

Preface

The Moral Economy of American Broadcasting

When *Gang Busters* came on the air Nanny Roy was packing her granddaughter's suitcase. It was nine o'clock in the evening in September of 1942. It did not take her long to realize that the story concerned her son. Twelve years previously, she sold dresses at a ready-to-wear shop in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, her husband ran electric trains at a foundry, and her son, Virgil Harris, processed corn at a starch factory. Then Harris became an armed robber, was caught and jailed, escaped, died—gunned down by state police—and joined the ranks of Depression-era bandits immortalized by true crime magazines, movies, and radio. Nanny Roy's granddaughter was leaving for college. Protective of her privacy, Roy promptly mailed a complaint to the sponsor, Earl Sloan and Company. The company forwarded her letter to program supervisor, Leonard Bass, whose response can be surmised from Roy's second letter. "I cannot except your regrets," she declared:

I understand perfectly if I were a mother with high financial standing this would never of happed. you can't deny the crime of all sorts the worst of all the *robbery* that happens every day thru the rich and mighty from the poor. why not expose them. put your investigator at work on the people who are stealing thru their capacity officially. . . . This sort of crime is worse to me than if a person point a gun at me and demand all I have. Yet it goes on. An 18 year old boy steals a sack of feed an inner tube or a tire and he gets sentenced to 20 years in an institution. let the big feller rob in his undermining way there's no publicity he goes on lectures to society and is met by the broadcasters with a hand-shake.¹

The true crime show had failed Nanny Roy in a variety of ways. Its researchers had pried into her family history. Its writers had omitted aspects of her son's life that drove him to rob banks. Its sponsors and producers had brushed off her point that workers turned to banditry to survive the Great Depression—a recent memory even as the country began to recover during the war. A modern reader might wonder why she bothered to correspond with broadcasters at all, given how well she understood and articulated the complicity of the commercial broadcasting industry in the inequities of American capitalism. Yet she did write, twice, and received a response. Nanny Roy's letter conveys both her sense of social justice and her expectations of reciprocity from the radio industry.

Many Americans shared her sentiments. Between 1920 and 1950, during the “golden age” of radio, they extended communal values to the increasingly complex national economy and politics. Populist movements revolted against the rise of the impersonal bureaucratic nation state and modern industrial society. The union rank and file believed in “moral capitalism,” a social order where industrial employers had a responsibility to provide a fair share for workers. Large corporations advertised themselves as friendly neighborhood stores to appease restive consumers. And the expanding federal government had to meet rising expectations of fairness from the loyal citizenry. This moral economy governed the development of radio as an industry and a mass medium.³ The industry operated on tacit assumptions that held broadcasters responsible to their audiences. Americans looked to radio not only to reflect but to resolve some of the tensions they felt about the nature of big institutions, the location of social power, and the future of both market and political democracy. This book describes how their expectations shaped the medium.

Today, the idea that listeners' sense of justice shaped broadcasters' production practices appears to defy common sense. Once the main ground for scholarly battles over media effects and national culture, in the era of television radio became the province of memorabilia and tape collectors. Ronald Reagan's deregulation policies made it relevant again, inspiring influential studies of how advertising and corporate monopoly stifled programming and technical innovation. Participatory amateur radio in the early 1920s gave place to one-way local commercial, educational, and non-profit broadcasting. Following the Radio Act of 1927 and especially the Communication Act of 1934, national networks dominated broadcasting and consolidated American national culture. After the ratings services appeared in the early 1930s, broadcasters rarely confronted real listeners, only “demographics” classi-

fied by gender, race, geography, income, and purchasing habits. Networks, ad agencies, and sponsors erected a self-serving system of pseudoscientific measurement to render audiences into a commodity that could be more easily sold to agencies and clients alike. Despite flawed methods, ratings have persisted as the foundation for commercial broadcasting into the twenty-first century. “Radio,” legal scholar Yochai Benkler concluded in 2006, “for a brief moment destabilized the mass-media model, but quickly converged to it.” After that, “there were no more genuine inflection points in the structure of mass media.”³ According to this bird’s eye view of the industry, listeners had little impact on its everyday organization but bore the brunt of the consequent corporate media system.

To those who take a closer look, however, radio’s past seems less decided. Local stations in the 1920s, it turns out, forged symbiotic relationships with their farmer, immigrant, and middle-class neighbors. The networks did not blanket the entire country until the late 1930s. Regional chains and local stations continued to operate alongside the national system. The Federal Communications Commission used antitrust law to break apart the National Broadcasting Company in 1943. Commercials that hailed shopping as a form of citizenship inspired consumer boycotts. Network programs created a sense of intimacy rather than an impersonal national culture. Listeners imagined personal connections with radio characters, and expected scriptwriters, actors, and sponsors to heed their advice. These new accounts amend the tale of network and commercial dominance. They begin to explain why so many Americans—over 80 percent by 1940—owned radios and listened on average for four hours daily, and why in a pinch families would rather give up their furniture, linen, or icebox than their radio set. George Washington Hill, the president of the American Tobacco Company and one of the first radio sponsors, defined radio as 10 percent entertainment and 90 percent advertising.⁴ His often-cited quip becomes more programmatic than descriptive once one looks, as this book does, beyond business plans and political debates to the everyday practices and expectations at work in the making of broadcasting.

The Listener’s Voice argues that audiences were critical components in the making of radio, the establishment of its genres and social operations. During the Jazz Age and the Great Depression, with no scientific structure yet available to analyze and predict audience response, radio producers created devices and programs relying on individual listeners’ phone calls, telegrams, and letters. In their responses, Americans demanded access to radio production, aiming also to reframe the terms on which modern institutions,

the radio industry included, structured their lives. In this period, listener response inspired changes in radio technology, genres, and institutions. Writers and stars used their relationship with listeners to gain some creative autonomy from network and agency executives. By wartime, however, the broadcasting industry relied mainly on scientific management of audiences. Ratings and surveys of specialized markets shaped production choices. Radio genres had standardized and producers no longer invited listeners to participate in the creative process, allowing them only to express taste preferences. Networks consolidated their power over programming decisions, edging out input from audiences, agencies, writers, and stars. It also became harder for radio personalities to convince listeners that their individual testimonies mattered. But scientific marketing never triumphed completely—as television producers embraced ratings, audiences gained more control over local radio. By the time postwar prosperity arrived, centralization and scientific methods gave way to local reciprocal forms of radio production.

This book thus uses radio history as a lens to examine the moral economy that Americans imagined for themselves and for the nation. Its chapters proceed chronologically, focusing on key moments of creative, intellectual, and ethical discovery, when certain listeners and broadcasters challenged corporate standards of ownership and control. Radio technology, and the amateurs, hardware bootleggers, and sports fans who influenced its initial development, appear prominently in the Jazz Age. The Federal Radio Commission becomes a key character in 1927, when it destroys popular visions for a decentralized broadcasting system in favor of national networks, leaving it to radio fan magazines to re-educate listeners in living with the commercial network system. Radio serials enter the narrative during the Depression, when scriptwriters and fans negotiate their storylines. Scientific audience research comes into focus on the eve of the war, when German philosopher Theodor Adorno, having just escaped the Nazi brand of scientific management, confronts its authority at the Radio Research Project, at Princeton and later at Columbia University. At the same juncture, true crime shows elicit poor listeners' disenchantment with corporate radio. And the music industry takes center stage in postwar prosperity, when rhythm and blues disc jockeys, in collaboration with fans, challenge established norms of music production and property. Together, all the strands of this story describe how Americans shaped the early broadcasting industry, and, in the process, invented a moral media economy—a set of uncodified but effective assumptions as to what was and was not legitimate in the relationship between the industry and its audiences.

This story matters because it calls attention to the recurring cycles of popular participation and corporate control in modern media. Scholars usually look back to the pre-1920s experimenter era of radio to imagine a utopian relationship between a mass medium and its audiences. According to media theorist Henry Jenkins, when amateurs relinquished control of radio to broadcasting stations, Americans lost “the potential for a broad-based participatory medium” to “corporate interests.” Digital media, he suggests, may experience the same fate. More generally, cultural historian Michael Denning notes “the great paradox” of twentieth-century media where “the genuine democratization of cultural audiences required such large capital investment and technical training as to have restricted greatly the production of films and broadcasts.”⁵ A small community of skilled enthusiasts—radio amateurs or computer hackers, for example—develops a collaborative medium. But by the time wider audiences gain access to it, the gap between corporate producers and mass audiences grows to the extent that collaboration is no longer possible. This book instead explores how mass audiences have applied the participatory ethic of the early experimenter period to their relationship with commercial cultural industries.

To begin with, commercial industries needed audience participation to create and reinvent a mass medium. Sportscasts owed their raucous ambient sound, and soaps their fantastic plot twists, to listeners’ demanding enthusiasm. Even after corporations took control of the medium, in periods of crisis industries had to abandon scientific marketing in favor of direct interaction with audiences. When television encroached on radio’s dominance, network radio failed because it reused old programs and stars. Local radio survived because it developed new formats in collaboration with local audiences. Histories of sound reproduction technologies have focused on corporate standards for radio sound. *The Listener’s Voice* amends these accounts to show how Americans continually reinvented the new sound medium to help them perceive modern structures of power and authority that encroached on their daily lives. Even with wireless technology already in place by 1920, Americans still needed to invent radio broadcasting as a new “medium” in a broad sense suggested by art historian Rosalind Krauss: to discover specific instruments, styles, and business practices that would extract cultural meanings from the technology.⁶ In response to listeners’ letters, engineers, writers, performers, and managers made specific formal choices. These choices in turn suggested new forms of sound perception and social order.

Precisely because corporate producers wielded more power than mass

audiences, these periods of interaction and negotiation raised questions about social justice in media and society. Media scholars have celebrated audiences—from teenage Madonna look-alikes to *Star Trek* fan fiction writers—who refashioned mass culture to fit their own needs. Let us not. Popular critiques of corporate capitalism became most articulate not during the freewheeling experimenter era, but when the industry upset audience expectations of reciprocity—when networks displaced local radio and when scientific audience research made it impossible for individual listeners to affect radio production. Some audiences proved more likely to draw parallels between political, economic, and cultural domains. Ethnic and rural audiences defended local stations more readily than urban middle-class listeners. Down-and-out Americans were more prone to relate radio executives' disdain for listeners to Depression-era economic inequities. Black listeners appreciated some minstrel performers' artistry yet saw race humor as evidence of their second-class status as audiences and citizens. Such moments provide a unique record of the vernacular social imagination—the ways ordinary Americans conceived and enacted their relationship to big institutions. They allow us to trace modern institution building from the bottom up, as political historian Meg Jacobs described state formation. If cultural historians looked for “popular political theory” in Betty Grable pinups and Hollywood films, this book looks for vernacular political economy in ordinary people's own writings to radio producers.⁷ When the industry upset audience expectations of reciprocity, it lent listeners modes of perception and argument that enabled them to critique the industry itself, as well as other institutions and the economic, racial, and gender inequities of modern America.

As a historical touchstone for contemporary debates about participatory media and corporate power, early radio serves well to investigate the American economic moral sense. Gifts, trade, consumption, revolts, elections, and law have all provided material for specific studies of reciprocity. Several wide-ranging and influential accounts disagree about its origins, timing, and attributes. French sociologist Marcel Mauss defines “gift economy” as bonds of obligation created by gift exchange in “archaic” societies, from the ancient Romans to the Haida and Tlingit of the American Northwest. British historian E. P. Thompson considers the “moral economy” of eighteenth-century food riots a prepolitical response to capitalism. Yochai Benkler believes that a new non-market economy of “social production” is inseparable from the digital communication networks. Meg Jacobs places the “pocketbook politics” of consumer entitlement in the early twentieth century, encompassing the

welfare capitalism of the 1920s, New Deal social security, and the economic citizenship of the mid-century fiscal state. These scholars describe related concepts and draw on each other's theories.⁸ Yet it is hard to grasp a phenomenon described alternatively as precapitalist or consumerist, primitive or digital, prepolitical or fundamental to liberal politics in America. A focus on an emerging medium resolves some of these contradictions. Media innovation requires reciprocity; with each new innovation, moral media economies inevitably resurface, reshaping and occasionally defying established standards of property.

More generally, the history of American radio presents a paradox, where apparently premodern or postcolonial sensibilities permeate modern life in the West. "Modernity," in its multifarious summations, spans Cubist painting and New Orleans jazz; railroads and the assembly line; statistics and sociology; liberal democracy and colonialism; corporations and migrant labor; simultaneity and speed; the popular press, cinema, and radio. Outside of the West, the story goes, these changes in technology, economy, politics, art, and sense perception encounter indigenous practices and worldviews, producing "alternative" modernities. In Nigeria, the domestic film industry thrives on video pirates' expertise and distribution networks. In Egypt, students, shopkeepers, and taxi drivers hear a moral guide to political judgment in the rhythm and tone of Islamic cassette sermons. In Cameroon, the poor use their belief in witchcraft as a weapon in struggles over material and political resources. The West, all but free of these aberrations, enjoys the classic modernity of free market capitalism, instrumental rationality, and disinterested public debate. The story of radio instead suggests that piracy, sensibility, and belief may be fundamental to modern political economy everywhere.⁹

Commercial broadcasters, for one, put faith in modern scientific surveys. American population management projects stretched from the first U.S. census in the 1780s to the opening of the Harvard Bureau of Business Research in 1911, Army intelligence tests during World War I, and Robert and Helen Lynd's quest for average "Middletown" Americans in Muncie, Indiana, in the 1920s. Scientific methods soared in popularity in 1936, when George Gallup's and Elmo Roper's representative sampling polls correctly predicted Franklin Delano Roosevelt's victory in the 1936 presidential election. Surveys of media audiences followed, with mixed results. After several unhelpful pilot studies, Radio-Keith-Orpheum and Walt Disney Studios refused to renew their contracts with Gallup's Audience Research Institute. But broadcast ratings took hold because they helped networks sell potential audiences to sponsors.

Telephone surveys and audimeter machines underestimated radio audience size by up to 20 percent but shared in the egalitarian authority of opinion polls. Gallup and Roper redefined civic participation when they conveyed the nation's opinion on the economy and military intervention. Network statistics departments trumpeted sponsored radio as a democracy when they quantified and categorized listener preferences. After some grumbling and protests, Americans learned to imagine society as a rational system, known and managed through surveys.¹⁰

Or so it seemed. Radio fans instead relied on what political theorist William Connolly called “visceral modes of appraisal.” They argued from the particular—a sack of feed, a tube, a tire—and opted for practical knowledge against the systematic rigor offered by the networks. They patronized the bootleg radio tube industry, dispensed advice to fictional radio characters, and sent them gifts. They favored trenchant language. Nanny Roy, retired saleslady (“you can’t deny the crime of all sorts the worst of all the *robbery* that happens every day thru the rich and mighty from the poor. why not expose them”), violated every standard of detachment, diffidence, prosody, and voice evident in the scientific writing of Hugh Beville, NBC research manager (“It must be admitted that there is still some doubt about the general listening pattern of the lowest economic group”). Excitable and unruly, radio fans resemble neither the mass public constituted by ratings or opinion polls, nor the anonymous and impartial citizenry debating politics in the bourgeois public sphere, as German philosopher Jürgen Habermas famously defined it. Their demands for reciprocity seem to confirm a notion, widely shared today, that sentiments make reasoned judgments impossible.¹¹

A long view of audience correspondence tells otherwise. Like the popular periodicals of the eighteenth century, broadcasters cultivated exchange with their publics. In 1711, the London *Spectator*, a popular general circulation daily and, by many accounts, the birthplace of the public sphere, invited gentlemen and, less enthusiastically, artisans, shopgirls, and servants to send in reports and opinions as “materials” for the editor’s “speculations” on literary style and urban life. The *Spectator* appealed to an imaginary public of disinterested citizens, but published letters to the editor and accounts of coffee shop debates to trace the circulation of opinion among actual readers. Broadcasters, too, addressed an imaginary public of citizen consumers, wondering if their listeners really existed. The earliest radio stations installed telegraph and telephone operators in the studio to report listener responses in real time. Networks organized mail contests and set up departments to

process and answer listener mail. To sort and route to the artists, program managers, and sponsors the more than 12,697,000 letters received during 1931, the Columbia Broadcasting System's audience division reportedly trebled its personnel and facilities. In March 1936 alone NBC claimed to have spent more than \$300,000 on postage replying to 1,015,372 letters. Radio fan magazines printed readers' opinions in columns entitled "Voice of the Listener" and "The Listener Speaks."¹² Marketing drove much of this, but ideas did circulate, letters were written, sent, read, and answered. Broadcasters did not conjure up their listening public with a throw of a switch. The public participated in its own making.

Like the serial novels of the nineteenth century, radio programs unfolded as if in an intimate conversation with their audiences. Around the mid-nineteenth century, Congress reduced the basic U.S. postage rate to two to three cents per half ounce, where it remained virtually unchanged for the next hundred years. Rural delivery, motorized post carriers, and airmail came in the early twentieth century. In 1861, the U.S. Postal Service carried 161 million letters, or three times more per capita than twenty years earlier. In 1930, it carried 28 billion. As expectations of personal contact expanded beyond one's home and neighborhood, novelists, stage headliners, and movie stars became objects of epistolary affection. Serial narratives especially promoted "communion between the writer and the public," as William Thackeray put it, "something continual, confidential, something like personal affection." Radio, to advertisers' delight, also made "thousands of people feel free to sit down and write a friendly and personal letter to a large corporation." Sensitive microphones, crooning voices, living room radios, protracted storylines, and informal speech amplified the sense of a "personal touch." Commercials used personal appeal to direct consumer desires. Roosevelt, who received more mail from his constituents than any previous president, began his "fireside chats" with a drink of water and an aside, "It is very hot here in Washington." Yet listeners addressed broadcasters as intimate enemies as well as friends, as Roosevelt found out from the angry responses to his short-lived Supreme Court packing plan.¹³ Intimacy served as a mode of judgment as well as a persuasion technique.

Far from an aberrant alternative to modern scientific audience research, this epistolary exchange, and the moral economy it sustained, were fundamental to the making of broadcasting. This became clear as I scanned decades of reader columns in nine radio fan magazines, read thousands of fan letters in seventeen archival collections across the United States, and traced their

authors' lives through census records. (Some of these letters, their authors' bios, and many radio sounds that inspired them can be found at thelisteners-voice.org.) Over and over, networks and agencies spent millions "educating" the public on the democratic nature of ratings and sponsored broadcasting, against the persistent criticism of reformers, scholars, and lay listeners. Their monumental attempt to produce individualist and property-abiding "citizen consumers" compares in scale, if not violence, to reeducation projects aiming to forge new "Soviet persons" in twentieth-century socialist states. Yet with each creative turn in broadcasting history, the very conditions of production ate away at their powers of persuasion. Engineers bent patent regulations; disc jockeys, copyright laws. Early broadcasters listened to local audiences. Network writers negotiated with fans. These practices embodied the ideas of reciprocity that listeners articulated when they confronted national corporate networks and the formulaic ratings system. Today, media executives once more speak of "reeducating" the public on the sanctity of intellectual property. Lawsuits and publicity campaigns presume that file-sharing audiences will stop and listen, just like Nipper, the fox terrier who forever heeds "his master's voice" over the gramophone loudspeaker in the HMV trademark, first used in 1902 by the Victor Talking Machine Company.¹⁴ *The Listener's Voice* offers reciprocity between speakers and listeners as a persistent counterpoint to the relationship this famed drawing prescribes.

Notes

Preface

1. Mrs. W. W. Roy to Leonard Bass, October 18, 1942, box 16, folder GB 281, 2 of 2, LC-WOR; *Real Detective*, clipping, used for "Case of Virgil Harris," GB, September 18, 1942; box 16, folder GB 281, 1 of 2, LC-WOR. This book relies on thousands of letters, most of them handwritten. For the sake of clarity, I did not use "sic" to mark numerous spelling and grammatical errors and typos in listeners' letters and broadcasters' memos. Whenever I was in doubt about a possible error in a handwritten letter, I used the correct spelling in the quotation. Unless otherwise noted, occupation, age, ethnicity, and residential data on letter writers is taken from the U.S. federal census records for 1910, 1920, and 1930, available at Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com/search/rectype/census/usfedcen/default.aspx>.

2. See, for example, Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1978), on community; Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), on populism; Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), on workers; Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), on corporations; James Sparrow, "'Buying Our Boys Back': The Mass Foundations of Fiscal Citizenship in World War II," *Journal of Policy History* 20, no. 2 (2008): 263–86; and Meg Jacobs, "'How About Some Meat?': The Office of Price Administration, Consumption Politics, and State Building from the Bottom Up, 1941–1946," *Journal of American History* 84 (December 1997): 910–41, on wartime government; and E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* 50 (1971): 76–136, on the concept of "moral economy."

3. See Susan Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899–1922* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), on amateurs; Robert McChesney, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for the Control of U. S. Broadcasting, 1928–1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), on legislation; Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920–1934* (Washington, D.C., and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994) and Thomas Streeter, *Selling the Air: A Critique of the Policy of Commercial Broadcasting in the United States*

(Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), on advertising and surveys; and Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), on national culture. Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 27, 196.

4. See, for example, Derek W. Vaillant, *Sounds of Reform: Progressivism and Music in Chicago, 1873-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), and Clifford J. Doerksen, *American Babel: Rogue Radio Broadcasters of the Jazz Age* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), on local stations; Michael J. Socolow, "To Network a Nation: N.B.C., C.B.S. and the Development of National Network Radio in the United States, 1925-1950" (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 2001), on network coverage and the FCC; Alexander Russo, *Points on the Dial: Golden Age Radio Beyond the Networks* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), on regional networks; Charles F. McGovern, *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), on citizenship; Kathy Newman, *Radio Active: Advertising and Consumer Activism, 1935-1947* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), on boycotts; Jason Loviglio, *Radio's Intimate Public: Network Broadcasting and Mass-Mediated Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), Bruce Lenthall, *Radio's America: The Great Depression and the Rise of Modern Mass Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), and Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (New York: Times Books, 1999), on intimacy. Claude Fischer, *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 22 (radio ownership); Erik Barnouw, *The Golden Web: A History of Broadcasting from 1933 to 1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 6 (giving up necessities); George Washington Hill quoted in Charles A. Siepmann, *Radio, Television, and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 49.

5. Henry Jenkins, "Contacting the Past: Early Radio and the Digital Revolution," *MIT Communications Forum*, December 3, 1997, http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/papers/jenkins_cp.html; Michael Denning, "The End of Mass Culture," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 37 (Spring 1990): 15-16.

6. See, for example, Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002); Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002); and Steve J. Wurtzler, *Electric Sounds: Technological Change and the Rise of Corporate Mass Media, Film and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). This argument extends Rosalind Krauss's concept of "reinventing the medium" in visual arts; see Krauss, "'The Rock': William Kentridge's Drawings for Projection," *October* 92 (Spring 2000): 12.

7. For example, "active audience" theory celebrates audiences' power to reinterpret media narratives. It took as its starting point Stuart Hall's "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language*, ed. Stuart Hall et al. (London: Hutchinson, 1980); for examples, see David Morley, *The Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding* (London: British

Film Institute, 1980); and Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992). On parallels, or “homologies,” between different social domains, see Raymond Williams, “Typification and Homology,” in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 104–5; and Pierre Bourdieu, “The Intellectual Field: A World Apart,” in *In Other Words: Essays Toward a Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity, 1990), 140–41. Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America, Politics and Society in Twentieth-century America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004); Robert B. Westbrook, *Why We Fought: Forging American Obligations in World War II* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2004) (“popular political theory,” Betty Grable); Lawrence W. Levine, *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) (Hollywood films).

8. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason For Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), originally published as “Essai sur le don: Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques,” *L'année sociologique* n.s. 1 (1923–24): 30–186; Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd”; Thompson, “Folklore, Anthropology and Social History,” *Indian Historical Review* 3 (1977): 252–72 (Mauss and gift giving); Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*; Yochai Benkler, “Coase’s Penguin, or, Linux and The Nature of the Firm,” *Yale Law Journal* 112 (2002): 33 (Mauss and gift giving); Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*; Jacobs, “How About Some Meat?” 913 (Thompson and moral economy). Mauss and Thompson inspired many followers and critics; one of many accounts that considers “gift economy” and “moral economy” as related concepts of reciprocity is Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), 68–70.

9. Useful starting points for the study of modernity and its varieties are Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988); Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, ed., *Alternative Modernities* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001). Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008), ch. 7; Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); and Peter Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997). This argument extends points made in Ann Laura Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies,” *Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (December 2001): 829–65.

10. Sarah E. Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007) (Middletown, popular critique, then acceptance, of surveys); Susan Ohmer, *George Gallup in Hollywood* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Streeter, *Selling the Air* (ratings); Herta Herzog, “Radio—The First Post-War Year,” *POQ* 10 (Fall 1946): 311–12; Hans Zeisel, “The

Coincidental Audience Measurement,” *Education on the Air* (1946): 387, 399. On population management, see Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago and London: University Of Chicago Press, 1991), 87–104.

11. William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Carlo Ginzburg, “Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method,” in *Dupin, Holmes, Peirce: The Sign of Three*, ed. Umberto Eco and Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 81–118 (reasoning from the particular); James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 309–41 (practical knowledge); “Counterfeit Vacuum Tubes Now Made on Huge Scale,” *BG*, September 23, 1923; Mrs. W. T. Oppemann to John Murray, June 4, 1944, box 46, folder 1, WHS-IP (advice to a character); Orrin E. Jr. Dunlap, “Listening-In,” *NYT*, April 24, 1932 (gifts); Hugh M. Beville, “The ABCD’s of Radio Audiences,” *POQ* 4 (June 1940): 199; Jürgen Habermas *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989).

12. The *Spectator* is the key early example in Habermas’s account of the public sphere; here I extend the more recent definition of “publics” in Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005). Joseph Chaves, “Strangers and Publics,” *Media History* 14, no. 3 (2008): 303 (*Spectator*); Julius Weinberger, “Broadcast Transmitting Stations of the Radio Corporation of America,” *PIRE* 12, no. 6 (1924): 779 (telegraph and telephone); NBC Statistical Department, “A Brief Study of the Appeal and Popularity of ‘The Goldbergs,’” July 25, 1932, box 13, folder 58, WHS-NBC (mail contests); “Radio Fans Found More Mail Minded,” *RG*, January 28, 1932 (CBS); “Fan Mail,” *Literary Digest*, May 22, 1937 (NBC); “Voice of the Listener,” *RG*, February 6, 1937; “The Listener Speaks,” *RPW*, April 7, 1927.

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Chapter 1

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