

## BOOK REVIEW/ COMPTE RENDU

**Rick Helmes-Hayes and Marco Santoro** (Eds.). *The Anthem Companion to Everett Hughes*. London: Anthem Press, 2016, 250 pp., \$115.00, hardcover (9780857281784)

**E**verett Hughes – born 1897 and died 1983 – is a pivotal figure in American (and Canadian) sociology. He was one of Robert Park’s students at the University of Chicago and was a member of “the first generation to receive, as a heritage, a completely constituted definition of sociology as a teaching and research discipline (Chapoulie, 41).”<sup>1</sup> Hughes was the closest to Park both in intellectual scope and sensibility, and had the greatest influence on the generation of students that flooded the university after World War II. Even more than Park, Hughes had a penetrating analytic mind, broadly read in literature and the social sciences, and had a grasp of history that was rare, even for the more classically trained scholars of his period.

Charles Sanders Peirce once claimed that he would like to rename his particular approach to thinking as “pragmatism” instead of “pragmatism”, so that the ugliness of the term would deter people from pigeonholing it as *received wisdom* and rather view it as a *stepping-stone to discovery and insight*. Hughes had the same approach, both literally and figuratively. The influence of American pragmatism through John Dewey was strong at Chicago, and its adamant disdain for making dogmatic arguments from first principles in any form seemed to waft in from Lake Michigan with the wind. Hughes was a consummate craftsman in this branch of philosophic thought. He wrote as he spoke, and his idiom was the plain-speech of his New England Yankee ancestors: direct, clear, a matter of fact lexicon, and an almost laconic – but in the end, pointed—way of telling a story. If the reader hasn’t done so already, reading a compilation of most of his essays, *The Sociological Eye*, not only delights but also is an urgent invitation to the craft of telling it like it is, and, of course, the art of figuring out just what that *is* that should be told might be. Put simply, Everett Hughes’ thinking illuminated the world of human affairs. This was his gift, and he did his best to transmit it to his fellow sociologists.

Everett Hughes’s legacy is underappreciated. What many of the chapters in the volume under review reveal, however, is that he was emulated by students who went on to create an increasingly rigorous tradition of field work that in time compelled a more scientific sociology to respect both its craft and its findings. The work of Howard Becker, Anselm Strauss, their students and countless others, has established a touchstone for sociological

work: when it gets down to some elemental controversy about situated social processes, it's time to send in the ethnographers. *Who* was sent in was often either trained by Hughes, his students, or people who wish they had been his students.

The years since Hughes' death in 1983 have witnessed growing interest in his work among newer generations of scholars not only in the United States and Canada, but also in France and Italy. The *Anthem Companion to Everett Hughes* is a wonderful introduction to Hughes' unique way of thinking for a new—and increasingly international—generation of sociologists. Three of the contributors are American, six are Canadian and the remaining five are European. All of the chapters are solid and some are truly exceptional.

The goal of the editors is not to encompass Hughes' work encyclopedically, but rather to offer the reader focused investigations on the aspects of his intellectual and personal biography that establish his significance for the discipline. Some of these contributions consider aspects of his life and work that are not as well-known as they should be (Scott and Hoonard on Hughes' role in defining 'master status' and other important concepts in sociology, and Low and Bowden on Hughes' impact on Canadian sociology). Others are testimonies to Hughes' capacity to inspire (Harper on his experience as an apprentice, and Wagner's account of a particular research project using a Hughesian approach). Two other chapters are concerned with assessing just how penetrating his understanding of the big picture – macro-sociology – might have been (Fleck on Hughes' unpublished memoirs of post-Nazi Germany, and McLaughlin and Steinberg's critique of his approach to race and race relations). Finally, some of these contributions concern issues that are reasonably well known but not fully appreciated (Chapoulie on his relation to the Chicago tradition, Helmes-Hayes on Hughes' view of how institutions work, and Philippe Vienne on field-work).

The lynchpin of the book is a sharp—yet collegial—debate between Jean-Michel Chapoulie and Rick Helmes-Hayes (one of its editors), about the theoretical coherence of Hughes' thought. Chapoulie, is a French sociologist who has played an important in stimulating interest in Hughes in France, and also expanded Hughes' legacy by training French ethnographers much as Hughes did his own students. Chapoulie's chapter is magisterial: a sensitive, elegant, and nuanced appreciation of Hughes' thought that should be a staple in graduate school courses in social theory.

Chapoulie's view is that while Hughes was gifted theoretically, he viewed attempts to create theoretical models built on general principles as an intellectual dead end. Hughes believed that social scientists did not know enough about social networks, their histories, and their dynamic potential for reinventing experience, to codify them in any productive way other than as either provisionally useful frameworks or nuggets of insight

that could inform further investigation. A half-century later, sociology is still in the same situation: trying to figure out better ways of modeling and accounting for ever more complex social relations and processes. For Chapoulie, however, the temptation to codify Hughes' thought as a way of prizing a mode of thinking that is still sadly undeveloped in sociology would undermine "the investigative spirit at the center of his sociology (Helmes-Hayes, 16)."

Chapoulie's chapter resists this temptation and instead provides the reader with a supple, and historically grounded, analysis of the development of Hughes' ideas by examining his noteworthy contributions to the study of work, race relations, institutions, and fieldwork. Chapoulie makes it clear that Hughes had a consistent approach to the investigation of social doings, which can be uncovered by examining in close detail almost any of the various analytic summaries that pepper his work, or by identifying the links between what he had to say about different aspects of social life. A comment by Everett Hughes during an interview with Robert Weiss is illuminating.

In any society there are certain mobilizations of people for expression and action. They are "going concerns" [...] If we are to study human society, we must attend to the going concerns which are subject to moral, social and ecological contingencies. It is thus that institutions are discussed in these papers as enterprises (quoted in Helmes-Hayes, 73).

"Certain mobilizations of people", or as Howard Becker later termed the phenomenon, "people doing things together", is the first step to identifying "social contingencies." Who are these people, what are they doing, who are they doing it with, for what purposes and with what consequence? The "moral contingencies" require attention to how these groupings define the proper way of achieving their goals, how they resolve disputes, and how this affects other salient aspects of their lives. Finally, "ecological contingencies" refer not only to the influence of spatial and temporal factors on group life, but also to their wider institutional, economic, geographical and cultural contexts. In this sense, Hughes was building on the legacy of the German school of historical economics, and especially the contributions of Max Weber.

It's easy to see how such a clear-eyed perspective that focuses on concrete people and what they do in their social relations could—with a wide-ranging and creative imagination—engender the panoply of Hughes' contributions to the field. Looking at institutions as "enterprises" or "going concerns" identifies them as dynamic entities. There is thus only a fine line between other forms of collective behavior, social movements and more long-standing institutions. When ignored, this encourages us to attribute more permanency and stability to institutions than they actually have and neglect their often uneven and unusual histories. Additionally, established

enterprises may encourage the development of “bastard institutions” that provide those goods and services that respectable enterprises don’t countenance, but may find hard to sanction effectively, and with which they may be forced to coexist. All of these arrangements constrain what people and groups can make of their lives—usually giving more to some and less to others—which may or may not come to act as “master statuses” in their patterns of identity formation and social treatment. Finally, managing the activities of disparaged others so that they do not affront nor challenge those who are seen—or wish to be seen—as respectable and entitled, often requires practices that those deemed worthy of respect would find hard to either justify or stomach. All societies find some way of relegating the “dirty work” to somebody or some group. Dirty work is always unpleasant. Sometimes it is even horrific. Whatever the form, Hughes believed that attention paid to how dirty work is assigned and accounted for has much to tell us about business as usual or, in other words, the social order.

Everett Hughes was often badgered by his students to teach a course on “theory.” Because he exemplified a real feel for making sense of novel events and relationships, he appeared to be a master of the art of interpretation. His students assumed that he must possess a well worked out theory derived from first principles, and they wanted in on the secret. Hughes’ usual riposte, “theory of what?” -- because any theory has to be about something – annoyed them and wore thin over time. In later years, he occasionally mused that he should write a “short book about theory.” He was likely just trying to get them off his back. In any event, he never wrote the book.

Rick Helmes-Hayes chapter on “Studying going concerns”, however, is intended to provide an outline of what Hughes might have written. In his editorial preface, Helmes-Hayes identifies 8 principles as a comprehensive summary of Hughes’ theoretical position, while his own independently authored chapter discusses 11, and in greater depth. Principles 3 and 4 in the preface, as an example, read as follows:

3. If society is a bundle of interactions, then social phenomena are continuously in flux, that is they have a processual nature. Change is inscribed in social life...

4. Every social object – a norm, an institution, a social group, even a social representation – is a historical product situated in specific spatial-temporal coordinates. It is context-dependent and should not be analyzed exclusively in general and abstract ways (Helmes-Hayes, 16).

Helmes-Hayes instructs the reader that Hughes in this regard “resembles in content and in style the approaches of such scholars as Norbert Elias, [Erving] Goffman and [Pierre] Bourdieu (Ibid).”

I find little to fault in Helmes-Hayes' characterizations and they are well worth considering. Nor, I imagine, would Chapoulie. These principles summarize Hughes' assumptions and theses, and suggest that there *is* a coherent and encompassing logic to Hughes' project. But, *for* Chapoulie, if these principles were all that remained of Hughes' work, it would be difficult to reconstruct what he was thinking and how he went about doing it. Chapoulie objects to any such attempt to summarize Hughes' approach.

Everett Hughes had a patrician elegance about him. He was warm, but stern. His students never expected to become his buddy, but hoped to find in him a spiritual father, and become the better for what he either encouraged or admonished. Hughes was also wry and often sardonic. He was very much aware of the ironies—and worse—in social life and realized that they reflected emotional engagements that were often very painful. Wherever you looked, social life was deeply personal, and finding out about what people were doing required you to encounter them in a way that was just as emotionally engaging. While most accounts of Hughes' contributions to fieldwork emphasize his strictures to get your 'hands dirty' and to 'immerse' yourself in the world that you were examining, he also insisted on getting the facts straight, and maintaining a certain detachment from the events witnessed, and in that way extract information and insight not otherwise available. Nevertheless, he was never a fly on the wall. In this regard, Philippe Vienne's chapter is an excellent introduction to Hughes' views on fieldwork and what he expected of his students, and himself.

Christian Fleck's chapter on Hughes' experience in Germany shortly after the end of World War II—which yielded a manuscript that never made it to publication—documents beautifully how he worked as an ethnographer. Put simply, in this particular historical confluence, Hughes identified a “[Saint] Peter temptation” that occurred when many of the Germans he encountered would note that he was not like “the average American” (e.g. he was taller, blonder, more cultured, etc.). He invariably deflected the comment by noting that few Americans were ever “average.”

He realized that he was being tempted by the offer of a shared identity (a “we”) that required him to identify other Americans as “they” (Blacks and Jews). This was not an invitation to rapport, but something different (more sinister even), and if accepted, would enable his hosts to imperceptibly direct the flow of conversation away from what they would prefer not to discuss. Thus, he maintained a cordial and welcoming manner; but learned, for example, to respond to their often-disparaging questions about the “black element” in the US, by referring more inclusively to “eleven million black Americans”. What Hughes gleaned from such encounters, what he was able to observe and surmise, depended as much on his skill as an actor – his ability to manage his persona—as it did on his analytic abilities.

In a particularly telling instance, he noticed that German students – when they realized they could speak freely with him – would often bring up issues that implicated American violations of human rights. When asked about the treatment of Native Americans, Hughes answered directly: “*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.” And in case the students didn’t get the point, he added:

You probably wait for me to disown those people who did the dirty work. But I cannot do it this way because my own family passed on the legend of one predecessor who guilefully killed the last Indian in Gallia County, Ohio (Fleck, 53).

Hughes noted that those present couldn’t wait to change the subject. Was there something that they didn’t want to discuss that his directness had triggered? Were they upset that Hughes was not helping them distance themselves from those who had done the “dirty work” resolving the “Jewish Problem?” And so, from such encounters, Hughes developed the idea that every society—or agglomeration of “good people”—has “dirty work” that needs to be accounted for, and which identifies a phenomenon like the Holocaust not so much as a singular implosion of German social psychology under acute social stress (the prevailing view in post-war American social science) but rather an instance of a moral possibility latent in human social organization. It has taken historians several generations to come to a similar conclusion and appreciate the explanatory power of this insight, and its moral and political implications. Everett Hughes, however, perceived it in the moment. His gift, therefore, was an acute sociological imagination, or “mood” as he preferred to call it.

You can thus imagine Hughes—as he reflected on his experiences and compiled his field notes—wondering what any of the events he witnessed might be a case of, and what they revealed about the human condition. To so generalize, or abstract, from the particular, he would draw on his vast knowledge of anthropology and the historical record to see how what he had observed was either like, or unlike, other events in other times and places. From these musings he would identify properties of social organization that might account for these differences. Hughes was not a comparative sociologist like Barrington Moore, Charles Tilly or Theda Skocpol. He did not write books comparing one society to another. Rather, he wrote mostly about American (and to a lesser extent Canadian) society, but utilized a method of “constant”, and often “extreme”, comparison to other worlds and varied situations to develop his concepts and organize his material. Some of this intellectual discipline is evident in his publications, but much of it is not. He never formalized the approach but it is perhaps safe to say that Anselm Strauss and Barney Glazer’s work on *Grounded Theory*

most closely approximates how Hughes would have codified his views had he chosen to do so.

Everett Hughes, moreover, champions a mental activity that grounded theorists rarely explore: “free association.” Not once in his writings, however, does he tell us how he came to this cognitive-emotional practice; nor does he define what it entails. But it is always clear what he means by it. A researcher should access the unconscious, or whatever it is that sprouts unusual and strange associations between one image and another. These often startling analogies should be welcomed, clarified, and their rational core extracted.

The craft of social analysis is most certainly a higher order cognitive function designed to produce logically consistent and testable propositions about the world and its workings. But social analysts are people and inevitably live in the mess they study. And, like everybody else, they possess lower level cognitive functions that respond emotionally, intuitively, and often immediately, to what these situations afford. These flashes of imagery may not, in the end, amount to much, but they are part of who we are, and might be alerting us to something unusual in our relationships. Why not mine them for what we might learn from them? What’s more, why be restricted to just what’s in our own minds? Why not look at what others have speculated about how relationships in some imaginary universe might play out? Why not read, or view, fiction assiduously, as a necessary, albeit enjoyable, way of stimulating theoretical sensitivity?

Erving Goffman, who was Everett Hughes’ student and died in the same year, claimed to be a “Hughesian” in an interview several years before his death and acknowledged an allegiance to an ecological perspective on society. Rick Helmes-Hayes labels Hughes’ theoretical approach as “interpretative institutional ecology” and the term does alert us to what the two men share. Goffman focused on face-to-face interaction and was particularly fascinated by the properties of those encounters between individuals not sanctioned by a binding social relationship. In contrast, Hughes was more concerned with how social relations came to be and were maintained. Hughes supported Goffman during his career and was interested in seeing just how far the younger scholar could get with his research agenda, exploring the boundaries between the social and pre-social in human behavior. Both Hughes and Goffman, however, realized that the envelope that was being pushed had been most clearly expressed by Hughes.

Everett Hughes realized that we are at our best when we stand not only on the shoulders of giants, but also others of more modest talents. He, thus, persistently referenced older scholarship that he found illuminating. This practice included reminding his colleagues of long forgotten (even in this own time) contributions of French and German scholars, as well as, for example, admiring and quoting William Graham Sumner, who many of Hughes’ contemporaries dismissed as outmoded and whose political views



they – and Hughes – found reprehensible. Hughes also looked toward the future and embraced his students' insights and work, which constituted an important stream of evidence cited in most of his own essays. Vienne tells us "Hughes wanted the tradition [of inquiry that he valued] to continue and regarded [Howard] Becker and [Blanche] Geer as the next generation of 'masters'. '[Who] will learn from the new people as I have learned from the old' (Vienne, 106). Doug Harper's chapter on writing his dissertation under Hughes wonderfully captures how Hughes drew on his students' strengths and appreciated and encouraged the unexpected and novel gifts they might bring. For example, Harper, a noted visual sociologist, points out that Hughes was open to using photography ethnographically and was perceptive in "peeling away layers of meaning" from an image because he saw photos as a "natural extension of close observation (Harper, 142)," years before Harper even imagined a more visual sociology.

Everett Hughes envisioned sociology as a "going concern" becoming more robust through the efforts of a multi-generational community of scholars uncovering the processes that animated emerging social relations in a changing world. To be sure, there was always a danger of fragmentation in a growing discipline, but what could be gained in new knowledge and insight was well worth the risk. In any event, it was important for students to learn how to theorize about the empirical world by developing sound concepts that could be utilized by those who came after them. Hughes' approach to research included the informed use of descriptive statistics, documentary records, and of course face-to-face investigation of real people managing their affairs in natural settings. Getting your hands dirty in this way required reading widely, examining and evaluating the ideas of intellectual ancestors and contemporaries, cultivating the imagination and great curiosity. This was his approach and constitutes his legacy. As David Riesman put it:

If sociology is to maintain its link with social reality through the interaction of fieldworkers with interviewees and through unobtrusive observation, we will need to encourage more sociologists to follow the example of Everett Hughes (quoted in Vienne, 109).

The *Anthem Companion to Everett Hughes* is a valuable contribution to appreciating this legacy and its challenge to contemporary sociology.

*Wheaton College (Massachusetts)*

John Grady

**John Grady** is Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts. His research has mostly focused on visual sociology. In addition to numerous articles, he has produced five documentary films, including *Mission Hill and the Miracle of Boston* (1979) and *Down the Project: The Crisis of Public Housing* (1982).