

**“A Second Standpoint”:
Howard Becker talks about music, sociology, and their intersections.**

Interview by Elizabeth Jackson

Dividing his time between San Francisco and Paris, American sociologist and professor Howard S. Becker, born April 18, 1928, has researched and written on the sociology of art, qualitative method, visual sociology, and the practice of research and writing in the social sciences. But he has also worked, and still works, as a professional jazz pianist. In his most recently published book, *Do You Know...? The Jazz Repertoire in Action*, Becker and his co-author Robert R. Faulkner investigate the process of improvising and collaborating by drawing on their long experiences as sociologists and musicians.

This interview, by Elizabeth Jackson of the ICASP project, provides further inquiry into cooperative performance, or more specifically, how musicians are able to show up for a job and successfully play together with other musicians with whom they have never played. They discuss the dynamics of power differentials not only within improvised performance, but also in daily life, while Becker shares the lessons he has learned from making music. For further information:

<http://home.earthlink.net/~hsbecker/>

<http://www.amazon.ca/Do-You-Know-Repertoire-Action/dp/0226239217>

<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/presssite/metadata.epl?isbn=9780226239217>

E: I see quite a bit of overlap between the ICASP project’s core focuses on dialogue, listening, contingency, flexibility, and the way you describe musical performance taking place. In the moment, there are musicians, following each other’s cues and negotiating what they do and don’t know and drawing on their own repertoires in order to create a performance that works for the context. I wanted to ask you if you see any kind of politics at work in musical performances. One of the questions that keeps coming up through conversations in this project asks if there is an inherent politics to certain forms of music-making, or whether politics can be enacted through musical performance. People seem to have very strong feelings on the matter in all sorts of directions and I wanted to hear yours.

H: Well, can you explain a little more of what that issue is? Specifically what kind of politics do people see there?

E: Sure. One argument is that because improvisation is collaborative and involves listening and engagement, and seems to dismantle hierarchies in some contexts, there is a sort of liberatory politics available through improvised performance, such that there is a potential leveling of power differentials, or a mobilization of alternate forms of knowing. Instead of received knowledges and received top-down ways of functioning, there’s this model of [H: OK I got it]...so is there anything inherently political about improvised, collaborative music-making?

H: The kind of improvising we're describing is not unique to playing music. It's the way ordinary social life goes on. That's one of the reasons that we think other sociology subjects should be interested in what that book says. So much of sociology is devoted to explaining that people do things because they're dominated by power coming from somewhere else. We think, however, that this model we see in the ordinary musical job is actually the way almost all social life works. People are all trying to get something done in the moment, like, get this meal on the table, get this piece of furniture that we're making out the door and to the customer. Everybody has to cooperate to make that happen. This is not some kind of utopian notion about cooperation and democracy, all getting together and voting on everything, it's just that everybody is looking to get this done so they can get on with whatever else they have to do and they do it the best way they can, which is by paying attention to each other and picking up cues. It would be the same thing in a basketball game. I'd love to quote something from David Mamet, the playwright, which I have never, ever been able to find in print, and I know I read it some place, but no one can help me find. I remember reading that when he writes a scene he keeps in mind that every character in that scene is there for a reason. They want something, or else, he says, they wouldn't be there and they would be some place else where what they wanted was. So they're all there, they all want something, none of them want exactly the same thing, and the scene plays out by each of them trying to get what they want and what they end up with is something that nobody wants, so they all agree to keep going forward. He's not talking about musicians playing a job, he's talking about people doing whatever: making a business deal or deciding where to go for dinner or deciding to buy a house. It's just ordinary life, so there's nothing special, by way of politics, about improvised music...it's just one other place where people do that. It's the way everything happens. I guess that puts me firmly on one side of that argument.

E: That's good and clear, thanks. I'm very interested in this because this continuously comes up in my conversations with others who work on improvised music. It always comes back to...

H: Well, I know why people say that, because it often does seem that what they're thinking about is sort of the farthest, purest reaches of somebody doing whatever they damn please. I studied piano with Lennie Tristano and he and his group were famous for, as far as anybody invented free jazz, being among the first to do that. They didn't play a tune; they didn't play in a key; they just started playing. They would start playing and when somebody heard something that was interesting, they would pick up on it, join them, and so on, and they'd do that as long as they felt like it. It's about as free of external constraint as you could imagine. I think that's what they have in mind, but I think that's not the way hardly anybody gets to play.

E: You talk in your book a lot about all the different factors at play as a performance is planned and as it happens. There are audience expectations, and there's your employment status, and there are other members of the group and there's what you already know, and there are gaps in your collective knowledge. This all leads me to ask: how do you see power working within these groups? There are these amazing stories about people negotiating with each other and the ongoing, shifting, perceptions musicians

have of one another, depending on what they know and what they need a cheat-sheet or a chart for, these kinds of things. I'd like to know what you saw, as you were going over all these notes, in terms of power at play within these groups.

H: The simplest thing is, "I'm the leader, do what I say."

E: Right, and is that the norm?

H: Pretty much. In the end, if the leader says, "do this," then you're going to do it, because that person got the job and they're the one that's responsible. There isn't a whole lot of power differential in one of these groups. I should say that the relationship to improvised jazz is very murky here, because all of these guys would say, "yeah, I'm a jazz player." If someone were to ask, however, "Is what you're playing tonight jazz?" they would say "Well, sometimes it is, sometimes it isn't." That is to say, if you think of jazz in terms of freedom and the ability to just do what, artistically, seems best to you, jazz isn't happening very often. What is happening is some kind of finding your way among competing interests that you have. One of those interests is, "I'd like to get more work." So the person who could give me more work, in that sense, has some power. I remember we quote something toward the end of the book when this guy, this great jazz player from New York City, insists on having somebody write out the changes to Cheek To Cheek, or something like that, for him, and these people are appalled, "what do you mean? You don't need a chart." And he insists, I have to have a chart, and the guy said to Rob, "well, so I finally wrote out the changes for him, but it'll be a long time before I hire him again." That's a kind of exercise of power, but mostly it varies so that one night you're the leader, the next night I'm the leader, so there's not a lot of power differential. There's differential with respect to reputation, or how good someone thinks the other player is, but that's really not power. Does that answer it for you?

E: Yeah. I'm finding this so fascinating because the script at the back of my head is what I've heard people saying – and maybe what I've been thinking – in much more conceptual level conversations about collaborative music. I'm loving the chance to talk to a musician who's studied musicians about the pragmatics, at ground level.

H: Well, you've got the Musicians there. George Lewis is a musician.

E: Oh, yes, there are loads of phenomenal musicians, and musicologists, working with ICASP. I've just not had many chances to really immerse myself in those conversations yet so this is a really interesting glimpse at the more pragmatic side of these debates.

H: Social theorizing is much freer when it doesn't have to deal with empirical realities because empirical realities are what they are, and real life is generally a mixture of all kinds of things. You don't see this stuff in pure, conceptual form. The way to have the high level conceptual discussion is to get rid of all the details.

E: Yes, that's right. I feel like talking with you and reading your book is a chance for me to come back down to ground level and check in and see where I've drifted to. So, for

example, when you were talking about, you know, “I am the leader one night, you’re the leader another night,” immediately, the theory part of my brain can write this beautiful thing about, even when musicians are playing for hire, collaborative music offers a model of shifting leadership and a lack of top-down hierarchies, contingent power plays...

H: Oh, that’s exactly right.

E: So, you do see that there? That’s not me making that up?

H: Yeah...when it’s like that.

[laughter]

E: Ok. Fair enough, yeah.

H: See, the thing is, you can never be sure what it’s going to be like.

E: There’s not anything inherent about it.

H: Some guys are only leaders, they’re never sidemen. Years ago, before I moved down here, to San Francisco, permanently, I used to spend a lot of time out here and I was at Stanford for three years. While I was there I played for a guy who was a drummer. He rented a big vacant nightclub, just down the street from where I lived, and he would rent it out for dances and parties. He would always sell his band, along with the room, so you would rent the room and get the Dick Reinhardt Band. He was a drummer and he was an absolutely terrible drummer, really just awful, and if he wasn’t the leader, nobody would hire him. So he was always the leader.

E: So he created a niche for himself.

H: He did indeed, because he was good at getting work.

Let me just mention, because I think it’s important, there was a temptation for us and anybody who talks about the book we wrote, to think of these players as jazz players. Well, they are and they aren’t. In general, at least as far as social science goes, we’re better off not to talk about kinds of people, but to talk about kinds of activity. These then are people who play jazz occasionally, would like to play jazz all the time, but in fact, that’s not what they do. What they play is what they play, what this boss and what this leader want, and what these other guys can do. If you start calling them jazz players, as we’re inclined to do, you’re being misleading. That’s why I picked up this wonderful work, that I got from a French sociologist who wrote a wonderful book about jazz, Marc Perrenoud, and he calls them, “*ordinary musicians.*”

E: And that’s the terminology you’ve used in the book.

H: Yes. Because they're people who are available to play whatever needs to be played, that they can play. If you call me and say, "listen I'd got a job playing nothing but polkas all night, you wanna do that?" and I don't have anything else, I'll do that. I've done that.

E: Is this largely then musician meets working world? Is the motivation almost exclusively in terms of career and income and supporting themselves, or is there also a sense that, for these ordinary musicians, every gig is an opportunity to expand their repertoire, or to make more contacts? Or is it all kind of tied up together?

H: Yes. The answer is yes.

[laughter]

E: I kind of talked myself into a circle there didn't I!

H: No, no. That's what I would have said anyway. It's not either/or. Everybody would love to take the opportunity to expand a little, if that's available. Everybody would like to get through the job - mind you, for almost all of these people, music is not the only thing they do. I mean this kind of music is very largely a second job. Most people are working another job as well: for example, they're teaching school, like my friend Robert Faulkner. He's a professor. I always had another job - well, when I was a kid I didn't, but I was going to school and that was my job - but otherwise, I played for years and I always had a day job. The word 'day job' is there for a reason: most people have them.

E: Why then do people become ordinary musicians? Is it a passion for music? Is it because they're hoping ultimately to not be simply 'ordinary' musicians?

H: That's a question that a lot of people ask about all sorts of things...and the answer to that, that I've always told students, is forget about why people do it, find out how they arrived at the place where that's what they're doing. I used to tell them, if somebody said to me, "why did you become a sociologist?" I'd say, "well, I could tell you that I like working with people," that's an okay reason to give, and you'd say, "oh yeah, okay I can see that," or, "I want to be a professor because that's a good, steady job and a certain amount of prestige and you get tenure and a salary," so then people would say, "yeah, that makes sense." I could say, "I did it because I want to be rich," but then they would just think I was goofy. This is not a good way to get rich. And I used to tell people, when I lived out here in California in the 60s, I could have said to people, "I did it because I'm an Aries and that's the way we are." And, you know, there were people who would say, "oh yeah, right."

E: So, is the question then, *how* do people become ordinary musicians?

H: Right, and the reason that it's important to make that distinction, is that people don't generally end up doing exactly what they intended to do. They end up doing what is most possible for them to do, given this, given that. "I wanted to be a doctor, but I didn't get into medical school." That sort of thing. Or "I wanted to be a great jazz player, but I

couldn't find work doing that, so I ended up writing jingles for advertising." The way people get to be where they are now is the way they got there; the road is the answer to the question. People have ideas all along, "this is really what I want to accomplish," but what they end up actually doing is something else. If you say to somebody, "why did you do that?" what you almost always get is a kind of defensive answer. They have to think of a good reason that will be acceptable.

E: Yeah, you have to create a narrative that leads to it being the best choice.

H: So that it will all make sense, yes. If you say "why" that's what you get. If you say "how did it happen?" people understand that question in a very different way, they say, "oh, well, you know, I was doing this, and then I bumped into that and then I had this chance so I tried it, and you know what, it wasn't bad, so then I did this and then I..." and it's a long story, with a lot of twists and turns and branching forks where you could have gone one way or the other.

E: And of course it's different for every single person you ask it of.

H: Right. Different, but then the conceptual part is looking for the similarities among the differences.

E: Maybe a different way for me to ask what I was trying to get at is kind of a qualitative question. What's your impression, having spoken with all these people and reviewed all these interviews, of the personal benefits or payoffs of being this kind of a musician? I'm coming from a childhood spent dreaming of being a star singer. All the reasons I wanted to be a star singer were probably not even true for most people who are world famous singers. I wanted to be famous and beautiful and admired and be able to hush people with my voice and this kind of thing. And here I am now: I can hush people by yelling, but that's pretty much all I've got! I guess what I'm asking, then, is this: the people you speak with who are doing this work, who, as you've said, are often doing it as their second job of the day, what is in it for them? What comes from the process that makes it worth negotiating with bossy bandleaders, or picky fathers of the bride?

H: Well, a lot of it is a lot of fun. You have a skill and you get to exercise it. I don't want to downplay the improvisatory getting-it-together experience, which is really wonderful. Everybody who plays has been present in a moment when it all clicked. I remember saying to myself one night, "God, you know, we're not playing the music, the music is playing us," where it's like you're riding on top of the wave. Those are very wonderful moments and exercising a skill is a great pleasure for almost everybody. And people get into it – there's a certain amount of problem solving to it, in the same way that there is fun in doing a crossword puzzle. And there's fun in that, getting it and making it come out right. There's some wonderful descriptions in the book of, I think it's Rob, talking about working his way to the bridge in *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes*, which he found extremely confusing, because it changes keys at the bridge. It goes down a Major 3rd, it goes down from Eb to B and there you are. How do you make that transition? If you can't do it it's a real pain, but when you find a way to do it, that's really terrific. Find a

way that sounds good and pleases you, it will please other people: those you respect, your fellow players. Also, a lot of people like the way of life. They like getting in a car and driving 30 miles in the snow and then playing in a club for 3 or 4 hours.

E: I always feel like creative work, or creative processes are just, somehow – and I don't understand the psychology of it, or the chemistry of it – but they operate in a difference register sometimes and when you get in to that place, there's a fullness to the experience that doesn't come from other kinds of work.

H: Yeah, that's what I was trying to describe.

E: So that's the secret that keeps people driving and working?

H: Well, no. There's no secret that keeps people...that's one of the things that they enjoy about it. For a lot of people it's a second income that they rely on. I didn't go out one night to play polkas because I got a great kick out of playing polkas for 3 hours, but, you know, it's something to do, kept me off the streets and I went home with whatever I got paid. That's part of it too.

E: And this is what I love about this book. I didn't know what to expect when I read it, but what I love about it is that you're so clearly and cleanly giving me a peek into this world that I've never been in before and into minds that I would never have known.

H: Oh, you didn't end up actually singing?

E: Well, not yet. We'll see how my fame unfolds...

[laughter]

E: But, really, this isn't my world, and you've laid it out in such an accessible way that I can find myself starting to –

H: Well, it's not mysterious.

E: No, I know. That's what I like about it. You've grounded this in such a way that it's kind of demystifying in a really productive way.

H: I wrote a book years ago called *Art Worlds*, which is sort of the background to this, or rather my experiences in music were this background to that. That's a book that talks about artworks as being the result of all the things that all the people did that made any kind of contribution to it. So the guy who manufactured the trombone, the repair guy who fixed the trombone when it was broken, the person who composed the music, the copyist who copied the parts out, all those people contribute to it. It's clear when one of them doesn't do their job. If I walk into a club and the piano's out of tune, or several of the keys, several of the hammers are broken so that a note won't play, you know, somebody didn't do their job and now what I create is going to be different as a result.

E: So in that sense artistic practice, musical performance, are exactly like everything else in human life, right? It's this blend of pieces and practicalities and mundanity and joy and aspiration...

H: Here's what's funny: when I wrote that book, quite a few social scientists, and especially aestheticians, thought it was terrible because it treated art as something just like everything else, just like you've just said. I never got a complaint from any working artist in any of the arts and a lot of people read it. They all said, "Yeah, of course, that's the way it is."

E: Who stands to gain, then, from these ideas of art as a world beyond?

H: Oh, I don't know who stands to gain.

E: It's got to work for someone or...

H: Apparently it worked for you.

E: Yeah, it *did* work for me, for a time.

H: Well, there you go.

[laughter]

E: And to be honest, it was nice to think that there's this special class of beings that can capture things beyond the grasp of the rest of us...

H: But that's not the experience of anybody who works in the arts. What they experience is a lot of drudgery and a lot of repetition. When I was quite young I spent a couple years at the University of Illinois, which is in a terrible, God-forsaken place called Urbana, and I got to be friends with the former Dean of the music school, who was an old Dutchman who was a viola player, a very interesting guy. I asked him what his background was, how did he end up being a Dean (it was clear how he became an ex-Dean because he talked too much) and he said he'd been a viola player and he played with the Minneapolis Orchestra for years and they went out on tour. When an orchestra goes on tour they have 2 programs, the A program and the B program, and you just alternate them night after night for 3, 4, 5, 6, weeks. One of the things they were playing on this tour was the Tchaikovsky E minor Symphony, I think, and he said in the first movement of that piece there's a passage where the violists play a 16-bar phrase that starts very low and it gradually ascends and it ends up on a high note with a fermata over it, which means you hold it until you're told to continue. And he said they would play the 16-bar phrase and would end up on this fermata holding the note, and that phrase occurred something like 15 or 20 times in that movement. That's a lot of times to end up on a hold like that. He said about the 6th or 7th night out they're playing that he began to have delusions that time

had stopped, and he was just sitting there, holding this note forever, so that's when he decided to quit.

[laughter]

And he became a choir director. People understand. Everybody who plays in symphonies knows that when you've played the Beethoven Symphonies 20 times, there's not a lot more you're going to get out of it. It's not all that interesting anymore.

E: Just a slog.

H: It's just a slog and maybe the concertmaster is having fun. There's that old joke about the two percussionists who are playing in the opera orchestra in the pit and they're playing Carmen and there are periods of 15-20 minutes when the percussion players don't do anything and they go out back to have a smoke. Then, one day, the timpanist says to the other guy, "you know the place where I go like this: boom boom boom?" he says, "the other day, I went and I sat in the house while somebody else was playing that, and you wouldn't believe what's going-on on the stage! All these people are running around and they're singing!" With timpanists, it's very often they sit there for 10-15 minutes and they don't do anything. And there are some interesting books about symphony players, just describing that.

In fact, in Richard Faulkner's first book, which is about Hollywood studio musicians, it's really interesting because they're recruited from two sources. Generally, the string players were classically trained and they all wanted to become great virtuosi and didn't and some of them ended up in the Hollywood studios, which pays extremely well, but it's very stressful, and they all resent being there, they hate it, even though they're making a lot of money and it's not bad hours and they don't have to travel and all that. The brass players and the percussionists almost all came out of the jazz world and they love it because the work is so steady. For symphony players, they're easily bored and it's not a great, wonderful, creative experience.

E: What's a great, wonderful, creative experience for you? What are the ingredients that let that happen, or can you not identify it from moment to moment? I mean, for you personally, not sociologically.

H: For me personally? The best way to put it, like from before, it's like if you were surfing – not that I ever did such a thing – and you're on top of the wave and just going with it. And everything is moving right, everything's happening in a way that's surprising, but you can handle it. You do things that you didn't know you had to do, but it was there for you to do, you just didn't know about that. I have the same experience writing. Getting in a groove, I guess, is a good way to put it.

E: You described it earlier as feeling like the music was playing you. So, is your understanding that that comes from something within the group? So this vibe, or this flow – people use all different words to describe it – when that happens, is it a product of all

the little bits of people and energies that are going into the music? Is it from the people? Or is it something bigger?

H: Ah ha!

E: This is one of those questions, eh? We should be having beers while we talk about this.

H: Yeah, it's a exactly that kind of a question.

E: Is it a human construct, or is there something about music that brings in energy with it?

H: Of course it's a human construct; it's people doing these things, but when they're really paying attention to each other – I couldn't demonstrate this to you, this is just what I think – it's kind of a lesson of Zen, to really pay attention. If everybody's paying close attention to what's going on in that moment, you're actually listening to each other, picking up on what other people are doing. Because so often they're not, you're just getting through the night, or you've done this before and it sounds like it's going to be the same as the last time you did it. There's a pleasure in that too, but it's not the same kind of pleasure.

E: I used to play piano and I'd do a recital and I would be playing my piece and it would just be like I was on automatic. My fingers would just do their thing and I could be thinking about anything and my hands would just play whatever piece. I found that singularly unsatisfying. But then, when there were moments when I was struggling, or really in the zone, or could hear things in the music that I hadn't heard before, that's for me when it became something utterly different.

H: Yep. I think everybody has that range of experience. When I was playing clubs in Chicago, we played 'till four in the morning and I would actually go to sleep while I was playing.

E: Oh, I remember you said that in the book! How is that even possible? Your hands kept moving!

H: I don't know, but apparently no one noticed. No, I kept playing and I would get lost when I woke up. I don't think I went sound asleep, but I was drifting there and I'd sort of come to and say, "Where the hell am I? What are we playing? What key are we in?"

E: That's amazing. Body memory of a kind, I guess.

So here's a question, this is a bit of a side step, so you're talking a bit about the lessons of music making, or the kind of ideal, the focus, the paying attention, the listening to one another. How has your career and your experience as a musician and a performer affected

other areas of your life? Are there things that you learned from being a musician that helped you to be a good sociologist, or that helped you to be a good professor?

H: Oh yeah. I think that, in being a sociologist, one of the things that really is advantageous, is to have a kind of outsider view of things, so that you're not simply accepting what everyone else believes as the God-given truth. Instead you say, "Oh yeah, well let's have a look, let's see." At the age of 15 or so, I was playing in taverns and watching the bar-owners bribe the police and seeing all kinds of shady things going on. First of all, I knew that the policeman was not my friend. Maybe other kids thought the policeman was their friend, but I knew better. It gives you a second standpoint. The minute you can look at things from here, or from over here, and you see that what you took for granted in this place, you can't take for granted in this other place, that's a great eye-opener. For some people, it comes from moving off the farm and into the city. For other people, it could be something else, but for me it was being a musician. That's one thing. Being a musician also got me used to performing in public and realizing that I was going to screw-up every once and a while and the world did not come to an end. So, if I gave a bad lecture at the university, too bad, there's always tomorrow.

E: That's quite a gift in the tenure-chasing process, I'd think.

H: Well, I didn't do any tenure chasing. I got my PhD very young, I was 23, and that was for a variety of organizational reasons. It didn't mean I was smarter than anybody else. It really didn't. I went through the PhD program very quickly because I wasn't serious about it and it was kind of a hobby. The real business was playing the piano: I was studying with Tristano. So I never worried about exams, I never worried about any of it, I just did it. Like I say, kind of as a hobby. There I was, 23 years old, with a Ph.D. and I had begun to conclude that maybe, playing in bars on 63rd St. was not the greatest thing in the world for me, because I have a big mouth and these places were run by Mafiosi or by gangs and thugs. I could see that some day I would probably get myself into trouble and maybe I should go get a job doing sociology because that was fun. So, I just wandered into that.

So I was telling you why I didn't chase tenure. So, here I am with a PhD, 23, and that was in 1953. Nobody wanted to hire a 23-year-old kid as an instructor when they could get grownups for the same price, so I couldn't find a job teaching and I ended up in research jobs. That was actually the best thing that could have happened, because while my buddies were busy chasing tenure and teaching, with no time to do any research, I got hired to do research and publishing, so I was building up quite a resume. Then, in the 60s, when the baby boom really hit the university and they needed to hire some people, there was a real shortage of professors and it was a real seller's market, especially of people that had done a lot of research and published a lot. And there I was.

E: Perfect.

H: Well, there's one more twist to this, which was that the first real faculty job I got was for full professorship at Northwestern in Chicago. The way I got that was that the

chairman of that department was, guess what, a drummer, and we had met in that kind of context before. So I walked into my first university job as a tenured full professor.

E: Beautiful. You know you're making me drool a little bit right now with this.

H: Well, I do think that, having worked in the music business I was used to dealing with thieves and tough guys, like Deans, and so when they tried to cheat me in one way or another I was ready for them. I knew when I walked in and talked to a university administrator, I knew that I should keep my hand on my wallet, so that I walked out with it.

You know, people some times ask me, like they ask the old sage, "what do you attribute your success to?" I tell them I attribute it to having being born in the right year, because anybody who gets into social science now, it's a terrible time. There's no jobs. It ain't good.

E: We're almost at the end of our hour and I wanted to ask you one last question. My last question for you is, what's next? What's next for you?

H: Well, I'm in the midst of a new research project.

E: Already!

H: Yeah, I wandered into this.

E: Can you talk about it?

H: Sure. Rosanna Hertz, who teaches at Wellesley, got her PhD at Northwestern some years ago. We were talking, she had just finished a big project and was casting around for something else to do, and her husband works for Accenture, which is the transformation of Arthur Andersen, the big management consulting company, and Bob was also a PhD from Northwestern. He was always traveling all over the place and she said, maybe she'd go with him to India sometime and interview women executives there, but she didn't sound very happy about it. So I said, being a meddlesome type, "oh, there's something that I've wished people would do for a long time: study how women actually decide what kind of clothing to buy and what to wear, because, you know, my wife and other women I know are always talking about these things in ways that I just can't solve what's going on." So, she said, "You know that would really be interesting. I think the way to do it would be to ask people to show us their closet and tell us about everything that's in it." So, I said, "go ahead, do it, that's perfect" and she says, "well I think you need to be involved too." So, I thought, well, you know, okay, that's a message from somewhere, because I'm given to listening to messages from somewhere. So we began doing that and we've now got 11 lengthy interviews... because people love to do that. They go into the closet, "where did you get that?" "I bought this at blah blah blah, I paid so much for it. This one, my mother-in-law gave me."

E: Yeah, there's a history to each item I guess.

H: A history, yes. We ask them essentially two questions: where did you get it? And when do you wear it? How do you get dressed in the morning? When you got dressed to go to work this morning, what were you thinking when you picked out the clothes to wear?

E: Well, I was just in a huge rush and I picked up the least dirty ones.

[laughter]

H: Well, that's an answer. One thing that the 3 or 4 guys we've interviewed, a number of them do essentially what I do with shirts, they're all hanging on hangers in the closet, I take the next one. Some of them even have a name for it: they call it rotation.

E: It's very systematic.

H: Mhm. I mean, it's very interesting.

E: So, there's going to be a book, or a journal series of this?

H: Well, very likely a book, I don't know.

E: It would make an amazing documentary.

H: Oh, wouldn't it? But, you know, closets are dark!

[laughter]

E: Yes, true, you'd need really good lighting.

H: ...but it's just fascinating. So, we're very pleased with that. That's the new thing.

And I spend three months a year in France. We go there every fall. So, I'm busy writing a couple of papers that I'll be delivering there. They're going to have a big, several day meeting devoted to my thoughts about the sociology of art that they're inviting a whole bunch of people to in Normandy, in October. I think that is going to be a lot of fun. Because, ever since I seriously tried, you know, began learning French, both my wife and I, I've got a whole sociological life over there. There's quite a body of literature on jazz and related things in French, they're very into it.

E: I'm really happy that you were able to do this because I think you've covered so much ground. But, if you find yourself thinking of things that you think are relevant or would be of interest to us, please continue to send them along.

H: Oh, yes, I certainly will.

E: Alright, thanks very much. I appreciate your time and your thoughts. Have a good day.

H: Thank you. Good bye.