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"Mapping the New Mental World Created by Radio": Media Messages, Cultural Politics, and Cantril and Allport's *The Psychology of Radio*

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During the 1930s a number of interesting critiques of science and society emerged in the social sciences in general, and in psychology in particular. One example of this trend is The Psychology of Radio (1935), authored by Harvard psychologist Gordon Allport and his former student Hadley Cantril. The book, which was intended for both professional and lay audiences, sought to open discussion on the effects of the pervasive presence of radio, and to throw into relief the political, cultural, and economic contexts in which this new form of mass communication was embedded.

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, radio suddenly emerged as a powerful new form of mass communication. According to the Columbia Broadcasting System, of the 29,904,663 homes counted by the 1930 U.S. census, 21,455,799, or approximately 70%, possessed radios in 1935; estimates placed the number of Americans who were habitual radio listeners at nearly 78,000,000 (Cantril & Allport, 1935, p. 85). By decade's end more families owned radio receiving sets than owned telephones or automobiles, had plumbing, or subscribed to newspapers or magazines (Cantril, 1940, p. xiii). Of even more significance, perhaps, radio broadcasting permitted a mass array of individuals across regional, class, ethnic, and racial lines to experience the same live event at the same time: During these years it was estimated that 20,000,000 people could be found tuned in simultaneously to the same program (Cantril & Allport, p. 3). As Americans experienced the rapidity with

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which radio broadcasting was becoming embedded within the patterns of everyday life, few doubted that its presence was effecting dramatic social, economic, and political changes. But what the specific nature of those changes might be remained a matter of great uncertainty.

In 1935 Harvard psychologist Gordon Allport and his former student Hadley Cantril challenged their colleagues to acknowledge that the "radio revolution had caught social psychologists unprepared" to answer the flood of questions that had arisen about a radio-saturated social world (p. 4). Asserting that "the really important problems of the radio are now psychological problems" (p. 4), they stated that the time had arrived for psychologists "to map out from their own point of view the new mental world created by radio" (p. vii). The vehicle for their argument was *The Psychology of Radio*, a work that was as much an attempt to exemplify the proper scope and moral economy of the still youthful field of social psychology as it was an exploration of the topic at hand. In Cantril and Allport's view, social psychology's progress could no longer be measured by the "number of textbooks annually produced, nor by the mere plausibility of its pronouncements." What was required instead was that the field be judged by "the incisiveness and the validity of its analysis of significant social problems" (p. vii). Given that radio was showing itself to be "preeminent as a means of social control, and epochal in its influence upon the mental horizons of men," its salience as a significant social problem was clear (p. viii).

But the legitimacy of this assertion was by no means clear to Cantril and Allport's colleagues, for two reasons. First, to tie social psychological research so closely to current events appeared to encroach upon the autonomy of academic scientists to set their own research agendas, in which the pursuit of "pure" science —held to be truth's gold standard—presumably necessitated detachment from the social world, with its demands for immediately usable knowledge. But the authors of *The Psychology of Radio* went beyond arguing that social psychologists should speak to contemporary social problems: In asserting that psychologists should be judged not only by the subject matter they chose but also by "the incisiveness and the validity" of the analyses they produced, they raised the question of who would do the judging. That their work was published by a mainstream press and intended for a general audience—rather than directed solely to their peers, through authorized disciplinary venues—indicated that they believed the public should constitute the jury regarding the significance of scientific work. In *The Psychology of Radio*, Cantril and Allport offered a model of the social psychological expert as a partner with the public in seeking to make sense of matters of political import and social philosophy. In doing so, they challenged the norms of scientific inquiry shared by many of their orthodox peers. (For further elaboration of this point see Pandora, 1997.)

Social Psychology as Social Activism

Historians of psychology have drawn important insights about the dynamics of social psychology during the 1930s by using the founding of such organizations as the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI) in 1936 as touchstones, but there is much more to learn about psychology's cultural politics by reaching further into the work of this period.[1] Historical examination of such neglected works as *The Psychology of Radio*—which in its genesis was a pre-SPSSI rather than a post-SPSSI phenomenon—offers scholars new insights into the hard-fought disciplinary battles that marked psychology during the 1930s, and of the wider intellectual, social, and political referents and ramifications of these disputes. Intended by its authors as an effort to locate social psychology squarely in the midst of the public arena, *The Psychology of Radio* was a contribution to an ongoing political debate about the corporate control of this newly influential communications medium. *The Psychology of Radio* offered itself as an example of what social psychology in the public interest might look like in a brave new world undergoing technological transformations. It was representative of a new vision of the relationship between scientific researchers and the larger polity, one that Allport a few years later would describe as a commitment to the pursuit of "psychology for society's sake" rather than to "psychology for science's sake" (Bruner & Allport, 1940, p. 775).

Although striving to present a "factual report" characterized by "a strictly objective and dispassionate attitude," the authors did not interpret this duty as foreclosing their obligation to state their conviction that impartially rendered scientific research "reaches the fullest justification when it is employed not in the advancement of private profit but in the promotion of the social and intellectual growth of mankind" (Cantril & Allport, 1935, p. 272). Cantril and Allport therefore advocated that radio "in order best to serve the American public ... should be removed from the dictatorship of private profits, and at the same time be kept free from narrow political domination," and they argued that broadcasters should devote air time to discussing these issues in an open and forthright manner (p. 271). In their terms, objectivity indicated a stance that endorsed seeking out information on which to base a reasoned interpretation, not the suppression of interpretation. One reviewer endorsed this view, congratulating Cantril and Allport for producing a "splendid book" that was "a credit to academic applied science," characterizing it as "a well-written survey of the entire field of the radio, together with results of a highly

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[1] For an introductory overview of SPSSI's initial phase, see Finison, 1986. The whole issue of *JSI* containing Finison's article is devoted to SPSSI's history. I elaborate on this argument in Pandora, 1997. In this work, I focus on psychologists Gordon Allport, Gardner Murphy, and Lois Barclay Murphy, and the intersection of their work in personality and social psychology with debates within the larger polity.

significant research program. Scientific objectivity is combined with an urbane social-mindedness which is amused by the antics of pressure groups and which sees nothing axiomatic in the profit motive" (Kirkpatrick, 1936, p. 816). Objectivity and values were not held by all to be mutually exclusive.

The Psychology of Radio is representative of a body of work critiquing science and society from a social democratic perspective that emerged during the 1930s in America that has yet to fully assayed by scholars. The audacity and creative intensity characteristic of American science during the 1930s has been overshadowed by presumptions that World War II had such a profound influence on science that what came before is of little consequence for events that followed the war's end. (Indeed, the decade of the 1930s is customarily assigned to an era known as "the interwar years.") Although World War II clearly had a powerful impact on the career of the sciences, and the atomic age contained distinctive cultural imperatives of its own, I believe that the cultural politics of these later decades cannot be fully charted unless closer attention is given to the complexities of the tensions that marked the social science of the Depression era, in which various generational cohorts attempted to make sense of the failures of capitalism, the success of new political philosophies such as fascism, and the increasingly interconnected nature of global life in the wake of technological developments. The commitments displayed in *The Psychology of Radio* speak to each of these concerns.

In a world in which we have become jaded by the presence of television, cellular telephones, and cyberspace, it may take some effort to appreciate the assertion that radio "represents a technological advance and a commercial achievement of the first magnitude . . . [and] is an agency of incalculable power for controlling the actions of men" (Cantril & Allport, 1935, p. 3). But the ease with which the voices of demagogues, propagandists, and commercial interests could be amplified and spread from coast to coast via radio represented a startling departure from the status quo media constellation that had existed but a few years previously. Furthermore, the effects of this novel communications medium had begun to unfold during a time of considerable confusion and uncertainty, due to the severe economic conditions wrought by the Great Depression. Indeed, *The Psychology of Radio* highlights the political implications that this new medium of persuasion held out for the polity: References in the opening section to foreign leaders such as Mussolini and Hitler and to demagogic domestic political figures such as Senator Huey Long and Father Coughlin signaled their immediate significance.[2] Cantril and Allport's most important point was that radio broadcasting was an ongoing social experiment that was generating unsettling new phenomena, if social psychologists cared to listen.

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[2] On Long and Coughlin, see Alan Brinkley's (1982) insightful study. On the 1930s in general, see Pells, 1973; Leuchtenberg, 1963; and Susman, 1984. On scientific activism, see Kuznick, 1987.

Background to *The Psychology of Radio*

Radio and Corporate America in the 1920s and 1930s

Radio initially developed along two tracks in the United States. Business interests conceived of radio as a literal analogue of telegraphy: Radio was *wireless* telegraphy, and could be used in circumstances in which traditional cable communication was impossible, as in transmitting ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore messages. Indeed, the development of radio as a public communications medium instead proceeded largely through the enthusiasm and initiative of radio hobbyists, called amateur operators. The first nationwide relay of radio broadcasts, for example, came about through the efforts of amateurs. When technological advances allowed radio buffs to transmit messages via audio (rather than being restricted to Morse Code), it was they who first explored the potential of radio as entertainment. As amateur operators began experimenting with playing phonograph record concerts and other material over the air, what had been a popular hobby blossomed into a public craze. By 1922 the *New York Times* reported that "in every neighborhood people are stringing wires to catch the ether wave currents" (quoted in S. Douglas, 1987, p. 303), and by the end of that year 690 stations had been licensed (G. Douglas, 1987, p. 34). During this period, radio stations were owned by a diverse array of entities that included newspapers, department stores, colleges and universities, churches, labor unions, and municipalities (G. Douglas, p. 33). In the next two years, sales of radio receiving sets climbed from $60 million to $358 million (p. 75). That money could be made by selling radio sets to an enthusiastic public was evident, but whether money could be made from broadcasting itself was unknown. When large corporations belatedly began to catch up with the public interest in radio broadcasting, their attention turned to how programming itself, not simply the sale of receiving sets, might generate profits. As communications theorist Robert McChesney (1993) indicates, it was not until the end of the 1920s that "the modern network-dominated advertising-supported broadcasting system came into existence and, therefore, only then that significant elements of the American population had a chance to experience commercial broadcasting and formulate a response" (p. 5).

The debates over commercialization were made particularly urgent by the fact that there existed only a limited number of frequencies on which to broadcast, and the question of how the "ether" (that is, the electromagnetic spectrum) was to be parceled out—and whether the increasingly powerful corporate stations would dominate the new medium—became a highly charged issue. Overcrowding of the airwaves had already created tensions in the previous decade when the Navy grew exasperated at interference by amateur operators and used its influence in Washington to lobby for ways to restrict or eliminate hobbyists in the name of national security and public safety (S. Douglas, 1987, pp. 209–210). But the amateur operators fought back hard, arguing that the broadcasting spectrum was a publicly held

resource and that neither military nor commercial interests deserved priority in making use of it. Psychologist George Hartmann gave voice to this viewpoint in 1936, when he observed in a review of *The Psychology of Radio* that "the physically limited wave lengths" that carried radio broadcasting, like the nation's "vast public lands . . . have been almost completely dispersed among private interests and none reserved for the general welfare" (p. 227). Conceiving of the "ether" as a public resource challenged the right of corporate interests to appropriate this domain for the purpose of private profit. The debate over who owned the airwaves was first joined in this context, with amateurs establishing the argument that radio consti-tuted a realm, in historian Susan Douglas's words, where "the individual voice did not have to defer to the authority of business or the state" (S. Douglas, 1987, p. 214). The United States was not the only country debating the question of radio commer-cialization in this period: Great Britain and Canada, for example, were also engaged in lengthy public discussions over how the costs of this new medium would be underwritten, although unlike the United States, they would decide the issue in favor of noncommercial broadcasting systems in 1932 (McChesney, 1993, p. 8; see also Smulyan, 1994).

The issue of how radio was to be regulated was placed on the public policy agenda in a more focused form when Congress passed the Radio Act of 1927, which set up temporary guidelines. The debate would effectively be decided in favor of corporate control of radio in 1934 with the creation of the Federal Communications Commission, although this would not be immediately evident. In this period, then —from 1928 to 1935—an American reform movement originated, generating "a significant critique of the limitations of network-dominated, advertising-supported broadcasting for the communication requirements of a democratic society" (McChesney, 1993, p. 3). Educators, religious groups, labor organizations, civic entities, and intellectuals mounted vociferous opposition to the prospect of the cor-porate control of radio and to its potential effects on the polity. John Dewey, for example, in a radio address from 1934, argued that radio could serve as the "most powerful instrument of social education the world has ever seen" or be "used to dis-tort facts and to mislead the public mind." Dewey contended that "one of the most crucial problems of the present" was whether or not the latter use would predomi-nate, or whether radio would be employed "for the social public interest" (quoted in McChesney, p. 86). Joy Elmer Morgan, chair of the National Committee on Radio Education, similarly assigned radio an urgent significance, arguing that America could not "solve any of its major political problems without first solving the radio problem" (quoted on p. 47).

McChesney (1993) makes the cogent point that the battle over radio's fate, although "short and one-sided . . . provides the sole instance in modern U.S. history in which the structure and control of an established mass medium would be a legiti-mate issue for public debate," and he judges that "the broadcast reformers and the many intellectuals sympathetic to their cause generated a critique of the limitations

of a capitalist media system for a democratic society that anticipates much of the most trenchant recent media criticism" (p. 4). *The Psychology of Radio* was written as a contribution to this movement. When Cantril and Allport stated that the problem of radio must be approached by social scientists with "a strictly objective and dispassionate attitude, leaving to the reformer and the legislator the duty of weighing the moral and legal questions radio has created," they were not dodging responsibility for the possible uses to which their research might be put (Cantril & Allport, 1935, p. 4). They were referring to an immediate political clash in which their work was intended to side with public interests against the claims of corporate privilege. By itself, Cantril and Allport stated, radio "is as democratic, as universal, and as free as the ether" (p. 271). Under capitalism, however, "it is an altogether elementary psychological fact that dissenting opinions and germinal attitudes favoring radical change in the American way will not readily be encouraged by an instrument controlled by vested interests" (p. 270). Though they and their allies were ultimately unsuccessful in winning the day for their position, attention to their arguments nevertheless challenges historians to flesh out more fully the contours of scientific activism in 20th-century America. The politics of memory has left in obscurity efforts such as these at reformulating the relationship between scientific expertise and the wider polity, which has resulted in an overestimation of the amount of agreement that has existed within the scientific community over how to define what counts as proper scientific practice.

Aspects of Social Psychology's Activist Roots: Radical Religion

The Psychology of Radio contains a diverse array of material, ranging from information drawn from radio industry surveys of listeners' habits and preferences to practical interpretations of radio as an educational and entertainment medium. Five chapters were based on experimental results obtained in the Harvard Psychological Laboratory, where broadcasting and receiving equipment on loan from station WEEI of Boston had been installed (a hardware array that included such items as "a two-button carbon microphone," a control panel, loudspeakers "of the 540 AW cone-shaped type manufactured by Western Electric," and a system of signaling devices; Cantril & Allport, 1935, p. 107). The experiments were designed to examine such matters as how an individual's thought processes might differ when listening to a speaker personally present as opposed to when listening to a voice through a loudspeaker, the effectiveness of various forms of radio delivery, and why most people preferred to hear a man rather than a woman speak over the radio.

The theoretical core of this somewhat amorphous compendium lay in Chapter 3, entitled "The American Way." The authors begin this portion of the book by asserting that although average Americans "may at times complain that there are too many advertisements, too many crooners, or too many stations on the air," they rarely questioned "the socio-economic principles underlying the institution of

radio" (Cantril & Allport, 1935, p. 36). A listener offering such complaints there-fore failed to realize "that what he hears, and therefore much of what he thinks, would be different in a country where radio is supported differently . . . [for] the composition, the coloring, the variety, and the duration of radio programs are the expression of complex social conditions" (p. 36). In order that readers might fully "appreciate the importance of economic and political determination," the book pro-vided tables that enumerated the type of radio ownership and control that existed in various countries and summarized the effects of four systems of ownership and con-trol on broadcasting (p. 43). The chapter's exposition covered such topics as how private ownership affected broadcasting, determined programs, and shaped listen-ers' attitudes and opinions. Cantril and Allport's study of the psychology of radio was thus framed as social psychology not simply because it concerned human groups, but because it concerned human groups operating within the values of a spe-cific socioeconomic system. Far from adopting the detached stance of the view from nowhere, these psychologists' perspective instead emanated from a very par-ticular somewhere: an analysis of the psychology of radio as expressed within the political economy of "the American way." As the authors explained to their readers, "virtually none of the psychological phenomena of the radio can be fully under-stood apart from the framework of political and economic philosophy under which the industry has developed" (p. 36).

From what stance in regard to "the American way" was *The Psychology of Radio* written? In the case of Allport, the senior partner in this research and the fig-ure with whom I am most familiar, this work was generated from within a home-grown version of socialist thought that owed a special debt to activist versions of a radicalized Social Gospel.[3] Falling somewhere in the realm between "liberalism" and "revolutionary socialism," the insurgent status of the Social Gospel—the belief that "social salvation precedes individual salvation both temporally and in impor-tance"—has often been viewed with suspicion by scholars (Hutchison, 1976, p. 165). William McGuire King (1989) observes that the term "social gospel" became "a vague catchword for the supposed sins of liberal Protestantism" (p. 50), with

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[3] I am just beginning to look at Cantril's early work. Cantril had been a student of Allport's at Dart-mouth who moved with him to Harvard for his PhD; when *The Psychology of Radio* was published, Can-tril was at Columbia Universtiy Teachers' College. Also important for Cantril was the work of Muzafer Sherif, especially the *Psychology of Social Norms* (1936). For information on Cantril, see Ittelson, 1968. For a concise discussion of Cantril's war work in the area of mass communications and propaganda, see Herman, 1995, pp. 32 and 54–57. Allport's wartime contribution is also discussed in this chapter, titled "The Dilemmas of Democratic Morale," which offers a portrait of the ambiguities of psychologists' democratic commitments. For a general overview of scholarly studies of the mass media see Czitrom, 1982. Arguments regarding the importance of religious values for some of SPSSI's members have been made by Jeanne Watson Eisenstadt (1986), especially on the importance of Union Theological Semi-nary and psychology at Columbia University, and Ernest R. Hilgard (1986). For a further elaboration, see also my analysis in Pandora, 1997.

critics frequently charging that "the social gospel represented a superficial moralism and theological naivete" (p. 49). As early as 1949, however, historian Henry May had pointed out that proponents of a radical Social Gospel could be easily distinguished from their moderate counterparts, in that they "did not confine themselves to demanding a 'new social spirit' or a few limited reforms. . . . The remedies they proposed, though they were Christian, nonviolent, and often unrealistic, were sweeping" (p. 235). Indeed, many of the political and economic critiques embedded within these radical doctrines were socialist in nature. Theologian Walter Rauschenbusch (1912), for example, who set the Social Gospel's tone in the early part of the century, maintained that "the most important advance in the knowledge of God that a modern man can make is to understand that the Father of Jesus Christ does not stand for the permanence of the capitalist system," and he argued that "political democracy without economic democracy is an uncashed promissory note, a pot without a roast, a form without substance" (pp. 322, 353). One historian has noted that resolutions advocating socialism were so prevalent at denominational meetings during the 1930s "that the investigator receives the superficial impression that two clergymen could not meet each other on the street without one of them banging a gavel, calling the other to order, and then introducing a resolution damning capitalism" (Miller, 1958, pp. 100–101).

Proponents of a radicalized Social Gospel advocated that "social control" should be exerted by the public against the depredations of economic and political elites, whereas for many of their contemporaries the idea of social control meant the regulation of an irrational public by administrative elites. For example, Methodist Episcopal Bishop Francis McConnell, in *The Christian Ideal and Social Control* (1932), maintained that "a social force as powerful as patriotism cannot be allowed to run loose in the world," and that "the patrioteers, by which term I mean those who profit by patriotism, always know when the Christian ideal threatens their interests" (pp. 131–132, 140). McConnell also argued against the assumption "in orthodox political circles that property ha[s] rights all its own over which society itself ha[s] no control," asserting instead that it was now being "recognized that the social force is a creator of the individual's property rights. Some values are created outright by the fact that people live together" (p. 14). As an example, McConnell pointed out that "living together makes necessary the building of roads for the most ordinary intercourse, and the road gives the leader in commerce or industry his extraordinary opportunity" (p. 15). From such circumstances, then, the public derived its right to exert "social control" over its economic elites.

Such religious and political views were consonant, for example, with Allport's proclamation of the "basic ideological affiliations of democracy, socialism, and Christianity" (1939b, p. 8). Socialism, Allport contended, was "in spite of its obsessional and quarrelsome character . . . nothing more than an elevated version of democracy demanding that the cankers of industrial and economic exploitation be eradicated so that democratic objectives may be more perfectly achieved" (p. 8).

Allport pointed out that "when democracy persecutes socialism, as it frequently does, it denies its own essential creed, refusing to extend democratic rights into certain tabooed regions such as industry, finance, or perhaps social security or colonial policy" (p. 8). Likewise, Christianity was accountable for persecuting socialism, while continuing "to shelter Father Coughlin, the Klan, the Christian Front, and other race-hating, rabble-rousing, person-destroying travesties of Christianity" (p. 8). Dismayed at democracy's "reservations and half-heartedness" and at the church's "corruption," socialism, Allport stated, "sometimes turns upon both and repudiates kinship" (p. 8). Thus it was that "these three expressions of the doctrine of human liberty" were kept apart, Allport observed, "while in half the world the person is being suffocated by the poisonous vapors of totalitarianism" (p. 8).

Allport recommended that those looking for an "effective course of combat" should seek "participant memberships" in organizations striving to change the social order. Among those he found particularly noteworthy were "the cooperative movement [and] the left-of-center political parties (I say left-of-center because it is in them that one is likely to find the most vigorous conceptions of democracy). For those who can write, there is the progressive press, and for those who can speak, there are organizations guarding civil liberties" (Allport, 1939b, p. 8). He particularly wanted to emphasize the importance of the labor movement, which he described as being propelled by "an activist policy intent on keeping democracy from sinking into the museum of defeated political theory" (p. 8). Allport underscored this sense of urgency in other written work as well. In an address to undergraduates on "Psychology in the Near Future" delivered around this same time, for example, Allport remarked that because the human race was facing a difficult future, "there is little time now for playing games, scientific or otherwise. For civilization cannot much longer afford to support sciences that do not pay dividends by showing that their work is useful in the context of life" (Allport, circa 1940, p. 10). That the subject matter of social psychology placed researchers at the crossroads of the societal and the personal meant that they were especially well situated to observe how self and society were mutually constituted and continuously being remade: that is, that social psychology was political psychology. In Allport's formulation, for the work of social psychologists to reach its greatest usefulness in the context of American life it would need to be directly concerned with enhancing democratic imperatives.

Aspects of Social Psychology's Activist Roots:
Apprehension Over Domestic Fascism

Allport's reference to the threat of democracy's becoming a defeated political theory touches on an aspect of the political struggles underway during the 1930s that scholars have too little emphasized: the alarm that many activists felt about the rise of fascism. Indeed, Christian socialists such as Allport had become

increasingly concerned that the prospects for economic democracy were threatened not only by industrial power brokers but also by the spread of fascism at home and abroad. Progressives during the 1930s, as Peter Kuznick (1987) observes, "viewed the democratic victory over fascism, not the socialist victory over capitalism, as the salient political struggle of the day" (p. 177). Were fascism to triumph, the question of social democracy would be rendered irrelevant. Indeed, Allport believed that as obstacles to the realization of some form of socialism in the United States lessened, the real "active oppos[i]tion" would be offered not by "capitalism but by fascism." The opposite of socialism was not capitalism, Allport contended, but fascism: Both fascism and socialism had philosophical underpinnings, whereas capitalism was merely a set of practices (Allport, undated, p. 14).

Historian Lawrence Levine's survey of films during the Great Depression is an effective cautionary to historians who find the soul of the 1930s to be bound up in struggles between collectivists and capitalists. Levine notes that, during the early New Deal, it was common for magazine readers to come across "articles entitled 'Roosevelt—Dictator?' 'Fascism and the New Deal,' 'America Drifts Toward Fascism,' 'The Great Fascist Plot,' 'Is America Ripe for Fascism?' 'Must America Go Fascist?' 'Will America Go Fascist?' 'Need the New Deal Be Fascist?'" (1985, p. 170). Sinclair Lewis's *It [Fascism] Can't Happen Here* (1935) predicted that indeed it could; the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Theater project produced a dramatic version of the story, opening the play in 22 separate productions in 18 cities on the night of October 27, 1936 (Levine, p. 178). In a similar manner, as Levine relates, the film industry, through its story lines, sought to come "to the defense of the traditional American democratic system in the face of rising authoritarianism" (p. 181). Levine adds, however, that the "streaks of pessimism and doubt" contained in the scripts left many productions enveloped in "a quiet but pervasive sense of despair concerning the future of both the individual and democracy" (p. 181).

Such concerns were demonstrated by Allport (1923) at least a decade earlier, in an impressionistic piece of reportage he published in the *New Republic* on the response of German citizens to the French advance upon the Ruhr in 1923. Allport described a series of emotional outbursts he had witnessed in various public settings, in which individuals had spontaneously coalesced into groups to express "their festering hate and bitterness" (p. 63). Allport remarked on the economic strain under which the populace was laboring, noting that "with a watch in hand one can count the hours as the closing down of industries and heating plants, and the fall in the purchasing power of the mark summon forth the terror of cold and hunger, and with them an increasing strain upon the instincts of the individual German for law and order" (p. 64). Allport characterized the currents he was witnessing as "an inevitable demoralization" that had occurred as a consequence of the vicissitudes of World War I and its "insufferable peace" (p. 64). He acknowledged that counterweights to demoralization still existed, although he argued that it was an open question as to how long such factors, which were, after all, "simply attitudes of the past

persisting through habit," could provide "effective resistance against the onslaught of disrupting forces" (p. 65).

It should not be surprising, therefore, that in trying to throw light on the course ahead in Depression era America that a psychologist such as Allport turned to a consideration of what impact radio might be having on the formation of social attitudes during a time of increasing turmoil. The novel nature of radio communication, Cantril and Allport (1935) observed, was playing "havoc with traditional theories of crowd formation and of group thinking" (p. 4). They remarked that radio made possible the creation and preservation of a "crowd mind" without the presumed prerequisite of personal contact. Although they theorized that such crowds were "less violent and less dangerous" than traditional face-to-face crowds—that is, that radio could "create racial hatred but not itself achieve a lynching"—they stated that "the fostering of the mob spirit must be counted as one of the by-products of radio" (p. 21). They also noted that broadcasts, in their view, were capable of inducing "a far more intense feeling of membership" than did print media (p. 260). For those fearful that domestic fascism could take root, a belief that radio held a particularly significant place among the "media of public control" in "forming opinion and in guiding action" held out troubling possibilities.

Radio's "Influence . . . Upon Mental and Social Life": Main Arguments

Cantril and Allport's (1935) study of the effects of the pervasive presence of radio was intended to throw into relief the cultural and economic context in which "radio as a social institution" was embedded (p. 4). They asserted that "although human nature may be everywhere *potentially* the same, the ways in which it actually develops are limited by the constraints of each particular social system" (p. 43). Such constraints were difficult to discern as a matter of everyday routine, for they "become second nature to the individual. He seldom questions them, or, indeed even recognizes their existence and he therefore takes for granted the great majority of the influences that surround him in everyday life" (p. 43). Here, then, is one of the key roles that Cantril and Allport see social psychologists taking on in producing useful knowledge: encouraging the public to look at that which is taken for granted in a new light. It was the responsibility of the social scientist to question the status quo and subject it to critique to see if it accorded with the democratic ethos that Americans held to be the binding element of their shared culture.

What radio listeners were taking for granted was the corporate control of the airwaves, an assumption that Cantril and Allport held possessed grave implications beyond the question of private profits being appropriated from a public resource. As the authors explained, "the problem of the rights and responsibilities of broadcasting companies is a delicate one, for it involves the two explosive issues of censorship and propaganda" (1935, p. 48). That propaganda and censorship were structurally embedded aspects of commercially controlled radio indicated that "the

American way" of broadcasting delivered authoritarian rather than democratic values into millions of American homes on a daily basis, with unsettling implications for radio's psychological "influence . . . upon mental and social life" (p. 19). If the creators of radio's commercial content were experts in using this new communications medium to serve their interests, Cantril and Allport offered themselves as counterexperts capable of describing the rhetorical conventions of radio under a profit-based system, and therefore providing guidance as to what was at stake for the general public if the present course held.

Propaganda, Censorship, and the Realities of American Radio

Cantril and Allport defined censorship as the "process of blocking the expression of opinions, and thereby of arbitrarily selecting the listener's mental content for him," and propaganda as the "systematic attempt to develop through the use of suggestion certain of the listener's attitudes and beliefs in such a way that some special interest is favored" (1935, p. 48). On the issue of propaganda Cantril and Allport made forcefully clear their assumption that advertising was propaganda, and that "the socio-economic framework within which radio operates always creates a temptation for its managers to exert censorship along some lines and to facilitate propaganda along others" (p. 48).

One of the first phenomena discussed in The Psychology of Radio is the way radio's rhetorical conventions favored the radical simplification of "all the subtler issues in favor of clear-cut positions" in regard to discussions of public policy (Cantril & Allport, 1935, p. 23). The authors remark in bemusement that it was as if people could only see the world in "two colors, black and white, and were blind to all the shades of gray. Left to themselves the listeners would evolve a large number of attitudes, but under the guidance of radio the potential variety becomes limited through sharply drawn points of view" (p. 23). The choices as presented by radio implied a distinctly bifurcated reality in which the listener was pressured to think of decision making as a task requiring the taking of one side or another: "prohibition or repeal, Republican or Democrat, prostrike or antistrike, Americanism or Communism, this or that" (p. 23). In reducing the world to dichotomous terms, radio programmers encouraged a worrisome narrowing of listeners' minds; but the situation was even more problematic than this, for "in practice the radio often favors the emphasis upon only one opinion (for example, in the case of Communism versus Americanism)" (p. 23, italics added). Such one-sided forms of communication contributed to a standardization of Americans' "habits of living," a phenomenon that was continually being reinforced by the legions of radio experts instructing their listeners on "what to eat, what to read, what to buy, what exercise to take, what to think of the music we hear, and how to treat our colds" (p. 23). In tandem with the directives of experts was the relentless assault "on individuality in taste and conduct" orchestrated by advertisers. Furthermore, radio's

stylistic conventions were such that distinctions between experts and advertisers were often left "intentionally vague" (p. 23).

Cantril and Allport also pointed out that radio amplified the influence of political incumbents, for it offered "special advantages to officials already in power" (1935, p. 31). Radio was also producing large-scale changes in politicking, with campaign budgets undergoing vast increases in order to match the costs of advertising over the radio (p. 32). Theoretically, the airwaves were free to all political candidates, for "if a radio station permits one candidate to speak, it must permit all others to speak" (p. 50). But since a station could legally refuse air time to all candidates, "political freedom over the radio becomes, legally, proportional to a candidate's campaign funds or his credit." In 1934, the Democratic Party's debt to the two major broadcasting companies for the 1932 campaign totaled $155,221, and the Republican party owed a comparable sum of $130,274. Cantril and Allport wondered "whether the same credit would be extended to radical parties and radical candidates." The alert reader would find the answer to the question in a footnote: "[A]pparently not," they responded to their own query, "according to Upton Sinclair's statement of his difficulties during his campaign for the governorship of California in the fall of 1934" (p. 50). Sinclair indicated in an article in the *Nation* that there was still a small amount of radio time that his opponents had not already bought up. But he noted that "in order to engage time we have to pay cash in advance—no favors are granted to disturbers of the social order" (p. 50). Examples of cruder methods of censorship could also be found, as when individual station managers instructed their engineers to silence the microphones of those who wandered into what the managers considered subversive territory. (For further examples, see Summers, 1939.)

In regard to the propagandistic effect of advertising, Cantril and Allport took special note of the fact that children, "owing to their lack of experience and of critical ability," were especially vulnerable to the authoritarian influence of what they heard on the air (1935, p. 63). Indeed, they found advertisers exerting considerable ingenuity in constructing their campaigns to seduce the youngest members of the radio audience. The formats of children's programs were cunningly designed so that "at the beginning of the program the child is made to wait for his story until he has learned by heart the message of his sponsor, and again at the end, and sometimes in the middle, he is forced to transfer his sharpened interest to the product" (p. 236). The child listener was "informed that his little private dream will come true if he drinks or eats the sponsored preparation . . . [and] the excitement, the theme music, the incompleteness of the story, the insistence of the announcer and the authority of his voice, conspire to make the child restless until he has obeyed the semihypnotic suggestions" (p. 236). These psychologists' distaste for the attitude taken by advertising Svengalis toward their credulous and suggestible targets is clear. Because children control "an immense amount of purchasing power" through their demands, the authors tartly remark, "for advertisers, the moral is obvious—or perhaps it is not so obvious" (p. 243).

Social psychological scrutiny of radio as it was then constituted, Cantril and Allport asserted, could not help but lead to the conclusion "that the psychological and social significance of radio is out of all proportion to the meager intelligence used in planning for its expansion" (1935, p. 270). Corporate America had not only shown itself to be an unsuitable guarantor of radio's potential for enhancing democratic imperatives, it had in many instances displayed distinct tendencies toward undermining the democratic ethos. Members of the social science professoriate such as Cantril and Allport felt no compunction in taking the business world to task for insisting that the American way and the free enterprise system were synonymous. But in many quarters of American life such an equation did hold sway: If the "autocratic interests" who controlled radio served its consumers only "incidentally," need this situation generate any more concern than the custom of advertising in magazines or on the side of commercial buildings (p. 270)?

Cantril and Allport acknowledged that many American citizens might well take a more tranquil view of the commercial nature of radio than did they. They noted that advertising propaganda was "frank and revealed," and that Americans accepted it "as an inevitable daily experience" (1935, p. 60). They observed, for example, that "the American listener has a keen sense of *quid pro quo* in economic matters" and generally felt comfortable with the idea that sponsors had a "right" to "dictate" the nature of the programs for which they paid (p. 269). But the radio question was not simply one of arguing the ethics of choosing between a noncommercial system and one designed "to increase the profits of a few competing entrepreneurs"; a third path was also increasingly on display, as evidenced by the fact that radio in some quarters had already become "an instrument to secure the status of dictatorial governments" (p. 270). Cantril and Allport stated that radio propaganda was being used in both the Soviet Union and in Nazi Germany, pointing out that "the Nazi propagandist minister, Goebbels, uses it ubiquitously to spread the doctrines of Hitler and says that 'Some day the radio will be the spiritual daily bread of the whole German nation'" (p. 60). How thin was the line that existed between turning radio over to the selling of goods and turning it over to the selling of ideas that might lead to the relegation of democracy to the museum of defeated political theory? The year before *The Psychology of Radio* was published, one prominent social commentator had already suggested that "when a formidable Fascist movement develops in America, the ad-men will be right up in front; [and] the American versions of Minister of Propaganda and Enlightenment Goebbels (the man whom wry-lipped Germans have christened 'Wotan's Mickey Mouse') will be both numerous and powerful" (Rorty, 1934, p. 394).

Attitude Formation and Radio's New Power

Because the medium of radio has held little interest for communications scholars—despite, as Hilmes (1997) notes, "its dominance of America's waking hours

and public consciousness from 1922 until its apotheosis in television in the early 1950s"—an understanding of the significance of its impact on American life has yet to be incorporated into the mainstream historical record. But for academics such as Cantril and Allport, who were participant-observers witnessing the institutionalization of a radically new form of communication, radio's unprecedented potential for transforming the personal, the social, and the political seemed glaringly apparent.

The question of how radio's rhetorical practices influenced the process of attitude formation in listeners was thus of considerable import. This point was buttressed by the cases "of Huey Long, of Mussolini, [and] of Hitler," whose "listeners had ready-made attitudes toward these leaders that needed only to be intensified and directed through vocal appeal" (Cantril & Allport, 1935, pp. 8–9). But in the realm of attitude formation radio possessed a new power, one the authors found in the example of Father Coughlin, who "was not a well-identified leader before he used the medium of broadcasting. His principles were not known nor were they widely accepted." And yet, "were it not for Father Coughlin's feat in creating exclusively on the basis of radio appeal an immensely significant political crowd, one could scarcely believe that the radio had such potentialities for crowd-building." Coughlin's example offered psychologists and citizens a lesson in the "creation as well as [the] shaping" of political attitudes literally right out of the air (p. 9).

Cantril and Allport speculated, for example, that the radio listener, unlike the reader of the printed word, "has an imaginative sense of participation in a common activity," radio filling people with a "'consciousness of kind' which at times grows into an impression of vast social unity" (1935, p. 8). In this way radio could prove "potentially more effective than print in bringing about concerted opinion and action" (p. 8). An orator such as Father Coughlin took care to emphasize to the individual members of his audience that millions such as themselves were tuned in to his program, that millions had sent letters at his behest, and that millions had joined his National Union for Social Justice. The authors reported that it had taken "only four radio appearances" for Senator Long to receive five million enrollees in his "Share the Wealth" program, and only a few months for Coughlin to achieve an alleged membership of eight million (p. 9). Perhaps "the prestige of multitudes" allayed the misgivings and vacillations of undecided citizens, who concluded that since "eight million people can't be wrong, and eight million follow this leader, so, too, with impunity may I" (p. 8). Indeed, President Franklin Roosevelt had first demonstrated the psychological feats that a politician with a mastery of radio rhetoric could accomplish with his use of radio addresses to defuse a nationwide financial panic on March 4–5, 1933. In regard to an event such as this, in which social disruption had appeared inevitable, "the radio voice of someone in authority, speaking to millions of citizens as 'my friend,' tends to decrease their sense of insecurity. It diminishes the mischievous effects of rumor and allays dread and apprehension of what is unknown" (p. 21). But the voice of authority could also induce seeming hysteria, as the strange events of October 30, 1938, would show.

Cantril's Analysis of the "Invasion from Mars"

Three years after the publication of *The Psychology of Radio*, its two authors must have been stunned to learn that on Halloween eve radio had begotten an event of social psychological significance that seemed the stuff of science fiction. In a way it was. Of the estimated six million listeners who were tuned in to Orson Welles' Mercury Theater dramatization of H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*, more than one million appeared to have taken the fiction to be true and became panic stricken. The radio play, cast as a news report, "interrupted" a dance program to announce that a mysterious meteor had landed in Grover's Mills, New Jersey, a real town near Princeton. Subsequent updates related "eyewitness" accounts of Martians systematically annihilating the humans in their path with death-dealing ray guns. The next day the *New York Times* reported that the broadcast had "disrupted households, interrupted religious services, created traffic jams, and clogged communications systems" (reprinted in Koch, 1970, p. 18). The question on everyone's minds was what accounted for why some listeners responded in such confusion and alarm. Cantril took on this question, assembling a research team that conducted over 135 interviews, the results of which were published in 1940 as *The Invasion from Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic*.

After the event, a large number of explanations converged on the premise that those who panicked did so due to their lack of intelligence. Cantril recounted that the noted columnist Dorothy Thompson asserted that the "incredible stupidity" of the victims had led them to panic; a prominent psychologist similarly theorized that "no intelligent person would be taken in," and another claimed that those disturbed by the broadcast were all neurotics (Cantril, 1940, p. 127). Cantril argued that "such glib generalizations are not only wrong but dangerous, both theoretically and socially," for they reduced individuals to "types," ignored questions of context, and "condemned 'the masses' in wholesale fashion" (p. 127).

Instead, Cantril (1940) pointed to the importance of "critical ability" to stem the panic reaction. Cantril defined critical ability as a realization that interpretations other than the one originally presented are possible: a readiness to reevaluate initial interpretations, and a willingness to look for new standards of judgment and juxtapose them against others. A lack of critical awareness and a tendency to suggestibility, alternatively, would be marked by a complete absence of awareness that things might be otherwise than they are made out to be (p. 196). In his analysis of the interview material, Cantril found that critical ability was related to educational level in many of the cases of individuals who panicked, although not in all: Some highly educated people displayed no critical ability and joined in the panic; some individuals of minimal education possessed high critical ability. But critical ability alone did not account for the responses that had occurred, in Cantril's view; equal attention needed to be given to the contemporary context in which the behavior was embedded. Cantril argued that a suggestible frame of

mind had been engendered across the population by the "highly disturbed economic conditions many Americans have experienced for the past decade, the consequent unemployment, the prolonged discrepancies between family incomes, the inability of both young and old to plan for the future" (p. 203). These circumstances had created "widespread feelings of insecurity" that rendered everyone potentially vulnerable, given the right stimulus (p. 203).

In the case studies he offered, Cantril (1940) contended that the confusion sown by the broadcast seemed little less perplexing than the reality Americans had been experiencing since the stock market crash of 1929. Many people expressed the belief that in such a disordered and chaotic world it was conceivable that anything might happen, and it was hard to foresee a time when everything might once again be "all right." Many of those interviewed expressed the belief that they were living in times of rapid social change, in which "just what direction the change should take and how it may be peacefully accomplished" were difficult to imagine (p. 155). As Cantril summarized the matter, "a mysterious invasion fitted the pattern of the mysterious events of the decade," representing but another phenomenon in the outside world that lay beyond individuals' control and comprehension (p. 194). Cantril was clear in his belief that "the anxiety and fear revealed by the panic were latent in the general population, not specific to the person who happened to participate in it" (p. 202). There was no insurance against panic-inducing situations, unless the "basic causes for panic are removed," an effort that would require both social reconstruction and a commitment on the part of educators to teaching the skills of critical analysis (p. 204). Americans would need first of all to be freed from the harassment of "emotional insecurities which stem from underprivileged environments," and to be provided with educational opportunities where they would be "taught to adopt an attitude of readiness to question the interpretations" they heard (p. 205).

As a companion piece to *The Psychology of Radio*, *The Invasion from Mars* strikes a number of similar notes: an interest in the rhetorical conventions of radio and their possible implication in attitude formation; the potential power of radio to incite mass action; a concern with the enmeshed nature of particular socioeconomic-political environments, communications technologies, and human thought and behavior. Cantril offered the observation that "if objective conditions may be slow to change, there is encouragement in the fact that our subjective reactions to these conditions may be made to change somewhat more rapidly by education" (1940, p. 204) . If critics like Cantril and Allport had failed to prevent radio communication from being turned over to corporate interests, thus leaving it free to develop into a medium more adept at reinforcing the status quo than in hastening social change, psychologists might still be able to use the social psychological lessons of radio to point to the need for Americans to form new standards of judgment with which to question reality in an age of mass communication.

Conclusion

That the cascade of mass media communications technologies introduced over the course of the 20th century has had far-reaching effects in shaping our social worlds and personal identities is an indisputable fact. Exploring the response of social scientists who experienced the first wave of this transformation during the emergence of radio can offer present-day researchers and analysts potentially useful vantage points from which to assess the current situation with fresh insight. Indeed, the many parallels between today's ongoing social experiment with the Internet and the early days of radio—that is, radio's roots as an amateur and participatory medium that quickly became dominated by corporate imperatives, issues regarding censorship and government control, and fears about the cultural effects of new configurations of time and space—suggest that revisiting the situation confronting researchers in the 1930s may prove instructive for contemporary investigators.

One of the most striking aspects of a work such as *The Psychology of Radio* is the authors' attempt to combine a commitment to state-of-the-art research (going so far as to obtain radio transmitting equipment for their laboratory experiments) with pointed social commentary, melding the objective and the subjective in a form that sought to enhance both perspectives. During this era, and indeed down into the present, much disciplinary force has been exerted in trying to expel values from scientific practice, in the belief that the taint of the subjective compromises the validity of scientific knowledge. During the 1930s, pointed debates were joined over this formulation in regard to epistemological as well as political questions. *The Psychology of Radio* is a rhetorical experiment that represents one contribution to this debate, and is characteristic of a time when science operated on a smaller scale, with researchers acting as intellectual entrepreneurs willing to risk their professional capital in striving to craft scientific practices that crossed disciplinary lines and also moved across the professional-public divide.

In an address on "Current Trends in Social Psychology" at Tufts University, Allport contended that social psychology should "show how custom shapes habits, how impulse and thought intervene when [an] individual fails to adjust; [and] how new and tentative habits are formed" (1939a, p. 2). In short, he observed, social psychology should be able to explain how humans get from one point to another, or how the "next step" is taken (p. 2).

The Psychology of Radio is one example of an attempt to influence what the next step would be in the discipline of psychology in 1930s America. It argued that psychologists should engage the real issues of the day and seek to answer questions of social significance. What was the good, Allport asked in this speech, of putting "millions of man hours into trivial operational agreements" (1939a, p. 8)? Instead of the pursuit of a transcendent purity, Allport advocated an activist stance, urging psychologists who valued democracy to identify themselves to each other: "Let's work

together. Let's discover why this propaganda is effective; how to stop attacks on educators; how to eliminate teachers' oaths; how to eliminate war" (p. 8). Allport argued that acknowledging that the pursuit of scientific knowledge was a value-laden endeavor did not mean that individuals would not make use of their training "to avoid manifest error"; indeed, Allport suggested, one would be "a better psychologist for admitting values" (p. 8). Such a view was highly controversial within a discipline that worried that values had no rightful place within the pursuit of scientific knowledge, and belonged only to questions of how to apply the results of "pure" research.

No social scientists during the 1930s had decisive answers to the debates being waged over the nature of objectivity in the search for truth. But the questions raised and the generative tensions that resulted deserve greater historical attention, for they were more broadly based and widely ranging than has been generally recognized. Closer examination of these critical years also reveals how deeply rooted are some of the disputes that animate the intellectual and moral debates of our own era in regard to the place of science in the larger polity and the roles and responsibilities of scientists within it. Allport's exhortation to his audience to watch out for activist research offers a question still worthy of consideration today: activist research, he said, "is militant but may be productive for science and may be productive for [the] social good. Life is bigger than social psychology; why shouldn't the latter be firmly locked to Life?" (1939a, p. 8).

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