

help him, if possible, and they did it. During Dmitri's stay in Rome, he was invited by Franco Ferrarotti, and Merton helped him get into graduate school at Columbia University, which enabled him to find his feet. American sociologists could not assess his Soviet dissertation on George Herbert Mead because nobody could read Russian. But after Shalin had published several papers in the leading sociological journals, Columbia University awarded him a PhD for his achievements as a whole, which was a rare case (though it was after Merton).

After Gorbachev's perestroika, when it was possible to travel abroad (I came to the USA for the first time in 1988, but I received my first formal invitation in 1966), I met Merton regularly in the Russell Sage Foundation, in New York City. Even after he had left Columbia, he was there each Wednesday. He had an excellent memory. In the early 1990s, he tried to renew my previous invitation to Stanford, but I was 60 already, so it did not happen. During all my visits to New York, Robert and his wife Harriet Zuckerman, also a famous sociologist, invited me in the evening to a club, for men or for women respectively. It was intriguing and I enjoyed it.

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Shalin: My dissertation was about George Mead and pragmatism. When the borders opened up, I emigrated to the U.S. where I contacted Blumer and Merton, whom Igor Kon knew, and maybe a couple of other sociologists, to see if I could study with them. Blumer wrote to me that I can come to work with him but that there is no money to support my education, nor much of a face value of the diploma at the American University (I think that's what it was), where he taught at the time. Meanwhile, Columbia University offered me a fellowship and an apartment for me and my family, so I went there, even though Columbia wasn't exactly a stronghold of interactionism and pragmatism.

Gladys Lang: When was this?

Shalin: I left Russia in August of 1975, and I came to the U. S. in January of 1976.

Kurt Lang: You said you got an apartment...

Shalin: It was at the Columbia University housing for graduate students on Broadway and 112th street. I planned to continue my work on pragmatism and Mead, but that didn't

¹ Lang K., Lang G. Goffman Converted His Personal Neurosis or Inferiority Complex into a Very Productive and Creative Solution // Bios Sociologicus: The Erving Goffman Archives / ed. by D. N. Shalin. 2009–2011 (Las Vegas: CDC Publications). URL: <http://www.unlv.edu/centers/cdclv/archives/publications/ega2.html>

come to pass. I happened to take Merton's seminar on the sociology of science where I gave a talk on the institutionalization of sociology in the Soviet Union. Rather inadvertently, my presentation advanced Merton's thesis about middle range theories challenging grand theoretical constructions. In that case it was empirical sociological research in post-Stalinist Russia which, I argued, undermined the Marxist predictions about the disappearance of alienated labor in a socialist economy. At the end of my class presentation, Merton said that he saw a dissertation and a monograph developing from my research. That was quite an encouragement. But I didn't want to become an expert on Russia in the United States and told Merton that much. I mean, I felt honored by what seemed like an invitation to work with the great man, but I really wanted to continue my research on pragmatism and sociology. Looking back, I realize that I might have broken an unwritten protocol — when Merton invites you to work with him, you don't tell him you have other plans. If you think there was a cult of Blumer [at the University of Chicago], you can imagine Merton's standing at Columbia.

Kurt Lang: Right.

[Laughter]

Shalin: I continued work on my topic, wrote some 300 pages which were supposed to be part one of my dissertation on "Romanticism, Pragmatism, and Interactionism." The idea was to track the evolution of Romantic idealism into pragmatist philosophy and then into the interactionist dialectics of self and society. Merton read the text and was clearly displeased with what he saw. He said the study was too philosophical, too theoretical, or what not. Meanwhile, I got a job at Southern Illinois University on the basis of my publications, A.B.D. from Columbia, and a Ph.D. I earned at the Russian Academy of Science Institute of Sociology. Years later, when I was on a sabbatical leave at Harvard, I ran into Allan Silver, one of my Columbia professors...

Kurt Lang: I know him!

Gladys Lang: Yes, Alan Silver.

Shalin: Allan said, "Dmitri, whatever happened to your doctoral thesis? I see you publish all those articles — did you ever submit your thesis?" I told him about my experience with Merton and the fact that he passed me on to his student and colleague, Jonathan Cole, the job I got at SIU, and tenure I earned there. The situation lost its urgency by then, and I didn't think I would get far with my research topic at Columbia. Anyway, that is when Allan told me about the *extra muros* defense option Columbia University has for people like me when...

Kurt Lang: Oh, we know that.

Shalin: ... Ph.D. is awarded to those who finished formal graduate school requirements but instead of writing a thesis submit their publications. Allan Silver told me that the other person awarded a Ph.D. at Columbia in this fashion was Daniel Bell.

Gladys and Kurt Lang: That's right!

[Laughter]

Shalin: And so Allan said, "I know your work. Quickly, put together a folder with your publications and send it to me. I will put together a committee, we shall set a defense date, and you will get your Ph.D." I said, "Are you serious? Can this be done?" He said something like, "Try me." I did as he told me, and guess what — Columbia awarded me a doctorate. So I got my second Ph.D. while doing research at Harvard on my sabbatical leave from Southern Illinois University.

Kurt Lang: We know a couple of other people [who did that].

Shalin: And when I came back from my sabbatical, I got a call from UNLV that was looking to hire a theorist and eventually made me an offer I couldn't refuse. Andy Fontana was the one who contacted me initially.

Kurt Lang: Yes.

Shalin: I told them that I had tenure and I couldn't leave SIU without certain guarantees. But that's a long story. I don't want to bore you with the details. This is how I came to UNLV.

Gladys Lang: This is the University of Nevada?

Shalin: University of Nevada in Las Vegas. The sociology department here has a strong presence of interactionists. *Symbolic Interaction* was housed here for a while. When Andy Fontana edited the journal, I served as an associate editor. Later Simon Gottschalk took over the editorship. The department has a notable qualitative orientation. My own research is focused on pragmatist sociology and Russian culture. For some years now I have been trying to articulate a program of pragmatist hermeneutics and conduct biocritical studies which explore the intersection of theoretical, biographical, and behavioral data. One key premise on which this work is based is that sociological imagination feeds on our emotional experience, that talented social scientists like Erving Goffman ride a strong affective impulse rather than simply straddle a discourse, apply a paradigm, and it is some personal embodied experience that allows a scholar to articulate what everybody knows yet no one notices. This applies to artists, writers as much as to humanist scholars. For instance, Anton Chekhov, a famous Russian writer and doctor by profession, has a story titled "Ward No. 6" that depicts an asylum where odd but otherwise sane people find themselves brutalized by the staff. This novella, I am convinced, reflects Chekhov's affective strains, and it also has uncanny resemblance to Goffman's *Asylums*.

Anyway, I embarked on this project, exploring the interfaces of Goffman's scholarship and biography. The web site where the project is housed features Goffman's publications, critical scholarship, media accounts, memoirs and interviews like the one I am conducting with you, which give his students, colleagues, and friends a chance to remember Erving Goffman. I can send you the web links or hard copies of my interviews. Oh, yes, there is also a section on "Comments and Dialogues" where we have a lively exchange on the ethics of fieldwork, problems of interviewing, Goffman's legacy, and so on. If someday you have any comments, I would like to post them in this section.

In a nutshell, that's where I am coming from and where I am heading.

Gladys Lang: I see. Well, that is quite remarkable. You have barely any accent.