Communication Scholars Oral History Project
Annenberg School for Communication Library Archives
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA

OSCAR H. GANDY, JR.

interviewed and transcribed by

JEFFERSON POOLEY

recorded by

ANDRES SPILLARI

July 22, 23, & 24, 2019

Tucson, AZ

BIOGRAPHY

Oscar H. Gandy, Jr. (1944–), professor emeritus at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, is an influential political economist of communication. Gandy has made significant contributions to the study of privacy, data brokerage, public relations, framing, and the representation of risk. He is the author of four books, including *The Panoptic Sort: A Political Economy of Personal Information* (1993), a widely celebrated work that—among other things—anticipated Silicon Valley's business model of surveillance capitalism. Gandy, born in 1944 in Amityville, on New York's Long Island, was raised by an aunt in nearby Hempstead. He was educated at Catholic institutions, including an all-boys high school where he was the only black student. After securing an associate's degree in social sciences at Nassau Community College in 1964, he matriculated to the University of New Mexico (UNM) in Albuquerque. At UNM Gandy majored in sociology, participated in anti–Vietnam War and anti-racist activism, and worked as a research assistant to radical sociologist Harold Meier. After his 1967 graduation, Gandy moved to Philadelphia to pursue a master's in social work at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn), with the aim to work as a community organizer. He soon dropped the program and—after a stint living in Oakland, California—returned to Philadelphia to join a master's program at Penn's Annenberg School for Communication. There he was mentored by the School's influential dean, George Gerbner, and produced a thesis on the effects of television camera movement on viewers. While at Annenberg, Gandy produced the *Right On!* community affairs program for the local CBS affiliate. After his Penn graduation in 1970, he took up a post at the University of San Diego California (UCSD), teaching television production, where he worked alongside critical communication scholar Herbert I. Schiller. In 1973 Gandy moved to the Bay Area to pursue doctoral studies in Stanford University's Communication program. At Stanford, Gandy took a number of courses from radical economists and education scholars, and created a model of development communication, TrEE (Transformation, Effectiveness, and Efficiency). After completing his dissertation on the Defense Department's subsidies for educational technology in 1976, Gandy moved to Tanzania in an unsuccessful attempt to apply his TrEE model. He soon returned to Philadelphia and the Annenberg School, as a post-doc under Gerbner's sponsorship. In 1977 Gandy moved into a position at Howard University in Washington, DC, where he spent a decade on the faculty. At Howard, Gandy published *Beyond Agenda Setting* (1982), which developed the influential concept of the "information subsidy," whereby resourced organizations help shape news coverage by providing ready-to-use materials for journalists. He also took an active role in communication policy work in this Howard period, with the DC-based Telecommunications Policy Research Conference in particular. In 1987, Gandy—by then an established member of the community of radical political economists who gathered at the Union for Democratic Communication (UDC) and the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) conferences—assumed a tenured post at the Annenberg School, where he would remain for the balance of his career. His landmark book *The Panoptic Sort*, whose research was improbably supported by AT&T, was published in 1993, to great and lasting acclaim. In this same period Gandy began working on news framing, including research on proactive framing for social justice ends, with special attention to race. That work culminated in a 1998 book, *Communication and Race*. Fueled in part by participation in a Penn seminar on racial statistics and public policy in 2002 and 2003, Gandy developed an innovative research program on the representation of risk and probability, leading to *Coming to Terms with Chance* (2009), a major if unheralded work that connects the prevalence of probabilistic decision-making with unequal life chances. Gandy retired from the Annenberg School in 2006, moving to Tucson, Arizona, where he resides with his wife Judith.

ABSTRACT

Session Three (July 23, 2019)

The interview covers Gandy's career in the period between the publication of *The Panoptic Sort* (1993) and Gandy's retirement from the Annenberg School for Communication in 2006. Among the topics discussed include his year as a fellow at the Freedom Forum Media Studies Center in 1993–1994 and his engagement with the literature on risk, probability, and life chances. Gandy recounts his work in framing, beginning in the mid-1990s, including his interest in the representation of (statistical) risk and race, as well as his engagement with proactive framing for social justice ends. The relationship of this 1990s work to George Gerbner's legacy and approach is discussed. Gandy describes his relationship with the political economy tradition in North American and the UK, and his encounters with political-economic communication scholars, including Vincent Mosco, Herbert Schiller, and Nicholas Garnham. A related strand of the interview is Gandy's criticism of cultural studies on methodological and quietism grounds. His involvement in privacy policy around the turn of the millennium, including his public criticisms of Alan Westin, are recounted. Gandy discusses his mixed feelings about teaching, especially undergraduates, as well as his appreciation of close graduate-student collaborations.

RESTRICTIONS

None

FORMAT

Interview. Video recording at the home office of Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., in Tucson, AZ. One mp4 file of approximately one hour.

TRANSCRIPT

Transcribed by Jefferson Pooley. Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Jefferson Pooley. Transcript reviewed and approved by Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., Jefferson Pooley, and Samantha Dodd.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND CITATION FORMS

Video recording

Bibliography: Gandy, Oscar H., Jr. Interview by Jefferson Pooley (session three). Video recording, July 23, 2019. Communication Scholars Oral History Project, Annenberg School for Communication Archives, University of Pennsylvania. **Footnote example:** Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., interview by Jefferson Pooley (session three), video recording, July 23, 2019, Communication Scholars Oral History Project, Annenberg School for Communication Archives, University of Pennsylvania.

Transcript

Bibliography: Gandy, Oscar H., Jr. Interview by Jefferson Pooley (session three). Transcript of video recording, July 23, 2019. Communication Scholars Oral History Project, Annenberg School for Communication Archives, University of Pennsylvania. **Footnote example:** Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., interview by Jefferson Pooley (session three), transcript of video recording, July 23, 2019 Communication Scholars Oral History Project, Annenberg School for Communication Archives, University of Pennsylvania, pp. 14–15.

Transcript of Interview conducted July 23, 2019, with OSCAR H. GANDY, JR. (session three)

Tucson, AZ

Interviewed by Jefferson Pooley

Q: This is session three of an oral history interview of Oscar Gandy, conducted by Jefferson Pooley in Dr. Gandy's home in Tucson, Arizona. The interview is part of the Communication Scholars Oral History Project of the Annenberg Library School for Communication Library Archives at the University of Pennsylvania. The date is July 23rd, 2019. So Oscar, we've wrapped up the last session talking about *The Panoptic Sort*, and it was almost immediately after that publication that you then got invited to be a fellow at the Freedom Forum [Media Studies Center] for the 1993–1994 year.[1] And it seems that you began work on a new project that involved risk and race and framing. And so maybe you could just talk a little bit about that year and what it was like.

GANDY: I have had a number of wonderful, important years. This one was not all that it could have been, in large part, because I commuted. It was supposed to be a residential fellowship. I commuted every day to New York and to Columbia University, even, in order to have these kinds of meetings. I'm not sure that what I decided to write about was exactly what they thought I was going to write about before. But again, it was an opportunity for me to read, an opportunity for me to share my ideas with colleagues in that group. I actually met with one of my graduate students there, so lots of meeting and greeting and thinking in that regard.

But I don't believe, and I could be even wrong, in terms of whether or not I spent my year doing the kinds of analyses now that I had been doing in the past—that is, some kind of data manipulation, rather than reading and writing and theorizing in that regard. So I'm not even sure, actually, what I did in my project there. I don't think they resent my having been there in that regard, but I'm not sure exactly what I actually produced at the Freedom Forum. Other than, as you identified, the kind of shifts in my work relating to risk and difference in that regard.

Q: You did seem to attribute, in the papers that came afterwards—

GANDY: credit

[1] Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., *The Panoptic Sort: A Political Economy of Personal Information* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Q: —credit the year in New York City as being an important point of engaging with this literature and reading it. And I did wonder if some of it harkened back to the reading in decision theory and kind of making decisions under constraints. That kind of Annenberg post-doc reading that you did—or if there wasn't much of a connection.

GANDY: I should say, though, one of the communities of engagement at the University of Pennsylvania were, in fact, decision theorists. So there's a large group of decision theorists that talk about the constraints in that regard. So I read their materials and heard their presentations in that regard. So that's where maybe some of that comes from, but being at the Freedom Forum gave me the opportunity to go further with that. That is, what kind of constraints were decision makers facing in terms of the resources and information and the arguments that they confronted in trying to decide to do X rather than Y.

Q: It seemed like there was a concern—this phrase "life chances" shows up, an interest in the distribution of life chances and the ways in which that seemed to be the motivating, underlying concern somehow in lots of this work that came after. And I'm just speculating about that and want—

GANDY: —so maybe that's a happy happenstance in terms of this author—talk about risk. But this author, I think, was probably writing 20 years before about life chances and things that affected how it is, the choices that you would make, generate and modify your life chances. And so that just resonated with me as a way of talking about how it is that decisions made by one group at a particular point in time affected the opportunity—that is, the outcomes of struggles throughout life that you could characterize as life chances. But it's the resonance between the language of life chances and the language of risks and the language of predictions that made that the right language, that the right metaphor in order to understand what was going on in this regard. How is it where the kinds of decisions that were being made, changing the paths, the tracks, the opportunities and the chances, the life chances—the gamble. So writing again about probability, writing again about prediction, or about life chances in that regard, and how is it that somebody's engagement with the activities, and the limits, and the opportunities affect life chances—the kind of life that you can have.

Q: And there's one way of saying that's the through-line through all of your work, even way back to your associate degree in Nassau Community College. Not to say it was work then, but just your interests as you'd described them back then about your friends in Hempstead and their fate.

GANDY: Yes. Yes. So the notion of—certainly you've got an economics that talks about decisions that individuals make on their own. But they're making decisions in the context of sets of choices or options that have been presented to them. Even [Anthony] Giddens has this discussion about the kinds of decisions that you make and the kinds of informed choices—this nature of agency that you are choosing, but you really don't know what the conditions of the choice are. You don't know what the interests, determinations, desires, plans, and hopes of those who are providing you with some options that you might not have chosen yourself. Indeed, a lot of the options that we face are imposed upon us. You need to choose between one

of these boxes. Even boxes that you choose in order to identify yourself in order to meet one of these five categories, in one of these checklists in that regard.

So this notion of choices—notion of whether or not you are making those choices, that is, choosing what you're going to choose, or whether or not you're choosing from choices that were placed before you that you didn't even know that they were reflecting somebody else's interest, or that they were even responding to pressures that they couldn't avoid. So life chances is a very powerful construct for me.

Q: Speaking of risk itself, this could be a very short answer, but I wondered if Ulrich Beck in *The Risk Society* [1986/1992] was important for you at the time.

GANDY: Sure.

Q: IIt came out just before.

GANDY: Certainly cited. I mean, so this whole movement, which I—again, I pointed in the direction of social scientists, theorists, also having adopted this prediction orientation. So risk is part of—even though it's not generally applied in the affirmative, I mean, in terms of a positive outcome in that regard, it's mostly in the negative, the loss, the danger, the harmed kind. But it is still the same prediction of what's going to occur, what are the consequences that are going to flow from it, what are the benefits or the cost, what are the returns. So it is, was in the discourse.

Now part of the notion of risk in that regard was that people didn't know. We couldn't know. That is, there was greater uncertainty about what would happen if we were to choose X rather than Y in that regard. That's how I understand that literature.

Q: Well, I want to ask—I want to ask about another major, I think, completely related—in fact, absolutely tied into the work you were doing then and the many, many years following—but the turn to framing, to the analytic approach of framing as a concept. And I want to just ask about it in general, but also that you ended up at a—being invited to a symposium in 1997 that became the book that you co-edited, called *Framing Public Life*.[2] And your critique of, that you expressed in that keynote address, which became the epilogue of that book, of the limitations of framing, or at least the way that framing is often approached without the origins being described.

GANDY: Alright, so framing is a tool, right? It is a resource. It is a strategic resource in order to influence how it is that people understand a threat, an opportunity, a public policy, or the like. And so that's kind of a power tool. Which is different from agenda-setting, but it can be related to agenda-setting. It is a focus on how the same facts might be presented just slightly differently in order to generate a different kind of response. And so the psychologists that talk about this in

[2] Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., "Epilogue–Framing at the Horizon: A Retrospective Assessment," in *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*, ed. Stephen D. Reese, Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., and August E. Grant, 355–78 (New York: Routledge, 2001).

terms of just a slight adjustment of [gestures] will change—substantially, significantly—the kind of responses that people make. So the power of framing has been recognized by certain communication [scholars] especially, but others it fields as well. Again, the ability to frame a situation, the ability to identify a responsible party, the ability to identify the outcomes—and the outcomes that should be preferred, rather than others. That's all part of this process of framing—assigning responsibility, to act, to choose, to respond.

So, yes, framing has been a substantial part of my research. Think about that, though, in terms of this history which I've given you, really of content analysis. So examining newspapers, examining television programming, examining other kinds of things—but think about them maybe just as deciding, especially with regard to violence studies, what are the nature of the acts that occur. So these are things about which one can have great confidence—that you think you saw it and you know what that was and, therefore, you would count that as an act of violence, or you would count that as a killing, or you would count that as something else.

Well now, framing is quite different. It influences the way you understand this—maybe in terms of an accident or an intentional act or an unfair organization. It shifts the responsibilities in certain ways. So framing is another part of communication research that became important to me.

Q: OK, and that brings me right to the body of empirical research that you then began in the year after the Freedom Forum stint, which was to do content analyses of—a number of them—of the way in which, you might say, outcomes, often around statistics, which I want to ask, specifically the way that statistics are portrayed, but not always that. The way in which racial differences of life chance expectations are represented with small differences in wording that you use a large corpus, corpi of newspaper articles to judge. And there's more to ask about it. But I guess I just want to ask, first, your decision to focus on race in particular, where—almost all of this work dealt with over the years to come—race and these representations of risk through frames.

GANDY: I guess there are other representations of risk, but—you're correct. So race was the anchor. Other times there is place, where there are places that are more dangerous than other kinds of places in that regard. But the race part is certainly a carryover from my Howard [University] days, and my orientation toward who are the population groups that are most affected by framing of policies and responses—and framing of responsibility for their own behavior.

So if I could just, you know, take you through all of these little, if you will, domains of application that matter. So you think about framing health, framing responsibility in health. Who's responsible for obesity? Who's responsible for a whole host of things that have to do? Well, people frame that in order to say how we're going to intervene in people's lives in order to move them toward the appropriate, the desirable, the inexpensive, the efficient, whatever the titles you use in that regard. So the power of framing in order to mobilize or influence and control people's behavior is especially important with regard to a population that has been

abused and mishandled throughout our experience in this nation. So race is an important factor in there.

A lot of research then talks about how is race treated. So I think it's important to say that part of the statistics, or part of the methodological orientation, is to say, well now there are a number of ways one can talk about probable outcomes. One can talk about, black people are more likely to lose, but you can also say black people are less likely to win, white people are more likely to win, and white people are less likely to lose. So those are kind of those four options there. And if you will allow [me] to make another reach back to George Gerbner, who talks about, It is not what you're exposed to, it is not where you live, it is how much time you spend in this medium. But my research in this area and the focus in this area is to say, No, no, this stuff varies dramatically from market to market to market, and it even varies within markets in terms of the material that people are exposed to or choose to consume in that regard.

So it was important for me to try to say, Well, what is it then about the market? What is it about the characteristics, the socio-economic characteristics, of the market? What is it about the political characteristics of the market that might explain the choice of the headlines or the frames that are used in order to tell the story about opportunity and risk in that regard? So, yes, a lot of that research then tried to say, How is this risk level framed and does it vary as a function of the size of the population, the income of the population? Here we go, the proportion of African-Americans in the population, the political status and power of African-Americans in the market, and all the work in terms of explaining how it is that risk, that outcome, is likely to be framed. I thought and still think that's an important kind of way to look at this.

Q: And I just can't help but remember you talking about how this was potentially a source of tension with Gerbner back in 1977, when you—when that paper wouldn't be published, that did look at—

GANDY: Yes. With regard to the nursing.

Q: —the market-specific—

GANDY: Yes. Yes, it's not a new thing. It's been around for a while. But if we both understand—that is, I'm not misrepresenting Gerbner's commitment to—and I find lots of places where it's said that Gerbner is really interested in how much you consume, not what you consume. The assumption, therefore, is that the content is all the same. The lesson of capital is the same, through all of that content, which it's not. If you understand that, if it's going to have effectiveness, it needs to be prepared differentially, for a different audience segment, for them to get it, for them to understand it, for them to see that it associates with them.

George [Gerbner] wasn't going there in his work. It was not laid out that way, because there were only three television networks, or however many there were, that people were exposed to. But the newspaper world and the fine work by journalism scholars in different markets that talked about the differences in the performance of the newspapers in those markets. They

didn't say why. They just described the differences. But I think my approach would help to say why [laughs]. What was the nature of the commodities—audiences—that they could provide, that would explain where they could go with their production and the quality of their production in that regard.

Q: And you were referring to these as structural differences at the time, which would obviously go on to—it's a language maybe that you already had, but Giddens seems to be important there.

GANDY: Yes.

Q: And I guess I was—so when you were in, some of these papers from the mid '90s, that were talking about risk and race and framing around winning and losing, like you just talked about, you seemed concerned in the policy implications of these word phrasing changes—that white support, for example, for policies that might be in the welfare state tradition would erode if stories tended to be framed in one way as opposed—

GANDY: It's for them, rather than us. Yes [laughs].

Q: Yes, especially when the Clinton administration was in the middle of dismantling the welfare state. And then, but it seemed that there was also this interest in how black audiences might perceive their own life choices being artificially constrained by how the statistical reporting was conveyed.

GANDY: I'm not sure that I pursued the extent to which African Americans—as an audience—understood their status as an audience who could be affected by those people reading this frame. I'm not sure I did that. I may have, but it wasn't a prime part of my engagement with African American perception of their own risk, of which there is a literature. And I contributed to that literature.

Q: And that's what I was referring to.

GANDY: Yes.

Q: So the policy context, though, did seem really important—you were concerned with the implications for public support of policy.

GANDY: I think really that, probably my whole life, my whole scholarly and academic life, has been focused on public policy and the consequences that flow from public policy, and the consequences that flow from certain actors with certain resources and certain pathways being able to implement, being able to influence, those kinds of public policies. Yes, you're correct.

Q: And it did seem like you extended this later to look at kind of public intellectuals and expert witnesses—how they framed statistics. And I don't know if you want to say anything about that work—it's like in addition to journalists, these other kinds of public representers, if you will.

GANDY: So part of my work—and I don't know if I've leapt into another space here or not. I mean, trying to understand where are the places, where are the locales, what are the circumstances where people's framing is for a different audience and requires a different kind of framing. And my expectations about whether or not particular kinds of frames would be working in Congressional hearings versus being directed perfectly to the press, or whether or not in popular television, is an interest in saying, Do people understand where frames may work better than in other settings where those frames just aren't going to move the audience.. I did a study that tried to explore the extent to which presentations about risk in Congressional hearings made it in the press.[3]

So that's the kind of question that says, OK, how is it that the presentation of material, which on its face could be important in terms of helping to identify the problem, helping to identify persons responsible, helping to identify the consequences for somebody else—the fact that the press wouldn't publish, was not likely to publish very much, certain kinds of frames that appear in those Congressional hearings, is a real question.

That even caused me to reflect and weaken my own concerns about the extent to which testimony in Congressional hearings does the work that I think it does. Because the data suggests, maybe not so much [laughs]. There are only certain things—there are only certain kind of frames—that are going to maybe respond—I'm not sure I've written this—maybe respond to the news strategy of a particular media, a particular newspaper. That is, we're going to get the audience that we need to get by paying attention to this, not that stuff. And so despite how you framed it, if it don't get covered, it didn't happen.

Q: The tree falling [in a forest]. So this is backtracking a tiny bit, but I just wanted to quickly ask about the influence in this framing work of—it's a question, really—of Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman's work. You were citing it way back in the late '70s when it was still unknown or very—well, becoming very influential. But it's now in this 1990s period where you're, in every paper of this kind—

GANDY: I make reference to it [laughs].

Q: —and you make reference to, and giving examples of how little changes in framing can have big effects. And so was that work important to you?

GANDY: It was. I mean, certainly that's not that—I referenced them because, you know, they make the point, and lots of people, as you say now, know who those authors are and understand the nature of their work. So it's easy, important and expected that you make reference to that kind of scholarship that shows just that little adjustment is enough to move the needle in some cases.

[3] Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., "Public Opinion Surveys and the Formation of Privacy Policy," *Journal of Social Issues* 59, no. 2 (2003): 283–99.

Q: Well, I'm hoping we can move to a related topic, which is—and in some ways, I'd be curious how it is related—this really interesting book, *Communication and Race: A Structural Perspective*, so it has this word in the title.[4]

And it was published in 1998. But before even asking you about the book, I noticed that one of the engagements early in the book is with cultural studies, and maybe a couple of years before this you had edited a special issue [colloquy] on political economy and cultural studies.[5] And so my question before the book is just, as cultural studies became such a prominent phenomenon in communication studies, including at the Annenberg School, how did you engage with it in that context?

GANDY: Sure, so I hesitate to do this, but I'll do it anyway. I mean, until what I would characterize as his adjustment, Vinnie [Vincent] Mosco was with the rest of us in terms of cultural studies is not an appropriate use of our resources in that regard. And Vinnie, you know, adjusted and got closer to cultural studies than certainly I have in that regard as being an appropriate response to—I would call it the abuse of power in society. So, yes, this is part of what I consider to be political economy's orientation toward its project and the project of cultural studies.

And, again, characterize cultural studies as having a project of denying power, denying influence, denying concentration, whereas political economists are about identifying and explaining and pointing out power and its exercise. The reference that you make is to kind of a debate between Nicholas Garnham, who is certainly one of the really important scholars of political economy—interesting histories of some of these folk, I mean, in terms of filmmaking, in order to go into political economy and write extensively about, as economists, about that. And that's certainly part of his background and work there. Him against Larry [Lawrence] Grossberg. So here are these two American, not American, British and American voices that are really the loudest and in some sense, harshest.

And indeed, if you go back in and look at that piece in *Critical Studies* [*in Mass Communication*], we had a fifth guest who dropped out because Garnham was too mean, too disrespectful in terms of his interaction with them. She said, I'm not going to play along with this. So I mean, it was a good struggle. I mean, and the title of it was appropriate—is this going to be a coming together again? No, it was clearly not, because he doesn't, didn't play in this regard. I thought that was an important, fair representation.

Now, for whatever reason, however, I don't know, I haven't had these kind of conversation of Vinnie, although in my own mind I associate part of his shift is his sharing work and visions with his wife, who's a cultural studies person. And maybe that starts to make—but then he may also have had a closer partnership with Graham Murdock, who was really comfortable in this middle space in that regard, and that might explain part of it. But this division between political

[4] Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., *Communication and Race: A Structural Perspective* (London: Arnold, 1998).
[5] Oscar H. Gandy, Jr. and Nicholas Garnham. "Political Economy and Cultural studies: Reconciliation or Divorce?" Colloquy, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12, no. 1 (1995).

economy, as I understood it at that point in time, and cultural studies, as I understood it at [that] time, was never the twain shall meet.

Q: And it seemed like your critique, as you laid it out in this introduction to the race and structural analysis book, was both the absence of power, which you had a beef with that, but also a refusal to even try to generalize and to focus on particular texts.

GANDY: Which is, if you think about, again, kind of the methods that you've seen as being all over my track record in that regard, numbers matter. And you can't get numbers of the kind that you think by just talking to one guy or just talking to one woman. It's difficult to challenge. It's difficult to assess the breadth, the impact, the accuracy, the truth, and the importance of this single person's impression of another single person in that regard. And to the degree that I was being fair in characterizing much of what cultural studies is, says to me, well, that's not going to take us anywhere. Because you want to understand about population and maybe even population segments, but nevertheless, we're not talking about one or two, we're talking about a group.

And what do we know about a group and group's experience and group's orientation and the things that affect group's orientations and behavior? So yes, I didn't think that that was—that was fun. I mean, think of, if one thinks about—forget my hand waving—but if one thinks about the pleasures being derived from being creative and being poetic and being even musical, as you're presenting the lives of the people that you spoke to, well alright, sure, you can make progress and that, and you get evaluation of some of that work in terms of how creative and how engaging that is.

OK, but that doesn't do social work. That doesn't do political work. That doesn't, as as far as I know, change society. And political economy is about, in my view, about change. It's about making things better than they are right now. If we only knew how to act, but nevertheless, it still is about making change. You work to make things better, to understand how to make things better, to know which things you ought to work on in order to make things better. I didn't get that from cultural studies.

Q: Well, this might be a question you don't want to answer, but was there—I should ask, Does this critique of cultural studies that you will outline now and in the book, did it resonate at all in the Annenberg School context where the buckets were at play and there was a kind of cultural studies bucket, more or less?

GANDY: No, because you don't have to—I mean, other than this cute little interaction that Klaus [Krippendorff] and I had about power, there was no confrontation. And I'm not sure, if you'll allow, that in my time at Annenberg—and I was there a long time though—the kinds of people who I would identify as on the outer fringes of cultural studies, didn't last long. They recognized this is not the home for me to look down on my colleagues and to speak my displeasure with those other colleagues. They just said, Can't do that here, and wouldn't stay. So I don't think there was anybody that I would characterize as being the kind of cultural studies people that I spoke bad about, spoke ill of. I don't think we had any of that.

Q: So the book itself, can you just talk a little bit about what motivated it? It's a theoretical book for the most part, and it's an intervention in a way. And it announces its intervention in the word structural. And so maybe, you know—

GANDY: So again, here's George Gerbner, in that it's about institutional processes. It's about markets and actors with power in markets that are producing content, which is described in the book. And the third part is, what are the consequences? What are the effects? What are the effects on inequality? What are the effects on African Americans? What are the effects on poor people? So it's my taking George's project, his project, and applying it to the current day, but applying it my way, in terms of how I think that one ought to make your way through all three of those levels.

Q: And even treating the structural part as being, or I should say, maybe the—the kind of content not just being the amount of exposure, but—

GANDY: Well, no, you need to know what's in the content. You need to know—but that's not, that wouldn't be a fair criticism of George. That is, George certainly talked about it, and his work with Klaus would provide the description of the content there. I mean, yes, some of it might think of how many acts of violence, but it was much more sophisticated than that, right, in terms of describing what kinds of things were being portrayed and people were consuming in the marketplace, so—

Q: But you were elaborating in the book this kind of—different structural conditions that vary by population and by region and along all of these lines.

GANDY: Yes. Well, I mean, so, to the degree that there are people maybe from a journalism tradition and therefore doing content and framing analysis from that kind of tradition, they studied not one market or one family or any of those single things, but they're interested in—because they understand from a structural institutional sense—that that markets matter, places matter, populations matter, resources matter, predictions about the future matter in each one of those markets, and it's reflected in the kind of content people get to read in their life space.

Q: And how was this book received within the community of communication scholars that work on race, within the broader universe of scholarship that is focused on questions of race and difference?

GANDY: Night and day. So *Panoptic Sort*—all across the board. I mean, it is very popular. It explained my international presence. The race focus is marginalized, smaller populations. I did get some reviews, some nice reviews that I liked, with a twitch here or there in that regard. But they were good reviews. But beyond that, that book didn't, in my view, go anywhere.

Q: And do you have a structural analysis of that difference?

GANDY: So maybe there was nothing to do, that is, there was no plan for intervening with that. This thing is too big and too complex for this analysis of yours, which doesn't open my eyes, to

something special about the world, nor does it provide me with, you need to do X, Y, and Z, in that regard. I don't need this, is what I'm saying. And they're probably right.

Q: Yes, I have a quote here from the book that you wrote in the conclusion. You said, We're no longer as confident as we once were that we could identify the primary contradictions within the capitalist system. And so there was an interesting omission there.

GANDY: [Laughs] Where do we go? Yes, which one of these do we grab on to it and twist? Where do we strike first? You're absolutely right. And I guess others read that and said, What do I get from that?

Q: Well, anyway, it's something that we'll pick up on again because the theme of risk appears again, and you continue to work on this topic. But I wanted to move to what really was a kind of maybe a second life for *The Panoptic Sort* work, when the early internet came along, which is immediately after. When I say the internet, I really just mean the World Wide Web. But immediately after the publication of *Panoptic Sort* that all of a sudden there was another techno-utopian discourse around the World Wide Web's emergence. And you continued to basically extend the *Panoptic Sort* approach to internet questions, in a couple of papers.[6] Is that the way you thought of it?

GANDY: Well, why shouldn't I have?

Q: No, you should have, and I'm just—

GANDY: [Laughs] So, I mean, if you say, and if you've already demonstrated that it matters what people are consuming and where they are, and now you have a technology that is able to divide and distribute and, not only that, get data, get information about where it's going, well then that just makes that process of segmentation and targeting even more powerful. So, yes, I mean a natural extension of that other work, I would think, I'm sorry.

Q: Yes, no, no, completely. And you seem to focus even more on those papers from the '90s through about 2000, when you were writing in this period on the internet, on categorical vulnerability. Again, it's obviously there in the original book, but you seem to be more focused on it. Is that fair?

GANDY: Well, I'm not sure if I said anything about that, I mean except the distinction between assignment to a group by officials with power to assign, as opposed to analytical categories—that is, the generation of categories on the basis of a kind of sophisticated statistical analysis making use of all kinds of data from all kinds of sources changes the game rather dramatically and, in part, it changes the game in that the way that people don't know the category to which they've been assigned. Their antenna are not up. They're not paying attention, and the expectation that they are being manipulated and targeted and set aside for a special version of

[6] E.g., Anthony Danna and Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., "All that Glitters Is Not Gold: Digging Beneath the Surface of Datamining," Journal of Business Ethics 40 (2002): 373–88; and Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., "Exploring Identity and Identification in Cyberspace," *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics, & Public Policy* 14, no. 2 (2000): 1085–111.

that. Although there is some research that people have more understanding than they did when I started writing, right, not saying I explained to them, but they understand something about segmentation and targeting in population reconstruction.

Q: It's maybe not unrelated, that you were working in this period on legal and policy interventions much more. And writing in law journals quite a lot and including analyses of what you were talking about a bit before—group privacy, what informed consent might mean, opting out versus opting in, and some concrete policy interventions, actually. And it's striking, you made a critique of this legitimate business interest defense from would-be data-miners. Was this kind of new interest in getting into the weeds of policy—I'm not saying it's new, because you always reference policy, but you had, it seemed to me, maybe a bit more of a fatalistic attitude in *The Panoptic Sort*, about—

GANDY: —nothing to be done.

Q: Yes. And that there was quite a lot of active work and plotting what might be done, if not couched in optimistic language.

GANDY: So this later work tried to understand, in one sense, even segmentation and targeting in terms of the policy environment. And again, trying to understand how information subsidies played a role in shaping particular kinds of policy outcomes. And I don't know if you're making reference to this one piece which talked about public opinion and its influence on privacy policy, and the way in which, then, information subsidies—people making testimony within hearings related to privacy in order to shape—and that project, identified the actors, identified the kinds of actors, identified the kinds of resources they had.[7] And if you'll forgive me again, I mean, kind of my identification of a major figure in the privacy environment, Alan Westin. And kind of my emergence as a new kid on the block and one that challenged his connection, indeed his financial connection, with those industries.

So much of my research, you know, made use of research that was paid for by his clients. But as a scholar, he made a lot of that work, research available to the public, so that you could go in and do secondary analysis on his data and ask different questions of those data. But the idea that that group of actors, the kind of actors—those actors in the information business, those actors in the public relations business, those actors in the advertising business—were the ones who were financing the research in terms of how the public responded and understood their, if you will, their risks and their needs, with regard to privacy legislation.

It was an interesting moment, I mean, in terms of the debates in policy conferences and policy writing about what does the public believe? What does the public feel? And where did the public come to understand how they felt about these things? So yes, that was a challenge within the field. I mean, so, he was really a star. And Gandy attacking a star—OK [laughs], I'll go in that direction. Because it was clear to me that he was a paid expert in the field and dominated the field. And his focus was primarily initially on government. And he moved, maybe

[7] Gandy, "Public Opinion Surveys and the Formation of Privacy Policy."

in response, but he moved to pay attention to regulation of businesses in that regard. So there needed to be some kind of struggle in that regard.

Q: And so the use—well, I suppose his own scholarship is an example, perhaps, and also in that what I think is a brilliant paper about commissioning of public opinion polls and the way that surveys are used instrumentally, as you say, as information subsidy is, well, it's really, really interesting.[8]

And it's basically kind of sociology of knowledge in a way of like, How does the information—

GANDY: It doesn't drop out of the sky [laughs].

Q: —and I never asked about it yet, but in very early reference, even in your dissertation, appears here and there to [G. William] Domhoff and his analysis of—

GANDY: Yes, yes, yes, power structure analysis. Yes, absolutely, G. William Domhoff.

Q: Yes. Domhoff. And does that work resonate with you? I mean, it appears here and there.

GANDY: Sure, it does and did. I mean, so maybe I've read a number of pieces of his. But, you know, in order to understand what's the nature of the power structure, who are the actors, what are the resources that they have, and where do they use them in order to shape the policy outcomes, is interesting. Another, and I can't bring his name to mind, and maybe it will come to me, he is identified—identifies himself and his son as communitarians. And so he—I'm sorry, I can't bring up his name—he talks about limitations on policy formation, because people will not go to the marketplace, they'll go to the government. And he will talk about—that is, you get more bang for the buck by subsidizing government workers than you do trying to go in an indirect way to get the public to go in that regard. So that was kind of inconsistent. I felt, in one sense, good that there was this star who was talking about this policy process in this way. It was consistent with—

Let me make another reference about this community of scholars. There's a publication, if I can find it, on the *Journal of Social Issues*, which was on privacy formation. So Westin was in that journal, Gandy was in that journal, and Gandy was beating up on Westin [laughs] in that journal in that regard.[9]

The notion again of making it clear that this is not the way democracy is supposed to work. And anybody who is being paid to provide a blanket of protection for commercial actors, capitalists, ought to be called out on it. And I had the good fortune, I guess, enough visibility from *The Panoptic Sort*, to be called to speak. And to speak truth to that powerful actor. Even though I used his data.

[8] Gandy, "Public Opinion Surveys and the Formation of Privacy Policy."
[9] Gandy, "Public Opinion Surveys and the Formation of Privacy Policy."

Q: Did he ever respond to you?

GANDY: No, no, no, he didn't. Indeed, in his paper, in that journal issue, I don't exist. We've looked at each other in conferences and he didn't comment.

Q: That's interesting. I wanted to also just ask about some work you did on African Americans' opinions about privacy and some of the explanations why their answers tended to be different in patterned ways.[10]

GANDY: Right. I wish I could remember that work, but I'm sure it has to do with the nature of the experience, the nature of their black identity, a whole host of things that explain how it is that people make identifications with self or group as self. That's reflected in what they think about risks to collective self.

Q: And that was your argument.

GANDY: Oh, OK.

Q: Yes, and even that they, and in these opinion polls anyway, were less concerned in a sense about kind of invasive commercial marketing, and your speculation was that they just are excluded from that marketing.

GANDY: But anyway [laughs]. You're not in that space, and your newspapers don't collect money from those sources because you're not going to buy that stuff. Or you're going to buy it anyway, without having been marketed in that regard.

Q: This is only partly related, but I just noticed around that time you were engaging with Habermas more, Jürgen Habermas and the public sphere works. And there were references earlier, when you were talking about communication competence and so on, but did you read more and get more interested in Habermas in this period?

GANDY: So it's probably I had a new student, a Chinese student, whose orientation was toward Habermas and wanted the press in China to have that same orientation toward—and so I had to read more. And did read a lot more. She still wrote a dissertation that dealt with, but she didn't do it in an individual paper—she did it in comparison of with five nations, in terms of how it is that they framed these kinds of issues in that regard. I won't say any more about her in that regard, but nevertheless, that was the source.

So often, in my working with students, and I can—after with some time to go back to my records, I could identify a number of students whose projects were so far out of my experience that I had to go in and read a lot of material that I hadn't read before. It didn't hurt. I mean, it benefited in that regard. And so both of us kind of negotiated our way toward an understanding

[10] Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., "African Americans and Privacy: Understanding the Black Perspective in the Emerging Privacy Debate," in *The Information Society and the Black Community*, ed. John T. Barber and Alice A. Tait, 31–58 (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001).

of that work in relationship to what it is that they did. So students were in one sense the person who would introduce me to something that I hadn't looked at in the past.

Indeed, I'll say, a student of mine who is, I'm not sure if she's full professor yet, but she might be, might be real close, did really well in school, and she had administrative skills as well. She, because of her research, got me reading more [Pierre] Bourdieu than I would have read otherwise. So it's a good job, especially graduate students, the degree to which you are partners in this process, and you are collaborators in this process. And that you can [say], OK, I'll read that, and we'll come back and talk about it. I had one student, in fact, negotiated with me that he would do an independent study, where we would both read the same material and come back and talk about the same material. It was neat. It was very, very good.

Q: Well, it actually does make me curious about your teaching in this period at Annenberg. And what were the classes that you would typically teach or on your rotation?

GANDY: Oh, I taught *Communication and Race*. I had a good audience on *Communication and Race*. I had *Political Economy*, two courses in the political economy. I might have done *Media and Content Analysis*, and maybe the equivalent of agenda-setting kinds of things. I think that's probably the limit. I mean, again, since you've gotten through my history, you know that technology is a big part of that. You know that politics are a big part of that, and political influence is a part of that. So that's what I thought. The lesson of the Annenberg School is that you teach what you do.

Q: Did you do undergraduate teaching much?

GANDY: I did. I had to. I taught a big course, but it was about new media. So I could get up there and wave and show all kinds of material to them, and so they followed on it. Indeed, they had to write papers too. But I also had a research assistant or a teaching assistant in that regard, who would go through that material. I had some great teaching assistants, as well. But if I could have avoided teaching undergraduates, I would have in a hot minute.

Q: And why is that? So you're—the teaching that you did do most, that you liked a lot better, what was it about the graduate seminar?

GANDY: Oh, it's a small group. A small group that I could intervene with. A small group that had to write papers. A small group that did essay exams. All of the things that rarely happen unless you're really special with undergraduates in that regard—that they won't do. So, that I think that I had a good relationship to those students, even the ones that managed to come over from [The] Wharton [School], would sit there in the class and take those classes. Graduate courses were not the same partnership as a research project, but nevertheless it was a sharing of this kind of space and responding to the same material publicly, but also in their own paper.

Q: And did you feel like you looked forward to teaching graduate classes?

GANDY: Again, I'd take three graduate classes over one undergraduate class any day of the week. Of course I didn't have to teach three graduate classes and one undergraduate class, but any day.

Q: But even relative to research or service obligations, is teaching something that you cared about as—graduate teaching in particular?

GANDY: Well, I mean, again—no, my graduate research was better than teaching because we were really partners then. So almost everybody on that team was committed to that project and was going to make a contribution to that product and hope they got paid off by not a grade, but by a publication. So those relationships were much more valuable to me than standing up in front of a class or even in a class where there's a lot of interaction in that regard. That interaction was special. I mean, that's really teamwork.

Q: Yes, it's almost Harold Meier.

GANDY: Yes, exactly so. Thank you.

Q: Yes. And, you know, I'm going to ask a couple of questions in our next session, but I'm curious about the Annenberg School in the, maybe the second half of your career. You retired in 2006. So this period in which, you know, you had published *The Panoptic Sort*, you were the Herbert Schiller Professor. And I'm curious about your decision to choose Schiller.

GANDY: It was a bad choice. I didn't ask him. How about that? I mean, I was bad. Nobody said anything. I mean, nobody gave me advice and said, You're not supposed to put somebody's name in when he's living. But I did. Life went on [laughs].

Q: Did he ask you about that?

GANDY: No. I'll say this. I saw him before his death, maybe a couple of months before his death, in his house. And I handed him the card, and he was—he must have known about it, but to actually see it and be in that space. He didn't say anything negative about it. He moved him, I thought, in that regard, so I felt OK.

Q: Good. Well, I'm curious about that period in which you were, for most of it, under the deanship of Kathleen Hall Jamieson, or at least a good chunk of it, and how the school changed after the reins were handed over from Gerbner. And you can speak to it as much as you want or as little as you want.

GANDY: Sure. I'll give it some thought.

Q: OK.

GANDY: Or do you mean now?

Q: Yes.

GANDY: OK. I mean, so certainly George was a powerful force, and George had his own scholarly mission that he and Larry [Gross] defined for the world, and therefore the research effort moved to that first. But Kathleen had her own, and very different—and didn't involve, I don't think, didn't involve the rest of the faculty in quite the same way that George involved as many of the other faculty as he could. Kathleen had a different vision of what the school had, and I suspect—I think that's probably correct—that she had a different relationship with the funder, Walter Annenberg, than George did. I think George's was much more close, you know, at risk, all throughout that process than Kathleen's was. So that changed the nature of the process. Beyond that, Kathleen gave almost all of the faculty chairs. So who's going to argue with that? So here's this pool of money that you can pursue your interest without having to go through this process of fundraising. I had managed at Howard [University] to bring in some kind of money, but I didn't have to get any money. Who can beat that? Not me.

Q: And what about the decision to close down the master's program. You had been a master's graduate yourself.

GANDY: I'm not sure I was even there when that happened.

Q: I can't tell you the exact date.

GANDY: No, but I'm not sure. But certainly the master's program was close enough to a relationship in that you had to do a research—you were expected to do—a research project. So that was still a good relationship. And sometimes that turned into a Ph.D. relationship with your students. So I don't remember that point in time when it went away. Interesting.

Q: And were there any close relationships during that last stretch in the 2000s, especially with faculty, other faculty I mean? Like, had you maintained your friendship with Joe [Joseph] Capella? Maybe you weren't across the hall from him any longer.

GANDY: So are you describing when I was retired?

Q: No, in the years of—the last ten years.

GANDY: I think I mentioned that Joe had moved upstairs. And so I didn't encounter him regularly. And so the kinds of discussions that we had almost every morning—Joe would come in with his half gallon of coffee [laughs]. And we'd chat in that regard. So in one sense that was an unfortunate structural change in the way that things facilitate the production and consumption of other kinds of things—that one made it much harder. And I don't know that Joe was replaced with anybody for me in that regard.

Q: And you continued to have friendly relations with Klaus and—

GANDY: So Klaus wasn't there anymore either. Where was Klaus? Maybe I'm trying to see that space in my office where Klaus was still right across the hall from me. But I'm not seeing him there, so I don't know.

Q: And what led to your decision to retire? I mean, you could have stayed on if you wanted and here you are, faced with turning 65, you decide that you—

GANDY: —could afford not to stay there and deal with the undergraduates. I'm a frugal person as you can see [laughs]. I don't spend a lot of money. Never had a new car in my entire life. And I was reasonably well paid at Annenberg, so I didn't have to stay. The University of Pennsylvania provided me with three years salary. Yes, you know, a gold ladder, to go down, so that was, you know, that was cutting the retirement time again that way. So, yes, hey, you took it.

Q: OK, and what did the school do as you decided to retire? Was there an event?

GANDY: There was. There was a wonderful event. So you hadn't heard about it?

Q: No.

GANDY: So the people knew, especially the people that knew that I liked to dance, that I liked zydeco dancing. And they first had gotten a Philadelphia zydeco band. And then I found out that a real zydeco band was coming to town, and they did it! Got me a real zydeco band. And so we had a party [laughs]. It was like—it was just absolutely wonderful. Can you picture a faculty retirement party with a zydeco band?

Q: No, I can't.

GANDY: I've had a good life. I've had a really good life.

Q: Well I can't think of a better way than that to end this third session. And so thank you, Oscar, so much. And we will pick up tomorrow with a fourth session.

GANDY: Super. Thank you. Have a good day, y'all.

END OF SESSION THREE