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Introduction

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Introduction

by Rick Helmes-Hayes *and* Marco Santoro

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Still unknown to many practicing sociologists, rarely listed among the masters or seminal authors by historians of social thought, usually missing in dictionaries, encyclopedias, and guides to the discipline,¹ Everett Cherrington Hughes (1897-1983) is nonetheless recognized by a handful of scholars spread all over the globe as one of the most innovative, original and even, paradoxically, influential sociologists of the Twentieth century. His historical relevance in the development and establishment of sociology in the US and in Canada is unquestionable.² He was a prominent member of the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago – where he studied in the 1920s and where he taught, after an interlude in Canada, between 1938 and 1961 – and a crucial figure in what is widely known as the “second Chicago School” [Fine 1995]. Hughes’ unconventional teaching and pioneering research practice attracted a wide array of students and he contributed to the *formation* of several sociologists who became famous and influential in their own right: Howard S. Becker, Joseph Gusfield, Anselm Strauss, Donald Roy, Edward Gross, Eliot Freidson, Gaye Tuchman, Bernie Thorne, and, probably most notable of all, Erving Goffman. The last mentioned has indeed on a few occasions attributed to Hughes not only some of

¹ For an exception, see Ritzer [2004] and specifically Helmes-Hayes [2004].

² Hughes’ thinking and teaching could also have exerted some impact on post-war, occupied Germany, where he and other Chicago sociologists helped, as US scholars, to re-establish and modernize sociology after World War II [see Guth 2010]. Aspects of Hughes’ point of view on post-Nazi Germany may be seen in “Innocents Abroad 1948,” here published for the first time.

his ideas but his whole approach to sociological research, defining it as “Hughesian sociology.” By this he meant that at its core it had an exceptional curiosity about small-scale entities (e.g. occupations) and relied, above all, on a “qualitative, ethnographic perspective” [Verhoeven 1993, 318]. This is a decisively surprising homage, considering the Canadian sociologist’s dislike of labels and intellectual “schools” and well known reluctance to reveal his sources. Likewise, though not strictly speaking Hughes’ students, David Riesman and William Foote White, authors respectively of *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) and *Street Corner Society* (1943), i.e. two of the most celebrated and successful sociological books of the century, on many occasions acknowledged the strong influence of the Chicago ethnographer on their work, indeed on their very sociological vocation.

Hughes’ contribution to sociology extends beyond his impact, both personal and scholarly, on manifold important and influential scholars. He was more than the beloved and appreciated teacher or friend of talented students and fellow sociologists. Briefly put, in the more than forty years of his intellectual and academic career, Hughes was a pioneer in at least two substantive fields – occupations and race and ethnic relations – and one area of methodological research: ethnography. Beginning with the latter, we may justifiably say that Hughes was an authentic and undisputed master of the ethnographic approach. This was true in a double sense. First, he was a highly talented practitioner of the method. Second, he introduced more than one generation (indeed, at least two, if not three generations) of US and Canadian sociologists to ethnographic research and taught them how to look at social reality with a sensitive and discerning ethnographical “gaze,” or, better, “eye.” To his teaching we owe a series of outstanding ethnographic studies that to this day are considered essential readings for any apprentice to the ethnographer’s art: from the classic *Street Corner Society* mentioned above to Polsky’s *Hustlers, Beats and Others* (1967), from Becker’s studies on jazz musicians (later collected in *Outsiders*) to Roy’s ethnography of factory work, later replicated and supplemented by Michael Burawoy [Roy 1959; Burawoy 1979], and from Tuchman’s *Making News* (1974) to Thorne’s *Gender Play* (1978). To Hughes himself we owe the classic Canadian ethnography *French Canada in Transition* (1943). And we are further indebted to him for supervising both *Boys in White* [Becker *et al.* 1961], a classic of occupational and educational ethnography, and the highly valuable *Making the Grade* [Becker *et al.* 1969].

Hughes regarded the sociology of occupations as a broad area of research that included the sociological study of professions – a specialty that both Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton were eager to insulate and separate from the more humble world of trades and jobs. In the field of the sociology of occupations, Hughes’s influence was impressive. Indeed, in a sense, we can reasonably say that the field exists

in good measure because of Hughes and his courses, teaching, and early writings. His first contribution to occupational sociology dates to 1928, the year of his entry in the professional world of sociologists. His first book, *The Chicago Real Estate Board*, drawn from his PhD thesis, was also a detailed ethnographic study of an occupation – real estate agents – and its claim to professional status. And he retained this interest throughout his career. At least five books Hughes authored or coauthored, including the classic *Men and their Work* (1958), are devoted to the study of occupations. It is to Hughes that contemporary sociologists of occupation (themselves an integral part of the more general, maybe too general, sociology of work) owe such profitable and precious concepts such as “license,” “mandate,” “the social drama of work,” and “level of effort” – not to speak of original developments from Hughes’ ideas like Andrew Abbott’s notion of “jurisdiction” [Abbott 1988].

In the field of ethnic relations – where Park’s teachings are possibly more apparent than elsewhere in Hughes’ work – Hughes’ legacy constitutes a comprehensive perspective rather than just a series of conceptual tools. Simply put, for Hughes there is no collection of traits which allows us to say: “This group constitutes an ethnic group.” For Hughes, an ethnic group exists only in so far as there is a boundary among two or more social entities. It is the moving boundary and not any fixed collection of traits that explains, indeed constitutes, ethnicity. Contemporary writings on ethnic identity, including writings that challenge the concept of identity, are in debt to Hughes’ pioneering work. Even current criticism of sociology as an only apparently universal (that is, “scientific”) discipline that needs to be “provincialized” [see Burawoy 2005] finds in Hughes, with his plea for a non-ethnocentric sociology, an insightful forerunner.

A return to Hughes nowadays, especially a return to his intellectual example and teachings, can be justified for reasons other than a nostalgic homage to a forgotten or neglected master. Certainly, it is this sense that Hughes’ approach has current relevance that has recently produced an interest in his work and legacy in France and Italy, two countries intellectually distant from the American spaces which provided Hughes with exemplars and research objects as well as stimuli for his highly original and provocative thinking. This is particularly the case in France where, more than other country, there has been a veritable “rediscovery” of Hughes beginning in the 1980s. This rediscovery, in actuality a “discovery” in most cases, came about largely as a result of the work and activities of Jean-Michel Chapoulie. Chapoulie is the author of a number of landmark studies on Hughes’ work and legacy [e.g. Chapoulie 1996] and, as well, edited a collection of the first translations of Hughes’ writings in a language different from his native tongue. This development would have pleased Hughes, who spoke fluent French (and German), taught for some years in Quebec,

and addressed much of his early work to Canada's Francophone population. Indeed, he is probably best known in Canada as the author of *French Canada in Transition* (1943), one of the true classics of the pioneer era of Canadian sociology. But the impact of Hughes' work on French sociology goes well beyond this Franco-Canadian link, and has to do with the ethnographic and qualitative turn that French sociologists have experienced and fostered in the last twenty years. The annual presence in Paris of Howie Becker, whose habit is to spend part of every autumn in the French capital, has contributed a good deal in this regard. Becker has long been interested in ethnographically oriented French sociology and anthropology (e.g. Raymond Moulin, Bruno Latour and others, even younger scholars) and for his part has contributed a good deal to the insertion of a sort of "Chicago brand" or "style" into some of the sociological work done around Parisian institutions such as the Ecole de Mines or the Ecole des haute etudes en sciences sociales.

An even more recent development, still in the making, is an interest in Hughes' work developing among Italian scholars. This interest has been fostered in part by the "Parisian gravitation" of a few Italian sociologists. However, it grows as well out of a burgeoning interest in the Chicago tradition – beyond its conventional symbolic interactionist (and Goffmanesque) streams – as well as the spread of the more general ethnographic turn that occurred in Italy as elsewhere in the 1990s. The Italian translation of most of Hughes' *The Sociological Eye* [Hughes 2010],³ promises to be the right step for finally introducing the name and insights of this scholar even to sociologists who are not attuned either to ethnographic approaches in general and the Chicago tradition in particular. Hopefully, this will include those more inclined to social theory and macrosociology – a substantial camp in Italy. Indeed, as both of us (Santoro and Helmes-Hayes) have noted in our respective writings on Hughes' work, there is much that is theoretically interesting and precious in Hughes' writings, even if it is not the kind of theory to which we have become accustomed – for example, as it appears in the writings of theorists such as Talcott Parsons and Jurgen Habermas. Everett Hughes produced neither an elaborate, complex and highly abstract system of conceptual categories nor a philosophically inclined critical theory. Nonetheless, he had well developed conceptual skills, a keen critical and political eye, and always kept theoretical concerns in mind as he carried out his various research and writing projects. The unpublished texts here collected and made public for the first time show this clearly.

³ Marco Santoro, co-editor of this special issue of *Sociologica*, promoted, edited and wrote the introduction for this volume of Hughes' essays [see Santoro 2010].

The first of the three papers – “Innocents Abroad, 1948” – is quintessential Hughes. It came about as a consequence of his travels in Germany after World War II. In many respects, it is a companion piece to one of the most praised and seminal of Hughes’ articles, “Good People and Dirty Work” (1962). The latter article dealt with the tendency for people to allow others to do “dirty work” for them – in this case to run the Nazi concentration camps. “Innocents Abroad” outlines Hughes’ argument that it was crucial for Germans to admit their guilt and openly discuss the cultural meaning and significance of their collective decision to allow the Nazis to commit atrocities against the Jewish people. As well, however, it makes plain that the phenomenon of “dirty work,” like the use of subterfuge to label and rank “others,” the temptation to try and portray oneself in a positive light, and so forth – all of which Hughes illustrates by reference to post-war Germany – have no national boundaries. Here as always he uses the strategy of comparison to sociological advantage.

The second of the three previously unpublished works printed herein is a long letter or, better, a memorandum, to Hughes’ early student Erving Goffman. The memo, which deals at length with the concept of the “total institution,” was discovered in Hughes’ papers in the Archives at the University of Chicago by Belgian sociologist Philippe Vienne. As Vienne points out in his introduction to the piece, it highlights Hughes at his best as both conceptual analyst and imaginative thinker. The context is clearly the complicated, somewhat tension-filled intellectual relationship between Hughes and Goffman. The memo is interesting not only because it illuminates the origins of the concept of the total institution, but also because it offers a privileged occasion for understanding how this concept might have worked in Hughes’ able hands. The mentor does not claim in the letter an explicit paternity, but it is clear that he feels the concept emerged directly from his own thinking and teaching.

The third previously unpublished text is short but arguably precious. Hughes produced it as a teaching aid, an outline as we may call it and Hughes probably called it, for the study of occupations. We cannot be sure this is the *Outline* to which Hughes refers in one of his most famous papers – “The Humble and the Proud: The Comparative Study of Occupations” – as a benchmark for any student of occupations coming from Chicago (in the 1940s and 1950s), but we think it worthy of publication in any case. Certainly, it clearly exemplifies and summarizes the specific way Hughes approached, and taught others to approach, not only occupations – a highly relevant sociological topic in itself, to be sure – but any entity or object of sociological concern. We can describe his approach as provisional, processual, comparative, critical and even cosmopolitan – in the sense of not ethnocentric, and always eager to identify, locating in it any specific concrete instance, the field of possibilities of any social object, including its same existence as a recognizable and recognized object. Among

other things, the *Outline* demonstrates Hughes' sensitivity to the use of language and to linguistic variation, in the form of naming and "definitions"; it is through language that any field of possibilities first expresses itself but also comes to some closure (through the official definition). As Santoro suggests in his postscript to the paper, this sensitivity to language makes Hughes an important forerunner and early practitioner – rarely acknowledged as such if not systematically neglected – of the cultural turn that has had such an impact on sociology since the 1980s.

In addition to these pieces of Hughes' work, this section of the special issue also contains four critical essays. The broadest purpose of these essays, written by Howie Becker, Marco Santoro, Rick Helmes-Hayes, and Philippe Vienne, is to provide a conceptual and historical context useful for understanding not just the Hughes' texts here published but the rest of his work as well.

We are particularly pleased to introduce what we consider an especially insightful and sensitive essay by Hughes' "master pupil": Howie Becker. Becker's creative mind is here focused on a specific methodological dimension of Hughes' research practice – his emphasis on comparison. According to Becker, Hughes' focus on the use of the comparative method merits more careful attention than it has heretofore received. Indeed, in Becker's estimation, the comparative dimension of Hughes' work was absolutely integral to his thinking and practice, nearly as important as direct observation (ethnography). The two are indeed, for Becker, so strongly intertwined in Hughes' masterful hands that they are inseparable.

Becker's insistence on comparison as a crucial hallmark of Hughesian sociology also resonates in the essays by Helmes-Hayes and Santoro. Helmes-Hayes' contribution reflects on Hughes' methodological thinking and practice, demonstrating its integral connection to what Helmes-Hayes sees as Hughes' overall theoretical frame of reference. Perhaps the most unusual feature of Helmes-Hayes' argument comes in the essay's conclusion, where he claims that Hughes' theoretical frame of reference and methodological orientation contain a view of how to live a reflective and reflexive life as a scholar-citizen. Helmes-Hayes' contention is that Hughes did not, as the conventional wisdom would suggest, everywhere and always separate sociology and politics.

Santoro's contribution offers, under the manifest cloth of a modest postscript, a discussion of "Hughesian sociology" – a category which entered the sociological vocabulary mainly through Goffman, who used it reflexively in a well known interview [Verhoeven 1992], moving from the same "Outline for the sociological study of an occupation" referred to above. Its aim is to track the essential features – the apparent but also hidden logic – of a manner of doing sociological analysis which has produced over the years a remarkable quantity of very high-quality sociological knowledge. The main point of the paper is that "occupation," far from being a con-

tingent object, and as such modifiable and interchangeable with any other, is a crucial social reality. That is, it is a strategic object for sociological analysis in so far as nobody socially exists without being occupied in doing something and occupying some place at the same time. We can define “occupation” as an elementary structure of social life, and still before an elementary category of social thought, including the profane one. Be it occupation of the soil or of a certain place in the social division of labor, occupation has to do with the conditions themselves of human life as socially and territorially grounded.

It is not by chance that the article that concludes the collection is written by a Francophone, the Belgian scholar Philippe Vienne. As we noted above, for the past fifteen years, France more than any country outside the United States has been a site for the scholarly study of Hughes’ teaching and writings. This occurred in part because of the Canadian (and therefore Francophone) mediation, but more importantly because of the strong impact both the “Chicago tradition” and ethnographic method more generally have had in France since the 1980s. In turn, this has been a consequence of Bourdieu’s mediated reception of Goffman.⁴ Vienne’s interest in Hughes is grounded clearly in this Francophone – recent but already well established – interest in Chicago and interactionism. Using a novel approach, Vienne approaches Hughes’ ideas indirectly, by examining his relationship to one of the stars of the Chicago tradition, Erving Goffman. Vienne demonstrates the extent to which Goffman was influenced by Hughes, investigating how the latter originally approached and elaborated the idea of “the total institution,” a concept generally regarded as having been developed by Goffman. In the process, Vienne tries to make sense of a difficult and evolving intellectual relation between a “master” – Hughes – and a “reluctant apprentice” – Goffman. Vienne’s analysis capitalizes fully on previous studies and reflections by Tom Burns [1992] and especially Gary Jaworski [2000] but draws as well on rich documentation about the Hughes-Goffman relationship he has located in the Hughes’ papers in Chicago. What is clear after reading his work is that there is much Hughes in Goffman, thus demonstrating that intellectual influences are a topic as relevant to the sociologists of knowledge and ideas as they are to historians of social thought and social theorists.

⁴ Bourdieu and Goffman met in the early 1970s in the US and soon became friends and mutual students and critics of each other’s work. In France, Bourdieu has promoted the translation of many of Goffman’s texts into French in his collection at Minuit.

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26.

Introduction

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