from Goffman. Progressive pragmatism I espouse may strike you as leftist and naïve. I can live with that (see enclosed my essay on [Obama’s pragmatism](#) that will give you an idea where I stand on some practical issues of the day).

Speaking of archive fever, I am familiar with Derrida’s essay, and I disagree with his take on the issue. If EGA taught me anything, it is that properly compiled and honestly surveyed archival materials shatter preconceptions about sacred origins or historical continuity. What they show is the creative inconsistency endemic to foundational figures like Erving Goffman and the magnificent chaos that is history. A good archive demonstrates the futility of our efforts to subsume the original minds under a neat label and turn them into emblematic figureheads of best-selling textbooks. Continuity and discontinuity inform historical experience – the same event, transaction, life’s trajectory lends itself to conflicting interpretations. I see my task as an amateur archivist in salvaging alternative readings and circulating differences to whom it may concern, so that the fresh particulars can challenge the existing universals and clear room for the new ones. That’s what Mead and Dewey and James urged us to do, much as they differed from each other.

Writing can be therapeutic but I’ve got to stop. Hope this note finds you alive and well and open to the mysterious world you enjoy in your solipsistic paradise.

Dmitri

April, 2016
Dear Dmitri:

The death of your mother – so shortly after Sherri’s death-doubles the devastation. You have reason for being in a funk.

On March 29, like Humpty-Dumpty, I had a great fall, bashing my skull and fracturing my ribs. I will never be put together the same. Adding to these injuries, I’m noticing personality changes, thus my own self has become an object of study. I find myself snapping like an ancient turtle at any remark that challenges my intellectual superiority. Dmitri, if I snap at you, it’s not me, but my concussion.

Merton, an accomplished magician, was my model of a model sociologist. He was a magician playing the role of a sociologist. The real secret of magic is the contempt the magi has for the audience. This contempt is functional for it forestalls stage fright. The audience not only doesn’t know what is going on, but it doesn’t know it doesn’t know. In this encounter, the magician is the smartest guy in the room and controls the audience through “force of personality.” You crossed Merton, and paid a price. The moral: Don’t fuck with the magician.

You live in the world capital of magic, and you might find it rewarding to observe the magicians who perform at your table or in the small rooms of the casino. In attitude they are all little Mertons.

Credit Merton for seeing through Goffman's Act, which he derisively called "a sociology of gossip." Now, granted that Cioffi's distinction between science and pseudo-science is too rigid, the point is that Goffman impression-managed a theoretical science, while all the time he was engaged in what Husserl called "Existential Self-Study" – the opposite of a "theoretical science." For Husserl that's a compliment.

During one of those drinking and milling occasions at an ASA meeting, I was present when John Lofland came up to Goffman and said, "You know, Erving, all your work is bullshit!" Goffman's response, "Yes, but it is very high quality bullshit." Did Lofland contribute to EGA?

I do not think it is unfair to call EGA a "sociology of gossip." The four contributions I read were fascinating reading, guilty pleasures. Isn't that reason enough for the Archives? You seem to find it necessary to construct a vocabulary of theoretical science, gesturing at "bio-hermeneutics" to give gravitas to the enterprise, when none is needed.

The Archive is something of a side-show for you. In "Progressive Pragmatism" you carved out a niche in which you are singularly expert. Your leftist positioning fits well with contemporary Academic thought. You are never naive, but super-sophisticated.

Your Obama paper is not a serious political analysis, but a very smart defense of presidential failures. Rorty said "Pragmatists view truth as... what is good for us to believe." What you wrote is good for us to believe. You are working strongly and successfully in your niche and I would never put it down.

To edify a reader like me, however, I would like to see an explanatory statement when you dismiss intellectual opponents. (This is what you did with Derrida's critique of Archive Fever. What do you disagree with?) Your hit-and-run tactic in dismissing comments by George Will and Charles Krauthamer is sufficient only for readers that are fully in accord with your position. Current liberals don't argue; they simply dismiss opponents as intellectually or morally wrong. I would like a little more engagement with these figures. That would help clarify the position you espouse.

My intuitive opposition to "Progressive Pragmatism" rests on two concerns. First, the progressive impulse wants to eliminate symbols of the past, whether they be memorial monuments or the faces on our currency. No one seems to notice the creeping anomie resulting from destruction of traditional symbols. To me "progressive" is a red flag for "unintended consequences." Raising minimum wage is said to be progressive. The very term "living wage" is an example of the elite leftists' effort to capture the language, to change reality by changing how we describe it. Same-sex relations become "marriage equality," natural global warming becomes "climate change," and so on.

My second point of resistance to "progressive pragmatism" is that John Dewey is my least favorite philosopher who bears the label of "pragmatist." In his idea of using philosophy as a basis for reconstructing society, along with his obsessive thinking in triads, he resembles an heir of left-wing Hegelianism. Worse yet, I side with Paul Crosser's "The Nihilism of John Dewey." (Incidentally, neither "Crosser" nor "Nihilism" find a place in the index of your book.) You use Dewey as a stick to silence opposition. The conservative individualism of William James is lost.

Keep doing what you are doing (and I'll have something to respond to),
Marvin Scott

May 16, 2016

Greetings Marvin:

Your nasty fall must have been frightening. I hope the damage this incident has done to your body and mind will not be lasting. Your sense of humor and the ability to notice the unflattering changes in your interactional routines are reassuring.

I am working on a paper about embodied sociology comparing George H. Mead and Lev S. Vygotsky, two early 20th century social psychologists who had premonitions about the key role that the central nervous system and body circuits play in sustaining social order. As I plow through the neuroscience literature, I see an intimate link between our selfhood and somatic-affective apparatus. The sense of self is tied to somatic wellbeing, with the damage to the body circuits affecting our mood and behavior. Perhaps you can expand on your observations in a suitable genre, scholarly or otherwise. Meanwhile, hang on in there.

Merton's fascination with magic must have started innocently enough. When he began to apply his otherworldly skills and conventional superpowers he accumulated in this world to derail the careers of those who crossed him, his wizardry turned into dark magic. Admittedly, I am biased, but the stories I hear from Merton's colleagues and students tell me I am not the only one. Your firsthand experience is different, attesting to the fact that Merton was a man of many parts.

I don't patronize casinos, so Las Vegas magic is wasted on me. I marvel at the many ways the dice of life can be loaded and the depth of "slumber" in which common folks has been submerged through the magic powers of propaganda and self-deception. Goffman had some inkling about this facet of social life yet chose not to dwell on it. He was high on theory, fancied himself a theoretician, and mined his experience deftly to reach his destination. Not for him is formal system building (*Frame Analysis* being a possible exception). But as I see it, the ability to ride an emotion rather than straddle a discourse is at the root of innovation in social sciences. What is intriguing to me is how his discoveries – stigma management, self-presentation, Potemkin portable village maintenance – affected his own behavior. I wonder if his theoretical stance has something to do with his studied disregard for interactional conventions. Hard to believe his discovery of conartistry at the core of social life wouldn't have influenced his own self-presentation.

Lofland has been ambivalent about EGA. At first, he thought it was a collection of unverifiable and actionable gossip meant to cast aspersion on his teacher. He mellowed with time, submitted an interesting memoir about his dealings with EG at Berkeley, but failed to finalize the text on the ground that it needed more work. I haven't heard from him for a few years.

You ask if it isn't better to forswear the trappings of science and treat EGA materials as a collection of gossipy memoirs. Who needs all that claptrap about self-sampling, biocritique, biocritical hermeneutics, and what not? I try to use specialized vocabulary sparingly, connect abstractions with everyday experience, but some scholarly habits are hard to dispense with, especially if you need to publish in professional journals. Some of it might be helpful.

"Will to believe," as James put it, is at the heart of knowledge production. Commitment to this pragmatic wisdom need not blind me to the fact that my beliefs don't always mesh with reality, that my value commitments require work to align them with the world out there. Truth is a practically accomplished unity of knowledge and reality, and as such it is bound to be historically emergent, situationally specific, partially realized, and subject to ongoing reconstruction.

George Will and Charles Krauthammer are fine intellectuals who have grown shrill and partisan in recent years, refusing to give the Obama administration any credit even where it is due. Their unwillingness to take on the obscene income inequality, to tackle the welfare for the rich, to find anything redeeming in progressive reforms and the unbound enthusiasm for the everyone-for-himself-and-the-devil-take-the-hindmost philosophy bothers

me. I don't think the conservative position is any more rigorous than the liberal one. No amount of argumentation would convince this folk that the trickle-down economics turned out to be a fraud, that the only way profits trickled in the last two decades was upward, that deregulating, cutting taxes and starving the government beast did not make all the boats rise.

Do progressive policies breed unanticipated consequences? Of course they do. The conservative agenda is hardly immune to this law (think of the 2007-2008 recession). To be sure, liberal politicians twist language to advance their cause ("living wages," "marriage equality"), but so do conservatives ("pro-life," "religious freedom," "marriage defense," "right to work act").

From what I could tell, you are on the same page with the mainstream conservatives (wonder what you think of Trump), and that's not going to change. So I will spare both of us trouble of making a rigorous case to prop up my political sensibilities.

That should do for today. Take care and be well,
Dmitri

P.S. I called Jackie Wiseman to let her know about Sherri Cavan but her phone was disconnected. Do you know how she can be reached?

May, 2016
Dear Dmitri,

For the last two years my major intellectual interest was the Philosophy of Mind. In the Hunter College library, Goffman's *Frame Analysis* was stacked with books on the philosophy of consciousness. In connection with my current interest in "consciousness," I've been re-reading *Frame Analysis*. None of the hard problems of consciousness are addressed, but it cleverly explores situations where consciousness is deceived.

Goffman had sent me a typed version of the manuscript and asked for my comments. When I opened the box and found a thousand pages, I wrote to him that I had no time to read it. He took this as a major betrayal, and our relationship was never the same. Although I would see him about every other summer in Berkeley for coffee and scones in a Hari-Krishna care on College Avenue, the subject of the unread manuscript was never mentioned.

Neuroscience has miserably failed to explain "consciousness." I have thrown my lot with the "Mysterians" who claim the problem is inherently unsolvable. (Colin McGinn is good here.) The biggest news in the philosophy of mind is "panpsychism" (Thomas Nagel is persuasive here.), which declares that mental properties pervade the natural world. This is a big boost for the Durkheimian (sometimes) claim that the "Conscience Collective" has an ontological status. Given that consciousness arrives only with human cultures, it is time again for a rapprochement between Durkheim and Mead. You might have fun doing it.

The EGA can be presented in terms of a "sociology of gossip." "A Plea for Gossip" is a chapter in *Moralities in Everyday Life* (Sabini and Silver). The authors are heavily influenced by Goffman, and the title of the chapter gestures toward Austin's "A Plea for Excuses." They call for a social-psychological study of gossip, emphasizing that gossip is a "tie-sign," a bearer of information about relationships. Now, if people display their relationship by gossiping, EGA has actually created an electronic community, with any member having access to any other member.

You asked for my take on Trump. Okay, but you must first understand where I'm coming from. I have never voted, nor have I ever cared who will be president, unless I had a bet going, Hillary or Trump? *Ça m'est égal*.

People don't understand my indifference, because they don't understand *apathia* is an active attitude. Moreover, there is no achieving *ataraxia* unless you withdraw from political life, which consists of resentment or hatred, two toxic emotional states, so that, for example, "inequality" become "obscenity," and your kidney produces heaps of cortisol.

The most obvious analysis of Trump is Weberian: In cases of crisis a charismatic authority emerges and on the basis of his power and personality evokes an irrational mass following. If the mass is big enough you can win an election, which would likely lead to one of three possibilities:

1) Trump is Mussolini

In the 20's and 30's America was enthralled with Mussolini, as evinced in Cole Porter's lyrics to his hit song "You are the Top": "You're the top, you're the great Houdini / You're the top, you're Mussolini." Mussolini said that the two greatest influences in his life was William James's "Will to Believe," and Nietzsche's "The Will to Power." Trump manifests the will to believe in his against-all-odds-victory. The will to power defines your own sense of authority. So, for example, when a media interviewer told Trump that the military would not follow his command to water-board journalists, Trump retorted: "They will if I tell them." The Donald is the Duce. Even his facial expressions are remarkably similar. If elected, expect a benevolent authoritarianism, a friendly fascism, and a partnership with Russian counterpart.

2) Trump as Hegelian Hero

Trumpism is a dialectical response to Obamaism. This is one of the moments when a hero emerges to change the course of the *Geist* in ways that can on be known retrospectively. However, there is a "cunning of reason" so that a sublation may press history forward.

3) Trump as Hamlet

Like Hamlet's Denmark, there is something rotten in the state. The rottenness is identifiable as political correctness, multi-culturalism, and globalization. Those sectors and individuals supporting these ideologies will be targets for punishment, the Donald, as anointed one and punisher in chief, might say along with Hamlet: "Heaven hath pleased is so / To punish me with this and this with me / That I must be their scourge and minister." Of course he will use less elevated language.

All the best,
Marvin Scott

P.S. Jackie's nearly five-month silence and the disconnection of her phone lead me to believe she is dead. If you get word of this, please let me know.

June 23, 2016
Greetings Scott:

I've been plowing through the mind-body literature lately, tracking the debate over extended mind and embodied cognition. Which meant revisiting the split between Descartes and Spinoza, squaring off with panpsychism as it transpired in Fechner, James, Mead, Vygotsky, and then all the way to the Chalmers "hard problem of consciousness" and the "extended mind" kerfuffle.

Can't say I see the light at the end of the tunnel, but Whitehead had interesting leads with his notions of occasion, organism, consentient set, prehension, and relativity. Mead, who followed Whitehead's lead, is intriguing in this regard, as he treats the relativist transformations of mass in the physical world as a case of proto-sociality and frames role taking as the emergent form of relativity at the societal stage of evolution.

Neuroscience doesn't resolve the hard problem, so your decision to cast the lot with the mysterians is understandable. But then, we need not resolve the issue of qualia and consciousness definitively to address down-to-earth problems surrounding body, emotions, selfhood, and society. Mead's suggestions strike me as more promising than Durkheim's musings about collective representations, which reify society and threaten to swallow individual agency.

Thanks for the Sabini and Silver lead. I was not aware of their work. EGA as a gossip hub for those caught in the Goffman gravitational pull – why not? Some of the EGA contributors think Goffman would have enjoyed this project, with all its laundry washing and what not. Others disagree. It would be fun to know where EG would have placed himself in this debate, watching it from above (or from below).

Apathy, ataraxy is a noble disposition. I listed this meditative attitude under the name of “serenity” as one of the four primary color emotions for the MoodCount survey I devised a decade ago. (The results are summed up in my paper “Agency Scan,” http://cdclv.unlv.edu//programs/etm_findings.html). I am enclosing a chart that lets you see where this attitude fits to in the emo world according to DS.

Your refusal to participate in the democratic ritual is understandable given your contempt for politics and the desire to minimize cortisol levels in your bloodstream. Some people have harder times insulating themselves from the suffering of others, telling themselves not to worry about the inanities of this world. So they throw the seahorse washed ashore back into the sea, knowing full well that many will die stranded. Or they drag themselves to the polls to forestall Donald Trump's presidency, fully aware of the fact that the alternative is nothing to be inspired about.

James's “will to believe” strikes me as a different animal than Nietzsche's “will to power.” The former implies empowering of others, being what one wishes to be; the latter achieves its end by making others bow to your will. That's the difference between James's pragmatism and Mussolini's fascism, as I see it. Donald Trump – a blowhard, a bigot, a consummate conman – is now a standard bearer for the Republican Party whose zealots are bent on winning by all means necessary, even if that means stalking racist sentiments. Trump does indeed have something in common with the KGB strongman Vladimir Putin. No wonder the two formed a mutual admiration society.

You may stay home on Election Day to protect your affective palette and let providence do its job. I will drag myself to the poll and cast the ballot. I want my voice resonate – if not with the country than at least with my two kids.

Take care, Dmitri

July, 2016

Dear Dmitri,

Reports of Jackie's death were premature. But she is under some kind of stress, because she sent me only one page of a two page letter. All I can glean is that she is voting for Hillary, and being romanced by a charming Republican who reminds her of me.

Random thoughts:

1. Your “emotion template matrix” effectively describes the difference between Master and Slave moralities. The upper quadrants are affective features of Masters; the lower quadrants, Slaves. You omitted the slave's most important characteristic – resentment.

2. Vygotsky is a very good place to start inquiry about how thoughts and language are intimately linked. Vygotsky goes well with Mead. Throw in Luria and you have something. Incidentally, Fechner – who you mention – is off my intellectual radar.
3. Whitehead’s notion of emergence deserves revival and closer investigation. I would be very interested in anything you write along these lines.
4. Of course James’ “Will to Believe” is different from Nietzsche's “Will to Power.” They may have nothing to do with each other. Nevertheless, both are manifest in Trump’s actions, and both were explicitly mentioned by Mussolini as his two greatest influences.
5. Your depiction of Trump doesn’t explain his charisma. Moses, Jesus, and Caesar were all blowhards, bigots, and con men. The idea of Trump as a Hegelian hero creates cognitive dissonance for you.
6. Rorty somewhere points out that liberal democracy carried with it an altogether too rosy picture of the capacity of ordinary people to attain the truth about political matters:
 - a) Were you supportive of Obama Care? We now know that it passed because of the dissembling of the MIT economist who designed it and who admitted that passage depended upon the stupidity of the public.
 - b) Were you supportive of the Iran nuclear deal? We now know, according to Ben Rhodes – the failed fiction writer who composes narratives for Obama – that passage depended on the stupidity of the press corps which echoed the narrative that it was the best deal we could get.Do you think you are capable of writing a value-neutral eight pages on the topic: “Deception and the Art of Government in the Obama Administration? I think not. You are in a deep slumber.
7. I reject your “account” that your ballot will be cast for your two kids. As a visible liberal progressive, you have no choice but to vote. You can’t not vote. Your kids would be more appreciative if you took them to the MGM Grand for a Saturday afternoon performance of David Copperfield.
8. If you knew more about Trump’s ideologists, you would understand why I call him Punisher in Chief. Punishment would be directed against purveyors of political correctness, multi-culturalism, and globalization. Trumpism goes by the name of “Neo-Reactionary” or “Alt-Right.” The foundation text is written by Curtis Yarvin and Nick Land, *The Dark Enlightenment*. Beyond white lowermiddle class males, the new reactionary ideology appeals to Nihilists of all stripes, probably 30 percent of the Bernie Brigade. Yarvin and Land focus on this group with a work “An Open Letter to Open-Minded Progressives.” If Trump wins the election (an unlikely event), it will be the result of these nihilists from the left. The Brexit may be a portent of what to expect.
9. Goffman would have loathed the idea of EGA. I told him that after I publish the *Racing Game*, my next book will deal with his works from the *PSEL* to *Strategic Interaction*. He scowled me and said “Write instead on Max Weber.” He wanted only for sociologists to employ his concepts for use as a resource, not as topics. So my next book was *A Sociology of the Absurd*.

Tally-Ho!
Scott

August 3, 2016
Greetings Scott:

I’ve been tied up with a few chores and couldn’t answer sooner. My mother-in-law is moving to a retirement home in LA and I was helping her to pack. I’m still struggling with my [article on Mead, Vygotsky, and extended mind](#), which is well past its deadline. Hope to be done before my departure for the ASA meeting in

two weeks. I will send you the piece when it is ready. Meanwhile, enclosed you will find the [Goffman in Las Vegas journal issue](#).

Glad to hear Jacquie is OK. She must have recovered from a femur fracture she had suffered after a nasty fall a couple of years ago. Her romancing a charming Republican is a good sign.

Donald Trump as a Hegelian hero, charismatic and strong-willed, a kindred spirit of the Russia autocrat – I can see the cunning of reason at work here. Maybe providence is trying to teach us a lesson. Surely, the Republicans deserve a comeuppance. They've created a Frankenstein in the hope of destroying their opponents, but now the monster is turning against its creators. Perhaps we all deserve a punishment and must suffer this boastful buffoon. But the con will have his finger on the A-trigger, and given how quickly he gets unhinged, his fans may live to rue the day.

Obama Care has many holes and needs to be fixed, something his opponents will not allow. Twenty million people who gained coverage through the Affordable Care Act are better off today. Still, the political tricks used to push the Affordable Care Act through might have been unseemly, but so were the machinations Lincoln resorted to once he set out to end slavery. Would the country be better off without his tricks? Politicians demanding that their opponents play by the book have no intention to follow the rules when they gain power and their vested interests are at stake.

The Iran nuclear deal was a close call. Its critics may yet to be proven right, though I hope they won't. Saudis and Netanyahu were livid when the U.S. struck the deal because they wanted America to bomb their archenemy into stone age. Now this option is off the table, for the time being. The more I watch Netanyahu cozying up to Putin – Israelis provided Russia with the surveillance drones, refused to denounce the invasion of Ukraine, kept mum on the annexation of Crimea – the more merit I see in the Iran deal. Ben Rhodes' keeping the press in the dark about the ongoing negotiations is self-serving. There must be more to the story than he cared to offer, so I will reserve my judgment until all sides weighed in.

Obama surely deserves criticism. I questioned his ends, ways, and means in my piece about his first term. Thus, he was justly rebuked for falsely promising the health policy holders that they would be able to keep their current policies and see their old doctors after the passage of ACA. It is not clear to me if he knew better or was misled by the experts, but he paid the price for his misstatement. Has the Obama administration been particularly deceptive and dishonest? I don't think so, not by the standards set by his predecessors. Obama has been remarkably open about his political agenda, just as he managed to stay above the fray and avoid the taint of personal corruption.

By and large, my kids share with me my political preferences. I do take them to Vegas shows when they are in town, they come with me on mountain hikes, we talk on the phone regularly. If they found out that I skipped the election they would be surprised, although in the past I declined to cast vote for either party candidate when I felt that neither merited support. This year is different, the stakes are too high. Look at the Brexit enthusiasts – didn't they the fruit of their victory bitter-sweet?

You say Goffman would have hated the idea of EGA. Is it because he loathed publicity, because he feared negative exposure, because he knew some of his contemporaries had an ax to grind, because the temple of science where he worshiped shouldn't be profaned with the glimpses of its backstage operations? Incidentally, EG's daughter appears to have more tolerance for public exposure than her father. And her political sensibilities are far more progressive.

All best,
Dmitri

November 10, 2016

Dear Dmitri,

Your [Las Vegas gaming journal](#) is wonderful! There was much to learn. I was stimulated to re-examine my assumptions about gambling and Goffman. Bravo!

Fleeting thoughts on your article:

- 1) I always resist your efforts to lump horse racing with casino gambling. Consider: In horse racing lore “a bad day” at the track is better than a good day anywhere else.” In Casino gambling, a bad day is a bad day. Period. Everything else is commentary.
- 2) The term “conundrum”, in the paradigmatic case, is a riddle whose answer contains a pun. An example from Hamlet: the first gravedigger merrily asks, “What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?” The second gravedigger answers: “The gallows-maker! For that frame outlives a thousand tenants.” “Do we derive behavior from values or deduce values from overt conduct?” Clearly, we do both: Weber derived behavior from values (*The Protestant Ethic*); Durkheim derived values from overt conduct (*Elementary Forms*). This is hardly a problem. I know I’m being a portentous pedant. Blame my concussion.
- 3) In a ramous lecture, Heidegger summarized the life of Aristotle: “He was born, he worked, he died.” I have the same view about Goffman. *The work is the only thing*, independent of his Ukrainian-Jewish background. You might have used Goffman’s ethical heritage to explain his voracious indulgence in casino buffets, leading to 15 pounds on his tiny frame.
- 4) You did a first-rate job in providing an overview and context for the articles that follow.
- 5) You have a sublime passion to hunt a needle in a haystack. Who else would scour the Internet for casino fires that broke out in the 1960’s?

A quick word on the other articles:

1. Schwartz: I learned a great deal about the Vegas scene. Schwartz has a show-stopping sentence about Goffman curtailing his casino study because of “a crisis that involved evil.” I imagined Goffman making a pact with the Devil, like in *Dr. Faustus*.
2. Green: There was even more to learn about the social-cultural history of Vegas.
3. Lyng: This is the most theoretical and stimulating essay. It was a smart move to connect WAI with Giddens and Beck on risk, and link Goffman’s notion of action with “hermeneutically mediated reflexivity.”
4. Sallaz: In effect what Sallaz is doing is using Goffman’s terms as metaphors for discussing two apparently opposing narratives. Goffman is a “strong poet” (in Harold Bloom’s term) and the result is understanding rather than empirical knowledge.
5. Manning: For decades I’ve been a big fan of Manning, but he was never a student of Goffman, who taught us to follow Parsons’ method of “analytic realism.” Parsons’ nemesis was Gouldner, Mills, and perhaps for argument, Blumer. But Goffman was always sympathetic to Parsons’ theory of action of 1937, and more generally to functionalism. Manning is using a straw man as a heuristic device.
6. Cosgrave: This was an effective conclusion, summarizing what went before and relieving the key points of your article.

I read Alice Goffman's *On the Run* with mixed feelings. She had only one footnote to Daddy, who warned that the danger of participant observation is the real risk of making oneself a horse's ass, which she did in this study. Alice went native. The cops subsequently came after her. After making a big splash, Alice went undercover. She has no interest in the role of attitudes, habits, and values that produce crime among blacks. Focus is on the victimage of blacks. She also fails to say anything about the "success" of those blacks in the "6th Street" section of Philadelphia. What is it about the personal histories of "clean blacks" (as Biden would call them) that have kept them that way. Alice does not talk about their relative success.

I had another extremely dangerous fall, leading me to reorder my priorities, which is the reason you haven't heard from me till now.

For your sake and Jackie's, I would like to have had Hillary win. She must be distraught. But, Dmitri, given your understanding of dialectical swings in the Geist and the experience of Brexit, you should have foreseen a Trump triumph. The problem of having a political preference is that you see what you believe.

Keep doing what you are doing,
Scott

November 28, 2016
Greetings Scott:

Another bad fall – this is not good. Sounds depressingly familiar. My mother had a bunch of such episodes in her 90s. Looks like the time has arrived for you to double down on caution as you move around. It is easier to counsel than practice such care, to be sure. Still, try to get a grip. There are people out there who need you.

Goffman lists horseracing alongside other forms of action, I just follow his lead. You know something about the domain that others don't.

There is a lot more to Aristotle and Heidegger than their work. Aristotle endeared himself to Philip of Macedonia, who asked the philosopher to tutor his son, Alexander the Great, and later tapped him to lead the Royal Academy. Aristotle's rise to prominence in Macedonia and Athens had to do with this patronage. The connection proved dangerous: after Alexander died, Aristotle had to flee Athens. The charges he faced (impiety) were spurious. The more likely reason is the fact that he was thought to be, and probably was, an agent of influence. EG's life was every bit as colorful as his illustrious predecessors, and as I tried to show, meaningful in the context of his intellectual growth. You side with Heidegger who despised biography (he insisted that Nietzsche's life had no bearing on his ideas). The only thing that matters in the intellectual's life, according to Heidegger, is the contemplation of Being of beings. I beg to differ (see enclosed my [article on Heidegger and Gadamer](#)).

The quote on "crisis that involved evil" as a reason why Goffman stopped his casino study comes from my interview with Travis Hirschi who attended EG's seminar in the early 60s. David Schwartz quotes this interview.

I am not sure you single out the right "Manning." You probably have in mind Peter Manning. The article in the journal belongs to Philip Manning.

Interesting observations on AG's book. Reasons why some ghetto residents gravitate to crime while others stay out are skirted in the study. I bought the book in the fall of 2014, wincing a few times as I read it. This is an impressive achievement, effective as a piece of advocacy rather than scholarship. While there is only one footnote referring to her father, there is a bunch of hidden citations (I jotted down notes on the book, comparing

EG's and AGs ethnographic styles). It's been painful to follow the controversy over her fieldwork practices. That must have been painful to her. Hope she has weathered the storm.

As for Trump's victory, it is a phenomenon. We shall face the consequences in years, if not decades, to come. A tax-evading, bigotry-stalking, crotch-grabbing conman is at the helm – the cunning of reason, indeed. To every folk the government it deserves, Hegel used to say. Hope this ignoramus will live to rue the day he threw his hat into the ring.

Take good care of yourself,
Dmitri

P.S. My [paper on extended mind and embodied social psychology](#) is enclosed.

January, 2017

Dear Dmitri,

As they say in Little Odessa, "S novym godom!"

Your latest manuscripts provide another opportunity to share the way I look at things. We are delightfully incommensurable. Take, for instance, Heidegger's philosophy and his Nazi membership and moral character. As you might suspect, on this issue I'm with Richard Rorty. That is, there is no connection between Heidegger's philosophy and his Nazi membership. In other words, there is no way to compare moral virtue with philosophy. Effectively, then, everything you say about Heidegger is a pragmatic heuristic analysis of an idea already in your head. Solipsism is fun.

No matter. What is important is that a piece of theoretical work must tell a compelling story. Richard Wolin writes a compelling narrative on your subject. What you have done here is quite "goodenough," to use Winnicott's term

Poor Gadamer. It seems his only sin is being a Conservative. I accept that an underlying (effective historical) perspective makes interpretation possible. It sounds a lot like Alistair McIntyre: We need to recapture the sense that what we are is largely a matter of what we have become through our history and traditions. Without these notions, morality can make little sense for us. This is what it takes to Make America Great Again!

Alas, you are a materialist reductionist like Vygotsky. This makes you vulnerable to neuroscience as an explanatory variable in understanding consciousness. Sociological neuroscience is an example of what Wittgenstein would call "...scientific methods and conceptual errors." I'm not buying any of it.

In your discussion of "panpsychism" you omitted mention of Thomas Nagel, who made the strongest case that mental properties are constituent features of matter.

Also missing was a story to connect Descartes and Spinoza. Here's the story. Kant, the great destroyer, asserted that the noumenal (God) cannot be known. This created a crisis for three Lutheran theology students – Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. The only solution was to resurrect Spinoza's pantheism. Descartes' dualism is replaced by Spinoza's monism, and the latest expression of this maneuver is "panpsychism." There's where I stand,

On stylistic points:

- 1) "I beg to differ" is one of your pet phrases. Strangle it.
- 2) You tend to give too much information about a subject. For example, you will write, "Anton Chekov, a Russian short story writer and playwright." It is as if you are writing for morons, and perhaps you are. Too much on Descartes.

If Trump and Putin arrange joint naval exercises in the South Pacific, call me a seer.

Onward,
Scott

January 25, 2017
Greetings Marvin:

Exploring interfaces and contradictions between our verbal, affective, and behavioral outputs is an acquired taste. You can read Heidegger without any reference to his life (although that would not be consistent with some of his pronouncements). On its merit, Heidegger's philosophy puts me off. The early texts where his imagination was nourished by existential concerns are inspired, even though *Being & Time* is verbose and abstruse in places. The latter Heidegger strikes me as rather trite. My preference is for the Socratic mode of blending theory with life. Platonic pronouncements on ethereal forms and essences that have little bearing on the conduct of life strike me as spurious. Which is not to say that disembodied speculations are without merit, that the interest in highfalutin abstractions is superfluous. It's just that I don't have a mind or talent for such philosophizing.

Neuroscience doesn't have all the answers. It undermines stale verities, sheds new light on the interfaces between mind and body, and to that extent is welcome by pragmatists interested in the working of self-consciousness. As for the reductionism of Mead and Vygotsky I, "beg to differ" or, which is the same thing in my lexicon, couldn't disagree with you more. The whole argument on which I based my paper on extended mind and embodied social psychology is that novel evolutionary phenomena like consciousness are emergent, that selfhood is supervening on – and hence irreducible to – the affective-somatic processes from which it springs and which it harnesses to its end.

Your take on the popularity of Spinozism among German idealists as a reaction to Kant's agnosticism is plausible. I can think of other reasons why Spinoza's legacy was reclaimed in that era but will spare you the recapitulation of what I said in my paper.

I write with my students in mind. They know little about Kant, Dilthey, Heidegger, or Chekhov, hence my thumbnail sketches and parenthetical explanations. Professionals might cringe, but few will bother with my writing anyhow.

As for the two of us, we share certain interests but see few things eye to eye. You find neuroscience misleading insofar as its findings pertain to the human mind; I am fascinated with it. You think solipsism is all fun and game; I see it as a costly escape from reality. You consider pragmatic liberalism to be wishful thinking and Obama's politics a ruse; I find his pragmatic sensibilities and cool intellectualism consequential and re/constructive. Let's leave it at that.

Take care and be well,
Dmitri

February, 2017
Dear Dmitri,

For 40 years the "climate of opinion" for academic intellectuals included globalism, multi-culturalism, diversity, bi-lingualism, political correctness, identity politics – and all of it acquired establishment approval and support. Then came Trump, as Hegelian hero, to shift the direction of the Geist.

A sudden shift in the institutional order Durkheim termed “acute anomie.” What follows is emotional excess and group hysteria, misery and fear. These feelings should fade in three months. If not, please write to tell why not?

Our ultimate difference is this: I believe (in my heart of heart) that Sociology requires the cultivation of *detachment*, even though it leads to a certain isolation from the culture and its institutional supports. This is Goffman’s view and the view of his teacher, Ed Shils who wrote a famous essay on “Sociology as a Galling.” It stresses the need to cultivate *detachment*.

Dmitri, I know, I know, you beg to differ. We are in opposing camps. Yeats described them: “The best have no convictions, the worst are full of passionate intensity.”

In his classes, Goffman announced to the students that to get an “A” on a paper, it must say something he didn’t know. Using that criterion, you are top “A” all the way. You have no reason to be defensive.

Don’t hesitate to send a copy of anything you write. Responses will not be meant to teach, but to provoke. And that’s a good thing.

Keep doing what you are doing,
Marvin Scott

March 6, 2017
Greetings Marvin:

I cherish the honest difference of opinion and try to expand room for it. I also revel in contradictions as a mark of real life. Which is why our differences are welcome. Not all differences are honest, however, nor all contradictions commendable.

You quote Yeats about the dangers of convictions and the willingness of the brightest to shun them. This is the man who flirted with fascism and pined for strong authority. Eventually, he jettisoned fascist politics – not because he lost confidence in its truth but because he saw fascism facing imminent defeat. Yeats’ poetry stands on its own, as is Ezra Pound’s (whom EG met while doing research at St. Elizabeth’s). It’s hard for me to savor their poetic imagination without considering the impact their political sensibilities had on their writing.


Detachment is a worthy quality. It helps sociologists avoid an uncritical identification with any one creed, class, regime. That doesn’t mean we should check at the door our right to judge.

Trump slammed Obama as a secret Muslim born in Kenia and fraudulently obtaining U.S. presidency. He accused Ted Cruz’s father in taking part in the JFK assassination. He conjured up millions of illegal voters giving Hilary Clinton the popular majority in the presidential election. And now he is accusing his predecessor in wiretapping the Trump tower. All that without a shred of evidence, or willingness to concede the truth after his loony claims were exposed.

The 45th president of the United States comes across as a pathological liar and conman. By contrast, the 44th stands as a man of dignity. I see no moral equivalence between the two, the cunning of history notwithstanding. Yes, you mean to provoke, not to offend, and I appreciate that. I hope you can see where I am coming from, too.

Be well Scott,
Dmitri

Below is a facsimile of one of Marvin Scott's letters.



Marvin B. Scott
85 East End Avenue, #2C
New York, NY 10028

January, 2016

Dear Dimitri,

Your book, article, and clipping are much appreciated. Next time, I will share my thoughts on all these "goodies."

Meanwhile, I'll try to clarify my thinking on the influences that account specifically for Goffman's "weird brilliance." You are thinking in a more general way about "precursors"; so, yes, Huizinga makes the cut. Among literary "precursors, I would say that Kafka, T.S. Eliot, and Henry James shaped his "style" and outlook.—Pirandello is sui generis.

Now, in mentioning Wittgenstein as one of the three major influences, I include Ryle, both providing an extreme analytic behavioral theory of mind. What resulted is ~~that~~ Becker's wry observation that Goffman's work sometimes had a peculiar whiff of positivism. What we have in PSEL is the absence of a self. Under the Wittgenstein-Ryle influence, there is no psychological self that thinks, believes, or feels. This makes the world strange. In sum, Goffman's weird brilliance is hard for me to conceive without Pirandello, Burke, and Wittgenstein-Ryle.

Blumer and Mead played a problematic role as influencers. For his part, Blumer dispraised Goffman's work as so many strings of "catchy phrases." Goffman told me that the only thing he got from Mead was the concept of "communication" whereby the meaning of a message is the response of the other. No small matter, since this notion is the foundation of a Pragmatic Sociology, which is another way of describing Goffman's work.

Sartre is also a problematic precursor. To be sure, Sartre and Burke share the same Logos, which can be stated either as a snooty "Existence precedes Essence," or the plain "Doing is Being." Sartre's chapter on "Bad Faith" was on G's reading list in his course called "Social Contacts." But Goffman would seem to reject Sartre on the big stuff. S emphasized Freedom; Goffman, constraints. S was a vocal Communist; G, a political conservative.

Because Merton was your one time dissertation supervisor, you might be interested in the following:

When teaching one summer at Columbia, I get a note from Merton that he wishes to see me. At the appointed hour, he took from his draw^{er} a letter from a former student who was disturbed at something I published in Social Forces that argued that Merton's anomie theory was equivalent to staging Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. The point being that the concept of anomie was Durkheimian, Merton's analysis was Weberian. Merton advised me, for the sake of my career, to write a retraction. The next time I saw Merton (at an ASA convention) I told him that my biggest disappointment in his work was that it showed no evidence of his background as a magician. Meanwhile, G, who was easy to fool, has written a veritable text for magicians studying deception. He acknowledged the absence of "magic" in his work, but maintained that Goffman was a sociology of gossip.

p.2

One evening Goffman came to my apartment in Berkeley for my wife's Filet Roast and my demonstration of "frame analysis" using card tricks. I told him that all the tricks involved putting the audience in one frame while operating in another. Without providing any further disclosures, he became increasingly peeved when he was fooled each time. To this day I debate with myself if it were better to have revealed the effects.

Evreinov holds such a special place in my life that I have saved him for last. During the six months I lived in Goffman's house ("establishment" he called it), I had complete access to his very large library. I searched for Evreinov and it was not to be found, nor did Goffman ever mention him. Evreinov was a serendipitous find in the University of Illinois as an undergraduate. The title ("Theatre in Life") was irresistible and the content spoke to me. I hand-copied some 20 pages of the book, esp. Ch 3 on "The Passing Show. . . I'm familiar with his plays, the funky music he wrote for them, and at my behest one of my students interviewed Madame Evreinov, living in Paris. Evreinov's work left me spiritually open to G's PSEL. When Aldous Huxley taught a graduate seminar at Berkeley in the Political Science Department, his students were to write a paper on "The Use of Analogy in Political Theory." Instantly, my analogy would be Evreinov's "Theatrocracy," the rule by theater. All governments, Evreinov said--democracy, socialism, dictatorship--were so ruled. Huxley (who was blind at this time and had a grad student assist him walk and read to him the papers) singled out the paper and said that thatrocracy was not simply an analogy but a homology. He asked me where I got the idea, and since my paper included a lot of Goffman's "catchy phrases," I said "Professor Goffman from the Sociology Department." Huxley turned to his assistant and said "write that down."

I read "Theatre in Life" once a year. In my book (with Lyman) The Drama of Social Reality, Evreinov looms large.

Onward,

Morris Scott
