Transcript of Video File:

Interview Transcript edited --Kurt Lang.doc

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Interviewer: Peter Simonson

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BEGIN TRANSCRIPT:

INTERVIEWER: ..about your family, origin, and coming to the states to give us that part of your life story.

KURT LANG: Okay, I was born in Berlin, right, in what later became the "western sector" of the city, and stayed there until I was 12 1/2 years old and of course lived through the political change, the fall of the Weimar Republic, and that was a signal for us to get out. And my father had the proper wisdom to anticipate what would happen. I should mention that I mean of course we were Jewish, but non-practicing Jews. I think my father would have been perfectly happy to have all of us baptized.

And my father was a physician, and both my parents sort of were in the fringe of radical politics. There was a group that would meet at our house every so on and so often; some of them were communists, some of them were leftwing socialists, and many of them had connections with psychiatrists and so on. [0:01:11.7]

My mother actually owned a book that that had been endorsed to her by Alfred Adler, a very prominent psychiatrist at the time, whom many people should still remember. And also my parents were very familiar with Paul Lazarsfeld's mother, Sophie Lazarsfeld, who was also, whatever it was, psychiatrist or psychotherapist, and so on.

We came to the United States arriving in the middle of 1936. It was very hard for us. My father was a physician. He felt he was too old to qualify for practicing medicine by taking one of the state board examinations. His German practice had been in gynecology and obstetrics. And so we settled in New York because all you had to do there is pass a language examination and you would be able to practice as a general physician, but not as a state-certified specialist. [0:02:09.9]

And I think it was very hard on my parents, and he did all right financially during the war, but then after the war his practice actually fell apart because he never got over his German bedside manners and ways of behaving and that just didn't go in the States. And also when physicians reached a certain age, patients don't come any longer.

Now that I have had children and grandchildren I recognize that I had a very atypical adolescence. My brother as well. Somehow, as you may know, we were a typical immigrant family, even though my parents were, you know, well educated. They never understood America, they never understood us, and I had enough of the German youth movement in me that I never fully adjusted to the American youth culture. [0:03:12.8]

So not really having our parents as support and not fitting in too well with the American youth culture, I developed I think two adolescent passions: One was art and the other one was politics. And I did very well in high school, but I made very few friends in high school. From about age fifteen-and-a-half, most of my friends were not in the same high school with me; the majority came from my political circle of acquaintances rather than through school

I occasionally got in trouble with my teachers for arguing about politics, something I knew how to hide from my parents so they never knew about this and would have been greatly upset over. My high school was very conservative. The only other socialist, a student 1.5 semesters ahead of me, was set upon by jocks and thrown into a goose pond a block from the school. I nevertheless graduated with honors from high school, because high school, after German

gymnasium, as you might know, was so easy. I should have gone to the Bronx High School of Science or Townsend Harris High School, but I would have had a long commute and therefore didn't. And while my parents wanted me to go to one of those, that was part of my obsteperousness. [0:04:26.9]

By the time I graduated the high school, the war was on. I did not want to go on to college, because if college were anything like high school it would just be another couple of years of boredom. That is how I felt at the time. And I decided, since the war was on, I might as well take advantage of the new job opportunities. [0:04:56.3]

So I first took a job in a factory on an assembly line that produced stapling machines. I might say one of the reasons for taking this type of job is that I felt I should be with the working class since, as I said I was very political. [0:05:18.2]

And of course then the company - after about two months in my job – had to shut down because they couldn't get any more material. After that, I managed to get a job in a mechanical laboratory. I actually had a total of two jobs in two different mechanical laboratories. I had about a full year of experience as an apprentice, as a tool and gauge maker, until I finally got drafted into the army.

So that's sort of my early life, my upbringing, until that disruption, which it surely was, that hit all of my age group, of being drafted into the army.

INTERVIEWER: And what were your politics in New York?

KURT LANG: Well, I was quite leftwing. I mean I began trying to find my way. And I said we were non-practicing Jews, but what do you do when the Nazis come to power and so on? You sort of flock around with your "likes," by which I mean other Jews. And so by a number of little steps I ended up in the Zionist youth movement, and that turned out to be fairly interesting, rather stimulating, you know, and so on. [0:06:27.5]

After coming to a year or two being bored, I looked around and found out that the same Zionist youth movement had branches that existed here in New York, except none was close to my house. I lived in Queens and the branches were in Brooklyn, Manhattan or the Bronx, where most of the Jews from eastern Europe had settled. I became very active nevertheless. And in the course of it - it was a leftwing Zionist movement -- I moved from left-wing Zionism to left-wing socialism. It wasn't just forming new social relationships. It was an embrace of

radical politics and happened just that way. [0:07:06.1]

I had also previously somehow come across Jack London's book, The Iron Heel, which is a sort of a futurist book like Edward Bellamy's, looking back from socialist society several centuries ahead "past" capitalist society. I chanced upon it when I was about 14 and it really had some sort of conversion effect on me. I, sort of became a socialist without fully understanding but began to read, you know, Marx and Veblen and you name them, and all the others -- Lenin, too, of course.

And so I moved from leftwing Zionism - I was never Jewish enough for the Zionist movement, and so what attracted me initially were the residues of the youth movement to which the members still adhered. [0:07:58.5]

By my senior year in high school I sort of broke with the Zionist movement and became committed to rather radical politics.

I might mention I was never pro-Soviet, I was simply leftwing socialist. And I felt as a socialist at that time you had to be in touch with the working class; that was a second reason why I decided… Maybe there is even a third reason. The first reason, for not going to college, is that I was pretty sick of dumb high school as it appeared to me. And second of all, I thought, you know, with the war being on and maybe even get a deferment from the army if I gained enough skill as a machinist.. And third, because I felt that, as I said, I had to be with the working class. I even tried organizing my shop and almost got fired, but the foreman said I was a good worker and so they kept me.
INTERVIEWER: So what year did you graduate from high school? [0:08:59.0]

KURT LANG: February 1942, or January '42.

INTERVIEWER: And then after working in the factory you were drafted. Tell me about your wartime experience.

KURT LANG: Well, my wartime experience - well, I took my usual basic training, and then we had a chance to be sent to college in the Army Specialized Training program. And because I had this tool-making and gauge-making background, I had one-and-a-half terms in engineering courses at Rhode Island State College. And then the army abandoned its program and I was back in the infantry and took basic training over again.

When we were sent overseas, I think it was in early October 1944. And by that time, since the people around me knew that I spoke German, instead of being with a B company as a rifleman, I got transferred to battalion headquarters and became a scout and observer. That's sort of the low-level combat intelligence; not much intelligence, mostly combat. [0:10:26.4]

I went together overseas together with the people I had trained with. We got into the line just a couple of weeks before the Ardennes breakthrough. And I remember we pitched tent in the Hürtgen Forest. It began snowing and we were being shelled. And then a call came for me to go back to division headquarters, where I was interviewed by a captain, who said he was looking for German…he was combing the division for German-speaking soldiers. [0:11:07.7]

And he interviewed me, and about a week later I got called back to division to join a new unit – part of the counterintelligence corps – attached to each division. In a round-about way, I actually rejoined my old regiment, but now as a counterintelligence person, which was much better than being, as you can imagine, up in a front line. We usually were about a mile or two behind, which was much better.

And, well, that's my career and I stayed with counter-intelligence till the end of the war. Our mission was basically to prevent any kind of sabotage behind the lines. Occasionally we would interview German POWs. And I might mention that our captain got the bronze star, because we arrested more Germans who had not been properly discharged from the German army but moving into American-occupied territory. As the German army was disintegrating, many tried to make their way home. Our mission was to see that none of these people, unless they had been properly discharged, got through. They were supposed to be interned because the command was afraid there would be a resistance movement, a "Werewolf" by trained soldiers. I was involved in this action about the last three weeks of the war until peace was finally signed. [0:12:45.0]

Oh, well, that takes me pretty much to the end of my military career. I might mention, if it's of any interest, that about six weeks after the - no, a little longer - about two months after the end of the war I was summarily dismissed from the counterintelligence corps because Washington knew something about my earlier political radicalism. I was sent to a replacement camp in France where most of us were expecting to be sent to the Pacific for the invasion of Japan. Luckily enough for us, the war ended before that became a reality. So that's about the

extent of my wartime experience. I didn't do anything heroic; I just got by the best I could. [0:13:42.3]

INTERVIEWER: And then you stayed around in Europe afterwards. Did you work in Germany?

KURT LANG: Yes. Well, my experience with the counterintelligence corps.., interviewing Germans.., you have to understand, I was completely bilingual, even although my German facility may not have been that of a sophisticated 25-year-old. My German was still that ofl a 13-year-old, but I did get by easily. [0:14:10.6]

And being politically conscious, I really was curious about what would happen to Germany after the end of the war, and since I had really had nothing to come back to in the United States that I felt - I didn't have any attachment to any girl or woman and so on - I decided to try for a discharge in Europe and then look for a position.

And I won't go through all the detailed machinations that I had to go through in order to work that. But circumstances hard to account for caused me to end up in Berlin, my birth place. After getting my discharge, a new problem arose: having to find a civilian job.

INTERVIEWER: And what did you end up doing? [0:15:01.7]

KURT LANG: Well, my first job…you have to understand, I had no real skills to sell except I was bilingual, so my first job was in denazification. And I did not like the way denazification was conducted and got into minor trouble, not big trouble for saying so. One thing I did was to write a letter to General Clay expressing my thoughts on how our policy was executed. You must understand that at the time I was not terribly sophisticated in the ways in which bureaucracies worked. Naturally, my letter was intercepted and never got to Clay. I was given all hell by my superiors. But anyhow, I decided it was time to get out of denazification.

And as good luck would have it, I heard (actually through a German, whom I knew slightly) that there was a job open in the Office of Information Control. [0:16:05.3]
I wasn't quite sure what to do but screwed up my courage. You have to understand, I was very - being an enlisted man - very anti-officer. I felt strong kinship and still identified strongly with the lower troops. By the time I was a civilian, I was entitled to eat at officers' mess but felt uncomfortable there. Who

after having been an enlisted man and taken all their shit – especially after several months as an "unssassigned" soldier --wants to eat with officers? I know that's hard for you to understand, but the two-class system in the army was much stronger then than it is now. You had to sir all officers and stand at attention, especially when you were in the infantry. During combat, to be sure, it had not been that bad.

So anyhow, I screwed up my courage, phoned them, and got an invitation to stop by. I was interviewed. At the end the civilian who interviewed me said, "Well, why don't you write up something about the German political situation?" "Any particular topic?" I asked. Whatever you feel like. And I said, "what about denazification? That is, after all, the subject I know best." He thought that would do as well as anything else. [0:17:11.7]

I went "home." I had already by that time bought a typewriter on the black market. I sat down and typed out I think about a four- or five-page piece, single-spaced, on denazification, the policies I had just spent a couple of months trying to execute and being frustrated by. No second drafts. The next day I went by his office and left it in his box. That was it.

I thought that's the end of it but, much to my surprise, about a week later I got a phone call saying, "We have read your piece and we want you to come over." I was interviewed again and was offered a job as a research analyst. My functions were essentially those of a research assistant for professionals with advanced degrees and/or professional experience. And it was formally the Intelligence Branch for the Information Control Division, the name for that part of American military government in charge of radio, film, theater, newspapers, and whatever else, including public opinion. [0:18:17.9]

And so I worked at headquarters in Berlin as a research assistant. The work was very interesting for me and I felt truly challenged. And since I was still bilingual I could still pass as a German and I would go, sometime incognito, and mix with Germans as, for example, by enrolling in a German adult education course. I got to know all kinds of people – among them left-wing workers and old socialists but also some writers, intellectuals, musicians, and even a camera man who had worked for Leni Riefenstahl. I picked up all kinds of information both about the past and about people's present circumstances, all of which helped me a good deal in consolidating and interpreting the reports from "the field" that it was my task to analyze and write up. I have come to believe that my superiors, most of whom also spoke German but tended to circulate more among Americans, were

intrigued by the perspective I brought to my work. My drafts were always reviewed and edited. This work experience, although I had no social contact with any of my co-workers and superiors, was a real eye-opener for me. What a thing to be working for and with educated and intelligent people who knew so much more than I did. [0:19:13.8]

The people I worked for, several of them had PhDs. In fact, the head of the branch was a University of Wisconsin PhD who had done his dissertation under Howard Becker. Not Howard S. Becker, but the Howard Becker at Wisconsin, whose book, after all, was on the German youth movement. And another one, the deputy-head, was Alexander L. George, who later on - he was quite young then; he was probably about four or five years older than I was, but died about a year or two ago after a distinguished career – became a highly respect professor at Stanford. Anyhow, that sums my German experience.

INTERVIEWER: Could you tell us a little bit more about the work that you did first in the denazification, what that was like, and then on the groundwork you did for the Office of Information Control? [0:20:06.6]

KURT LANG: Well, in denazification we had to screen German applicants to see whether their background qualified or disqualified them from employment by the American military government or even as housekeepers for American employees of military government. Now, the high-level consultants were screened by another branch. Where I ended up we screened all these people, you know, who worked as maids and cooks' helpers and automobile mechanics and drivers, secretaries and other low-level employees. And part of their remuneration was a free mid-day meal served at the American mess. Given the disruption of the economy and of normal trade that caused a food shortage in cities like Berlin, that meal was worth a lot, aside from having a job and earning something. I remember interviewing, for example, a retired German general for a maintenance job at the hearing plant. That free midday meal was very important.

As to my job - and within a couple of months, as others still in uniform returned to the States, I became head of this low-level denazification section. Basically we worked from a Fragebogen. You've probably heard about those long questionnaires. You had to state when you joined the party or whether you joined the party, if you had made any extra money under the Nazis, which one of the various party-affiliated associations you belonged to, how you had voted, and all of that. [0:21:24.9]

And on the basis of that questionnaire we would interview people and decide whether they were "qualified" for a job. Now, we had certain guidelines that told us if you had done this, that or some other thing in the past, you could not work for the Americans. No Nazis! But if you hadn't joined the Nazi party until 1937, then it was "discretionary but with an adverse recommendation" to us from above. But if you had joined the party before that, removal was "mandatory." There were many, many more such guidelines. And my job was basically to follow them to the letter, which – frankly -- I found difficult. For cases that did not quite fit, I felt moved to use my own judgment. This was one of the reasons, one of several reasons, why I got into trouble. [0:22:04.6]

INTERVIEWER: So how did it feel doing that kind of work after being in a family that had to leave ten years earlier?

KURT LANG: Well, I have to tell you, quite frankly, I have never had that general hate for Germans that, as you may know, many people in my situation had, and that was partly because my family had good relations with non-Jewish Germans. Not that I liked Nazis and those who played along with them. Whenever I discovered one who tried to get by us, to be able throw them out was a real delight.

But on the other hand, I also felt, here I was, myself drafted at age 19. The boys in my class in Germany… I had always gone to general school – a Montessori school that was closed down in 1933, then to a Catholic public school, and the last two years to a Gymnasium. I never went to a Jewish school. Now, the kids who were my class then would have had four years in the army, not all of them would have survived, with all kinds of bitter experiences. [0:23:08.1]
And then, if you can imagine, they'd come back from the war to confront circumstances completely different from anything they might have expected earlier. I could empathize with that to a degree. Many came back disillusioned. Of course, there were those who had been and those who remained Nazis. The initial appeal was clear. After Germany's defeat in World War I, it was forced to pay heavy reparations. Then, there was the inflation followed, 6 years later, by depression and mass unemployment and then suddenly, with rearmament and construction, there were jobs and Germany became the most powerful nation in Europe.

I could understand people being swayed by this. I don't mean to say that I approve of it necessarily; you don't get any medals for having been a Nazi. But I tried to deal with these issues and my experiences made me think about them.

Some of that thinking intruded also on the work that I was doing for the Information Control Division. And you were asking me about what I was doing for Information Control Division. Well, there were basically two sources of information that I worked with: One were polls, opinion polls conducted by military government. And I must tell you, I really knew nothing about polling at the time. I mean of course I knew that there was such a thing as a Gallup poll. [0:24:28.0]

But when the reports came to my desk saying they had used a random sample.... I would do the first write-up of them. And it would just say very briefly; not in such a way as to communicate, we used a random sample. I didn't know what the word "random" meant in connection with sampling, but I found out quite quickly. And I would do some of the interpretation or I - let's put it this way - did not interpret so much as provide the context; that was one thing I did. [0:24:55.9]

The second thing that our branch would do is provide politically relevant information. Our division had branches or field offices in a number of towns in the western zone or the American occupied zone of Germany. Their people might be sent out to talk to their informants about, let's say, who are the coming political leaders, or what is the political mood around here, or what is the reaction to the Nuremburg trials, and things of that sort, and then I would get these reports. They would often be terribly uneven and so on. And my job was to prepare a draft for my boss, who did the final editing, that pulled all the stuff together.

The reports were on all kinds of subjects. One I specifically remember is about the upcoming political leaders. And the interviewers in the field might write, here's this young man in a town: he's in his thirties, and he's a real comer, you know. Many of those people never panned out, because I think some of the people we had going out and interviewing about these things were not particularly well-trained either. [0:26:23.3]

Another topic was about German youth – the schizoid attitudes of German youth, which actually Alexander George ultimately wrote up. But I supplied them with some raw drafts of that material. I'm not saying they just cribbed my stuff, no, but I tell you, I often had very significant input into it.

INTERVIEWER: So that's your start in public opinion work, then.

KURT LANG: That is my start in social sciences. Yes, and the work was a real eye-opener for me. And, after having been very disdainful of school, I finally

realized that some of the people who I was working with really knew a lot more than I did. [0:27:05.1]

So in the course of that experience, I decided it was about time for me to go to college and get an education. I mean it's not that I was illiterate or unread, but I was uneducated, and I thought you could learn everything on your own, and these people made me realize that there was a real value to getting education. When in high school I read lots of books, but never read what was assigned in high school, or only as much as I had to.

INTERVIEWER: How are you doing on the tape?

FEMALE SPEAKER: We have 34 minutes.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, okay, great. Well, then take us back to the States and going to college and moving on from there. [0:27:53.5]

KURT LANG: Well, going back to the States. I went to University of Chicago and I can only tell you - I mean Gladys said, because of her family, she didn't have a very clear idea of what college would mean – I can only say my idea was equally non-existent, even though my father was clearly a university graduate and my mother was - although not university-trained – she certainly was educated and had a certificate in social work, as a matter of fact. But they had no understanding at all about how the American college system worked.

And also because of the alienation in immigrant families between the young generation ready to Americanize and the old generation retaining its old links and perspective. We never talked about such things. And so most of my friends didn't go to college, or if they did they went to the evening school in one of the New York City colleges, and that sounded very much the same as my high school. It wasn't quite the same, but it was somewhat similar. [0:29:11.8]

And so I arrived in Chicago full of expectations. I had chosen Chicago from the catalog. I got all the catalogs from all the major universities: Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia. And my buddy in counter-intelligence, who was a language teacher and recommended - told me - with whom I was in correspondence - told me I should also try University of Chicago.

I sent for their catalog and saw in it the names of professors, some of whose books I had read. Ogburn, for instance. That name was familiar to me. Veblen;

that name was familiar to me. I think they even mentioned Marx. And I said to myself that's the place where I want to go. [0:30:02.1]

I went there and felt -- most of the people my age, you see, had come back earlier and so I was behind. I was behind because I had worked before the war, not gone to college and then stayed in Europe after the war. So I was about three or four years behind everybody in my age group and so I felt a little - though I enjoyed the curriculum terrifically -- but socially felt a little bit out of place.

But Chicago was another eye-opener. I didn't know what I wanted to take or what I would want to be. I just wanted to partake of all the knowledge that I had bypassed. And that was basically my reaction to Chicago. I can't really tell you; I felt so euphoric when I arrived on the campus. I said, "Here at last I am." [0:31:08.0]

INTERVIEWER: And how did you end up in sociology?

KURT LANG: How I ended up in sociology? I don't really know. I think it was a series of choices. I thought that I might want to go into social psychology and also thought I might want to go into economics, even law but only for what law school might offer intellectually. I talked to Burt Hoselitz, who was a professor of economics there at the time, and he thought I should go to the Committee on Social Thought but not law. I investigated that but that program seemed just a little too obtuse to me. I also talked to one or two people from the Committee, and I don't really know what made me finally decide for sociology. I think I sort of slid into it partly because some of my friends, some of the friends I made at the University of Chicago - this is before I met Gladys - were sociologists. It may have been as simple as all that. And I'm just trying to think how I - I really don't remember. [0:32:24.9]

INTERVIEWER: Did you major in sociology, or did you have a general education -

KURT LANG: Well, the undergraduate College at Chicago at that time, was under Hutchins. You didn't major but then went into one of the divisions after two years of college. It was supposed to be two years. For most people it was more than two years; for me it was a little less than two years when I started to work for my Master's. And I did - yes, I did sign up at sociology. I really don't - I think it was almost sort of by default. I mean it's not that I wasn't interested in sociology, but I was interested in other things, too.

INTERVIEWER: And so you began your Master's in '49? [0:33:12.5]

KURT LANG: Yes, my Master's program, not my Master's thesis.

INTERVIEWER: Right, right. And I have in my notes that you were working on a project called the evaluation of strategic communications?

KURT LANG: Of strategic intelligence sources.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

KURT LANG: For psychological warfare. This was a project that Morris Janowitz worked on, and I might mention that Morris Janowitz was one of the people whom my bosses in Berlin gave me an introduction to. So the first faculty on the campus I met was Morris Janowitz. He was at that time a young instructor without - not yet quite finished with -- his PhD. And so now, I'm sorry, what did you ask me?

INTERVIEWER: I was asking you about the evaluation. [0:34:10.4]

KURT LANG: Oh yes, his project, the evaluation. Well, I think Gladys described it to you. A number of people went through the literature. The literature included newspapers - I mean good newspapers, prestige newspapers - social science journals, and intelligence sources, which by that time had been declassified, about the German resistance during the war and German political developments after the war. So you can see I was naturally fitted for that sort of project. It was through Morris Janowitz, who knew my background.... I ran into him in the library, and he said - oh no, it wasn't in the library, it was in the hallways of 1126, the social science building. And he said, "Do you want a job?" And I said, "Yes, I can use the job." He said, "Comb your hair and go over and see Douglas Waples."

I didn't know who Douglas Waples was but went there. They showed me what they were doing. Names of some German politicians, whom they did not recognize, were mentioned. And I said, "Oh, I know who these guys are, you know. This is so-and-so and this is his function and so on." I got hired immediately. [0:35:38.1]

Our task was to evaluate whether the analytic propositions or the prediction found in the literature turned out to be correct or not. You had one set of people

extracting propositions that others then coded. Finally, myself and Morris Janowitz and also Hans Speier (who came in at one point to review the project) evaluating them. We used several categories: Proposition correct, proposition incorrect, proposition based on a contingency that did not take place and things of that sort. [0:36:25.6]

And the upshot of the project, which quite frankly I think was a little too mechanistically handled, was that actually journalists for the Economist and New York Times and some of the prestigious newspapers actually were better on the predictions than the intelligence sources and the social scientists. I'm not sure that this finding would necessarily stand up, because a journalist probably got their ideas from the social scientists or from the intelligence sources. Anyhow, that was the project.

INTERVIEWER: Was that your introduction to the Committee on Communication? [0:37:00.8]

KURT LANG: Yes. I think I - yes and no. No, I.... Strictly speaking, no. When I came back to Chicago after the first summer, during which I went back to New York, where all my old friends were, I ran into some woman student whom I knew and she said to me, "you should take a course with Barney Berelson." He was scheduled for one called, I think, "Communication and Consensus" or something like that.

This will show you how naïve I was. I showed up for the first class thinking the professor is Berelson but finding the performance a bit of a bore. The first two class discussions were on why communication is taking place through the mouth, and I thought that was a rather silly thing to spend two class discussions on. And so I searched for an alternative, telling an advisor that"I just don't like Berelson" to be told "Well, Berelson isn't here." He had just gone to New York to work for the Bureau at Columbia. I won't mention the name but somebody had been substituting but I had taken him for Berelson.

Anyhow, that was my first contact with the Committee on Communication. And then you're right, It was through Morris Janowitz and Doug Waples. the head of it, that I made my contact with the Committee on Communication and it's through Morris that I met Lester Asheim and others connected with the committee. Then Don Horton came on the scene, but that was later, I think. I don't remember just when Don Horton arrived. He probably arrived also in 1949, but I didn't meet him until a bit after. [0:38:51.7]

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about the Committee on Communication, what that was like and what your experience with it was.

KURT LANG: Well, the Committee on Communication was a rather informal group of faculty and I think that, by the time I got there, it had lost a lot of its drive. Not everyone always got along with others on the Committee. It seemed a loose combination. [0:39:20.8]

[I WOULD THINK IT WISE TO CUT THIS IRRELEVANT SECTION UNTIL THE INTERVIEW IS RESUMED And Douglas Waples, who by that time was a very nice person and very helpful and generous and - but he (phone ringing) -

INTERVIEWER: Yes, we'll hold the phone just for a second.

KURT LANG: I'll repeat that.

WOMAN SPEAKER: Yes, I'd like to hear that, yes.

(Chuckling)

(Inaudible at 0:39:41.6)

INTERVIEWER: This is great, Kurt.

WOMAN SPEAKER 1: Hello.

KURT LANG: Okay, you ready?

WOMAN SPEAKER 1: Hello?

(Crosstalk)
KURT LANG: Oh yeah, she's still (ph).

WOMAN SPEAKER 1: Hello?

WOMAN SPEAKER: She's right behind you.

WOMAN SPEAKER: Anybody, one (ph), there?

KURT LANG: I'm sure it's Zeb.

WOMAN SPEAKER 1: (Inaudible at 0:40:00.0)

KURT LANG: He's talking to his cell phone and there's noise probably and his English has gotten rusty.

WOMAN SPEAKER 1: Tell him to ring back in a few minutes.

WOMAN SPEAKER: Yes, let's wait for a couple minutes, just to make sure that…

INTERVIEWER: I'm wondering if we should be getting the other camera going.

WOMAN SPEAKER: Sure, if you want, yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Do you mind?

KURT LANG: Now you've got two cameras, my God.

(Inaudible at 0:40:34.70)

WOMAN SPEAKER: Yes, your wartime experience is fascinating. Oh, you just want to move a little bit this way.

WOMAN SPEAKER 1: Oh. I understand you. I think I'll go out near the other phone anyway and so just call you if I want you to hang up.**[END OF IRRELEVANT SECITION. RESUME HERE]**

INTERVIEWER: So let's start over, and tell me what the Committee on Communication was like and…[0:40:54.1]

KURT LANG: Well, the Committee on Communication, I'd say in 1949... Berelson had left. He probably - I know that only from inference, I don't know that from direct observation - probably was the most energetic person behind it, followed by Morris Janowitz, who at the time was very junior. And the head of it was Douglas Waples, who was a very kind, generous person, who had done some excellent work earlier in his career, but was past his prime, no longer had the strength, the intellectual and moral and whatnot, to provide real leadership. As a result, the Committee existed mostly pro forma. I mean there were a couple of

courses listed under the Committee but usually double lised with a department. One of its main activity was the project I described earlier on intelligence sources. Funding has gone through the Committee on Communication. [0:42:09.0]

And Horton, Donald Horton - who I think came in about 1949 or ‘50 I think it was, ‘49 - and Waples didn’t particularly get along. And Lester Asheim had his regular place in the School of Library Science, where Barney Berelson’s had also been. Not a great deal was going on.

To indicate what things were like: I think it was in 1952, Waples suggested that I teach a seminar for the Committee. That shows you how short-handed they were. To be offered that at the University of Chicago at that time was something really special and more so for me. I was just five years from being a freshman. The Waples proposal was, of course, vetoed by the dean because, he was alleged to have said, we don’t have any of our graduate students teach any seminars because they can get from them, without paying tuition, the same information. [0:43:11.2]

But that gives you an idea. Looking back - I don’t really think I was qualified at that point to lead a seminar even with Waples as a backup. The Committee was basically Douglas Waples and the project. Waples did have another assistant by the name of Kenneth Adler; he stayed for several years after. Basically it was an office that Doug Waples ran. I did, however, take one of my PhD prelims in communication that grades Douglas Waples. graded. And I really don’t know anybody at the time -- and it may just be lack of knowledge on my part -- who actually got a degree in communication. It was just a loose affiliation of people who shared some kind of interest. [0:44:11.2]

INTERVIEWER: Did Riesman join the committee?

KURT LANG: As far as I know, no, nor do I know what joining the committee meant. I just don’t know how faculty got on the committee.

INTERVIEWER: Were there other projects that the committee ran besides the intelligence sources project?

KURT LANG: Not that I know of. Of course, Morris Janowitz did his book on the community newspaper and that was - no, he was still working on it while I was there. I do not know whether that was run through the committee or not.

INTERVIEWER: So you spent a great bulk of your time in the sociology department then?

KURT LANG: Essentially, yes. In other words, my connection with the committee was through the project on strategic intelligence sources, and then secondly through Doug Waples.

INTERVIEWER: And was anybody studying television at the time that you did the MacArthur Day study? [0:45:13.1]

KURT LANG: Yes. Donald Horton. I mean Donald Horton was brought to University of Chicago by William F. Ogburn, who was interested in social change with an emphasis on technology. He apparently thought somebody like Don Horton - again, nobody told me this, but just my inference –, because he came from television, would be an asset. Don Horton was a very, very intelligent person and very thoughtful, but his approach was completely different from that of Ogburn.

(Nonverbal sound)

INTERVIEWER: Quickly stop for a second.

WOMAN SPEAKER: I think it’s gone now.

(Crosstalk)

INTERVIEWER: So Kurt, tell me about the study of television in Chicago in the early 1950s.

KURT LANG: Well, the study of television. The only one I can think of at the moment really interested in television was Donald Horton, who had been brought in by Ogburn. He had worked for CBS, and Ogburn was interested. His whole idea of social change was built around the idea that the impetus to social change comes from technological development and gradually diffuses. And he obviously thought that someone like Donald Horton, who was trained as an anthropologist, would help him on that. [0:46:37.7]

Now, the one project run by Horton at Chicago on television that I know of specifically is a TV monitoring studies for the National Association of Educational

Broadcasters. Two compansion studies were run by Dallas Smythe, who by that time I think was up in Canada someplace - no, he was still at Illinois. Our timing and categories differed from Smythe's. Ours struck me as more refined. The studies focused on how much time was being used for commercialism; that's basically what it was all about. [0:47:21.4]

And Don gave a seminar on something - I forgot the title of it - on television and popular culture, which I don't think was particularly successful. I attended but found it to have too much chitchat. He had some great ideas which he later presented in two seminal articles on the pseudo-social, para-social interaction, ideas he was developing at the time. Apart from that, to the best of my knowledge, nobody at Chicago at the time was working on television. [0:48:07.1]

INTERVIEWER: And so what did it feel like to be doing the work with MacArthur and the conventions?

KURT LANG: What it felt like to do work on television at the time…But let me begin by saying we were not working on television. As Gladys said, we went out to study crowd behavior and we did not watch the television because we wanted to analyze the television content, as I think she said somewhat mistakenly. But we certainly had our 30 observers on the scene, and since Gladys couldn't go, we thought we'll have a 31st observer watching television. Good to have another. Maybe she'll observe something that escapes us.

And it was really only - and I think this is actually incorporated in the article - after it was over, after 3 o'clock, when I picked up a telephone, a pay telephone in those days - we didn't have cell telephones - and called Gladys. She said to me, "Oh, that was awful. Are you all right?" I said, "What do you mean? Of course I'm all right." "Oh," she said, "It was so terrible the way they were carrying on." I said, "What do you mean, carrying on?" I'm parodying the conversation a bit. We then recognized that there was a tremendous difference between what went on at the scene and what you saw on television. And all of our - not all of our - many of our observers expressed a keen disappointment. They did not see anything of the patriotic enthusiasm, you know, or rampaging crowds and whatnot that people were led to expect by the commentary, by the expectations. [0:49:56.0]

So then we said, "Okay, now this is an interesting problem" Gladys and Sally Cassidy, a fellow student, watched with Gladys. Both had taken notes of what they saw. Horton, who let us watch on his set, had recorded the commentary, not all but a good part of it - no videotapes at the time – which generously he let us

have for analysis. [0:50:11.8]

An other fellow-student, who had been a court stenographer, was good enough to describe some of it for us. That led us say, “Okay, now we put our heads together and try to see why and how this happened.” And frankly we thought of it as an interesting little exercise. After writing it up, as Gladys said, we submitted it to the Bernays committee with the thought that maybe somebody will see it and, when we apply for a job, might recognize our name and know something about us. It never occurred to us that we would win. Believe me, it just never occurred to us.

And then much to my surprise, some one from Columbia – I forgot who it was – writes to us, “Since you have specialized on television…” I didn't specialize on television. I had hardly ever seen television apart from MacArthur.

That's basically how, guided by curiosity, you get anointed as expert. I did some reading on television immediately after MacArthur. People often want to know who influenced us. I would have to acknowledge that the greatest single influence on that analysis probably was Siegfried Kracauer's book on film. And the most interesting part of it was the appendix of the book, which deals with German war films. That's not the only influence. One gets ideas from wherever one finds them. But the MacArthur was not really through the Committee on Communication. To give credit where credit is due: it was a spin off from the seminar on crowd behavior by Tamotsu Shibutani. [0:51:55.3]

And then we had the idea, as Gladys mentioned, we should do something about the upcoming political conventions. By then, we recognized the role television was likely to play.

And again, to give credit to Doug Waples, we tried to see if we could get a little bit of money for studying the conventions. Doug Waples, gracious as he always was, wrote to Oscar Katz - I'm sorry, to Frank Stanton, CBS and got from him $2500 for this study. It was supposed to go to us. And the dean at the time said, “Graduate students cannot accept funds. They're not qualified to be the recipients of university grants.” [0:52:42.8]

As a result, the grant went to Don Horton, and unfortunately or fortunately, Don used about half of it, if not more, for some of the things that he wanted to do, leaving us about a thousand dollars that we used to feed the people we recruited to monitor the television coverage on borrowed sets and to pay for audio tapes of

the commentary. By that time we were “hooed” into television. [0:53:21.0]

INTERVIEWER: And that continued into the ‘70s, then.

KURT LANG: Well, no, not - yes and no, yes and no. I mean first of all, you do get labeled. The first job that I got was at University of Miami where there was supposed to be a joint operation, a joint program, between the radio/television department and sociology involving research on radio and television. It turned out nobody was really interested; they had only pretended to be. [0:53:54.4]

My interest at the time was much more in political sociology, social movements, and things of that sort. And my Master’s thesis actually was on the putsch of German generals against Hitler. It was probably one of the first quantitative historical studies. Anyhow, that had been my interest. And my work with Morris Janowitz had much more to do with our common interest in the military - I wrote a number of articles on the military - than it had with communication. [0:54:35.7]

Since things in Miami never panned out, we left as soon as we could. We did not like Miami, but I needed a job. I resigned the job at Miami University on July the 20th. Nobody should ever resign from a job that late unless he had another job waiting. That’s what they all told me. Trying to find one in midsummer, I landed at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. That seemed the best of the alternatives that I had at the time. I went on to spend two unhappy years there but still doing research on all kinds of things, including the military. [0:55:19.8]

INTERVIEWER: Tell us about the CBC years.

KURT LANG: About CBC; well, I was hired for “special projects.” In other words, they were trying to.... they were concerned with ratings and things like that. But the head of the research branch insisted that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which is a publicly chartered corporation – a little bit - not quite like public radio and television, not quite the same, but publicly chartered, also had a responsibility to contribute to communication research. As you probably know, Canada was a leader in communication research. You know the name of Harold Innis.

WOMAN SPEAKER: Ask Kurt to stop for a second.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, yes.

WOMAN SPEAKER: Yes, I guess they're just running (ph) around the house right now.

WOMAN SPEAKER 2: You know while we're at it…

(Audio break from 0:56:13:0 to 0:56:27:0)

KURT LANG: ..joke about two Jewish rabbis that survive a shipwreck? Everybody else drowns and here are these two elderly men, they're the only ones. They get interviewed. The press: "How did you do it?" He says, "Well, you know, the boat went down so we talked, and we talked and talked and talked."

(Chuckling)

INTERVIEWER: So tell us about the CBC.

KURT LANG: About the CBC. How far do you want me to go back?

INTERVIEWER: Why don't you start at the beginning on the CBC.

KURT LANG: Okay, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the research office, was headed by a man who, when he interviewed me, told me that he thought that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation should also make a contribution to Canadian society through its research into communication.

And so I was hired as the director, or whatever you want to call it, in charge of special projects different from the routine activities that any broadcasting organization undertakes. In those days, ratings services and so on had not yet quite developed to the level which they have since. Canada lagged behind even what existed in the US. [0:57:54.7]

The problem I encountered there, some of them probably due to my own lack of planning and carefully crafted career strategy, which got me into trouble again. Shortly after my arrival, I proposed - it was... I went up there in September 1954. That Christmas television was to be introduced into Halifax. Having just started my new job and figuring out what might be interesting, I proposed about three or four projects. One of them was a before and after study of television in a city the size of Halifax. Such a study, I argued, would certainly put the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation on the map. It would have been more or less a Columbia type study. [0:58:52.0].

Contributing to the difficulties due to a short time frame was the head of research. He was someone who, first of all, did not really know anything about social sciences beyond a summer course that he had taken at University of Michigan Survey Research Center. And second, it was very difficult for him ever to make up his mind; he was always testing the waters on everything. [0:59:17.8]

So when all this happened, he first of all procrastinated and continued to do so. Instead of doing our before interviews in early October or mid-October, we didn't go out there until I think it was the very end of November. We had just about two weeks before the Halifax station was to go on the air.

Third, because the head of research felt unsure of himself -- and I never pretended to have any special expertise in the area of sampling and related areas –, he assigned the sampling and gave full authority over its selection to someone trained only in the labor force survey by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics.

So about two-thirds of the resources for the study came to be invested in drawing a representative household sample. In fact, we were picking households long after the interview had begun. As a result, the study never - I mean nothing ever came of it. They did go back after I had left, but I never heard anything about the findings. And the interviews and other data from an inadequately covered sample collected in 1954 were not high quality. I'm afraid I made the mistake of telling my boss exactly what I thought of his having messed up the potential value of the project. [1:00:36.0]

You must know that you don't tell a boss exactly what you think, especially when you're new to a job, unless you have something very positive to say. It took me about a year to somewhat repair our relationship. Meanwhile, there were a number of other things to cause friction. For example, I warned about a claim in a report the office was about to circulate through the Corporation to the effect that the diaries that they got from a community were representative of the community, that the proportions of suburban and inner-city households matched those in the census plus some other ridiculous claims while ignoring a large differential in educational achievement. I forgot some of the other follies.

I wrote a memo pointing to the importance of education. Calculations based on sampling for the number of actuall interviews showed a difference three times the standard error, assuming, of course, it was due to random variation. On

education, the difference was more than three standard errors. [1:01:49.0]

My boss, coached by our sampling expert, came back to say, "Well, when you have a stratified area sample, variation is much greater, so therefore the difference is within expected range." But if the normal spread was that wide, could you infer anything about the larger population? He would not acknowledge any such shortcomings in the comparisons.[1:02:10.6]

I do believe that by the time I left we were good friends again and he would have been happy to keep me, but it had been a very trying time for me. I had not been able to accomplish a great deal there.

I wrote an analysis of news broadcasting for them, which they distributed only after I had submitted it to the Canadian Journal of Political Science and Economics and got it accepted. That's a vignette of my history with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and people who went there subsequently all basically had the same experience, though different in style and personality, they ran into similar problems. [1:02:57.4]

INTERVIEWER: And you were involved in the study of the Nixon/Kennedy debates.

KURT LANG: Yes. Well, that was at Queens College. It was a very difficult time. We each had a 15-hour a week teaching load. Just try to keep your writing going under that load. And so on when the debates came along, we said, "Why not try to do something on them?" Basically, we used our students to jot down their own observations and do some interviewing, working with a rather loose interview schedule. Questionnaires with simple check-offs would have made it too easy to cheat, so we just gave them questions to ask. That was one way of squeezing out some research when you don't have any money and with a teaching schedule that doesn't leave much any time and when you have children to take care of and what not.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, tell us about your academic career then, when you came back from CBC. You're giving us a sense of the challenges of workload and family life and two careers. [1:04:11.1]

KURT LANG: Yes. Well, I don't think either Gladys or I have ever been particularly good career strategists. First of all, we never tied ourselves up with any particular professor who could get us a job. You must understand we were

doing what we wanted to do. As you know, the way to go ahead is to link up with the most famous professor and to do something that that professor, he or she, is interested in, and count accordingly on being promoted and sponsored, Next, you become part of an invisible college and so on and so forth down the line. We never did that and so we basically had to do it on our own. [1:04:59.6]

And also I think - well, when I met Gladys.... She had been out there in the academic circle, worked with all these famed people – like Margaret Mead and others -- and therefore I thought she knew all about careers, whereas, as I said, I was totally naïve. But neither of quite knew how to play the game. And our faculty at Chicago, you should know, never briefed us on this. Everett Hughes's attitude was, if you're from Chicago, you make it on your own. That's the way we do it.

When I heard of jobs here and there, mostly through an university employment office, I would apply. Later, while at Canadian Broadcasting, I applied for an open position at Queens College in New York, now part of City University. A phone offer came while Gladys was actually at home with her parents. I had stayed up until 2 o'clock in the morning, trying to get some writing done after my 8-hour job. The offer was for an instructorship – yes, even though I was three years beyond my PhD. I foolishly accepted. I didn't know about any implication this might have for future promotion and, you wouldn't believe it, but I didn't know about tenure and tenure tracks. I said to myself, "Oh, what difference does this rank make?" And the salary, well, it wasn't great. I now know I could have held out for an additional couple of hundred dollars. But he called me in the morning, I was still sleeping. He obviously called me early because they thought I'd be going to work early and I would try to shave off a little bit, you know, go to work a little later. [1:06:35.1]

That is how I came to Queens in '56 – after one year at Miami as assistant professor, two years at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and, by that time, having a couple of things published -- only as an instructor. And of course, once I arrived there, I discovered that instructors had far fewer privileges even than assistant professors. And they told me they couldn't promote me for some years. Oh yes, the tenured faculty voted to enlarge class size so that tenured people would only teach 12 hours, and instructors like myself had to teach 15 hours. [1:07:17.2]

This was decided at a meeting, where I was only one of two to vote against. All the other instructors voted for it -- foolish of them. Anyhow, it was a terrible

discriminatory action. It seemed to me that every situation that we were in always worked against us. There was a chance for me to go to NYU. They were ready to appoint me. Then they found out I was an instructor at Queens and so [according to some administrative requirement] they would only offer an instructorship. And so it went. [I turned down the offer.]This happened after I'd been at Queens two or three years.[1:07:58.7]

And how did we manage ? Well, first of all - and I think Gladys will confirm this– that we have always pretty much shared taking care of the kids. I mean I was the one who would get up in the middle of the night because I can go back to sleep and she can't. So from the time both of our kids were babies, I was the one.... The kids woke up at 2:00, 3:00 in the morning, and I was the one that gave them the bottle, not she, and some of my later feminist students never believed that. And whatever it was, we always took care of it somehow. Sometimes kids had to be picked up from babysitting. He or she - I or she - would take them to our class. I'd say, "Here, here is some paper and here are some crayons, you amuse yourself." And you know, they took to it quite well. Besides, we never slept very much. Lack of sleep.... I have to confess that there were times when I felt absolutely burned out. And I envied the people who would get these grants. We never knew how to get a grant. I know that's hard for you to believe. [1:09:10.8]

As part of the experiences at Miami and then being an instructor at Queens and being out of academia one begins to develop a rather poor self-conception, you know? Hence, I was surprised, though It may be hard for you to believe -- I think we were both surprised –, that people should suddenly consider the MacArthur study as path-breaking. We thought of it as a term paper that we were interested in doing. And of course we were pleased when Bob Faris offered to publish it in the ASR and so on. [1:09:55.7]

And I remember when we were trying to decide which of the three dissertations - I'm not talking about that we had among ourselves - actually had four if you want to speak of this, consider it a certain way; we should go for--. I was working on my German generals, which frankly I think is one of the best things I've ever done. I was never able to get it published because the referees never understood what it was all about. That's another thing that led to low self-esteem. [1:10:26.9]

And I remember going around to faculty at Chicago with the idea I could parlay my master's thesis on German generals into a PhD dissertation. But I still had to get the master's out of the way. Maybe I can use the MacArthur Day study for my master's and that way I'll be able to get through fast. The department refused.

They were just about to vote to accept the thesis I had submitted and not allow me to withdraw it.

That being the case, I did not think I could use the MacArthur study for a PhD thesis. I thought there's not enough for that -- and then discovered, much to my surprise, that they were willing to accept a proposal. They went farther. When I showed a full draft to Don Horton, who ended up as one of my thesis advisors, he said really how impressed and how original the study was. I was surprised at that, really absolutely floored but pleased nevertheless

And the way I got off into telling about these things – I know it may be difficult to fathom – is to document that we were excessively naïve about all sort of things and about the many things we did wrong because we simply didn't know about them , in part, because we were working so hard and never much thought about these things.

Another example, we did a nearly complete first draft of Television and Politics. And good old Doug Waples suggested, "Why don't you send it to my friend" - we're still at CBC [Canadian Broadcasting] - "at Rutgers University Press"? So we sent a detailed outline and the answer came back as "I'm fascinated by your manuscript plan, but I can get absolutely no interest among the people in communications here. They think it's the wrong book at the wrong time." Do you know who that was? I give you two guesses. [1:12:28.8]

INTERVIEWER: Wilbur Schramm?

KURT LANG: No, he was not at Rutgers.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, at Rutgers, right. You tell me?

KURT LANG: Well, who were the people in communications at Rutgers?

INTERVIEWER: I don't know who was at Rutgers.

KURT LANG: Okay, I'd better not mention any names. I don't want to bad mouth anybody. I know who they were.

So anyhow, you asked me how things were. Well, we just felt eminently frustrated and I think it sometimes shows through.
INTERVIEWER: So on the career front, what do you guys think you did right, or

what are you pleased with the way things turned out? [1:13:12.0]

KURT LANG: Well, I think we're both pleased. Had you had asked us 40 years ago, where we thought we would be today, we never would have anticipated that.... I mean, really, until into the mid-60s, we just worked and felt frustrated and whatnot. We do feel we have a reasonable amount of recognition now. Really, in some ways more than we ever anticipated because for 15 years, or 10 years at least, we just felt absolutely stuck. We often sat down and asked each other, "How the hell do we get out of the situation we find ourselves in? How did we ever get ourselves into this situation?" and so on, saddled as we are with a heavy teaching load and no research resources. [1:14:07.2]

While at Queens, I tried to get people to do something. When the president of the College met with departments.... We had a new president and - not brand new, but he was a change from the old regimen and he wanted to talk to the departments about their problems. He met with sociology and our chair claimed the usual things: how good the department was and everything else. I raised my hand and I said, "You know, you don't really encourage any research." I gave a couple of illustrations and got a kick from the chair under the table to let me know not to bring up such things Well, it turned out the president was very pleased to be alerted. Nothing came of it, because he left the same time I did. And so until, I would say, the mid-'60s, when I went to Stony Brook, it was very, very difficult for us. [1:15:08.9]

(Nonverbal siren sound)

KURT LANG: I know. I said the wrong thing so the police are coming. The police are coming to pick us up.

(Chuckling)

INTERVIEWER: Did you have much contact with communications research in the '50s or '60s with Wilbur Schramm or the Annenberg School or George Gerbner?

KURT LANG: Well, we had some contact with Columbia, but not primarily about communication – just more generally, and then of course through AAPOR [American Association for Public Opinion Research], in which we participated. We did not meet Wilbur Schramm until 1963, when we were out on the west coast.... I had a visiting appointment at Berkeley and we phoned Wilbur

Schramm, who invited us for a visit. It was the first time we met. And whom else did you ask me about? [1:16:13.3]

INTERVIEWER: Who else did I say? Oh, George Gerbner and the Annenberg.

KURT LANG: George Gerbner, we first met in 1966 at the ISA [International Sociological Association] meeting Evian. He was sounding us out about joining him at University of Pennsylvania. But by that time I'd gone to Stony Brook and got roped into taking over chairmanship. This was just too big a challenge at that point to think moving again. I don't know whether he would have made us an offer, but he certainly sounded us out about an offer.

And the one other person I had contact with about communications, I mean personal contact, was Herbert Hyman at Columbia. And I should add, some rather offhanded contacts with Elihu Katz, who was always organizing sessions on communications for the ASA [American Sociological Association] and he quite often wrote to us and asked us to submit a paper. [1:17:17.6]

INTERVIEWER: What can you tell me about the rivalry or the relationship between Columbia and Chicago in your era?

KURT LANG: The rivalry in communications between Columbia and Chicago in our area; well, if you're talking about schools of thought, that's one thing. If you're talking about institutional rivalry, it's something else. Now, in terms of schools of thought, I think that Chicago approached the subject differently and was completely pushed aside until it gradually came back in the '70s, you know, through Herb Gans and Gaye Tuchman and Harvey Molotch and a few others. The three are probably not the only ones, but they're the ones that immediately come to mind. [1:18:20.7]

Columbia was simply so dominant. And now institutionally, for a time Columbia really took over Chicago. I mean Elihu Katz, Phil Ennis, Jim Coleman. Of course, Jim Coleman's is much broader than that. And Rolf Meyerson was up there for a while and I don't remember who else. There was no Chicago for a while. Don Horton left whenever it was, after about six years or whatever he had until the up or out decision. That's how I view it. I mean Chicago…Now, it isn't that Columbia didn't contribute a lot nor that Chicago was perfect in every way, but there was a tradition that just got pushed aside. [1:19:19.9]

INTERVIEWER: Okay. A couple more and then I'll be done with you. You've

been really patient and generous. Early on, radical politics was an important part of your life. How did that pan out in the post-war era?

KURT LANG: Radical politics and how it panned out in the post-war era! Well, first of all, I learned a lot in the two post-war years that I spent in Germany. I don't know whether the name C.L.R. James means anything to you, but I knew him quite well and he was a very charismatic figure. And he convinced me when I was 17 or 18 or 19 years old - or certainly wasn't any older than 19, I'd say probably about 18 when I met him - about all kinds of things, including that there would be a revolution in Germany once the war was over. It's what he called revolutionary optimism. To see if this would happen was one of the reasons I went back to Germany after the war. [1:20:31.6]

Of course, in that phase in my life I grew up. I no longer led a politically sheltered existence within a circle of essentially like minded friends. I don't mean to say we all agreed entirely, but we shared some illusions with one another in something like an informational cascade and so on. That made me see things in a much more complicated way. My work also, what I did after the war. [1:21:15.3]

And including also a man who was an old friend of my family, whom I went to visit in Berlin, a man actually older even than my father, who was sort of – not arch-conservative --, but a conservative Catholic intellectual. I learned a lot from him, too, and he made me think about things to which I had given little thought..

And when I came back to New York in 1947, just before going to Chicago, one of the people I looked up was C.L.R. James. And he handed me the same crap he had handed me five years earlier about the revolutionary situation in Germany. My reaction, having just come back, "What the hell is he talking about, you know?" [1:22:08.7]

And I read the stuff his group put out on alienation. I had read a fair amount of the Marxist literature in German, all sort of tracts that never made it here in Marxian economics and about Germany and had become much more familiar with the Hegelian roots of Marxism. I gradually drifted away from the strictly politically oriented Marxism. Part of my interest in social movements I recognize as an interest in - what's the term for it - the apocalyptic aspects of social movements. [1:23:01.1]

So I mean it isn't - I still basically consider myself a person of the left. But I try to make a distinction between the crazy left but in terms of my generation.... we

were not at all like the radical students of 1968. I mean we weren't expressive leftists. We wanted to achieve something. We didn't think that we should be exempt from the draft and let others fight while we as college students, the supposed future of the country, we should not be subject to draft. I therefore in 1968 I took the position that college students should not be privileged over the working class and so on. [1:23:43.0]

But in the same way, back in the '30s, I was probably part of a crazy left. The one thing I can say, quite clearly. I was never pro-Stalin. I had read the Dewey Commission Report and I read, of course, Trotsky and Victor Serge and did not believe the Moscow trials plus some other leftwing, anti-Soviet literature by Mensheviks. [1:24:12.2]

So you begin to realize, it's the same error the neoconservatives are making today, that you want to improve the world, but you can't make the world over, and that's something that gradually dawns on one. I mean I have been active in a modest way in civil rights and other causes. That's what is left of the old radicalism. My old friends, many of whom I haven't seen in 30 or 40 years, may think.... They may have moved in the same direction I have. They may think that I've sold out or something. But that's what it is. I mean that's what's left of it. [1:25:00.9]

I still have a certain amount of sympathy for the wild ones. I can understand why people become leftists or radicals and so on, because I remember. I know how I became one. But at the same time I think again this is where I was somewhat different from so many of my younger colleagues, who told the students in 1968, "You do whatever you have to do." I said, "No, you don't do that if you really want to stop this war. I tell you the one thing you don't do is antagonize a local population. You don't do that, because you just create enemies. And if you really want to stop this war, then do away with draft deferment for students, because that will really get the middle class opposed to the war." But they didn't listen to me. Instead they.... I was denounced as a conservative. So that's where my radicalism stood in the post-war world. [1:26:02.3]\

INTERVIEWER: And of your intellectual achievements, what are you most proud of?

KURT LANG: Well, I like to put it this way: I think I had two - in my lifetime I had two good ideas. One is the basic idea that's Etched in Memory – do you know the book? -- about why reputations survive. I mean it's not an idea that can be stated

in a single sentence, in a simple proposition. And the other one, I think, is indeed the ... the notion that underlies the MacArthur study: the construction of the image of the world, and of public opinion, in a discourse significantly influenced by way of the mass media. These are the two ideas. They're not entirely original; nothing is entirely original but we've elucidated them somewhat. [1:26:59.0]

Someone mentioned the Watergate book. OK, we've written on a number of topics. I think the Watergate book is a good book, I would certainly agree. But I think it's more something - it's more the application of ideas, an interpretation that we did in that book. Although we do deal with theoretical constructs, I don't think that they're all that original. I mean we just made intelligent use of whatever people had said and/or theorized about. [1:27:29.0]

The one thing I would add and it's something I feel a little bit sad about, is that I do believe that my Master's thesis on German generals, which I could never get published and so on - I think I published one thing that's related to it, because I got totally opposing critics from referees, and again, it's part of my naïveté. You won't believe it. I didn't know how journal articles were refereed; that when you get something from an editor saying, "Here, I've got two reviews. One says it's too much of this, and the other one says no, it's too much of the other thing, and so on, then it's up to you to finesse it through them." My reaction, "The hell with it, you know? I can't do this, then I just withdrew it" and I never submitted it again. [1:28:18.1]

And I do think that that study was interesting in its findings and interesting in its methodological approach. It's probably as good as anything else that I've done, although the idea has not had very wide application to subjects other than how military putsches get organized during conflicts with civilian governments.. It was an analysis of networks, although we didn't call it network analysis then. The study built on a statistical technique to test whether various patterns of behavior could be ordered along a single dimension. That's why I considered it methodologically innovative. I used the Guttman scalogram to prove that the unidimensionality that behaviors I judged -- indicative of distance from the putsch-- ranged on a single dimension. [1:29:19.8]

And I'm a little sorry, and if I'd been more adept at things I could have gotten it published. But I didn't realize until long afterward that I had a tacit invitation from the editor to resubmit and that one of the reviewers was pushing the editor very hard to get the thing published. But I was just so discouraged I just said, "The hell with it" and never published anything on it.

By now there is so much more material (documents, memoirs, oral history) out on the subject that if I were to try to publish it now, with the conclusions and explanation of the method, I couldn't unless I were to go through volumes of literature that I don't have the time and energy for. When I did the research, I drew on just about every source then available. You never use all sources, but you know when you've come close. But in the decade since - after all, this is 45 years ago, actually 47 years ago, about 1960 - I think it was even the late 1950s that I submitted the article, so it's almost 50 years ago and so many more documents have surfaced. I don't think they invalidate my basic thesis, but I would obviously have to correct some misperceptions. And, as I said, it's one of the best things that I've done, but it's been one of many other works churned out every years.[1:30:46.7]

For some years, this thesis was one of the most read, because of the interest Morris Janowitz at the University of Chicago had in the military. With Morris long gone, there we are. Anyhow, that's the end.

INTERVIEWER: No, that's great. I'm going to ask you one more because we may do a documentary on Merton.

KURT LANG: Oh God, yes.

INTERVIEWER: And I'm interested in your impressions of what kind of - of Robert K. Merton.

KURT LANG: I mean as a person.

INTERVIEWER: As a person. As a person and as a scholar; give me both of those.

KURT LANG: Well, I'm a little reluctant to comment on Robert K. Merton because I can't say I knew him all that well, but I will briefly review my relations with him. In -

(Phone ringing)

KURT LANG: There we go.

Gladys, aren't you hearing?

INTERVIEWER: Is that okay?

WOMAN SPEAKER: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. [1:31:56.3]

KURT LANG: Okay, well - as I said, I'm a little reluctant to comment about Robert K. Merton, because I can't say I knew him all that well. But to briefly review my contacts with him: In 1948, in the summer session after my first freshman year at the University of Chicago, I went back to New York. And being on the 52-20 club, where we drew $20 a week as unemployment insurance because we were veterans, I decided I should do something with myself. I decided to sign up with Merton's graduate seminar at Columbia University. It wasn't really a seminar. It was a huge - turned out to be a course with about I don't know how many people, not all registered, but several of the famous Columbia sociologists were at least auditing the course -- among them, Lou Coser and Peter Blau plus some others. [1:32:56.7]

I must say he really gave a brilliant presentation. He's a brilliant lecturer, a stunning expositor, and so on. And I remember I approached him once after the class to ask him about something. It was summer session and, of course, he didn't know me at all. Of course, I had to lie to get into his course. He only wanted graduate students, so I put myself down as a graduate student. And he was very cold and almost off-putting. That was why... I never talked to him then. But the course was well worthwhile and there were some young faculty at Chicago, who were going to take their PhD prelims or whatever they call it at Columbia under Merton. Several borrowed my lecture notes from the course to prepare. [1:33:52.9]

I had brief contact with him in 1961. I was summer teaching at Columbia. And I mean again, well, it was a little different then. Our offices were but a few doors apart but, although he must have known of my presence, he never came in to say "hello," at least not until his assistant or his secretary prompted him to introduce himself. He came by and asked what I was working on, and then immediately began to lecture to me on the subject and pretending he knew more about it than he really did. He does know a lot but…[1:34:30.6]

Later, I don't know how it came about but little by little, being around New York, we saw more and more of him, and I must say he was always quite gracious. But

he strikes me, and struck me then, as somewhat vain, not that he didn't have things to be vain about. He was certainly a very presentable, good-looking man and he's certainly bright as hell and certainly literate. And he knew how to express himself. [1:35:04.1]

On the other hand, I can't say that I ever was able to completely warm up to him. I mean he was someone,who struck me as never quite being spontaneous and free. He was always, in a way, playing games. Of course we all play games, that's part of sociology, role-playing, but I think he would be an interesting case for Goffman. As far as his work is concerned, I fully respect it and find him highly erudite. [1:35:45.6]

I have never been.... In the course that I took with him, the graduate seminar, he was just outlining his ideas as they appeared in his book Social Functions: Latent and Manifest or whatever its exact title. It was truly interesting, although I didn't find it terribly helpful in my own work. I have never been a functionalist and often felt that Merton has gotten more prestige and recognition for his work because of the clever way in which he uses and employs his vocabulary. He knows what to call things and his clarity of presentation is superb. [1:36:39.3]

I have been most impressed by his work on science, which to me is a much greater contribution to our field than his structure-functionalism. The functionalism is useful if you approach a subject in order to ask certain set of questions. It's useful as a sort of a guide to the kind of things you might look for. I don't consider it a particularly useful sociological framework even though I recognize that there they are such things as functioning social systems. [1:37:27.7]

But social systems don't.... Well, some of the mechanisms he writes about exist. But social systems are much more malleable than other systems. They have a history and so on and except in writing on science, he overlooks so much of that.

He is certainly one of the outstanding sociologists of his generation, and whether his reputation will live on... You asked me that question before. I think - well, I have the impression, although I'm no longer in touch with upcoming graduate students or members of your generation – my feeling is that he's already been partly written off even by your generation. That's my impression and I'm not surprised if that should be.

INTERVIEWER: Thanks very much, Kurt. That was wonderful. [1:38:22.6]

END TRANSCRIPT