

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

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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 Two (July 23, 2019)

In the session, Gandy describes his decade of teaching and research at Howard University in Washington, DC. He recounts his major research collaborations with students and faculty colleagues. His active involvement with the Telecommunications Policy Research Conference and communication policy from a political economic perspective is described. Gandy discusses his relationship to radical political economy, including regular conference attendance at the Union for Democratic Communication (UDC) and the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR). The background to, and research for, Gandy's first book, *Beyond Agenda Setting* (1982), is discussed. The session includes discussion of Gandy's early engagement with questions of segmentation and targeting that would be the subject of *The Panoptic Sort* (1993). Gandy discusses the influence of Anthony Giddens and Michel Foucault, among others, on his thinking. His move to take up a faculty position at the Annenberg School is described, alongside his impressions and memories of the school and its faculty in that late 1980s/early 1990s period. The session concludes with Gandy's discussion of themes around, and the reception of, *The Panoptic Sort*.

RESTRICTIONS

None

FORMAT

Interview. Video recording at the home office of Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., in Tucson, AZ. One mp4 file of approximately one and one-half 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 two). 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 two), 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 two). 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 two), transcript of video recording, July 23, 2019, Communication Scholars Oral History Project, Annenberg School for Communication Archives, University of Pennsylvania, pp. 34-35.

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

Tucson, AZ

Interviewed by Jefferson Pooley

Q: This is session two 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 School for Communication Library Archives at the University of Pennsylvania. The date is July 23rd, 2019. So we ended the last session with your decision to take the job at Howard [University], and you had mentioned that it was significant that it was an historically black university, and maybe you can talk a little bit more about—maybe in the early years as you were building up to publishing *Beyond Agenda Setting*—how Howard and its context as a historically black university was important to you.¹

GANDY: I think there's some surprise here in that it's a historically black university, but it is an international black university as well. It's not only black but that's—sorry that I start with this, but the idea that there were relationships between the African-American students and the African students, that was striking and that was kind of a part of my trying to make sense about racial identity in this context here. It was a matter of race and class. The students from Africa were elites, come from families with resources, were expected to go back in and assume positions of power in their countries, whereas the black kids were just hoping to get a job, in that regard. So different kinds of tensions.

Howard was not your average school of communication. It was, if you will, led by Orlando Taylor, who is globally known for his work in speech and audiology—hearing problems, speaking problems, and the like. So large department, and many of my colleagues were in that area, something I had never encountered in my life. Then we had a very strong, and I would say a powerful and influential, film division. I can't think of his name for the moment—Abiyi [Abraham] Ford was one of them—but there may be three filmmakers that had national reputations, international reputations, and continue to do work there at the school. I came, actually, in order to be the coordinator of the broadcast production sequence, so bringing my television experience from WCAU. I think that was a good experience, was not my primary—as I may have mentioned with regard to my other job—you want to have the right job for the right place. That was not what I was designed to be, but it was still good—it was good relationships

¹ Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., *Beyond Agenda Setting: Information Subsidies and Public Policy* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1982).

with students, who became partners in my writing later. Paula Matabane was also in that department, so that was an important contribution to my development as well.

I don't know if I should say, but because it was this tension—let me lay this one out as well. The tension between African-Americans and African students was also reflected in a tension within the African community as well. So, we had a faculty member, Nigerian, who I believe influenced his students, and the ones he wanted to go, and so I got one or two students who were Nigerians who actually studied with me, and what they paid [laughs] as a result of having made that choice is still a question. But I think the ones that did make that strange choice benefited from it, because they had a chance to develop a real history with regard to telecommunications policies. So there was no guilt—they were rational choices that they made.

I was on a dozen committees at the university—maybe that's part of my career as well. I've spent a lot of time on committees with varying degrees of responsibility on each of those kinds of committees, but I was on committees at Howard. Faculty committees and content-determining committees—what kind of course material, course evaluation, tenure and promotion and hiring—all of the committees you could be on I've been [laughs] on them—I was on them at Howard University. So there was no way that I didn't get a chance to know my colleagues and get to be known by my colleagues at that university. I suspect my wife and I actually found a way to work our way through the tensions between African-Americans and Africans, in that regard, in that we had parties and we would bring students to our house and party together, in that regard.

So it was a good culture—it was a good place. I know this is not an academic side of me but, nevertheless, my wife and I enjoyed ourselves immensely because there was a large African community, and therefore there was a large Afropop music. There were places to dance and go and consume and be part of that culture all around the city, so that was a benefit. The benefits of being in the nation's capital and all of the kinds of cultural events—and political events—but there were the cultural events, there were all kinds of fairs. There were all kind of events, music came to town and we went to the music when it was in town.

They were a good ten years at Howard University. Can't think of—other than need to change life, take another step, you know. Howard University was good for me there. I suppose an important part of my time at Howard was my relationship with the Telecommunications Policy Research Council [TPRC]. This was a very important introduction, for me, into that that part of my research, and my writing, but it was also—is another example of me getting a position of power and importance and responsibility in the organization, in that I was on the organizing committee—got to be the chair of the organizing committee for the Tenth Annual Telecommunications Policy Commission [*sic*: Tenth Annual Telecommunications Policy Research Conference]. I had to finance it, and that is, to go out and find the funds, and so that was also a new experience for me—to go to all of the various sources that had been used in the past to provide some contributions, including Canada, in order to provide money to support this conference, because Canadians were an important part of it as well. Even more important though—you have a question.

Q: Well, I was just curious about the telecommunications policy conference. How is it that you got involved in it in the first place?

GANDY: I really don't know. So maybe it was Vinny [Vincent] Mosco, maybe it was somebody else that I know that said, Here's this thing, did you want to go to it? Or it was just that I found it and said, I want to go to it [laughs]. That here I am in television production, I ought to understand about the television system, in that regard. It was an invitation-only conference. It had a design in that it was to be academics, it was to be industry, it was to be government. So again, one of these triumvirates—everyone was supposed to be there. It's a struggle in order to say what kinds of papers were going to be here. Economists had a very important position—they were major providers of papers there—but the social scientists, the communication scholars, got a chance to play a role in that. The people that became part of my identity as a radical communication scholar were also involved in those as well, so again, it was a good thing to be in—it was a good thing to have an influence over. So that—I certainly played a role in selecting my colleagues from Stanford, and that history, in order to present papers at those panels. And in order to be in what I thought was a historical accomplishment, that was to get the publication, the annual report, our book published, the very next year, in time to be distributed and sold at the next conference. As far as I know that had never occurred [laughs] and has never happened again [laughs]. That was a good win, a good achievement, in that regard, and it's a good book too, good people are in it.²

Q: I'm curious whether you ended up staying involved in the Telecommunications Policy Research [Council] conference going forward?

GANDY: Must have been another four or five years. I mean, there's an interesting and a powerful story that goes along with it. I don't know that I've mentioned Vinny Mosco before, but I certainly will again. So Vinny was part of the Union for Democratic Communications [UDC], he was part of the radical communication scholars as a radical political economist, IAMCR [International Association for Media and Communication Research]—all of these things. We were part of a family, and Vinny got to be the organizer for the Telecommunications Policy conference. But what occurred was that Virginia refused to pass the Equal Rights Amendment for women, and we said, We're not going [laughs] to Virginia, in that regard. So the challenge of having to find a new location for this conference, and deal with the unions, deal with all of the things that were involved in moving the entire conference to Maryland—I suspect, in that regard. I think that that event, and the disruption, changed the Telecommunications Policy conference. It changed the extent to which it was not a permanent—not a rapidly changing—but a permanent management group. So if we were to do the history we'd find out that TPRC changed, in that regard. So if I left, that was certainly part of the reason for not going anymore, not doing policy. But I think it's probably also that I wasn't doing as much writing policy after that.

² Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., Paul Espinosa, and Janusz A. Ordover, *Proceedings from the Tenth Annual Telecommunications Policy Research Conference* (ABLEX, 1983).

Q: And I guess I want to take a moment to ask about, since we're talking about it, conference, and the community around the conference. Over time, even over the decades of your career, has there been a particular association or gathering of communication scholars, or more than one, that you've found is your home?

GANDY: Sure, it's a good question. Now part of the answer, I think, is a structuralist answer. Alright, so that I'm at Howard University and it's got a school of journalism. It was essential for me to be at AEJMC [Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication], so I was actively involved in AEJMC. I also published in *Journalism Quarterly*—I did reviews of books for *Journalism Quarterly*, so that was a very important source. I also went to ICA [International Communication Association], but journalism was much more important to me. Indeed, my current home is, in part, the product of we're having gone to Phoenix—an AEJ[MC] conference, in that regard.

But the most important in my career and in my identity is the International Association for Media and Communication Research or IAMCR, and it is such in part because political economy was a central—is still a central feature of the organization. So the people who became my friends or who were my friends, who introduced me to their friends in this conference were a very important part of that. So [Herbert] Schiller went, [George] Gerbner went, just—one can identify the list—Mosco went, [Janet] Wasko went [laughs], the whole list of the full core in critical and radical communications and political economy went to IAMCR.

IAMCR should be understood as trying to be egalitarian, in the sense that it would go to a conference once in the North and once in the South, once in the East and once in the West. And the East included Poland, included all sorts of places that I would not have gone—I did go to Poland, in fact, in order to deliver a paper there. So that was also—and I'll admit my wife and I like to travel, we traveled extensively. We continue to travel now that I'm, quote, retired. But IAMCR provided the opportunity to travel—then she would go in a place that she wanted to go to. Even Klaus Krippendorff—we traveled as a family. My wife, our daughter, and Klaus Krippendorff traveled to India [laughs] and further north, in that regard. I can just see us walking around parts of the city in order to find an artwork that he wanted, and one that I wanted, along those lines. A fabulous camaraderie, collegiality-building kind of conference.

I believe I give credit for one of the people at the conference who suggested the kind of table that I should use in the paper that I was doing, so it was that kind of conference, where older senior scholars would provide insights to younger scholars. It was, and continues to be, an outstanding conference. I just went to Madrid, which was an outstanding conference—my students, my colleagues, the other students, the people who got me through things were there—are still there—people go and stay. I don't go to ICA anymore. I don't go to AEJ[MC] anymore. I go to IAMCR.

Q: Thank you.

GANDY: [Laughs]

Q: And actually it is a good lead into the next question I have, which is rooted more in the period of the late 1970s, but that was IAMCR-related in the sense that it was one venue in which this debate over what got officially called the New World Information [and] Communication Order [NWICO]—and UNESCO’s role more broadly—and debates between the free flow of information and cultural sovereignty, to use two of the—

GANDY: —terms of art, yes.

Q: —and you did write a little bit about this, particularly a 1980 paper on the kind of market dynamics in cultural imperialism, and I just wanted to ask about that paper, but more generally, how involved you were in those debates or whether you were exposed to them, engaged in them?³

GANDY: Sure. I was certainly exposed to them. You can find a connection, right, between my dissertation in terms of education, you can find it in terms of my earlier work with regard to development communication, and you can find it in Martin Carnoy, that I referred to as education as cultural imperialism. But Herb Schiller certainly has written about this area as well. So a lot of the people with whom I associate and identify with, and spend time with, were part of the debates about, and the arguments about, cultural imperialism and the domination of developmental countries’ communication by the American media, the American systems. So I make a connection between Herb Schiller and Trần Văn Dĩnh, a Vietnamese scholar and activist, in that regard. So there was a lot of discussion about that there. I don’t think my paper was anything really special about the New World Information and Communication Order, except in terms of American domination, and government support for American domination of this media market. But that was really the extent of my engagement with it. I’m not sure that I actually wrote anything more about that particular debate in an argument after that. I may have, but it’s not salient to me.

Q: I have a slightly different question. It has to do with your early years at Howard and how you balanced this identity as a scholar, including your participation and organizing of this Telecommunications Policy Research Conference, but in lots of other ways too—you were working on your book—how you juggled or balanced the demands of service that you had at Howard and especially the broadcast teaching that you were doing, which wasn’t oriented to research, or at least wasn’t designed to be oriented to research. How did you carve out, in those early years, a role for your scholarship?

GANDY: That’s interesting. I didn’t see that as a problem, so maybe it was the shift, which I did make, from the broadcast production sequence into the graduate department, where research was an important part of that. But I don’t think that there was a major moment when Howard did not support my research. So, that is, one of the supports was for them to send me to these conferences to present papers. You didn’t get to go to the conference unless you had a paper

³ Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., “Market Power and Cultural Imperialism,” *Current Research on Peace and Violence* 3, no. 1 (1980): 47–59, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40724885>.

[laughs] to present. So I didn't—it wasn't a different game afoot, at Howard in that regard. The fact that they sent me to overseas to present at IAMCR was pretty different, but nevertheless they valued that—understood that that was important, that it said something, you know, for an international university as well, which Howard is and was. So it was no struggle for me in order to do the production. I mean, I published with my colleagues at Howard University, I published with my students at Howard University, so that—I didn't see that as anything out of the norm, for me anyway, in that regard.

Q: So it was during these early years at Howard that you were finishing the book that would become *Beyond Agenda Setting*—

GANDY: Yes.

Q: —and we talked a little bit in the last session about the idea of the information subsidy and how your encounter with Randall Bartlett's work was important for that. But even before asking about that, how was the process of writing the book? Do you recall—and since it was really your first major, kind of, solely authored book, outside the dissertation, you conducted—even the choice of a publisher, that sort of thing. Is there anything in your memory that stands out?

GANDY: I suspect that Herb [Schiller] played a role in that as well. That is, the editor of the communication series, Mel [Melvin] Voight, was at UC San Diego, and if one were to look in the front matter, you'll see all of the people who are part of this community—others as well. I mean, he wasn't just solely limited to radical political economists, but he really was focused on, and really did make a place in his publications, you know, that he managed as editor, in that journal. So that was—I didn't perceive that I had any constraint or anxiety about finding a place to get that published.

Q: I'm guessing that during the years after the post-doc while you were at Howard, but before the book, that you were continuing to develop the information subsidy idea and build it out in a way?

GANDY: Well, I mean, so I think as I've said, I mean that is, that postdoc was so powerful and so beneficial in terms of providing me the opportunity, and the incentive, to understand this window into economics, that was not very well-developed at this point in time. And so that was an important drive for me. I don't know about the source of my political interest, the political interest that is part of *Beyond Agenda Setting*, in that regard. But again, if one looks at the dissertation one has to understand that that financial subsidy didn't drop out of the sky, alright—it was the product of influence in order to bring funds to those companies, in that regard. So, in order to understand how it is that the distribution of subsidies and resources, and the creation of new markets, was a political process as well, and that was part of what was developed in that book—that is, how is it that politics plays a role in this process [laughs].

Q: Yes. Which is a great answer, because I'm going to ask next about the choice, I suppose, of taking the information subsidy argument and making it, in terms of, at least in the initial

chapters, as an intervention around agenda-setting theory. And I ask this just because, you can imagine, maybe developing it as part of kind of critical public relations scholarship. And so I'm curious about why you chose to intervene with agenda-setting in this kind of political communication context? And maybe you just answered that.

GANDY: Well. No, no that's a good question. So, in that book I was audacious in terms of identifying the Langs [Kurt and Gladys Lang], alright, as being the real source of agenda setting, and I was certainly more supportive of their contributions to critical research in that regard. But please understand that if information subsidy is an economic argument—and my dissertation was an economic dissertation, and indeed some question said, Was it even a communication dissertation? But certainly it was an economic dissertation. And therefore there was no need for me to move away from that. Now, I didn't consider that public relations was to be addressed by an economic analysis. Public relations is part of what Schiller would talk about with, you know, mind management and the like, but I didn't focus on that. And I still don't see that as being an economic issue or economic feature. It is, if you will, an advertising feature and a marketing feature.

I could see you could write a book about public relations in that regard, and indeed public relations authors made reference to the book and talked about in that regard, and indeed got me to write a chapter in a public relations journal.⁴ But I have been only unconstrained in my criticism of public relations as an activity. I still don't think we should be allowing that activity to shape people's understanding of the world. So I have no good space in my heart for public relations and it's reflected in that work as well.

Q: Your career-long interest in inequality, and particularly inequality and the distribution of information, was so vividly on display in this first book. And so you called it, in a few years after the publication, kind of social power orientation—but you really were describing what you had developed in the book. And so, maybe you could say something about how you were thinking about inequality in this *Beyond Agenda Setting* era.

GANDY: Well, I'm not sure I didn't have a chapter, actually [laughs], which dealt about inequality to some degree. And so, to the degree that subsidies are provided by actors with power and influence in order to amplify and extend their power and influence, it contributes to the development and the worsening, if you will, of inequality. Now, I didn't have any idea at that point in time that the degree of inequality that we were observing these days, you know, was going to come to be—but, nevertheless, inequality and then what got to be, in later work, racial inequality, was certainly something on my mind and was reflected in, you know, in that work. So inequality and power, inequality being able to produce influence over government decision-making—I was really not so much focused on corporate decision-making, it really was

⁴ Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., "Public Relations and Public Policy: The Structuration of Dominance in the Information Age," in *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations*, ed. Robert L. Heath and Elizabeth L. Thoth, 131–63 (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992).

government decision making in that regard—that’s an inequality that has all kinds of consequences in terms of who has access to goods and services.

I think I wrote a later piece about communication competence, and so differences in the ways in which access to education, access to media and information, influenced and shaped and limited the ability of African Americans and others, and the poor, but also it was racially oriented—I mean, in terms of their ability to participate in governance, to participate in the production of influence in that regard, without having the capacity to understand and to be understood, which I characterized as an important part of shaping inequality in that regard. So it’s got a link back to that work.⁵

Q: Absolutely, I know—and also has a link forward to *The Panoptic Sort* work, where some of those inequalities are maybe amplified by the segmentation, but—⁶

GANDY: Absolutely, well said.

Q: Yes, we’re getting ahead of ourselves, in part because I am curious about what you’ve mentioned, which really isn’t directly related to *Beyond Agenda Setting*. But the collaboration, a lot of it that you did with Howard colleagues in the early to mid-80s before you left for Annenberg. And, you know, I’m not going to dwell on any particular papers—you worked on Jesse Jackson’s campaign and student attitudes toward it, a study with a former student on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, a couple of others. I can ask you about them, but more generally I’m just curious about that period of time while you were at Howard. You were now in the graduate program and you’re doing lots of work, much of it in kind of political communication, much of it oriented toward issues of African-Americans, and all of it collaborative.

GANDY: And that’s a really good insight. Alright, so to understand that I must have been, if I’m an economist [laughs], deriving some kind of benefit [from] that collaboration. I was clearly learning more things about politics, and about race and politics, through my collaboration with my students, with my colleagues—some were multiple collaborations, others were one shots. Students, often, it was a one shot, you know—they would do a master’s thesis and we’d get something out of that. I’d be pushing, pushing, and pushing that in order to turn that into something and, you know, but sometimes they got a chance to present their papers at AEJMC or conferences. So again, mutual benefit in that regard. I learned, we learned together. They got a publication in their resume, and I learned some things which turned out to be valuable.

Now, it’s not that I went back to the politics, but you can’t really ever leave the political process. Now the focus, now, is not on, you know, race and politics as it was then, because of the structure, because of being at Howard, because of the interest of my colleagues in that regard. I just happened to think of one of my student colleagues, co-authors in that regard. So a number

⁵ Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., “The Political Economy of Communications Competence,” in *The Political Economy of Information*, ed. Vincent Mosco and Janet Wasko, 108–24 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

⁶ Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., *The Panoptic Sort: A Political Economy of Personal Information* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

of my students were business-oriented. So I've got one who has, you know, publishes and provides services for businesses in that regard. But I don't look down my nose at him in that regard. We both, you know, did well and communicated years after, in that regard. Howard was a great and important experience of learning—that is, getting and giving. I mean, I can see people who have made progress in their life, I think, as a result of our time together and I really feel [laughs] good about that, and its international community—all good.

Q: I'm wondering if any of those particular collaborations stand out for you? You know, you did a couple of papers with Larry Coleman on Jesse Jackson and those studies you did a couple of papers with Paula—and I know I'll mispronounced her last name—

GANDY: Matabane.

Q: —Matabane on perceptions of South Africa, and the African series, and you published quite a bit in this *Journal of Black Studies* as well—

GANDY: I did.

Q: —and you continued to going forward even. But I just wanted to give you the opportunity—if there's anything in particular—

GANDY: So Paula Matabane is an important one of my students. I mean, in terms of our collaboration. And I hesitate how far I'll go in talking about her, the transformations that she made in her life, as other students of mine have made transformations in their life. Paula was married to a South African, a South African activist very much involved in [laughs] the revolutionary movements in South Africa. So that was certainly part of our work on Africa and a focus on what students learned from the Africans, in that regard. But Paula has changed and has become a minister—people have moments in their lives, which you've got to find a place for. It doesn't change any of the work that we did together. We haven't worked since, we haven't had contact since. You don't want to have an interaction with someone where you know there's this elephant in the room [laughs] and you don't want to talk about. So I didn't do any of that, but we were very close colleagues there because of Africa, because of its orientation, because of the politics of Africa, so that was a good moment.

Larry Coleman was more politically oriented than I, but—Jannette Dates—I mean, there was just a whole host of colleagues that I worked with that were just a blessing for me. I won't say that there weren't any bad connections [laughs], you know, but there were just so many that were a blessing that just—nothing I could do but say Howard was an absolutely wonderful part of my life and my development in that regard.

Q: It's a perfect segue, then, to ask about this Center for Communications Research. That was, it looked like, in a planning phase, maybe the year before you moved along. And then you were the director for its first year of existence, and I'm just curious about its origins. Did you propose it? Were you—

GANDY: No. So I made reference to Orlando Taylor. Orlando Taylor is a success, he's an innovator, he makes things happen, in this regard. And I'm sure Orlando saw that he needed a research center, and I guess he said, You're the guy that could do it for me [laughs]. And I said, alright. I think most of the work that we did, and that was published through the center, was really about speech pathology and audiology. There is credit given to the center for the support that was given for this TPRC issue. But I don't think I've published anything else through the center—might have, but I did not. So it was not part of my career path and, therefore, I did not feel that much guilt by leaving it. Because I was going to next step on my ladder, you know—life is like that. People get an offer and they go to the next place, so I don't know that it still exists. I don't know who next got to be the director. Do I—is that true? No, that's not true. So the person I think that became the director was a very good friend and I continued to write reviews of articles for publications of the *Howard*—maybe I'm making a mistake here, maybe I would think that the center would be the site for the publication of the *Howard Journal of Communication*. So if I were to do the research and go back and see the *Howard Journal of Communication* was maybe its biggest success. I don't know whether that's true or not, and the person who is the editor, and the set of people who were editors, were good collegial connections there. And if I helped that along, fine, but I'm not going to pin a badge on my chest from that.

Q: Well, I want to shift, if you don't mind, to what I'm very curious about, the earliest engagement—and I'm not expecting that you can recall this—but with the bundle of interests that would end up resulting in *The Panoptic Sort* in 1993. It seemed, just from the evidence I could find from published sources, that you started to look at these questions of segmentation and targeting in the mid-80s, something like that. Can you recall anything about what triggered that interest and whether it was a particular set of readings or an encounter?

GANDY: So I'm reflected now over all of the things that we've said during our interactions and I think I probably said each time, I don't know when this happened [laughs]. I don't know how that happened, so that's not a way that I understand my transitions or my developments. So I think you may have asked me about my work and my scholarship and how it is that I use resources in that regard. So certainly something that I read before may somehow spark some thinking, and then I'll go in and read more and more and more about that. Understand that my postdoc at Annenberg with George [Gerbner] that introduced me to, or at least allowed me to, look at a whole different set of schools of economics. They're still there, they're still available to me, those people that I read at that time—are still productive and therefore I'll go back in and read them some more. I think I may have criticized my work. I certainly have done it in speeches where I say, I didn't understand, when I wrote *Beyond Agenda Setting*, segmentation. I didn't understand targeting. I didn't know anything about that. So that was a missing part of my work at that point in time, I just don't know how I got to it.

Q: It makes perfect sense, but it was around that time that you seem to have gotten at least to the stage of giving talks. There are a pair of conferences—or not conferences necessarily—symposia, one at Syracuse [University] around their new communication school that—

GANDY: Sure, OK.

Q: —resulted in an edited volume and another, I think, *Mass Communication Yearbook Review*—

GANDY: —in Massachusetts, is that—

Q: —in Maryland, I believe, with Jay Blumler [*sic*: Mark Levy] and—

GANDY: Yes.

Q: —Michael Gurevitch. I'm not asking about the specifics of those papers, but it was just that you started talking about, for the first time, at least publicly, segmentation and targeting, and you were clearly monitoring the trade literature and beginning to gather thoughts around this topic.⁷

GANDY: So, I mean, that invites reflection on my part about how is it that invitations to make a presentation change my path—knock me off the path that I was on onto another path. So I would say that that was probably, that is, the structure of the conference and what they said about the conference, might have said, Well, you know, I need to know something about this. I mean I had to write a paper for a privacy conference about inter—what is the term now? I lost it. So there's a term from black feminists about inter—

Q: Intersectionality?

GANDY: No, there is a term about the relationship of gender, and relationship of race, and relationships of class. Intersectionality is the term of art there. And so I didn't know anything about it, but I was invited to make a presentation at a conference about intersectionality. Well, of course, I'm going to go ahead and read [laughs] and read, and read, until I could make what I considered to be an acceptable, informed, compelling, and successful presentation about intersectionality and privacy—because it was at a privacy conference. So I would say that was the nature of the invitation that would spark me toward reading materials that I might not have been reading before. But examples? I don't have them.

Q: That is so interesting. What about—maybe I'll ask you about Jacques Ellul. He appears as an important figure around this time in your writing, all the way through to *The Panoptic Sort* itself, and then after as well. You're both clearly engaged with him and compelled at some level, but also critical to some degree. So how did he come about? Was he someone you had been

⁷ Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., "Headlong Into the Future Toward the Blue Sky of Information Technology With Both Eyes Open," in *Communications Research: The Challenge of the Information Age*, ed. Nancy W. Sharp, 125–28 (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988); and Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., "A Research Agenda for the Information Age: A Personal and Institutional Response," in *Mass Communication Review Yearbook 6*, ed. Michael Gurevitch and Mark Levy, 30–35 (Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE, 1987).

engaged with in the past but hadn't really appeared in your scholarship, or was it a new encounter?

GANDY: I have no idea. I mean, so that's interesting. So those things that matter in your trying to understand people's work, and I'm perfectly willing to say, well, Oscar doesn't fit into [laughs] any of those categories, because he doesn't do it the way that they did. So again, I characterize my life as being one of good fortune and good luck, but I also characterize it as one where my path has been shaped by an author or invitation that somebody has made, in this regard. So it's not that somebody told me to read Ellul, so I read Ellul before, but he then becomes a resource for me to respond to this new challenge, in this regard. I mean, so certainly Ellul and criticism of technology and the consequences of technology on society is something that is definitely in my work, but I don't know who to give credit or blame to for the rediscovery, if you will, of Ellul in my work.

Q: And at around that same time, I guess Frank Webster and Kevin Robbins, they published a big book in 1986 [*Information Technology: A Luddite Analysis*], and I think James Beniger was also—he published the same year his *Control Revolution* book, which both seem to be important to you.

GANDY: Those are powerful—both of them, from different places in the world—were very, very [laughs] powerful bits of work. Beniger really, on power as well, and nature of influence, and nature of influence across time, and the nature of influence on theory and research. But Webster—I had to go back in and look and see what these guys were doing. But I was just struck by their critical position. Indeed, I met somebody at the IAMCR conference this year, and she says, Webster. I said, Really [laughs]? He was part of your network, in that regard?

But I mean, again, the only person—and maybe you weren't expecting this—who I would say had a dominant influence was [Anthony] Giddens. Yes, you know, once you encountered Giddens and you start reading all of Giddens—so it's not like there was one book that each of them wrote [laughs]. Here's a guy who has written dozens of books that it's your responsibility to read and engage, in order to understand the kind of contribution that work can give to your work, including giving you the sense of self where you can say, Well, he slipped up here [laughs]. He didn't go where he should have gone, in that regard. So I would say that, out of all of the people that you might have seen, as having had an influence on my work, in that they are cited, nobody comes close to Giddens.

Q: It seems like the focus on structuration in particular and the role of agency and structure, and their mutual shaping, is especially important. Is that fair?

GANDY: Yes, it is. Yes, and so the contribution that Giddens makes in trying to talk about agency and then the individual, with their ability to shape the world, but inviting the criticism that says, They didn't know what the impact of their work was going to be, nor did they know what the impact of other people's work would be, on their understanding of the world and their actions. So kind of the—and I'm seeing some of my students now discussing this notion of agency, some

of the students that I've published with, we had lots of discussions about Giddens and agency and the nature of limits, and indeed, if I can bring up his name, from this poor memory of mine now. Really was going to take me down a path of where technologies had their own power, and its own power. I can't think of the name of that school.

Q: Technological determinism?

GANDY: No, there's another school where—talked really about the agency of technology in that regard, and so they were an active player, they were an actor—actor network theory [ANT]. Yes [laughs]. Is the nature of that work there—and we just had incredible discussions over coffee about, Yes, wait a minute, it can't really be—whether I'm getting to his view of the world now or not, I don't know, but it's possible, alright? So that is, when we get to talking about robots, we talk about the like, maybe there is [laughs] a certain degree of agency that at least we've got to find a place for, in granting true agency, as Giddens talked about it then, in that regard.

Q: It struck me that, when I was reading this, it's earlier in the sense that it wasn't immediately before *Panoptic Sort* was published. I'm thinking of, like, mid-1980s, roughly speaking, that you were talking about inequality in two different ways that were completely compatible, just slightly different emphases. One has to do with the growing bureaucratic advantage, as you came to call it, the way in which the state and corporations, because they were gaining this knowledge asymmetry, through segmenting and the data gathering, had over the individual. And so it was more about the bureaucracy versus the individual. Whereas a second emphasis was that particular individuals and groups of individuals were particularly affected because they might not be attractive consumers, because they might not have spending capital or they might be racially excluded or other kinds of particular ways in which the sorting mechanisms punish particular categories of people. It seemed like both of those were expressed in this mid-80s period, and they're compatible. But do you—

GANDY: Well, thank you for the for the distinction. I mean, that it is a real one, and it is important, and so therefore inequality at a bureaucratic level or at a government level is quite different from inequality at the human condition level or the social groups, or the neighborhoods, or gender—all those other areas in which we look at inequality and say that it's important and needs to be engaged. So inequality within the policy structure is certainly one thing, but also inequality that's related to information subsidies also—that are related to shaping policy outcomes, is also a part of understanding inequality in that regard. And everybody didn't have the same amount of power in order to shape and they didn't use the same technologies, and the same processes, in order to shape their future. So yes that's a meaningful distinction, thank you for that.

Q: And I'm thinking now might be a good idea to talk about that move to Annenberg. When it was, I suppose, 1987, so you had just hit what turned out to be a decade's tenure at Howard. How did it come about that you found yourself returning, a third time, to Annenberg—this time as a faculty member?

GANDY: I don't know but I can't think of anything other than George [Gerbner] said, What about—[laughs]. So that's the best—but I mean, the moment, the discussion, the event, the negotiation, if there was one—and there wasn't, far as I know—that's a prime offer. I think I will say that I think George wanted to bring me to Annenberg much earlier than that, and an unnamed faculty member was not supportive of that, and that was not going to happen.

Q: Oh, OK, and I assume you're deciding to leave the name unnamed on purpose.

GANDY: Yes.

Q: Well, with that in mind I suppose I'm curious what it was like to be at the Annenberg School. This period of time in the late '80s, I think, Gerbner himself might have been stepping down as dean during this five-year stretch from the '80s to the early '90s—

GANDY: Right, interesting.

Q: —and what the Annenberg School was like itself, if you—I mean it's impossible to reconstruct, but just your sense of particular faculty that you interacted with, or notable students you remember from your early years as a faculty member.

GANDY: Well, I mean, think about the the particular kind of magic, to come and have people, from an earlier moment in history—Bob [Robert] Hornik, you know [laughs]—be a faculty member there in the school in which I was then going to come in and be a colleague. Bob Hornik was an important part—I mean, we have not had much contact in a long time, in that regard. But we had a lot of contact, did a lot of work together, published together, made opportunities available, made students available, so that connection from Stanford. And Emile McAnany—not here, but nevertheless those connections were all still very very powerful in that regard. Again—here's me being a structuralist again—a spatial location matters. Joe [Joseph] Capella was right across the hall [laughs] from me. We became good friends. We spent a lot of time—I mean, I'm an early arriver and Joe would be an early arriver, so we'd spend each beginning of the day there talking about what happened in the news, or talking about something that either one of us was doing, in that regard.

I would say, an overwhelming majority—not everybody—of the colleagues at Annenberg just resonated real well with me and my sense of place. Carolyn Marvin was not exactly the same place, but nevertheless our interactions were active. Barbie Zelizer—I'm not sure she actually was there in the beginning, but soon came—marvelous person. I mean, it was just—as wonderful as Howard [University] was, the kinds of interaction with colleagues in the Annenberg School were just special, which is wonderful. For me to come—and after having been at Howard teaching telecom—to come in and teach telecom or did I—do I even remember when I was still teaching telecom in my next life? I guess I was.

So, Al Rose at WCAU television station, was still a faculty member, and therefore a colleague, and spending time together was a real plus in that regard. I didn't spend that much time with

Paul Messaris, even though he had a media background. A structural thing hooked me up with Charlie [Charles] Wright, because he was right next to my colleague—so we would still spend time together, in that regard. The—excuse me, it's kind of crazy, but the Xerox machine was right there. You couldn't not go in and see somebody as you were going to the Xerox machine, you would nod and make references, in that regard. There were changes in the location of faculty, I guess, maybe with the [Annenberg Public] Policy Center, so that some faculty were down the hall and some faculty moved into an upstairs—so that changed relationships. Just passing somebody each morning, being front of their office, said you were going to say some things and engage in conversations that you might follow up on, in that regard. When people were located in different parts of the Annenberg School the same contact didn't occur. You have to plan for it to occur.

Q: And I am curious about some of the teachers you had who were still on the faculty, and I suppose—I don't know if you ever took a class with Charlie Wright. He might be in that category. But Klaus Krippendorff and Larry Gross were both around, of course, and how was your relationship with them as former teachers and as—?

GANDY: As colleagues, absolutely wonderful. Klaus and I differ in our constructions of the world, but we were such compatible friends and colleagues, and so we were family friends, dinner friends, in that regard, as well. We still differed about power, and so we actually had a debate, a public debate, in the Annenberg School, where he and I [laughs] argued collegially about the notion of power and understanding of power. And we're still friends to this day. Larry, of course, became an editor in his next life, but clear colleagues. He didn't go to as many IAMCR's as I did, but he and his partner did go to some of those conferences, and we talked at length about the world in that regard. As the editor of the *International Journal of Communication*, and as somebody who would send things for me to review for the journal, you know that—again, a good relationship. There is no—I don't think that Larry and I had a moment's difference of opinion about how the world worked [laughs]. I mean, we were really resonant, you know, in our understanding of the nature of the world. Klaus and I had a place for our differences in the way we understood the world.

Joe and I had a, you know, that is [inaudible]—so Joe [Joseph] Turow—dare I go there, but I guess I should—Joe has become a privacy scholar in his work. But Joe was a business guy, Joe was a market guy before, and we didn't have a comfortable space at all. I guess I misbehaved when Kathleen [Hall] Jamieson as dean—so this is later—kind of created a fund, had real money fund, and she'd naturally expected that Joe and I would be partners, but I didn't want to partner, because he was not a partner of mine. Maybe that's me and public relations, and how I understood that, and how I expected—but he's gone on to do well with privacy. Privacy has—I mean, he has become the privacy guy at the Annenberg—whether he'd become the privacy guy at the University of Pennsylvania I don't know, but he's been making a real contribution, and in fact been making those contributions with some of my former colleagues from the Electronic Privacy Information Center, so I'm just pleased.

Q: I can't help but remember reading about UPCs [Universal Product Codes] in your work in the mid-80s and think now to the kind of supermarket surveillance publishing he's doing today.

GANDY: Yes, I mean—no, he has clearly become another person in terms of his orientation toward privacy. I mean, I just think that that's wonderful, in that regard, and blessings upon you, in that regard. But we were not, in the same way that others were—were partners of mine and discussants.

Q: Alright. Well, thanks for that. And I was hoping we could talk a little bit about the work that led up to *Panoptic Sort*. And it really must have accelerated once you are at Annenberg, and you seem to have had, from that period more or less, a large grant from AT&T that helped underwrite some of the research that was included in the book.

GANDY: I don't know whether I should give credit to George [Gerbner] or not, but I expect probably at some point George informed somebody—now it is quite possible that somebody might have known, that is, this person who gave me the grant who essentially foisted [laughs] a grant on me. I'm not sure how much I actually wrote in terms of a proposal, in order for me to get a grant. So I'm offering that as maybe George said, Here's Oscar, here's the guy who probably could come closest to meeting your need in that regard, and we want to make a connection between our school and your school, and a grant would be a good way to do that. I'm imagining George working that out, in that regard. But, yes, I got a substantial grant from a telecommunications engineering center that funded—so it may have been—I don't know, I could check in my [curriculum] vitae—it may have been \$300,000. It was real money, in that regard, that supported me during the summer. It supported my research assistants.

It supported my doing external research that they provided indirectly, the research there. It was an interesting partnership with AT&T—I mean, so, the University of Pennsylvania and that scholar, and all of the other grantees, that were going through his structure and therefore he's got some power there as well, and also some responsibility. But also AT&T as a partner in this grant has a concern about what's happening with their money, and as they learned more about me and my research, they were actually a little bit anxious about what kind of research—so they saw the kinds of questions that I wanted their researchers to ask in my surveys. They said, Why you asking those things? Well, I mean, I said, I'm asking those things because that's the way things work and I want to pursue them. I didn't change anything in that regard, but AT&T certainly did have a raised eyebrow.

Q: It is an irony, isn't it—

GANDY: It is.

Q: —because you certainly include AT&T, in the narrative of *Panoptic Sort*, as one of the players.

GANDY: Absolutely. I mean the idea that a corporate source funded a large part of my research that's critical of their power, and their partnership with other people who were involved in

gathering personal information, that they paid for that—life’s likes that [laughs]. That’s the best thing I way I can say that [laughs]. OK, I mean, if you would think about the majority of control and influence over science and health and all of the things that I wrote about before, through information subsidies in that regard—for them to have some criticism come from a microscopic fraction of the amount of money they spend on influencing scholarship, influencing science, selecting people. I mean, so they didn’t invite me to go out in the field and speak about my book [laughs], because they knew it was not going to go down very well, it wouldn’t fit it. It wouldn’t reinforce what they usually spend their public relations money on. But I credited them. It absolutely was good research resource, good funds that I could spend in ways that made sense to me. *The Panoptic Sort* was a major contribution to my presence, my visibility, and the next phase of my life, and they paid for that. How can I be mean and ugly—no I can’t [laughs].

Q: Well, it’s kind of incredible.

GANDY: Yes, it was a good moment.

Q: It might be an entry point for me to ask—since lots of what they paid for, or at least the method that they paid for, was a very well-done survey—just about the sheer variety of methods that you employed all the way back from the late ‘70s through to this period. I’m thinking, just looking at content analysis you were doing regularly of a quantitative kind—

GANDY: Annenberg.

Q: Yes. Right.

GANDY: Absolutely.

Q: —survey research—

GANDY: Annenberg.

Q: —industry analysis—

GANDY: Maybe some Stanford is on part of the survey research, because George didn’t do—at least in that part of my life—but no, in the latter part he did—so I don’t recall that I worked on survey research for George. I did content analysis for George—please?

Q: Industry analysis following the trades and reconstructing—

GANDY: Well, that’s a certain part, an early part of George Gerbner—institutional process analysis—and he let go. I didn’t [laughs]. That was important to me still.

Q: You even did citation analysis in this wonderful paper looking at the rise of economics concepts in literature in major communication journals—was published around this time with a co-author. So you're doing citation analysis and focus groups.⁸

GANDY: Well, I wasn't there, so I didn't do them, but I made use of the insights that were developed by focus groups that AT&T paid for with a company, in that regard. But I mean, I understand both the role of and the limitations of focus groups in terms of that third part of Gerbner's—that is, one doesn't do focus groups for effects, one does focus groups in order to get information about how people think about, how people understand, how they feel about—and certainly that fit into—and indeed one part of my publication talks about the process of how people develop their orientations toward privacy. So [laughs] that fit well.

Q: I'm just struck by the sheer diversity of methods and the range across qualitative and quantitative—not in this project alone. I just mean all the way up to that point. What's your attitude toward working in all these different methods, if you have one? Is it something self-conscious?

GANDY: No, that's a marvelous question. Certainly in parts of the struggles within political economy of communication, and communication in general, there are struggles in terms of, What are you doing that method for? And I think I spent a lot of time explaining it, but I felt that I am credentialed. I felt that I'm confident [laughs], I'm competent, and I think that that provides an insight that we ought not cast aside, in that regard, and so, I don't. I haven't done too much at the level of quantitative analysis that I did in that book. I haven't been back in that direction in a while, but I'm pleased that the reviews that are done by mainstream communication scholars, including one that I cite, who was also in the area, who talked about, And this Gandy book does this and this. Other people say, give me credits for the work that I've done in that area. Well, I'm pleased about that. I'm proud that I'm able to play in that field and still be a radical political economist.

Q: It's Harold Meier in a way.

GANDY: Yes [laughs].

Q: All the way back to the calculator. OK, good. You draw on, in that work in the late '80s and early '90s, and the book itself, some of the same people. Like, Beniger is there and so are Webster and Robbins—

GANDY: And they are on different parts of the world [laughs]. Alright, please—except, I'm sorry, but Beniger is really talking about power. He's really talking about influence, right, so it fits.

⁸ Kurt M. Miller and Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., "Paradigmatic Drift: A Bibliographic Review of the Spread of Economic Analysis in the Literature of Communication," *Journalism Quarterly* 68, no. 4 (1991): 663–71.

Q: So they remain constant over this period that you were engaging with them, but what's new—or one new interlocutor—so Giddens is also there throughout. But I'm thinking in particular of Michel Foucault takes on a new prominence in the book and in a couple of those late 1980s papers, where he is central, including, of course, providing the central metaphor of the panopticon from *Discipline and Punish*. And so, I'm just curious about Foucault and in some ways—one way of reading his approach and some of his orientations to epistemology, they might be at some tension—even that notion of power—with some of your other thoughts and work.

GANDY: [Laughs]. But that's interesting, I mean. So you certainly understand that Foucault has many lives and he has many selves in these different lives, and so it's alright for me to leave some of his lives aside [laughs]. I don't feel that because I quote and cite and use and benefit from the early Foucault historian, that I don't have to deal with the the Foucault identity in quite the same way that cultural studies people do. So Foucault's history about data and research, and he focuses on schools, focusing on health, focusing on all of the things that you've already pointed out, that are part of my identity, fits well into the kind of understanding about how research and data and analysis are appropriate in order to understand power. Now, he might not apply it in quite the same way that I do, but that's alright. I don't owe it to an author to use all of his or her work in the same way that they used it, in order for me to find value and utility in its use in my work. And Foucault, as I think I say in the book, is really an important source [laughs], almost as strong as—and I have given Giddens the same credit that he deserves. But if one were to go back in and do kind of a citation analysis, Giddens comes up pretty well—thanks—in relation to Foucault.

Q: That's true. So, how about the choice of that title, and that phrase in particular, which does stick with you and is the shorthand that the overall theory is a token for—*The Panoptic Sort*. Can you say something about the choice?

GANDY: Sure, and certainly I recognize the limitations on my work when that panopticon doesn't exist—even the prison doesn't really exist. But the idea—actually, I went to China to visit, on an invitation of a student of mine—it was another one of these things, an invitation brings a possibility—to lecture, can you imagine this, on privacy in China, for a student of mine, in that regard. She took me to a place in China that she described, and it looks exactly like a panopticon, this building with dual levels, and with inside space. Now her explanation of its structure was the security for the people within those spaces to have others looking, but looking on not to power, not to control, not to structure, not to influence, but to protect. You know, notion of lots of ways of building structures and some people point out there are some buildings—even including in Philadelphia—that have the same character of the prisons where the guards were there.

Alright, so, the panopticon is metaphorically still powerful in terms of actors who are able to view, who are able to construct the expectation and the belief that you're being viewed, which influences the behavior of persons within a structure, because they don't know when they're going to be viewed—they don't know what punishment is going to fall upon them, on the basis

of their being viewed—is powerful and still works. So certainly people criticized my work and say, But now wait a minute, your panopticon doesn't work with regard to markets because they are not in a central tower. They don't share their information. That is, they use their information for competitive advantage rather than their shaping and training. But they are shaping and training, even if they are not in a center tower, so I still think there is value in getting to that technology through a prison, which was not built, through an application which doesn't apply to mass communication and mass marketing. But I think the underlying process is still to be found. It is just different structural features.

Q: And of course the title had a second word, which is sort. And it does qualify the first, and that subtitle has this phrase personal information, which seems to enter your lexicon more and more around that time, and maybe that aspect you could talk about too.

GANDY: Alright, so, good. Part of what *The Panoptic Sort* wants to do—and I think I make reference, if not in the book, in other places, about my not having focused so much on in *Beyond Agenda Setting* in terms of the personal—that's really institutional, and institutional power, and corporate power, and organizational power. *The Panoptic Sort* is about individuals, the same ones that Foucault talks about in those prisons [laughs]. But here, now, is that system that I looked at in terms of information subsidies, in order to get government to act and provide resources, is trying to provide information subsidies to individuals in order to influence the choices that they make within markets. More critically, the kinds of choices they make within the political arena with regard to elections and outcomes in voting and public policy. I think that's really important in order to understand how it is that surveillance, that logically enabled surveillance, that surveillance that facilitates or enables not just studies of the mass but the visions of the mass based upon location, based upon differences in exposure to threats and promises that influence how they're going to respond to opportunities and challenges in this regard.

So *The Panoptic Sort* helps me to respond in an indirect way to limitations and struggles that I had had indirectly, but not face-to-face, conflict with George Gerbner. And George Gerbner's model that said, It's not what television you watch but it's how much television you watch. Whereas segmentation and targeting is really about the technology that provides different information to different people in order to influence their behavior in different kinds of markets. So that's an important part of my work that focuses on how individualized data, also data certainly that deals with types, but the kinds of types that exist are not the kinds of types that have—I mean, I'm not entirely or I'm not limited to the kinds of types that have a government basis for their existence—that is, exist in terms of laws that are meant to provide protections for African Americans that exist before. Some of the types of people that are produced through panoptic sorts are in groups that people are not aware they are in those groups, that influence their life chances in ways that are not available to people. They don't understand, so that they can't organize politically in order to resist, in order to appeal for government support or limitations, on the use of information to structure their opportunities and changes.

People don't know what groups they're in, in that regard. So it's a very different kind of use of information about individuals, but also people as members of groups, and groups that are different depending upon who's engaged in the sorting. They have their own reasons for paying attention to particular kinds of attributes that put people into groups. If I really think about this work in terms of how hard it is for individuals to organize politically, because they don't know about the groups to which they've been assigned, and therefore it's hard for them to organize—to groups, and the groups that they organized with aren't stable, don't last, don't hold together well, don't work well, because they don't know the groups to which people identify with and are identified.

You know, the extent to which people understand and accept the groups to which they've been assigned is an interesting question. I haven't really pursued that, but the idea that people are learning which groups they are in, and how they ought to behave in order to be successful in the groups to which they've been placed, is an important path. I hope somebody's going to follow down that path, I'm not sure that I am. I'm trying in one sense to deal with group privacy, and how it is that groups have a right and have privacy rights. Privacy law is so far behind where we need to be in terms of understanding the role of groups and the individuals who have been assigned to those groups. A lot of work to do [laughs].

Q: I'll tell you that that sense of the kind of futility, which might be too strong, of individual resistance was suffusing the work that is in *Panoptic Sort*, and I would also say maybe that the sense that privacy law is inadequate was very, very pervasive too, and you hadn't yet, in this period, started to talk about group privacy or even develop policy alternatives much. You were more pessimistic it seemed to me.

GANDY: Well, I mean, so understand, part of the constraint that policy scholars—especially legal scholars—understand that they can't actively respond in the courts. They can respond, maybe, in the regulatory center through making presentations and arguments. But they are always going to be against what the law says [laughs]. But the law says, Privacy is an individual concern—it's how it affects you. Where's the evidence that it affected you? Maybe they'll listen with some special consideration—does it affect black people, in that regard? But not so quickly, because it needs to be evidenced, and the smart people who are on the other side of that argument will say, Well, now wait a minute, what do we know about 'Joe' in this community? One of the studies that I cite, maybe, in lots of places, is about the white woman who suffers discrimination because she lives in a black community [laughs]. So whether or not she's able to talk about the use of the data in her community, that applies to 99 percent of her community but not her. Why is she suffering in this regard and, Why aren't they paying attention to me? The notion—does she want them to invade her privacy in order to make sure she doesn't get abused [laughs], because she is identified as a black person? It's a serious challenge here, as to how it is that policy-oriented scholars are able to move the policy-oriented scholars and their colleagues who are in activist organizations toward the next necessary construction of the target for a policy intervention and a regulatory change, in that regard. So this notion of group privacy is coming but it's struggling [laughs] to make its way onto the policy agenda.

Q: So one of the things I noticed, Oscar, about this later work that led right up to *The Panoptic Sort* was that you focused more on prediction and the way that targeting and surveillance leads to prediction and ultimately to some kind of control. I wondered if you would talk about that interest in predicting?

GANDY: I can't tell you when that prediction tendency occurred. It occurred clearly in insurance-related businesses, long-term investment-related businesses, but it also occurred in the social sciences—that is, the ability to be able to predict how it is a person would respond to a stimulus or a threat, or something along those lines. And I'm not happy about this. The problem is that prediction is not explanation. Prediction is not understanding. And, indeed, in the big data era there is even less incentive or motivation for understanding. All they care is, Can I identify what's likely, and strategically, can I identify what kind of intervention, what kind of stimulus, what kind of payoff, is going to work in terms of getting the kind of response that we like, or we desire, in that regard? And that's really troublesome, because we should understand—especially for those of us who might be concerned about changing the status of population segments, that is, improving them, helping providing them with what I referred to as communicative competence—that is, being able to speak and to be understood, in that regard. Just predicting isn't going to do it.

Q: Great, and you know, I was curious about the way in which, after the book was published, it was received, both immediately by your community at Annenberg, but also throughout the profession and maybe even beyond its borders, in book reviews—and just if it had any impact on your career?

GANDY: It was, again, a transformative kind of event and so it was received very well and it made me—I can go that far with it—made me somebody that people wanted to associate with, or affiliate with. And so I became a member of Electronic Privacy Information Center following that book—Mark Perry invited Oscar Gandy to come in and join the organization. Oscar Gandy eventually actually became, for a moment or two, the chair of the board of the Electronic Privacy Information Center. Oscar was invited to be a member of the National Research Academy on privacy [*sic*: National Research Council Committee on Privacy in the Information Age], and we published a privacy book, in that regard.⁹ So, again, I was an authority on privacy as a result of—that book was its source, in that regard. A business author, Robert Posch, whom I had no reason to be connected with, reached out, told me about the book, but also told me about this extended review that he did, which identified the book as the one book that marketers needed to pay attention to if they were going to read any of this academic stuff [laughs]. This is the one that they should be reading. He was nice to have met, a good interaction with him, in that regard. It certainly was the source of invitations to go to conferences and make presentations and the like, and to write. So that kind of impact that you'd like to have with a book matters. And an expectation that I could not possibly have had—it was the source, really, had to go through faculty members—but it was a source of Anthony Giddens

⁹ James Waldo, Herbert Lin, and Lynette I. Millett, eds., *Engaging Privacy and Information Technology in a Digital Age* (National Academies Press, 2007).

being the host for an invitation for me to come and make a presentation at the London School for Economics.

Q: Maybe you could just say something about that since we were talking about Giddens, a few minutes ago, being important all the way through this book—how that came about and what the context was?

GANDY: So the people in the communication program somehow decided to—having read the book, I guess and seen Giddens all throughout the book—suggested that we ought to bring Gandy here, and you ought to be the one to interview him. And, of course, I said yes [laughs], and went. I think the relationship was acceptable, but he was critical—especially with me being a wiseass in responding to a question that he said, What should we do? I said, Make it against the law [laughs]. He didn't like that much at all and went on. Indeed, most of my responses were not those that were satisfactory, in that it was talking about you ought to limit this, you ought not to allow this, you want to understand what the consequences of this are, and he wasn't in that place. But it was still a wonderful experience for me. I was arrogant, almost, in the sense that, in my opening statements, I said, This is the fellow—I didn't know I was going to be speaking with the fellow whose use of language and neologisms would make my wife, the editor, crazy, but I'm pleased to be here [laughs]. So I don't know if that started us off on the wrong foot, but there I was at this point in time.

Q: Oh, that's fantastic. And that might have been a little bit later—maybe 2002? Or maybe I'm wrong about that. But either way, it was in the aftermath of *The Panoptic Sort*?

GANDY: Yes, it had gotten popular. It had become known—a thing.

Q: So right around that time, in the early '90s, '92-'93, you were also writing about economics again, economics of information and subjective utility a little bit. And you were writing about the political economy tradition in communication. And there were a couple of papers in this period on this, and one thing in particular I wanted to ask you was—you really, in a deep, engaged way, dealt with the labor theory of value and the—in the context of this question of non-productive labor, partly speaking with Dan Schiller's work on that.¹⁰ So I wondered if you could talk about that kind of engagement with Marxist theory.

GANDY: I don't know how far I can go with that, and I wish I could get my hands on that article again. But my understanding and my response was this distinction about non-productive labor—that is, did it produce something, making use of labor, in order to provide resources for capital. The argument was that here was this thing called information that was terribly different. It wasn't the kind of materials that were manipulated in order to produce something of value

¹⁰ Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., "The Political Economy Approach: A Critical Challenge," *Journal of Media Economics* 5, no. 2 (1992): 23–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08997769209358221>.

with the application of labor. It was something that was—what’s the right word for it—could go off in the wind. The problem with it—

Q: Superstructural.

GANDY: [Laughs]. Yes. The problem with it is that it’s not a good commodity, is problematic as a commodity, in large part because it is easily reproduced. It is not used up when somebody else consumes it. Others can consume it. That makes it a really, really, really strange good and a very strange kind of commodity. So I wanted to make a point about the problems with information, especially in the context of all of the work in sociology and political economy talking about going to become an information economy. So, how are we going to become an information economy where that which we produce is not like any other commodity? Even when Dan [Schiller] talks about it, he includes many references to the machines, to the computers, to the transmission systems. He doesn’t talk about the thing, the information—this intangible resource, tangible only because of the medium used in order to deliver it. It might be that we ought to be talking about the market for the devices that we use in order to deliver this other kind of consumable resource, enjoyable resource. I probably didn’t say at that time, but certainly there’s value in thinking about this as being part of an experience.

So the extent to which one has a place within a labor theory of value, where one could say that, produce an experience for other people and charge them for that. So think about that in terms of the kinds of personal services that we provide in the marketplace, where people pay a fee to have their hair cut, to have whatever it is done for them, to have the experience of a theater, of a play, of a set of activities that they could consume themselves and want to pay for that experience. It’s just this magical quality of not being consumed. Now, you might say that a theatrical performance is consumed, unless it’s now captured by this technology, where it’s on a disk and you can play it again and again. But that’s the challenge and so to try to understand how this product, the use of which actually is not even obviously known to all of the people who might use it again—so my concerns about communicative competence is to say, well, now wait a minute, everybody can’t use this tool. It is not something that has a value, and should have a value for everyone, because it is not usable, its use value is not the same for others. So there are lots of questions still, to this moment, to be raised with regard to that commodity.

Q: It makes me think of a paper that—I won’t be able to tell you the exact name, but some time a few years after that, maybe just a couple of years—where you and a co-author attempted to find the value of, or determined the value of, a user or personal information, basically.¹¹ You attempted to empirically break down, on the basis of the prices that—

GANDY: —that they would pay—

¹¹ Eleanor Novek, Nikhil Sinha, and Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., “The Value of Your Name,” *Media, Culture & Society* 12, no. 4 (1990): 525–43, <https://doi.org/10.1177/016344390012004006>.

Q: —database companies were charging.

GANDY: But that couldn't be an accurate [laughs]—

Q: Yes, and you admitted that.

GANDY: It couldn't be actually measured because, look, prices are not fixed. And the nature of the distribution systems are such that you can vary the price for whoever it is delivering that you're delivering it to, and changes in the technology that actually limit your ability to share it with somebody else—I mean, all kinds of changes in the nature of the markets for information.

Q: So, by in some ways kind of pointing out problems with Marxism and Marxist theory in the analysis of information and media, what relationship did that put you in in terms of your sense as a radical political economist? Did you think of yourself like this in this period?

GANDY: You did not and do not have to be a Marxist [laughs] in order to be a radical political economist. I never felt that that was a necessity. It did mean that I needed to read, it did mean that I needed to have a sense of—I mean, I just didn't want to be stupid in this regard. But I didn't need to wear a flag around my neck [laughs] in that regard, and I didn't and do not—not concerned about that. Still could engage in conversations with, participate in debates about, so it was not a problem for me.

Q: In that book, *The Panoptic Sort*, and in other writings, you talk a lot about the role of the critical scholar. And there's a continuity throughout your whole career, but it's notable right around this time. And maybe you could say something about that—what the role of the critical scholar is as a scholar but having a role in the world somehow.

GANDY: You want both of those things, alright. So, certainly, there is an identification as being a critical scholar. You can expect somebody who's going to find the holes in—who is going to stick pins in—that work, try to get you to understand that this doesn't do all that it was set out to do, in that regard. So that's a critical role. By the same token, being a critical scholar is supposed to be also a political act. It is supposed to mobilize others to act. If they understand what the nature of—even the nature of their own positive consumption, beneficial consumption—that advances them while it does not advance others, including making inequalities between them, in that regard—changes in market value and the like. So a critical scholar always says, Wait a minute, you want to understand what the consequences are of buying this, using this, producing that, consuming that.

There are so many things for critical scholars to do in this environment that we are in right now. So think about—I actually tried to get a media policy related organization to deal with environmentalists. That is, somehow there is a common need for us to provide a criticism about communication, information, and the environment, and understand those as two different kinds of concerns. And one of the things about them is that they should be focused on the future, talking about the next generation, the next population, the kids that are growing up, in that

regard. We have a responsibility for acting in ways that don't damage or limit the life that they can experience. So that's what a critical scholar does. Wait a minute. Pay attention here. Listen. Do you really understand where this is going? Or at least have you asked, have you explored, do you understand? Is what a critical scholar is supposed to do. I think I tried to do that [laughs].

Q: Yes, completely, and it makes me think of the intent you had way back after the University of New Mexico to go be a community activist, community organizer maybe, and wanting to be in the world in that way. And do you feel like the critical scholarly role is a form of that or a variation on a theme?

GANDY: That's a good question. That's nice. Alright, so it is certainly one thing for a scholar to also be an activist, where the scholar works directly with the publics that she or he is committed toward helping. That's quite substantially different from the person who stays in the office or in the library, or whatever it is, and does this work. So those are important kinds of distinctions, and maybe in my latter years I have been, and will be doing, more—although I have been in organization after organization after organization after organization in my life, but—

Q: Including activist organizations?

GANDY: Oh, yes. I will certainly consider the Union for Democratic Communication, at least in its early creation, at least as we thought about it, was going to be an activist organization. And we talked about who the members should be in order that we would be able to do something in the world rather than just talk about it or write about it. So, yes a number of such organizations. But now I'm actually actively involved in a community public policy organization called Tucson Residents for Responsive Government, and it is our activity in order to shape, to influence, policy here in Tucson.

Q: Well, I'm looking forward to talking about that soon.

GANDY: Absolutely.

Q: OK. Well, this is a perfect point to wrap up our second session. So, thank you, Oscar. We will pick up with your year at the Freedom Forum [Media Studies Center] in the early 1990s just after you published the book.

GANDY: Super. Thank you.

END OF SESSION TWO