

Remembering Erving Goffman

Calvin Morrill:

Turns out Goffman Had Been Observing Students the Whole Time and Used the Notes He Had Taken While Observing Their Behavior

This interview with Calvin Morrill, Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Irvine, was recorded on August 3, 2008, during the ASA meeting in Boston. A group of sociologists assembled in the hallway was reminiscing about Goffman when Calvin Morrill volunteered this story and agreed to have it recorded. After Dmitri Shalin transcribed the interview, Dr. Morrill corrected the transcript and gave his approval for posting the present version in the Erving Goffman Archives.. Breaks in the conversation flow are indicated by ellipses. Supplementary information appears in square brackets. Undecipherable words and unclear passages are identified in the text as "[?]". The interviewer's questions are shortened in several places.

[Posted 10-10-08]

Shalin: It is August 3, 2008. I am talking to Calvin Morrill who teaches at the University of California, Irvine. He used to know one of the last students of Goffman at the University of Pennsylvania. . . .

Morrill: He transferred to Harvard in the summer of 82 or 83. . . . So, this fellow describes how he arrives one afternoon at Goffman's house somewhere just off the Penn campus for the first Social Interaction seminar [meeting] of the semester. He arrives at the appointed time with 8 to 10 students to find the door of Goffman's house ajar. Not sure what to do, they wait for a few minutes, after which somebody peeks in and sees this large living or sitting room set up for people to come in. There is some water in there, other things. Somebody says, "May be we should just come in, perhaps he is not here yet, got detained, left the door open for us." They troop in. After a few minutes somebody gets up and leaves, figuring maybe he shouldn't be there. The rest of them are hanging in for maybe 30-40 minutes. About an hour after they arrived, Goffman reveals himself. Turns out he had been observing them the whole time and used the notes he had taken while observing their behavior, how they managed to negotiate the situation, as a basis for the beginning the semester's seminar. . . .

. That's it.

Shalin: You might be the only person who heard this story from. .
. . . If somehow you can recall his name. . . .

[End of the recording]