

**BOOK REVIEW**

Helmes-Hayes/Santoro (eds.): Everett Hughes

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The series of Anthem Companions of Sociology claims to offer “authoritative and comprehensive assessments of major figures in the development of sociology from the last two centuries“ (publisher’s website). This Anthem Companion to Everett Hughes (1897–1983) edited by a Canadian-Italian duo compiles appraising, interpretative, and critical contributions by a distinctly international community of knowledgeable Hughes Scholars. Their views on Hughes’s (hereafter ECH) somewhat scattered works and legacy of teaching sociology also reflect the ECH reception that has taken place since the 1990s in European sociology.

The mere fact that ECH left no “magnum opus“ (Arlene Daniels quoted in the Introduction by Helmes-Hayes and Santoro 2016: 3 f.), but rather published a number of concise journal articles, and that he “inspire[d] generations of later-to-become-prominent sociologists“ (Howard S. Becker in the Foreword to Helmes-Hayes and Santoro 2016: ix) would justify to publish this book. Just as the “Festschrift in Honor of Everett C. Hughes“ edited by Howard S. Becker, Blanche Geer, David Riesman and Robert S. Weiss in 1968 appreciates Hughesian sociology.

ECH’s contribution to sociology is said to be underestimated, because “he did not produce either an elaborate, complex and highly abstract system of conceptual categories or a philosophically inclined critical theory“ (Helmes-Hayes and Santoro 2016: 17). Still his capacity of conceptualization and his fine, detached and sometimes ironic style is typical for him, and for his students, among them Erving Goffman and Howard S. Becker. The latter has contrary to the former frequently pointed to this lineage. On the other hand, however, ECH “made no effort to build a coterie of followers“ (Helmes-Hayes and Santoro 2016: 2). So readers who enjoy Goffman’s or Becker’s accurate reports of the sometimes weird facets of social life that contain a good amount of humor should definitely consider to read ECH’s *Sociological Eye* (Hughes 1984).

As opposed to the “high-strung indifference“ of the merely apparently free true believers (cf. Hughes 1984: 350) ECH seemed to enjoy the gaze of “self contained indifference to the opinions of ‘others’ which one sometimes observes, perhaps more often in women and cats than in men and dogs; ... detachment, amused and even bemused“ (Hughes 1984: 350). This quotidian practice of



distancing oneself as observer from the studied situation is not a bad start for the professional scientific study of the social world.

Fieldwork was one of the main concerns and threads of Hughesian sociology and this ethnographic perspective has provided a bridge between the two Chicago Schools (the founders W.I. Thomas and Robert Park of the First Chicago School and the Symbolic Interactionists H.S. Becker, Erving Goffman, Anselm Strauss and others), as Chapoulie argues in his chapter, a reprint of a 1996 article.

”Cultivate a way of thinking where everything is interesting“ (H.S. Becker, personal communication, Feb, 12, 1998 UCSB)—I bet that Howie Becker’s advice given in a graduate seminar at UCSB has been inspired by ECH. ”Every detail of social life had some meaning if you were good and patient enough to look for it“ (Helses-Hayes and Santoro 2016: 11). This approach requires modesty towards one’s own discoveries and will lead to reluctance towards authoring big tomes of grand theory. Instead, this approach encourages to write precise and concise conceptualizations of a great variety of observations, conceptualizations that always stay in touch with the macro concepts of sociology. Helmes-Hayes coins the term ”Interpretive Institutional Ecology“ for this approach that makes use of anthropological functionalism, human ecology, and Simmel’s as well as Weber’s work (Helses-Hayes 2016: 72).

An example for ECH’s reference to ”macro-variables“ such as social change in even trivial observations of everyday life is his concise and accurate conclusion that burnout is a consequence of the free choice of career: ”[ECH] mused that occupational burnout—then a hot topic—had been around as long as occupations were chosen rather than assigned. This phenomenon was particularly troubling when occupations required faith or belief in a larger purpose“ (Harper 2016: 134).

This puts in a nutshell what commentators of the woes and worries of ”late modernity“ spread out with many more words but far less brilliancy.

ECH practiced free association (Helses-Hayes 2016: 77) at its best, which is able to illustrate the *Sociological Imagination* (Mills 1959) to novices to Sociology. It’s no coincidence that the volume Lewis Coser edited in 1994 was titled *Everett C. Hughes on Work, Race and the Sociological Imagination*.

In ”Teaching as Fieldwork“ ECH gives many examples for this craft of free association, among them the observation of one of his students whose father was a salesman for men’s suits. These salesmen busy themselves in convincing the customer of the perfect fit by stroking neck, shoulders and back of the suit. This laying on of hands creates a somewhat ambiguous and uncomfortable situation for both customer and salesman. ”This case helps one to understand why designers of dresses for women are, if they are, male homosexuals“ (Hughes 1984: 570). Inspired by ECH one is tempted to push the argument further and asks, what about male hair stylists, male nurses, or dancers, and flight attendants. But wait; am I reproducing a common stereotype? However, ECH explains concisely that ”stereotyping ... is evidence of lack of communication and understanding“ (Hughes 1984: 575). A diligent fieldworker, such as ECH, may be immune to the fallacy of stereotyping because her/his curiosity will lead to communication and eventually to understanding.

Hughesian-style free association does not lead to a huddle of unconnected observations. “Rather, he has an extremely strong conceptual mind which operates with the materials of concrete reality, which functions by relating apparently disparate observations, presenting them in new perspectives, producing frameworks and concepts for organizing and integrating them”(Becker et al. 1968: xi).

The chapters in the Anthem companion not only offer insights and analyses of Hughesian sociology and its reception but also biographical information related to the work. These references to his life are, however, redundantly appearing in many chapters and could have been better integrated. Both Helmes-Hayes and Vienne give a detailed and nevertheless interesting account of ECH’s life—very deserving is that Helmes-Hayes also deals with the merits of Helen MacGill Hughes, thus recognizing her as a scholar *and* a congenial life partner.

We owe to Helen MacGill Hughes the explanation of the biographical fundament of ECH’s conviction that a sociologist ought to be a marginal man, because marginality is the precondition to the craft of accurate dispassionate observation of the social world:

”The sociological investigator cracks the secrecy, but buries the secrets, one by one, in a tomb of silence—as do all the professionals which deal with the problems of people. This means, of course, that the student of human groups must remain willingly and firmly a *marginal* man in relation to those he studies;“ (Hughes 1984: 436, emphasis in original).

She traces this attitude and ability to his upbringing as a PK—a preacher’s kid. “In the small Ohio town where Everett grew up, the PK was always something of an outsider. From childhood Everett was disposed to look on people analytically, dispassionately”(MacGill Hughes in Vienne 2016: 96). ECH’s curiosity about people and his interest for the even minuscule details of daily life are therefore deeply rooted in his youth and family history.

ECH is a typical representative of the emancipated provincial coming to the big city and travelling to foreign countries and thus encountering foreign cultures, this again with his innate curiosity for people. When in 1917 he worked as a night school teacher for blue collar workers of the steel mill he noted, “Out in the steel mills I saw industry for the first time; the heat, the roar, the white-hot iron pouring from the blast furnaces, ... It was thrilling after the life in Ohio villages, and a quiet college town” (ECH Papers in Vienne 2016: 97).

ECH stresses that emancipation must not come with alienation of one’s roots, rather each new experience adds a new perspective and yet another layer of the analytical gaze to the things so familiar to the observer. Emancipation is achieved by sociology thus engraining sociological insights into one’s personal development. I suspect that many a student of sociology will share this view and will therefore appreciate ECH as a virtual companion in research. Now that the Anthem Companion ennobles this approach as originating from a master of the discipline students are safe in defending it against Ph.D. committees or reviewers who consider fieldwork conducted in one’s quotidian surroundings not worthy to be called “data” or “evidence”.

The manifold observations of ECH’s *Sociological Eye* make good reading because we become immersed in the world of the provincial intellectual—this sounds like an oxymoron but probably represents the emancipated and yet not alienated sociologist from the country side who shows sympathy and yet detachment in his reports about the things so familiar to him—and us.

It almost reminds me of the popular fictitious community of Lake Wobegone by Garrison Keillor who portrays the characters of the small Midwestern town from the perspective of the returning and now intellectual provincial. The humor and sentimentality of Keillor's fiction are related to a Hughesian approach to fieldwork.

ECH's merit for sociology of the 20th century (and through this Anthem Companion Reader hopefully beyond) is his inspiring impact on scholars outstripping him in fame. Just like parents support their children's development best when they keep their own egos in the background, good mentors and teachers are those who give their apprentices room to unfold their own ideas and evolve their talents. Interestingly enough, ECH himself metaphorically called one of his students the grand-child of his own teacher and mentor Park (cf. endnote 20 in Vienne 2016: 112).

One can draw a parallel to the sociology of professions – a centerpiece of ECH's work: “For a sponsor, a protégé (1) eases the transition to retirement (Hall 1948; Hughes 1945); (2) gives him a sense of continuity of his work, and (3) gives some assurance that his intellectual offspring will build on his work” (Epstein 1970: 969).

Hardly is any research finding so highly self referential to the personal life of the scholar than as in the case of ECH and his impact on his students. Transition to retirement, however, was very late in ECH's life. Evidence for this offers the beautifully composed chapter by Douglas Harper who found in ECH his Ph.D. advisor at Brandeis. Harper pictures in a very personal and moving manner his own development and the impact of his teacher and mentor and surmounts his text with a photograph he had taken of ECH at one of his last visits (Harper 2016). Harper's praise would be appropriate for a festschrift, yet the editors Helmes-Hayes and Santoro declare that they deliberately wanted the book not to be another festschrift and thus included a critical view on ECH, too.

In contrast to the rest of the book, this chapter on ECH's view on race relations (McLaughlin and Steinberg 2016) lacks the profound knowledge of the work, life and archival material about ECH. (Obviously the archives in Chicago provide an exceptionally rich gold mine for scholars since ECH kept notes about almost any incident in his life and amply corresponded with his students and mentees.)

McLaughlin and Steinberg's critique that ECH were “an erudite professor, accustomed to the cloistered university that was deliberately walled off from the noise and distraction of the world outside” (McLaughlin and Steinberg 2016: 211) simply contradicts the facts well documented in ECH's fieldwork which again is reflected in the other chapters of the book. The authors nevertheless progress as true believers of the now so fashionable Marxist view on the civil rights movement and claim that ECH, by using terms such as race relations (instead of “subjugation and exploitation”), were ignorant of the causes and effects of the “civil rights revolution” (McLaughlin and Steinberg 2016: 223) which allegedly prevented him and the whole discipline of sociology from foreseeing the popularity of the civil rights movement. Therefore, while ECH delivered his ASA Presidential address in L.A. in August 1963, Martin Luther King marched to D.C. and held his famous “I have a Dream” speech.

The claim that oppression of the black (as well as of the native) Americans had been “the elephant in the room that is studiously ignored in the Chicago paradigm” (McLaughlin and Steinberg 2016: 224) blatantly contradicts the evidence e.g. presented in Fleck's chapter citing ECH's notes on a discussion he had with a student in Germany who related German anti- Semitism to the fate of the



American “Indians”: “So I answered that *we* had found the Indians not willing to get out of our way, so *we* had killed a lot of them and shut the others up in concentration camps ... ‘you probably wait for me to disown those people who did the dirty work. But I cannot do it because my own family passed on the legend of one predecessor who guilefully killed the last Indian in Gallia County, Ohio’” (ECH Papers in Fleck 2016: 153, emphasis in original).

If only McLaughlin and Steinberg had subjected Herbert Marcuse’s *Essay on Liberation* a similar critique (cf. Marcuse 1969)! Moreover, does Marx’s term ‘relations of production’ prevent us from recognizing their exploitative character?

Anyway, the critics accuse ECH of following the “doctrine of value-free sociology” (McLaughlin and Steinberg 2016: 217)—thereby showing their lack of familiarity with the differentiated Weberian term of ‘Werturteilsfreiheit’ (cf. e.g. Kaesler 2003: 234–51). Their only evidence for ECH being “blinded by a white frame” is a critical book review he wrote about Cox’s *Caste, Class and Race*, another book review (Frazier’s *Black Bourgeoisie*) that contained a praise but was allegedly not fully appreciating “Frazier’s theoretical acumen and ethnography” (McLaughlin and Steinberg 2016: 229). And finally an introduction he wrote for *Black Metropolis* where ECH did “not seriously engage [its literary verve]” (McLaughlin and Steinberg 2016: 229) while still lauding it.

”Of course, none of this would be worth talking about ... “ (McLaughlin and Steinberg 2016: 230)—I couldn’t have put it any more accurately! One very interesting and informative chapter demonstrates how ECH’s concept of ‘master status’ was received and changed from the context of race and sex to a wide range of interpretations. It became finally absorbed by the discipline so that eventually scholars use it today without even referencing it to its creator ECH (van den Scott and van den Hoonard 2016)

All of this shows that ECH’s ideas are timeless and most probably will inspire many more intellectual offsprings in the future of sociology. His minimalistic, almost aphoristic style liberates the student from the heavy load of grand theory or dogma. Free minds—and only free minds—are able to create innovation.

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