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## MEDIA SOCIOLOGY:

### The Dominant Paradigm

TODD GITLIN

Since the Second World War, as mass media in the United States have become more concentrated in ownership, more centralized in operations, more national in reach, more pervasive in presence, sociological study of the media has been dominated by the theme of the relative powerlessness of the broadcasters. Just as the national television networks – the first in history – were going to work, American sociology was turning away from the study of propaganda. In this essay I argue that such a strange conjunction of events is not without its logic. I argue that because of intellectual, ideological and institutional commitments sociologists have not put the critical questions; that behind the idea of the relative unimportance of mass media lies a skewed, faulty concept of “importance,” similar to the faulty concept of “power” also maintained by political sociologists, specifically those of the pluralist persuasion, during the same period; and that, like pluralism, the dominant sociology of mass communication has been unable to grasp certain fundamental features of its subject. More than that: it has obscured them, scanted them, at times defined them out of existence, and therefore it has had the effect of justifying the existing system of mass media ownership, control, and purpose.

The dominant paradigm in media sociology, what Daniel Bell has called the “received knowledge” of “personal influence,”<sup>1</sup> has drained attention from the power of the media to define normal and abnormal social and political activity, to say what is politically real and legitimate and what is not; to justify the two-party political structure; to establish certain political agendas for social attention and to contain, channel, and exclude others; and to shape the images of opposition movements. By its methodology, media sociology has highlighted the recalcitrance of audiences, their resistance to media-

generated messages, and not their dependency, their acquiescence, their gullibility. It has looked to “effects” of broadcast programming in a specifically behaviorist fashion, defining “effects” so narrowly, microscopically, and directly as to make it very likely that survey studies could show only slight effects at most. It has enshrined short-run “effects” as “measures” of “importance” largely because these “effects” are measurable in a strict, replicable behavioral sense, thereby deflecting attention from larger social meanings of mass media production. It has tended to seek “hard data,” often enough with results so mixed as to satisfy anyone and no one, when it might have more fruitfully sought hard questions. By studying only the “effects” that could be “measured” experimentally or in surveys, it has put the methodological cart ahead of the theoretical horse. Or rather: it has procured a horse that could pull its particular cart. Is it any wonder, then, that thirty years of methodical research on “effects” of mass media have produced little theory and few coherent findings? The main result, in marvelous paradox, is the beginning of the decomposition of the going paradigm itself.<sup>2</sup>

In the process of amassing its impressive bulk of empirical findings, the field of mass media research has also perforce been certifying as normal precisely what it might have been investigating as problematic, namely the vast reach and scope of the instruments of mass broadcasting, especially television. By emphasizing precise effects on “attitudes” and microscopically defined “behavior,” the field has conspicuously failed to attend to the significance of the fact that mass broadcasting exists in the first place, in a corporate housing and under a certain degree of State regulation. For during most of civilized history there has been no such thing. Who wanted broadcasting, and toward what ends? Which institutional configurations have been generated because of mass broadcasting, and which going institutions — politics, family, schooling, sports — have been altered in structure, goals, social meaning, and how have they reached back into broadcasting to shape its products? How has the prevalence of broadcasting changed the conduct of politics, the texture of political life, hopes, expectations? How does it bear on social structure? Which popular epistemologies have made their way across the broadcasting societies? How does the routine reach of certain hierarchies into millions of living rooms on any given day affect the common language and concepts and symbols? By skirting these questions, by taking for granted the existing institutional order, the field has also been able to skirt the substantive questions of valuation: Does the television apparatus as it exists fulfill or frustrate human needs and the social interest? But of course by failing to ask such questions, it has made itself useful to the networks, to the market research firms, to the political candidates.

## I. THE DOMINANT PARADIGM AND ITS DEFECTS

The dominant paradigm in the field since World War II has been, clearly, the cluster of ideas, methods, and findings associated with Paul F. Lazarsfeld and his school: the search for specific, measurable, short-term, individual, attitudinal and behavioral “effects” of media content, and the conclusion that media are not very important in the formation of public opinion. Within this whole configuration, the most influential single theory has been, most likely, “the two-step flow of communications”: the idea that media messages reach people not so much directly as through the selective, partisan, complicating interpolation of “opinion leaders.” In the subtitle of *Personal Influence*, their famous and influential study of the diffusion of opinion in Decatur, Illinois in the mid-Forties, Elihu Katz and Lazarsfeld were concerned with “the part played by people in the flow of mass communications.”<sup>3</sup> One technical commentator comments with due and transparent qualification: “It may be that few formulations in the behavioral sciences have had more impact than the two-step flow model.”<sup>4</sup> Daniel Bell, with his characteristic sweep, calls *Personal Influence* “the standard work.”<sup>5</sup>

As in all sociology, the questions asked and the field of attention define the paradigm even before the results are recorded. In the tradition staked out by Lazarsfeld and his associates, researchers pay most attention to those “variables” that intervene between message-producers and message-receivers, especially to the “variable” of interpersonal relations. They conceptualize the audience as a tissue of interrelated individuals rather than as isolated point-targets in a mass society. They see mass media as only one of several “variables” that influence “attitudes” or voting choices, and they are interested in the measurable “effects” of media especially in comparison with other “variables” like “personal contact.” They measure “effects” as *changes* over time in respondents’ attitudes or discrete behaviors, as these are reported in surveys. In a sequence of studies beginning with *The People’s Choice*,<sup>6</sup> Lazarsfeld and his associates developed a methodology (emphasizing panel studies and sociometry) commensurate with their concern for mediating “variables” like social status, age, and gregariousness. But in what sense does their total apparatus constitute a “paradigm,” and in what sense has it been “dominant”?

I want to use the word loosely only, without history-of-science baggage, to indicate a tendency of thought that (a) identifies as important certain *areas* of investigation in a field, (b) exploits a certain *methodology*, more or less distinctive, and (c) produces a set of *results* which are distinctive and, more important, come to be recognized as such. In this sense, a paradigm is established as such not only by its producers but by its consumers, the

profession that accords it standing as a primary outlook.

Within the paradigm, Katz's and Lazarsfeld's specific theory of "the two-step flow of communication," the idea that "opinion leaders" mediate decisively between mass communicators and audiences, has occupied the center of scholarly attention. In any discussion of mass media effects, citations of *Personal Influence* remain virtually obligatory. As the first extended exploration of the idea — "the two-step flow" appears only as an afterthought, and without much elaboration, at the end of the earlier *The People's Choice — Personal Influence* can be read as the founding document of an entire field of inquiry. If the theory has recently been contested with great force on empirical grounds,<sup>7</sup> the paradigm as a whole continues to be the central idea-configuration that cannot be overlooked by critics. Joseph T. Klapper's *The Effects of Mass Communication* (1960) is the definitive compilation of the field's early stages; but the Decatur study, spread out as it is in detail, seems to me a better testing-ground for a reexamination of the whole paradigm. By having the power to call forth citations and critiques at its own level of generality, it remains central to the field. For twenty years replicating studies have proliferated, complicating and multiplying the categories of the Decatur study, looking at different types of behavior, different types of "news function" ("relay," "information," and so on), some of them confirming the two-step flow on a small scale,<sup>8</sup> but most of them disconfirming or severely qualifying it.<sup>9</sup> All these studies proceed from the introduction into an isolated social system of a single artifact — a product, an "attitude," an image. The "effect" is always that of a controlled experiment (such, at least, is the aspiration), but the tendency is to extrapolate, without warrant, from the study of a single artifact's "effect" to the vastly more general and significant "effect" of broadcasting under corporate and State auspices. Whatever the particular findings, the general issues of structural impact and institutional change are lost in the aura, the reputation of the "two-step flow."

Perhaps Paul Lazarsfeld's looming presence throughout recent sociology is a "personal influence" that helps account for the dominance of his paradigm, even beyond what were at times his own relatively modest claims for it. But one man's charisma, however routinized, cannot be the whole story. It cannot explain, for example, how the "personal influence" paradigm finds its way, uncritically accepted, into a critical book like Anthony Giddens's *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies*:<sup>10</sup>

The influence of the mass media, and the diffusion of "mass culture" generally, is usually pointed to as a primary source of the supposed "homogenisation" of patterns of consumption, and of needs and tastes.

But research on the “two-step flow of communication” shows that formally identical content, as disseminated in the mass media, may be interpreted and responded to in quite different ways. Far from being eradicated by the uniform content of the media, existing forms of differentiation in social structure may be actively reinforced by it, as a consequence of such selectivity of perception and response.

Of course the issue for class structure may be neither its eradication (a straw man) nor its “simple” reinforcement (as if reinforcement were simple), but its transformation *in a patterned way* through the possibility of alternate, and hierarchically preferred, “readings” of any given media material.<sup>11</sup> But my point is that the Katz-Lazarsfeld theory still in 1973 had the power to compel enthusiasm in a theorist otherwise unsympathetic to their approach.

As Melvin L. DeFleur<sup>12</sup> and Roger L. Brown<sup>13</sup> have stressed, the course of mass media theory has to be understood as a historical process, in which theorists confront not only social reality but also the theories extant. Theorists, of course, respond to the going theories in the languages of social research then current, that is, within a social-scientific worldview now “normal,” or becoming “normal,” or contesting for “normalcy.” They respond, explicitly or not, in the light or darkness of history — of new, salient forces in the world, social, political, and technological. There are thus three meta-theoretical conditions shaping any given theoretical perspective: the nature of the theory or theories preceding (in this case, the “hypodermic” theory); the “normal” sociological worldview now current, or contesting the ideological field (in this case, behaviorism); and actual social, political, technological conditions in the world. The theory of the two-step flow, and the specific approach to “effects” in which the theory is embedded, are generated by a behaviorist worldview which makes itself decisive — and invisible — in the form of methodological microassumptions. The dominant paradigm has to be understood as an intersection of all these factors.

In the critique that follows, throughout Part I, I am concerned with *Personal Influence* as both buttress and instance of the larger, more general “normal” approach to questions of mass media “effects”; I want to identify the flaws in one particular theory, but more, to inquire into what they might imply for the whole field of communications research. In Part II, I probe for the roots of the whole intellectual enterprise.

### **The “Hypodermic” Theory**

The “personal influence” paradigm is itself located within a critique of the

earlier “hypodermic” theory, which is in turn both a theory of society and a theory of the workings of mass media within it.<sup>14</sup> In the “hypodermic” model, society is mass society, and mass communications “inject” ideas, attitudes, and dispositions towards behavior into passive, atomized, extremely vulnerable individuals. Katz and Lazarsfeld, who first named the “personal influence” paradigm, codified it, and brought it to the center of the field, were explicitly aiming to dethrone the “hypodermic” theory:<sup>15</sup>

...the media of communication were looked upon as a new kind of unifying force – a simple kind of nervous system – reaching out to every eye and ear, in a society characterized by an amorphous social organization and a paucity of interpersonal relations.

This was the “model” – of society and of the processes of communication – which mass media research seems to have had in mind when it first began, shortly after the introduction of radio, in the 1920s. Partly, the “model” developed from an image of the potency of the mass media which was in the popular mind. At the same time, it also found support in the thought of certain schools of social and psychological theory. Thus, classical sociology of the late 19th century European schools emphasized the breakdown of interpersonal relations in urban, industrial society and the emergence of new forms of remote, impersonal social control.

During the Twenties, the “popular mind” of which Katz and Lazarsfeld spoke was recoiling from the unprecedented barrage of nation-state propaganda during the First World War, and the first wide-scale use of radio. The “schools of social and psychological theory” to which they referred were those governed by the relatively simple stimulus-response psychology.<sup>16</sup> It was this “hypodermic” model which Katz and Lazarsfeld proposed to dislodge by drawing attention to the social milieux within which audiences received media messages. As a corrective to overdrawn “hypodermic” notions, as a reinstatement of society within the study of social communication, the new insistence on the complexity of the mediation process made good sense.

### **Behaviorist Assumptions and Damaged Findings**

But the “personal influence” theory was founded on limiting assumptions, so that its solid claims would be misleading even if substantial. Indeed, as it happens, the theory does not even hold up in its own terms; the Decatur study, taken on its face, fails in important ways to confirm the theory it claims to be confirming. Moreover, the anomalies themselves help us grasp the theory’s social context; the anomalies mean something. For now I want to isolate the

theoretical assumptions of the entire paradigm, and to see how they were applied in *Personal Influence*. In the discussion that follows, I center on the theory's limiting *assumptions*, some empirical *discrepancies*, and – a larger matter even if we set these aside – the theory's *limits in time*.

It is worth stressing again that the theory was rooted in a strict behaviorism. “Effects” of mass media lay on the surface; they were to be sought as short-term “effects” on precisely measurable changes in “attitude” or in discrete behavior. Whether in Lazarsfeld’s surveys or the laboratory experiments of Carl Hovland and associates, the purpose was to generate *predictive* theories of audience response, which are necessarily – intentionally or not – consonant with an administrative point of view, with which centrally located administrators who possess adequate information can make decisions that affect their entire domain with a good idea of the consequences of their choices.

Now it is true that in a number of footnotes, Katz and Lazarsfeld did note (the word is apt) the self-imposed limitations of their study and their concept. Later developers, users, and promoters of the theory were not always so careful to specify the boundaries of their work. As “received knowledge,” the notion of “two-step flow” and “opinion leaders” tends not to be qualified.<sup>17</sup> In one footnote, Katz and Lazarsfeld classified four types of “effects” “along a rough time dimension”: “immediate response, short term effects, long term effects and institutional change.”<sup>18</sup> On the next page, again in a footnote, they wrote:<sup>19</sup>

It is important to note that some of these longer range effects which have barely been looked into promise to reveal the potency of the mass media much more than do “campaign” effects [i. e., effects of a single, short-run promotional or electoral campaign]. The latter, as we shall note below, give the impression that the media are quite ineffectual as far as persuasion in social and political [i. e., non-marketing] matters is concerned.

A few pages later, they cautioned again:<sup>20</sup>

It would be a mistake...to generalize from the role of the mass media in... direct, short-run effects to the degree of media potency which would be revealed if some longer-run, more indirect effects were conceptualized and subjected to study.

And as the last word of their theoretical Part One, they concluded with a reminder that is as forceful as a footnote can be:<sup>21</sup>



It is perhaps worth reiterating what was said at the very opening: Mass media research has been concerned almost exclusively with the study of only one kind of effect – the effect of short-run attempts (“campaigns”) to change opinions and attitudes....What should not be lost in all of this, however, is the idea that there are other kinds of mass media effects – which have not been much studied – where the impact of the mass media on society may be very much greater. Thus, the mass media surely lend themselves to all kinds of psychological gratifications and social “uses”; they seem to have visible effects on the character of personal “participation” in a variety of cultural and political activities; they have often been credited with being the primary agencies for the transmission of cultural values, etc. These chapters have not been explicitly concerned with these (predominantly long-range) matters. But our prescription – that communications research must take full account of the interpersonal contexts into which the mass media are injected – may hold good, too, for the much needed research on these less apparent, but perhaps more potent, effects of mass communications.

Finally, to avert any possible misunderstanding, they inserted a statement in the text to locate the personal influence analysis, “short-range changes and face-to-face influences,” in any more ambitious program of inquiry:<sup>22</sup>

We hope that as time goes on, more and more links in the general influence chains permeating our society will be studied....No reader should confuse the modesty of our present enterprise with a blindness to broader and more complex problems. But these problems will forever be out of reach if we lose patience with very specific investigations such as the present one.

This last sentence must mean that personal influence analysis is *necessary* to a general analysis of mass media effects and *commensurate* with it.

But all disclaimers aside, the method of the *Personal Influence* study, and that of its precursors and successors, stands as a perspective of its own. Not only did a generation of successors work with the personal influence model, but Katz himself<sup>23</sup> and many later commentators wrote on it as a self-contained hypothesis. The model by itself is meant to be more than preliminary; it is of a piece; it stands separate from the wished-for general model that never materialized. It demands its own critique, beginning with its taken-for-granted assumptions.

*Assumption 1. Commensurability of the Modes of Influence: The exercise of power through mass media is presumed to be comparable to the exercise of power in face-to-face situations. “People” “play a part” in the “flow of mass*

communications.” The links in “the general influence chain” are all of the same order; the relations between their influences can be characterized as “greater” or “lesser.” This was assumed rather than explicitly stated in *Personal Influence*, although there are points in the text (for example, p. 96) where the assumption lay relatively close to the surface. Discussing the two “forms of influence” in the same breath, as functional equivalents or commensurables, is what made for the general effect.

This reduction of structurally distinct social processes to commensurables can be recognized as a cardinal operation in the behaviorist canon. But what is distinct about the two processes, of course, is that everyone has the opportunity to exercise “personal influence” directly on someone else, albeit informally, and generally the relation is reciprocal, whereas the direct influence of mass media belongs routinely and professionally to the hierarchically organized handful who have access to it. The very image of a chain is reminiscent of the medieval Great Chain of Being, in which everyone, indeed everything, is in its duly and divinely appointed place. Language of this sort reveals the silent premise of the work.

*Assumption 2. Power as Distinct Occasions: Power is to be assessed in case studies of discrete incidents.* Katz and Lazarsfeld discussed and rejected two other possible criteria of influence: The reputational method, for one, (a) fails to reveal the frequency of influences, and (b) may elicit the names of prestigious individuals who have not actually directly influenced the respondent. Second, the counting of face-to-face contacts might let the decisive encounters through the sieve. Instead of these alternatives, they decided to ask respondents to recall “incidents of influence exchange,” and the specific influentials involved therein.<sup>24</sup> In particular, they would ask respondents how they had changed their minds in each of four issue areas; then they would interview the next link in the chain. The occasion of influence was the face-to-face encounter in which individual A commended attitude *a* or behavior *b* to individual B. Those who exercised influence on such occasions were defined as “opinion leaders.”

Notice that this behavioralization of power is identical to that achieved and insisted upon by the pluralist school of community political analysts who also came to prominence and began to dominate their field in the 1950s.<sup>25</sup> Here too the revolt against an earlier paradigm which emphasized the power of elites (the hypodermic model on the one hand, vulgar Marxism or elite theory on the other). Here too the tacit denial of patterns of structurally maintained power, or what will later be called “nondecisions.”<sup>26</sup> Here too the insistence on studying discrete episodes of the exercise of influence, as if power were a

kind of freely flowing marketplace commodity in a situation of equality, more or less; whence, as we shall see below, the discovery that opinion leadership, like the pluralist concept of influence, is issue-specific and “non-pyramiding.”<sup>27</sup> “Opinion leaders” in one sphere did not have influence over other spheres, just as Dahl’s New Haven influentials did not “pyramid” their influence. The structural homology of the two paradigms, personal influence and pluralism reveals something more significant than a coincidental similarity in the shape of their results; it reveals the similarity of problematics and methodologies, the common thrusts of the two fields.

*Assumption 3. The Commensurability of Buying and Politics: The unit of influence is a short-term “attitude change” or a discrete behavior; or, more exactly, the report of such “change” or behavior by a respondent, and one which the respondent can attribute to some specific intervention from outside.* Katz and Lazarsfeld were concerned with “four arenas of everyday decisions: marketing, fashions, public affairs and movie-going.”<sup>28</sup> *These areas were assumed to be assimilable within a single theory.*

The domain of their interest is most accurately conveyed with a look at the relevant questionnaire items:<sup>29</sup>

With regard to marketing:

During the last month or so, have you bought any new product or brand that you don’t usually buy? (I don’t mean something you had to buy because it was the only one available.) Yes... No... (If no) On which of these have you tried a new brand most recently? a. breakfast cereals... b. soap flakes or chips... c. coffee... d. None of these.

With regard to fashions:

Have you recently changed anything about your hairdo, type of clothing, cosmetics, make-up, or made any other change to something more fashionable? Yes... No... (If so) What sort of change did you make?

With regard to movies, “our starting point was to ask the respondent to tell us the name of the last movie that she saw.” (The respondents were women. For the reason, see p. 236.)

And on public affairs, the interviewers asked a number of recent poll questions, then asked if the respondent had recently changed her mind about any “like” them.

So in two of the four issue-areas, the concern was explicitly with changes in consumer behavior; in the third, with another discrete behavior in the realm of consumer choice; and in the fourth, with change in the opinion expressed. These issue-areas were taken to be comparable, and the presumed comparability of political ideas and product preferences distorted some of the actual findings. But more: the blithe assumption of the commensurability of buying and politics, never explicitly justified, never opened up to question, hung over the entire argument of *Personal Influence* like an ideological smog.

*Assumption 4. "Attitude Change" as the Dependent Variable: More deeply, more tellingly, the microscopic attention to "attitude change" was built on a confining approach to the nature of power. In Personal Influence, power was the power to compel a certain behavior, namely buying; or, in the case of "public affairs," it was the power to compel a change in "attitude" on some current issue. Respondents were asked if they had recently changed their attitudes on a current issue; if they had, they were asked who had influenced them.<sup>30</sup> If they had not changed their attitudes, they were assumed not to have been influenced.*

Now there are two ways in which this sense of influence is inadequate. First, it is possible that a respondent had begun to "change her mind" on a given issue, only to be persuaded back to the original position by personal influences or, directly, by mass media. More important still are the ways in which attitudes failed to change at all. If one does not take invariance for granted, but as something to be explained, how are we to understand the resulting "nondecisions?" For there is no compelling reason why constancy of attitude, in the capitalist age, must be taken for granted. Indeed, what in the modern age is called a constancy of attitude would have been inconstancy itself in previous times. Fickleness of loyalties is a prerequisite of capitalist society, where private property routinely yields to the claims of wealth and accumulation.<sup>31</sup> In the phase of high-consumption capitalism especially, when "new" is the symbolic affirmation of positive value and "old-fashioned" an emblem of backwardness, "changing one's mind" about products is a routine event. And in the realm of public life generally, one is frequently confronted with new political agendas (ecology, say), not to mention technological inventions, social "trends," celebrities and cultural artifacts, on which one is provoked into having opinions in the first place. Shifting policies of state routinely call for the mobilization and shift of public opinion.

In this historical situation, to take a constancy of attitude for granted amounts to a choice, and a fundamental one, to ignore the question of the sources of the very opinions which remain constant throughout shifting circumstances. Limiting their investigation thus, Katz and Lazarsfeld could not possibly

explore the institutional power of mass media: the degree of their power to shape public agendas, to mobilize networks of support for the policies of state and party, to condition public support for these institutional arrangements themselves. Nor could they even crack open the questions of the sources of these powers.

And this absence is not rectified by the presence of another major term in the Lazarsfeld canon: *reinforcement*. For Lazarsfeld and his school, especially Joseph T. Klapper, reinforcement is the way in which media influence makes itself felt. The media are taken only to “reinforce existing opinions” rather than to change minds. Klapper’s summary book, *The Effects of Mass Communication*,<sup>32</sup> remains the *locus classicus* of this argument, which comes forward to void criticism of the more general argument about the ineffectuality of media. Klapper and others who write in this vein think of reinforcement as a lower order affair compared to persuasion or mobilization. Yet reinforcement of opinion is an indispensable link between attitudes and actions. If media “only” reinforce “existing opinions,” they may well be readying action, or anchoring opinion in newly routine behavior. Moreover, “reinforcement” can be understood as the crucial solidifying of attitude into *ideology*, a relatively enduring configuration of consciousness which importantly determines how people may perceive and respond to new situations. But “ideology” and “consciousness” are concepts that fall through the sieves of both behaviorism and stimulus-response psychology. They have no ontological standing in the constraining conceptual world of mainstream media research.<sup>33</sup>

Though he missed these points in his earlier work, Klapper has more recently compensated with a proposition that effectively demolishes the old theoretical apparatus:<sup>34</sup>

Reinforcement and conversion can, of course, occur only where there is an opinion to reinforce or oppose. It cannot occur in the absence of opinion. *Although there has been relatively little research on the subject, the media appear to be extremely effective in creating opinions.* By way of a commonsense example, a few months before Fidel Castro came to power, probably less than 2 per cent of the American people so much as knew his name, let alone his political leanings. A year thereafter, however, the American public knew a great deal about him and his political behavior and were rather homogeneous in their opinions about him. The source of their knowledge and the bases of their opinions were obviously restricted, for all practical purposes, to the mass media.

And of course such situations are routine in national and international

political life: people are constantly expected to know something about situations they barely knew existed the day before. The issues presented in this way are among the most momentous: issues of war and peace, of international stance and alignment, of economic policy. A media sociology severed from a sense of the political importance of such issues systematically misses the point.

Without raising such points, Klapper, the head of research for CBS Television and one of Lazarsfeld's foremost students, goes on:

It is not difficult to see why the mass media are extremely effective in creating opinion on new issues. In such a situation the audiences have no existing opinions to be guarded by the conscious or subconscious play of selective exposure, selective retention, or selective perception. Their reference groups are likewise without opinion, and opinion leaders are not yet ready to lead. In short, the factors that ordinarily render mass communications an agent of reinforcement are inoperative, and the media are thus able to work directly upon their audiences.

Now of course even this exclusion does not suffice as a statement of the conditions for media impact, since it does not discuss the source of whatever "existing opinion" do "ordinarily" prevail. And it does not address the substratum of belief that underlies discrete "opinions." Klapper is holding on to the personal influence paradigm. But his remark does show it is impossible to ground a theory of media impact in data collected on self-attributed sources of opinion *change*. And further: although Lazarsfeld and his students did seek to show that attitudes may be rooted in social position (socio-economic status, etc.), their practice of taking attitudes as discrete and disconnected units does not address their location in ideational structure: that is, in ideology.

*Assumption 5. Followers as "Opinion Leaders": Katz and Lazarsfeld took as given, definitive, and fundamental the structure and content of the media. The close attention they paid to "opinion leaders" not only automatically distracted from the central importance of the broadcast networks and wire services, it defined "opinion leading" as an act of following without the awareness — indeed, the amusement — that such confusion should have occasioned. They were looking at the process of ideas moving through society through the wrong end of the telescope.*

Specifically, the Decatur women were asked to nominate "opinion leaders" *in relation to the externally defined news*. To tell who was an "opinion leader," Katz and Lazarsfeld asked them "for their opinions on a variety of domestic and international problems *then current in the news*, e. g., on Truman's foreign

policy, on demobilization policy for the army, etc.” Then the women were asked if they had “recently changed their opinions” and whether they had been asked for advice.<sup>35</sup> “Experts,” meanwhile – those whose general public-affairs influence overflowed the boundaries between issues – were defined as those nominated in response to this question: “Do you know anyone around here who keeps up with the news and whom you can trust to let you know what is really going on?”<sup>36</sup> In what sense, then, did an “opinion leader” actually lead? What was an “expert” expert in, and who decided the content of certified expertise?

The problem, to use the official language of sociology, is that the administrative mentality exaggerates the importance of “independent variables” that are located closest in time and space to the “dependent variables” under investigation.<sup>37</sup> Only their administrative point of view prevented Katz and Lazarsfeld from taking seriously the obvious: that their “experts” were dependent for their expertise on a “variable” explicitly ruled out of the scope of analysis. Respondents were being asked to name as influentials those individuals who they thought were most tuned in to the mass media. Katz and Lazarsfeld were taking for granted the power of mass media to define news; and they were therefore discovering not “the part played by people in the flow of mass communications,” but the nature of the *channels* of that flow.<sup>38</sup> Vague language (indeed, a vague concept of power, as we shall see) masked a crucial distinction. It is as if one were studying the influence of streets on mortality rates – during an enormous flood. A street is a conduit, not a cause of drowning. But the distinction is lost in bland language. When they came to address the issue, Katz and Lazarsfeld skirted the issue of institutionalized news this way:<sup>39</sup>

Compared with the realm of fashions at any rate, one is led to suspect that the chain of interpersonal influence is longer in the realm of public affairs and that “inside dope” as well as influencing in specific influence episodes is much more a person-to-person affair.

The suspicion of a “longer chain of influence” is an evasion of institutionalized relations between broadcasters and audiences.

But an administrative point of view is likely, from the outset, to confuse a report of a certain sort of influence with originating power, since the institutional origin, by being more distant both conceptually and in time and space, will inevitably “leak” in transmission. In the process of asking *how* decisions are made at the bottom of the influence structure, it cannot ask *why* the occasion for deciding exists in the first place. It asks, in other words, the

questions an administrator asks, or, in this case, the questions a marketer asks. (In fact it was a marketer, Macfadden Publications, who commissioned the Decatur study in the first place. On the roots of Lazarsfeld's work in marketing research, see pp. 233–40.)

### Empirical Failings and Discrepancies

Even if we accepted the behaviorist premises embedded in the plan of *Personal Influence*, we would still have to confront the specific ways in which the theory fails of its *intended* purposes. Because of the sweep of their claim to have discovered a general principle of social interaction, Katz and Lazarsfeld blurred some of the interesting discrepancies in their findings. That is, they *reported* discrepancies but failed to *interpret* them, to give them proper weight in their theorizing.

The most striking discrepancy between finding and theory comes where Katz and Lazarsfeld reported the results of their survey of the sources of whatever “attitude change” on public affairs showed up between the two interview periods, June and August. Even if we permit the questionable assumption that people can reliably testify to the sources of their “attitude changes,” there is a peculiar anomaly. How is one to make sense of the following result?<sup>40</sup>

Not every [public affairs] opinion change [between June and August] involved a personal contact. Fifty-eight per cent (of the *changes*, not the *changers*) were apparently made without involving any remembered personal contact, and were, very often, dependent upon the mass media.

On the face of it, this extraordinary finding discredits the theory of the two-step flow; it is, in fact, consistent with the old “hypodermic” notion. “Not every opinion change” indeed!<sup>41</sup> The general theoretical conclusion, that “ideas often flow *from* radio and print to the opinion leaders and *from* them to the less active sections of the population,”<sup>42</sup> is now seen to be more wrong than right. How did this disconfirmation fail to enter into Katz's and Lazarsfeld's theoretical conclusion? I can only conjecture that the failure to incorporate the empirical disconfirmation into the theory — that is, the discrepancy was mentioned at one point in the book, but not when the general theory was being stated — flows from the study's construction of a false commensurability among the four areas of fashion, marketing, movies and public affairs. If one regards these areas as equally significant and comparable, and the theory is constructed to apply to all of them indiscriminately, then a serious disconfirmation in *only* one of the areas does not weigh so



heavily. If, on the other hand, one is investigating the impact of mass communications on political attitudes, the disconfirmation is decisive. Thus the extrinsic choice of four issue-areas (see p. 236) ends up permitting the authors to push a serious discrepancy off to one side.

There is another instance where the Decatur data pointed away from the two-step flow theory, and in which Katz and Lazarsfeld failed to take the empirical lapse into account in formulating their theory. People named as influentials or influencees in the area of public affairs were far less likely to confirm that status — to confirm, in other words, that they had in fact made an attempt to influence, or that they had in fact been influenced — than people named in the areas of marketing and fashions.<sup>43</sup> Fifty-seven percent of the designated marketing influencees acknowledged that role; 56 percent of the fashion influencees; but 38 percent of the public affairs influencees. For designated influentials, the confirmations were 71 percent for marketing, 61 percent for influencees; but only 38 percent of the public affairs influencees. For designated influentials, the confirmations were 71 percent for marketing, 61 percent for fashions, but only 37 percent for public affairs. In other words, in the area of discrepancy,<sup>44</sup> Katz and Lazarsfeld mentioned the possibility that the *men* who were disproportionately the public-affairs influencers may have been poor informants on these matters; they did not mention the possibility that specific influence on one's "public affairs attitude changes" was so hard to trace as to cast discredit on the idea of a two-step flow operating at all, or any other decisive interpersonal process of influence. Data like these are entirely consistent with the "hypodermic" theory: with the hypothesis that, in the area of public affairs, media work directly upon public consciousness. Although this marked failure of confirmation bankrupts the public-affairs variant of the theory, certainly one of the major extrapolations from their work in later years, Katz and Lazarsfeld passed over any such implication by calling for "much more study" and by labeling their study "exploratory."

### **The Theory's Limits in Time**

Even if we accepted the behaviorist assumptions of *Personal Influence*, and limited the theory's claims in order to be true to the empirical discrepancies, we would still have to confront its barely suggested historical boundaries.

Often enough footnotes are the burial grounds of anticipated criticism; they are also, therefore, good sites to begin the archaeological digs of critical investigation. So it is that, after hundreds of pages of generalization about mass communications, it was in a footnote that Katz and Lazarsfeld reminded the reader: "The study was completed before the general introduction of

television.”<sup>45</sup> And then they darted back to their discussion without noticeably adulterating the generality of their conclusions about “the flow of mass communications.”

It is hard to know what to make of this, and the authors did not afford us any assistance. But to begin with it is not obvious, to say the least, that what went for radio and print in 1945 should go for the more intrusive, more immediate, more “credible” medium of television later on. It would rather seem, *a priori*, that television would have, or at least could have, a more direct impact than radio or print. In other words, even if the findings of *Personal Influence* were persuasive on their face (which they are not), and even if the theory embodied there were compelling rather than weak (which it is not), we would still not be in a position to say anything cogent about the era after 1945, about the force of television in the domain of political consciousness and political conduct.

But a larger question arises here too, of the confusion between synchronic and diachronic dimensions. As their rhetoric makes clear, Katz and Lazarsfeld did not intend simply to make assertions about the relations between more and less media-exposed women in Decatur, Illinois, in the summer of 1945; they intended general statements, valid across the boundaries of time. Because of the methodological difficulties that would be entailed in studying long-run effects in a positivist fashion, they and their followers constructed a paradigm which would then be taken as valid over the historical long haul. From the snapshot, they proposed the inferences one could only make about a film. But the transposition was not justifiable. C. Wright Mills, who had supervised the field work in Decatur and then drafted the original analysis of the data in 1946, made one critical point very clearly:<sup>46</sup>

Many problems with which [abstracted empiricism’s] practitioners do try to deal – effects of the mass media, for example – cannot be adequately stated without some structural setting. Can one hope to understand the effects of these media – much less their combined meaning for the development of a mass society – if one studies, with whatever precision, only a population that has been “saturated” by these media for almost a generation? The attempt to sort out individuals “less exposed” from those “more exposed” to one or another medium may well be of great concern to advertising interests, but it is not an adequate basis for the development of a theory of the social meaning of the mass media.

Of course it was precisely what Mills considered “a theory of the social meaning of the mass media,” necessarily a theory of the mass media *in history*,

that Katz and Lazarsfeld would discount as vague, unscientific, and impracticable. Indeed, Lazarsfeld did so in no uncertain terms in the midst of his most critical essay (written with Robert K. Merton):<sup>47</sup>

What role can be assigned to the mass media by virtue of the fact that they exist? What are the implications of a Hollywood, a Radio City, and a Time-Life-Fortune enterprise for our society? These questions can, of course, be discussed only in grossly speculative terms, since no experimentation or rigorous comparative study is possible. Comparisons with other societies lacking these mass media would be too crude to yield decisive results, and comparisons with an earlier day in American society would still involve gross assertions rather than precise demonstrations. In such an instance, brevity is clearly indicated. And opinions should be leavened with caution.

And yet Lazarsfeld's cleanly positivist approach in *Personal Influence* is "grossly speculative" in its own way, by elevating the findings of a single study, themselves dubious, to the status of timeless theory. A four-hundred page book found a one-line footnote sufficient notice that its general propositions did not take account of a central feature of the reality they claimed to be uncovering; or, to put it technically, the central "independent variable" was grossly incomplete. Such brevity was plainly indicative of a lapse in caution. And if it were to be claimed that the positivist propositions of *Personal Influence*, however couched in the ordinary language of timeless truths, could in principle be discredited by future replications, and therefore remain scientific in the Popperian sense, it would have to be granted in return that general historical statements are in principle equally refutable, and are therefore equally capable of validation by the criteria of Karl Popper. Failing to admit straightforward historical speculation (and why could there not be *fine* speculation?), rejecting it as "gross assertion rather than precise demonstration," Lazarsfeld let "gross assertion" in through the back door.

If the alternatives are "gross assertion" and "precise demonstration," we seem to be left with the overly elaborated categories of microscopic technique, or what Alfred North Whitehead called "misplaced concretism." But a multiplication of categories is not necessarily a clarification of reality. Confusing the two is the occupational hazard of the positivist tradition. Later generations of scholars inherit and perpetuate the main outlines of the pioneering and misleading study, according it paradigm-founding status, and usually failing to examine it critically. It is so easy, especially in the press of one's own studies, to ignore or to override the cautions and contradictions of the founding work, especially when they are located obscurely in the text. The shape of the social

science that results is nicely grasped in the memoir of a former Columbia graduate student, Maurice Stein:<sup>48</sup>

One of my favorite fantasies is a dialogue between Mills and Lazarsfeld in which the former reads to the latter the first sentence of *The Sociological Imagination*: “Nowadays men often feel that their private lives are a series of traps.” Lazarsfeld immediately replies: “How many men, which men, how long have they felt this way, which aspects of their private lives bother them, do their public lives bother them, when do they feel free rather than trapped, what kinds of traps do they experience, etc., etc., etc.” If Mills succumbed, the two of them would have to apply to the National Institute of Mental Health for a million-dollar grant to check out and elaborate that first sentence. They would need a staff of hundreds, and when finished they would have written *Americans View Their Mental Health* rather than *The Sociological Imagination*, provided that they finished at all, and provided that either of them cared enough at the end to bother writing anything.

One should ponder well the actual uses of the studies Stein mocks; for the absurdity of their pretensions and the trivialization of their language do not halt them. Indeed, the web of assumptions that stands behind *Personal Influence* persists, albeit contested now by structural and radical critiques. Not surprisingly, this pattern of theoretical assumptions bears a strong resemblance to the assumptions of corporate broadcasting itself. The two enterprises share in a fetishism of facts, facts which by their raw muscularity, their indisputability, their very “hardness,” take on the authority of coherent theory. The fact in social science becomes a sort of commodity, the common currency of discourse, to be compared with, exchanged for, and supplanted by others, just as the fact as it is presented through mass media becomes authority itself, an orientation to the bewildering world that lies outside one’s milieu and outside one’s control. The society of the crisp, authoritative radio and TV voice, of objective journalism, and of abstract empiricism, is the society of the instant replay, of microscopically interesting sports records, of the Guinness Book of World Records – and of body counts and megaton nuances. *Dragnet*’s Sgt. Friday and mainstream sociology both demand “Just the facts, ma’am.” T. W. Adorno has traced this sociological orientation to “Durkheim’s rule that one should treat social facts like objects, should first and foremost renounce any effort to ‘understand’ them,” and this in turn to the reality of “relationships between men which have grown increasingly independent of them, opaque, now standing off against human beings like some different substance.”<sup>49</sup> The practice of making a fetish of the “hard” behavioral fact in sociology grows along with the use of “hard news,” of the

mediated fact as “technological propaganda,” or in “a propaganda of facts,” which functions to discourage reflectiveness. These phrases emanate, by the way, from an excellent analysis of the phenomenon, first published in 1943 by — Robert K. Merton and Paul F. Lazarsfeld.<sup>50</sup> The fetishism of facts as a practice proves stronger than the ironic theoretical understanding of its rise.<sup>51</sup>

## II. ROOTS OF THE PARADIGM

Why did the *Personal Influence* study start by assuming that mass media influence is comparable to face-to-face influence, and that power exists as discrete occasions of short-term “attitude change” or behavioral choice? How may we account for the theory’s thin sampling of reality, for its discrepancies and their absence from the summary theory? And why did the field that grew from these beginnings preserve that thinness and those discrepancies in both theory and methodology? If we step back from the Decatur study and its successors to the general style of thought they embody, to their sociological tenor, we find a whole and interwoven fabric of ideological predispositions and orientations. We find, in particular, an *administrative point of view* rooted in academic sociology’s ideological assimilation into modern capitalism and its institutional rapprochement with major foundations and corporations in an oligopolistic high-consumption society; we find a concordant *marketing orientation*, in which the emphasis on commercially useful audience research flourishes; and we find, curiously, a justifying *social democratic ideology*. The administrative point of view, the marketing orientation, and the Austro-Marxist variant of social-democratic ideology are a constellation that arose together but are (at least) analytically separable, and I will treat them one at a time.

One further prefatory note: *in the whole of the discussion that follows, I want to stress that I will be looking at roots of the paradigm as a whole — the search for specific, measurable, short-term, individual “effects,” and not beyond them — and not solely at sources of the specific two-step flow theory within it.* It is the whole scope of the paradigm — its methodological individualism, its market assumptions, its structural naivete — that is at issue. The “two-step flow” might be a sound theory, and questions would remain about the prevalence of its premises throughout the field.

And lest this search for general origins be seen as unjustifiably contextual, reductionist, or perhaps *ad hominem*, it seems only proper to quote an illustrious predecessor. Paul F. Lazarsfeld himself wrote that the “ideological

component,” “the intellectual climate,” and “the personal equation” were “probable roots” of his “new research style,” and that his ideological, intellectual, and personal origins permitted him “structural fit” with the emerging sociological scene in America.<sup>52</sup>

### The Administrative Point of View

When I say that the Lazarsfeld point of view is administrative, I mean that in general it poses questions from the vantage of the command-posts of institutions that seek to improve or rationalize their control over social sectors in social functions. The sociologist, from this point of view, is an expert who addresses problems that are formulated, directly or indirectly, by those command-posts, who are concerned, in essence, with managing the expansion, stability, and legitimacy of their enterprises, and with controlling potential challenges to them. In the development of media research in particular, as in the whole of postwar positivist surge in social science, the search is for models of mass media effects that are *predictive*, which in the context can mean only that results can be predicted from, or for, the commanding heights of the media. The “variables” are to be varied by those in charge of mass media production, and only by them; therefore they tend to be short-run in time-span and behavioral rather than structural in focus. From the administrator’s point of view, the mass media system in its structural organization is of course not at issue; it is the very premise of the inquiry. Thus, the administrative theorist (the term is Lazarsfeld’s own self-characterization)<sup>53</sup> is not concerned, for example, with the corporate decision to produce radio and television receivers as household commodities rather than, say, public ones, although this fundamental choice had serious consequences for the social uses, power, and meaning of mass media.<sup>54</sup> The administrative theorist is not concerned with the corporate structure of ownership and control at all, or with the corporate criteria for media content that follow from it: he or she begins with the existing order and considers the effects of a certain use of it. What C. Wright Mills called abstracted empiricism is not at all abstracted from a concrete social order, a concrete system of power.

It stands to reason that the administrative point of view comes most easily to the mind of one who is himself or herself an administrator, or comfortably *en route* to that position, especially of an intellectual enterprise developed under corporate or State auspices, set up with its financial backing, and in its organizational image, able to capitalize on its legitimacy to open research doors and to recruit a skilled staff. For the administrative point of view is an angle of theory intimately connected with a practice, and best nurtured

within it. Point of view and institutional position select for one another. Lazarsfeld was himself, of course, one of the pioneers in the bureaucratic approach to sociological research, by his own account an “institution man,”<sup>55</sup> indeed an administrative and entrepreneurial wizard. At first with the Office of Radio Research at Princeton he took charge of in 1937, then with its reincarnation as the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University, he “developed,” in his own words, “the image of the managerial scholar.”<sup>56</sup> He presided there over any number of research projects in marketing and media, over the training of successors, and over the reputation gathered by both projects and successors. His skill in gathering research funds was legendary; he knew how to shift them with aplomb from project to project, raising money here from foundations and companies for narrow, specific purposes, and then using the money, there, often for wider purposes. (Such was the case, indeed, with the Decatur study. See p. 236.) As a bureau director he was able “to take reasonable risks, to try deviant innovations without coming into too much conflict with prevailing norms.”<sup>57</sup>

The time of his ascendancy in American academic life was, as he pointed out, a fortuitous one. It was a time when administered politics, administered markets, administered culture, administered education were each coming into its own, each becoming legitimate, each developing tight interlocks with the others. Their mutual gravitational pulls were gradually forming them into a fixed and rising constellation, a recognizable life-world with distinct and dominant, though flexible, norms and practices. Universities, corporations and foundations were finding themselves in sometimes uneasy but mutually indispensable partnerships; and they were meeting under the sign of behaviorism.

In 1929, the new head of Social Sciences for the Rockefeller Foundation, Edmund E. Day, had begun his tenure with these words:<sup>58</sup>

Practically all the sciences have sprung initially from philosophy. The introduction of laboratory methods enabled the natural sciences to make a rather complete separation, and the medical sciences made the same break later. The social sciences are still in the process of establishing their independence.....*We have thus virtually to break an academic pattern. We have to establish a new academic mold.*

Within the next fifteen years, and with no small boost from the Rockefeller Foundation, that new academic mold was forming. A man like Paul Lazarsfeld, a serious and skilled theoretician and bargainer among theories as well as among men, a practitioner of positivism as well as an “institution man,” could become central to the whole developing process, in all its intellectual and

organizational aspects. But it makes little sense to ask exactly which particular institutions led, and which followed, in the vast social and cultural transformation into oligopolistic capitalism. Men like Lazarsfeld, coming to intellectual maturity under the political star of European social democracy, inventive with mathematical tools, able to put sociological methods at the service of a brash, expanding consumer capitalism, were looking for institutions to embody their approach to the world. Foundations and corporations, having learned the uses of quantification in the rise of engineering (especially in Taylorist production) and in the model-changing, price-increasing mass marketing pioneered by Alfred E. Sloan at General Motors, wanted to rationalize the social sciences and make them practical. The State was interested in knowing the conditions for effective propaganda. Universities wanted to establish new financial bases, to integrate themselves into the postwar boom and the new hegemonic culture, although they would have to be convinced that the new research style was legitimate, that it would not threaten the position of the entrenched academic mandarins. All these interests and strategies were converging, and a farsighted and adventuresome and skilled thinker like Paul Lazarsfeld was one to insist on the *common* interest, with great success.

In the crystallization of the new intellectual force, the Rockefeller Foundation did in fact play a substantial role, and never more effectively than in putting Paul F. Lazarsfeld on the American map. Lazarsfeld recalled much later that the pioneering study he organized, in 1930, of unemployment in the village of Marienthal, was suggested to him originally by Otto Bauer, a leader of the Socialist Party of Austria.<sup>59</sup> That study, a statistically rich prefiguring of his later work,

brought me to the attention of the Paris representative of the Rockefeller Foundation, and in 1932 I obtained a traveling fellowship to the United States, where I arrived in September 1933.

In a footnote to his memoir, Lazarsfeld added:<sup>60</sup>

The way I received my fellowship has its own interest. The Rockefeller representative gave me an application form. Living in the pessimistic climate of Vienna at the time, I was sure I would not get the fellowship, and did not apply. In November 1932 I got a cable from the Paris Rockefeller office informing me that my application had been misfiled, and that they wanted another copy. They had obviously decided to grant me the fellowship on the recommendation of their representative and it had never occurred to them that I had not applied. I mailed a “duplicate,” and the fellowship was granted.



The Foundation continued to care assiduously for “establishing the independence” of social science from primitive, non-instrumental philosophy. When, in 1937, the Foundation bestowed upon Hadley Cantril of Princeton and Frank Stanton of CBS the money for an Office of Radio Research, Robert Lynd at Columbia convinced Cantril to hire Lazarsfeld as Director. Within a few years the Office “had acquired an institutional life of its own,” and was able to procure grants from other sources.<sup>61</sup> But the Foundation remained its major buttress.<sup>62</sup> In Lazarsfeld the Foundation had found a superlative organization man who could bring the “new research style” inside reluctant universities, and make the positivist spirit prevail against the backwardness of of philosophy. The second edition of *The People’s Choice* records: “This study was made financially possible by drawing upon a general grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, the income of the Consulting Division of Columbia University’s Office of Radio Research, and by special contributions from *Life* magazine and Elmo Roper.”<sup>63</sup> Here is what the former President of the Rockefeller Foundation has written about the Foundation’s support:<sup>64</sup>

An undertaking of perhaps deeper promise was the support given to the School of Public and International Affairs of Princeton University toward a study of the role that radio plays in the lives of the listeners. Organized under Dr. Paul F. Lazarsfeld, it attempted to answer such questions as these: What individuals and social groups listen to the radio? How much do they listen and why? In what ways are they affected by their listening? The radio industry had, of course, been concerned with determining the size and distribution of its audience as prospective purchasers for products advertised over the air. To learn what it could of the listener as an individual and as a member of society, the Princeton study, quite literally, began where the industry left off. This same type of study was later supported at Columbia University, also under Dr. Lazarsfeld. The research by the two institutions not only gave a detailed and accurate portrait of the American listening public, but also developed new methods of inquiry applicable to forecasting and testing the response of untried programs; and *the reports which grew out of the studies having been widely used in the radio industry, Dr. Lazarsfeld’s office was increasingly consulted as a source of expert and impartial advice.*

Lazarsfeld, for his part, was not worried by his dependence on the Foundation. “The liberal formulation of the Rockefeller program,” he wrote later, “permitted me to do any kind of specific study as long as I gave it some nominal connection with radio problems....”<sup>65</sup> But not quite. The Rockefeller program insisted on underwriting only studies that were consonant with the empiricist program, and in at least one instance Lazarsfeld described, the hand that paid

the piper did actually and directly, and apparently despite Lazarsfeld's hesitation, call the proverbial tune. In 1938 Lazarsfeld, along with Max Horkheimer, now at Columbia, invited T. W. Adorno to the United States, to direct the music division of Lazarsfeld's Office of Radio Research. One would have to speculate on the full complexity of Lazarsfeld's motives: the humanitarian wish to aid a fellow refugee; Lazarsfeld's affinity for some of the Frankfurt Institut's early empirical studies; his desire, perhaps, to give more active expression to his suppressed critical underside. By his own account, Lazarsfeld wanted "to see whether I could induce Adorno to try to link his ideas with empirical research." In his own manner, fitfully, reluctantly, and critically, Adorno did try: during his time with Lazarsfeld he wrote a number of concrete studies of what he would later call "the culture industry."<sup>66</sup> Writing about the same period, Adorno did not criticize Lazarsfeld directly; instead he wrote this:<sup>67</sup>

Naturally there appeared to be little room for...critical social research in the framework of the Princeton Project. *Its charter, which came from the Rockefeller Foundation, expressly stipulated that the investigations must be performed within the limits of the commercial radio system prevailing in the United States.* It was thereby implied that the system itself, its cultural and sociological consequences and its social and economic presuppositions were not to be analyzed.

Adorno added dryly: "I cannot say that I strictly obeyed the charter." After a year of tension over the proper domain of cultural research, Lazarsfeld, to his credit, tried in a long letter to convince Adorno to abandon his own fetishism of language and his "disrespect" for empirical procedures, but to no avail.<sup>68</sup> Again according to Lazarsfeld,<sup>69</sup> John Marshall of the Rockefeller Foundation "probably felt that my efforts to bring Adorno's type of critical research into the communications field were a failure," and in the fall of 1939 the Foundation refused to renew the music project.

Lazarsfeld would argue in the Frankfurt Institut's own journal that "critical" and "administrative" research were in fact compatible;<sup>70</sup> he wanted empirical research to answer the questions put by critical theory. Adorno himself insisted that he objected not to empirical research as such but to its primacy *over* — and finally *instead of* — theory.<sup>71</sup> But however conflicted Lazarsfeld's position on critical theory, and however personally-grounded his difficulties with Adorno, the Foundation evidently did not want to come even this close to retrograde, offending "philosophy." "Expertise and impartiality" finally meant attentiveness to the practical problems of the culture industry; it required strict adherence to an administrative point of view.<sup>72</sup>

Lazarsfeld's administrative theory and his close relations with the cultural industry, in the person of Frank Stanton, proceeded apace. It was in 1935 that Lazarsfeld established what was to be a long working partnership – “friendly relations,” Lazarsfeld called them – with Stanton, “then a junior staff member of the Columbia Broadcasting System.”<sup>73</sup> Of course Stanton's corporate standing does not automatically establish that, in any simple sense, Lazarsfeld was beholden to the narrowly construed corporate interests of CBS, as opposed to, say, NBC or *The New York Times*. In fact, their affinity was considerably more profound than an immediate interest. Lazarsfeld's relations with Stanton, and Stanton's successful career, personify the rising estate of administrative social science just before, during and after the Second World War, and its tight links with the apparatus of corporation and State. The two men shared a common interest in positivist research, especially in the measurement of audiences and the “effects” of particular media messages, which would enable centralized institutions (broadcasters, advertisers, the State) to predict public reactions to institutional choices. Stanton himself had been hired by CBS in 1935 because the network was impressed with his Ph. D. psychology dissertation on audience research. Stanton had invented “the first automatic recording device designed to be placed inside home radio receivers”;<sup>74</sup> thus he anticipated A. C. Neilsen's lucrative little polling box. By 1938, Stanton was research director of CBS, and at the same time an Assistant Director of the Princeton project. Much was at stake for Lazarsfeld in such a relationship. He could become legitimate in the eyes of the media establishment, just as, in his associations with such sociologists as Robert Lynd and Hadley Cantril, he could strive for intellectual legitimacy. As a “marginal man” who understood himself as such, and moreover as a refugee Jew in the anti-Semitic academy, Lazarsfeld would have to secure both flanks.<sup>75</sup> With direct corporate connections, he could gain access not only to research money, but to the data without which administrative-type research was unimaginable. Stanton, meanwhile, would become President of CBS Inc. in 1946, and remain there until 1971, presiding over the decisive early years of television. The convergence of research interests between Lazarsfeld and Stanton, their lengthy collaboration in directing first the Office of Radio Research and then the Bureau of Applied Social Research, and in editing the intermittent Radio Research series from 1940 on, traced an emblematic success story: the two careers succeeded together, harnessed to the social science they brought to both commercial utility and academic legitimacy. It was a stunning instance of being in the right place at the right time, or what Lazarsfeld later called “structural fit”: the convergence of a refugee sociologist's worldview with “some nascent trends in the American community.”<sup>76</sup> One of his fellow immigrants recently said of Paul Lazarsfeld: “He was very American – the most successful of us all.”<sup>77</sup>

A man of political, ethnic, and ideological marginality, Lazarsfeld became what he called an “institution man,” precisely what empiricist social research in the United States needed to embody the new academic style in an autonomous but academically affiliated base.<sup>78</sup> His own training in both social science and mathematical methods, and his Viennese-Machian philosophical bent, made him valuable to the new commercial and social-scientific establishments. “It seems plausible,” Lazarsfeld wrote with characteristic insight and bluntness, “that such a configuration would lead to a career detoured through an institutional innovation rather than routed directly toward individual mobility.”<sup>79</sup> The institution builder, a marginal man by his own account, needed the firmest possible affiliations with the determining institutions, affiliated and indispensable to all yet independent of every particular interest.

No conspiracy here, but a powerful convergence of commitments. The crucial point is that the administrative mentality of Lazarsfeld and Stanton harmonized with the corporate interest of CBS *and* with the practical program of the Rockefeller Foundation *and* with the swelling positivist mode of American social science. Where there was friction, as with Adorno, Lazarsfeld was willing to sacrifice the putative critical edge of his thought. To understand Paul Lazarsfeld’s orientation, the force and reach of the theory and method of *Personal Influence*, it is not so important to know the exact identity of the signature of any given paycheck (though that is important too) as to understand the thematic unity of the administrative worldview in whatever institution it arises. With all the pressures working toward it, with all its utility for so many coordinating interests, some requisite signature almost certainly, sooner or later, would have turned up. The worldview and its research methods went seeking sponsors perhaps even more industriously than the sponsors went seeking techniques. So does ideology, shrewd and flexible, often hunt up the support of the interest it defends.

In his fascinating — and fascinatingly incomplete — memoir, Lazarsfeld discussed some of the difficulties he faced in negotiating the lingering differences between the institutional interests of the mass media and the methodological requirements of behaviorist research. And what he did not say directly, he implied. “Communications research was, at the time,” he wrote, “a new enterprise, and I gave speeches about it to rather high-level audiences such as the National Association of Broadcasters and the Association of American Newspaper Editors. On such occasions I faced a very difficult problem: the relation with the industry.” He continued:<sup>80</sup>

In one of those speeches, later published in *The Journalism Quarterly*,<sup>81</sup> I formulated the issue as follows: “Those of us social scientists who are

especially interested in communications research depend upon the industry for much of our data. Actually most publishers and broadcasters have been very generous and cooperative in this recent period during which *communications research had developed as a kind of joint enterprise between industries and universities*. But we academic people always have a certain sense of tightrope walking: at what point will the commercial partners find some necessary conclusion too hard to take and at what point will they shut us off from the indispensable sources of funds and data?"

It is interesting that in this speech Lazarsfeld did not worry about his relationship with universities; his commercial audience might have been assured to know that the tightrope had more than one edge. But, in any case, Lazarsfeld went on:<sup>82</sup>

I finally thought of a compromise formula. In a speech on "The Role of Criticism in the Management of Mass Media," I started out by saying that the mass media were overly sensitive to the criticism of intellectuals, while the latter were too strict in their overall indictment; *there ought to be a way of making criticism more useful and manageable for those who offer it and those who receive it.*

And he moved on in that speech to propose that journalism schools train students in criticism — presumably "useful," "manageable" criticism, not the unruly, contextual, structural, radical mode of an Adorno.

A delicate business indeed. What sort of "independence" is it that occupies the interstices of universities, foundations, media corporations, and the State? The "institution man" can negotiate differences among them, interpret each to the others, highlight and consolidate the common interest in the form of shared ideological symbols. As he "walks the tightrope," he safeguards the stability, the frequently delicate mutual dependence of the "joint enterprise." As an arbiter and go-between, the sociological administrator-expert avoids becoming beholden to any *particular* interest: a limited "independence" indeed. In a period of rapprochement among the political, economic, and cultural sectors, in this converging social vision of a rationalized oligopolistic capitalism, Lazarsfeld would seek the widest possible domain of institutional amity. He would take an interest, not surprisingly, in that sector of the State which coordinated and regulated corporate operations. So it was that, immediately after he finished discussing his speech to the media elite, without visible sign of conclusion or transition, or any grammatical justification for the subject, he continued in the following vein:<sup>83</sup>

In all of the work of the Princeton Office I tried to relate to public controversies, *but usually thought of our office as serving a mediating function*. Thus, for example, we served as a channel for a project of the progressive chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, Clifford Durr. He had commissioned Charles Siepmann to develop ideas on how the FCC could better work for higher broadcasting standards. This assignment resulted in two documents, the FCC's "blue book" promulgating stricter licensing standards, and Siepmann's *Radio: Second Chance*. To both publications the industry reacted with violent antagonism, and I prevailed upon John Marshall of the Rockefeller Foundation to provide a special budget so that I could organize a two-day conference among the industry, the FCC, and prominent scholars in the research field to discuss the issues.

As we see, this was no change of subject at all.

The administrative mentality, in sum, is a bargaining mentality, desiring harmonious relations among the commanding institutions, within a common, hegemonic ideological frame: in this case, that established through the legitimacy of a commercial culture industry. In the academy it is "interdisciplinary," in the government it is "interbureau," in the Pentagon it is "interservice," in the economy it is "labor-management." It is always coordinating, mediating, stabilizing, harmonizing. In the process, it manages external reality as data, and it prefers to work within and along with the main institutions, those which have the capacity to make the world sit still and become data, or to imagine it that way. Its *modus operandi* is, above all, the contact and connection of "personal influence."

### **The Marketing Orientation**

An administrative mentality is compatible with a range of societies, totalitarian as well as liberal; to each of these corresponds a theoretical orientation in social science. By itself, the administrative mentality cannot account for the appeal of the search for "personal influence," or the peculiar stress on narrowly construed behavioral or attitudinal "effects" in social investigation. We are closer to understanding American media sociology when we look to the particular variant of administrative thought that Paul Lazarsfeld brought into the American academy: the marketing orientation. Only with a search for the relevant history — in particular, the history of mass media in the United States — can we begin to grasp the significance of Lazarsfeld's work. For it is an *oeuvre* that is unimaginable apart from the emergence of the

practice and theory of a mass-consuming society in the twentieth century.

It is no secret that mass communications research descends directly from the development of sophisticated marketing techniques. The theory of “effects” was first developed for the direct, explicit use of broadcasters and advertisers, and continues to be used mostly in those circles, to grow more sophisticated there. With admirable brevity, Robert K. Merton has summarized the logical and historical line of descent:<sup>84</sup>

As Lazarsfeld and others have pointed out, mass communications research developed very largely in response to market requirements. The severe competition for advertising among the several mass media and among agencies within each medium has provoked an economic demand for objective measures of size, composition and responses of audiences (of newspapers, magazine, radio and television). And in their quest for the largest possible share of the advertising dollar, each mass medium and each agency becomes alerted to possible deficiencies in the audience yardsticks employed by competitors, thus introducing a considerable pressure for evolving rigorous and objective measures not easily vulnerable to criticism.<sup>85</sup>

As Paul Lazarsfeld arrived in the United States, marketing and advertising had just begun to come into their own. Through the Twenties, as Stuart Ewen has shown,<sup>86</sup> the oligopolies were emplacing the advertising and sales techniques for the consumer society that would emerge after 1945 in full flush. Mass consumer markets were already looming; advertising was shifting over the thin but noticeable line from the provision of information to meet existing, traditional demands, to the glorification of commodities and the manufacture of demands and, more important, the demanding consumer. (The all-black, single-model, no-options, Model T was replaced with a complex variety of automobiles rising in price, beginning in the 1930s.)<sup>87</sup> National brands were multiplying and taking over larger shares of their markets, and, inseparably, corporations were resorting to national advertising campaigns. They needed a marketing “science” to tell them what to say, how often, over which channels, to whom. The actual markets contracted during the Depression, but the technical infrastructure for a full-blown consumer society was steadily being developed under the surface, awaiting the explosion of consumer demand in 1945.

Broadcasting was in some ways the leading edge of the new, though now deferred, consumer society, and the Thirties, the time of Paul Lazarsfeld’s settlement in the United States, were a pivotal time not only in American social science but in the history of American broadcasting. Despite the

Depression, or partly because of it (with the great hunger for cheap entertainment), the mass market in broadcasting was in the making: it was one of the few mass markets that could penetrate an impoverished population. Television was not yet in mass production, and the market for radio receivers was on its way to saturation. The simple figures are suggestive. In 1925 there were 4,000,000 sets in the United States, or 0.15 per household; in 1930, 13,000,000 sets, or 0.43 per household; in 1935, 30,500,000 sets, or 0.96 per household; in 1940, 51,000,000 sets, or 1.45 per household.<sup>88</sup> Accordingly, as Merton says, competition was heating up. It would become more important to stations, and then to networks, to increase their shares of the existing audience, and to find their profits in selling advertising time more than in manufacturing radio sets. (When David Sarnoff had first imagined the possibility of a mass broadcasting industry in 1915, he had envisioned enormous sales of “Radio Music Boxes,” but he had not even dreamed of commercial advertising on the airwaves.)<sup>89</sup> NBC was organized in late 1926, and CBS first became a serious threat in 1928, with William S. Paley’s assumption to the presidency. Competition between CBS and NBC radio intensified through the Thirties.<sup>90</sup> In 1940, the Federal Communications Commission directed NBC to divest itself of one of its two radio networks, and in 1943 NBC did sell one to the newly formed American Broadcasting Company.<sup>91</sup> Between market saturation for radio sets and increasing network growth and competition for advertising, corporate developments were coming to require precise audience research on a grand scale.

CBS had hired Lazarsfeld’s collaborator-to-be Frank Stanton from Ohio State University in 1935, to give its new research apparatus the necessary rigor.<sup>92</sup> Henceforward, audience research (on the *marketing* of commodities) would be as important as “hardware” research (on the *production* of commodities).<sup>93</sup> In order to increase the price they could charge advertisers for network time, the networks would have to develop reliable knowledge of the size and composition (“demographics”) of audiences. The kind of research Stanton and Lazarsfeld were equipped and eager to do was going to come into greater and greater demand over the years — from the major retailers, from broadcasting networks, from publishers, from the conglomerates that would accumulate control over the means of mass communications, and finally from the academic world.<sup>94</sup> The Princeton Office of Radio Research was the first research institution on radio in America — a measure of the new importance of radio in the cultural life of the society and in the thinking of its economic-political managers. The stereotyped commercial, “Amos ‘n’ Andy,” the Fireside Chat, and the Office of Radio Research were shoots of a common plant. Radio had arrived now. It was not only necessary, but legitimate.

So it should not be surprising that, in one of Lazarsfeld’s “strategic fits,” a



specific marketing need and an academic interest could fuse, in the early Forties, to provide the backing for the Decatur study. When the first edition of *The People's Choice* appeared in 1944, with its first broaching of the "two-step flow" and "opinion leader" ideas, Macfadden Publications became interested in the theory of opinion leaders, hoping that a "two-step flow" could help improve the circulation, and therefore the advertising rates, of its *True Story* magazine.<sup>95</sup> Bernarr Macfadden, the founder, published *Physical Culture*, *Liberty*, *Graphic*, *True Story*, *True Confessions*, and *True Detective Mysteries*, and he had long been interested in boosting their circulation with broadcast techniques. In 1925 he had become the first commercial sponsor on radio station WOR in Newark, advertising on a morning calisthenics show.<sup>96</sup> In 1927 he nearly bought the network that was soon to become CBS under Paley.<sup>97</sup> Now his company was eager to use the research techniques of broadcasting to see if working-class readers would come to *True Story* "horizontally," through word-of-mouth from working-class "opinion leaders," rather than "vertically," from higher-class readers. For his part, Lazarsfeld had wanted for years to follow up the 1940 Erie County, Ohio study (written up in *The People's Choice*), to pursue the hypothesis of the two-step flow. He arranged the grant from Macfadden, and the Decatur study was ready to go.

It seems reasonable to suppose that Macfadden's sponsorship of the study directly influenced both the selection of the respondents and the questions asked of them. There seems no other plausible explanation for limiting the study to female respondents: women were, after all, the readers of *True Story*. And it seems highly likely too that Macfadden's sponsorship shaped the choice of the issue-areas of product buying, fashions, and movies; information about the process by which products, fashions, and movies were chosen by potential *True Story* readers would be useful to Macfadden advertisers. (Presumably the questions about political attitudes were added by Lazarsfeld.) Thus the ungainly and crudely ideological quality of much of *Personal Influence*, as it struggled to view political attitudes as commensurate with instant coffee preferences, may be attributed directly to the Macfadden sponsorship, though there is also, as we shall see below (pp. 243–5), a deeper meaning to this questionnaire symmetry: the *actual* convergence of political choices and consumer choices, in social fact as well as in theory. Again, it would be simple-minded and misleading to reduce this convergence to the Macfadden influence *in particular*. Long before he had heard of Bernarr Macfadden, indeed as a youthful socialist, Lazarsfeld had been struck by "the methodological equivalence of socialist voting and the buying of soap,"<sup>98</sup> and he was inclined on theoretical grounds, as we shall see below, to view political and consumer choices as structurally similar commensurables. That *Personal Influence* and its successors were soaked in the values of consumer

society — with consumer choice taken as the *ne plus ultra* of freedom — cannot be laid at Macfadden’s door. But it would be naive to say that the study’s sponsorship had nothing to do with its theoretical shape, and its failings.

Whether underwritten by Macfadden or McCann-Erikson, by Columbia University or the Columbia Broadcasting System, the marketing orientation takes the consumerist frame for granted, asks questions that arise within it, questions about “how,” and stubbornly does not ask others. It is interested in how the mass media may increase their reach, and in how ordinary social life presents obstacles to the extension of media power. It is not interested, overall, in whether the reach of mass media is a social good, and in which circumstances. It is not interested in the structural and cultural consequences of different models of communication ownership. It is not interested in the construction of a worldview through media techniques, nor — except polemically — in the historical precursors of mass media. Nor does it take as problematic the consumer culture itself. It cannot imagine a living political discourse that would be affected for better or worse by media representations of politics. Questions of this sort are not “practical” for the institutions that define what is practical, and so, as Merton has concluded,<sup>99</sup>

the categories of [mass communications] research have, until the recent past, been shaped not so much by the needs of sociological or psychological theory as by the practical needs of those groups and agencies which have created the demand for audience research. Under direct market pressures and military needs, definite research techniques are developed and these techniques initially bear the marks of their origin; they are strongly conditioned by the practical uses to which they are first to be put.

But then what was the alternative for media research? Is the critique necessarily abstract, a retrospective wish in the name of an unrealizable, Platonic ideal of social research? Critique always confronts this possibility when it cannot point to an actual choice-point when actual actors prefer one proposed course to others. In the present case, however, a conceptual alternative was actually put forward. Its fate and its limits tell us something of the grip of the marketing orientation. As a sidelight in the recent history of social research, it casts a distinct shadow.

As Katz and Lazarsfeld tell us in their Acknowledgments, the actual field work in Decatur, Illinois, was organized by none other than C. Wright Mills, then attached to the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia. We will know more about how Mills proceeded through methodological orthodoxy to a radical break when the historian Richard Gillam publishes his pending

biography of Mills; for now, it will have to suffice if we note that it was the ambitious young Mills who had gone to Decatur for the two waves of interviewing in June and August 1945. By the middle of 1946 Mills had drafted, for discussion, an analysis of the data. In this lengthy unpublished document, according to Richard Gillam, who has studied it in the University of Texas archives, Mills wrote “not just of ‘influence’ and ‘opinion’ but also more boldly of ‘ideology’...and relates it to institutional and class structure. Mills finds some evidence for the two-step theory of horizontal influence, but he also argues the importance of vertical or ‘pyramidal’ influence, especially in politics.” Mills speculated that the United States exists midway between the extreme models of “simple, democratic society” and “mass authoritarian society.”<sup>100</sup> Mills’ draft was actually a blurry document of divided loyalties, according to Gillam; Mills was immersed in the particularities of positivist analysis while trying to pay at least lip service to a sort of populist radicalism.<sup>101</sup> But he did propose a very different framework for the Decatur data. He proposed to read back from the sociometric data on political attitudes to infer a structure of political decision-making; and he proposed the beginnings of a theory of political communication as the foundation of a theory of American ideology in society. As Mills put it, guardedly, in a paper he read to the December 29, 1946 meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Boston, the “chain of political leadership is definitely a vertical affair.”<sup>102</sup>

Although he did not challenge Mills’ work in gathering and presenting the data, Lazarsfeld was evidently alarmed at the reach and the populist edge of Mills’ rhetoric, at his “handling and interpretation of information already gathered”; and consequently he decided to take the analysis of the Decatur data back from Mills.<sup>103</sup> But oddly, as late as 1950 Mills still had hopes of joining as a co-author in the Decatur study.<sup>104</sup> In that same year he wrote a paper endorsing the Lazarsfeld point of view.<sup>105</sup> Here, in a State Department publication for a Russian audience, of all things, he riproaringly endorsed that pluralist vision he was to repudiate so roundly in *The Power Elite*, published in 1956.

But Mills’ alternative of 1946 did not yet grasp, or was pretending not to grasp, that postwar America was already moving toward a new form of high-technology corporate capitalism with a tightening political culture based on consumption, in which bipartisan consensus would prevail and class opposition would be defeated and deflected and then – for a time – would peter out. Perhaps Mills’ failure stemmed from his affiliation with Lazarsfeld’s Bureau of Applied Social Research, or his own lingering illusions about the American labor movement; perhaps there were other reasons as well. In any

event, the emergence of a high-consumption society was not yet grasped — as Mills was to grasp it in *The Power Elite* — as a new condition. Which is another way of saying that, with a few exceptions in the margins of American sociology,<sup>106</sup> the marketing orientation of Paul F. Lazarsfeld was for the moment uncontested, indeed hegemonic. The moment stretched into a sociological era; the orientation and the paradigms attending it established themselves as normal sociological opinion.

A deeper alternative, both in theory and practice, might have begun, and might still proceed, by noticing the productivity gains that capital could accrue with the “scientific” organization of work, gains that made possible a consumer society in the first place. This distinct approach would notice and analyze whatever more-or-less autonomous political culture could be detected beneath the gelid surface of the consumer culture. It might approach consumer culture as a displacement into the private, individual sphere of impulses toward freedom and happiness unrealizable in everyday life as both condition and consequence of the failure of a radical political alternative that could speak to the prevailing unhappiness.<sup>107</sup> A counter-paradigm could scrutinize the “culture industry” as both social control and failed, muddled, privatized revolt against the exploitative conditions of work and family in the world of organized capitalism. Empirically, it could then pay attention to the degeneration of authentic, bottom-up political life in the twentieth century, and to the fate of counter-movements; it could note the multiplication of means for the engineering of public consent, especially for Cold War policies. It could study the decision-making processes of soap manufacturers and soap-ad propagators and soap-opera producers as well as that of soap consumers. It could look into the origins of political issues as into the origins of “political attitudes.” It could look at the consequences of broadcasting not only for individuals but for collective formations like social movements.<sup>108</sup> At the level of theory, it could grasp the compatibility of elitist structures and pluralist procedures in a “totality” of domination. With a complex methodology including life-histories and participant observation, it could inquire into the degree of *actual* convergence of consumer choice and political knowing, of voting and soap-buying in the lives of citizens, and inquire into the origins of this convergence instead of taking it methodologically for granted. Beginning with a sense of political structure, a media sociology could work toward what Dave Morley has called an “ethnography of audiences,”<sup>109</sup> showing how distinct class, ethnic, age and other audiences distinctly “decode” (and ignore, and assimilate) the patterns in media messages over time. (Then some of the specific Lazarsfeldian findings might be integrated into a larger social analysis.) It could work, in other words, to show a dynamic but determinate media process articulated with the whole of political culture.

Some of this, perhaps, was what Mills was driving at, obliquely, in 1946. In any case, it remained undone. Most of it remains still undone, and to be done. Instead, the marketing orientation *became* media sociology.

### **The Ideological Field: Social Democracy**

Theorists do not live by theory alone. Abstract empiricism is no exception. Just as facts do not stand by themselves, neither do the theorists of abstract empiricism motivate themselves for sheer love of endlessly accumulated small facts, or for the advantage that is gained by the possession and exchange of them. Abstracted empiricism is not only concretely founded on the prevailing political and commercial culture, it is also, for the most part, justified by an ideological position. Such a position may be more or less conscious and, if conscious, more or less public. It is generally considered bad taste to assert that ideology matters in this setting, unless it is radical; the genetic fallacy is adduced as a free ticket to the weightless, interest-less, empyrean realm of science, where all ideas are born equal and with equal opportunity to prove their merit through good (empirical) works. In practice, the genetic fallacy is less common than the fallacy of immaculate conception.

I said before that social democracy was an ideological frame that surrounded and served to justify the whole of the dominant media sociology paradigm. Here I want to open up some territory for this “outrageous hypothesis,” hoping that some of the leads that follow may be pursued by scholars whose critical temper and large spirit are matched by a long reach and vast patience. My sketch is concerned with two types of linkage between social democracy and the work of Paul Lazarsfeld: the biographical and the theoretical. A survey of the first will carry us toward the second, the interface of social democratic ideology and the theory of high-consumption society, where some implications of the biographical facts will speak.

The biographical facts linking Paul Lazarsfeld with Austro-Marxist social democracy are plain enough.<sup>110</sup> In his own memoir, Lazarsfeld teasingly — and self-teasingly — pointed to the linkages himself: they are at least methodological. But more, by his own account, social democracy was part of the ideological climate that gave rise, sometimes by indirection, to his interests. Lazarsfeld did not develop his theories in post-Hapsburg Vienna, did not come to his conclusions there, but he *did* define his lifelong problematic there, and the roots of his approach to it. The facts will require a slight historical commentary — enough, I hope, to outline a context and feeling-tone.

In his youth, Lazarsfeld was a leader of the Association of Socialist High School Students in Austria.<sup>111</sup> In 1916, he was, for reasons unexplained, “living in the custody of Rudolf Hilferding,” one of the great theorists of Austro-Marxism.<sup>112</sup> He credited the Social Democratic leader Otto Bauer with giving him the idea of studying unemployment, the subject of his first major social-survey work.<sup>113</sup> He attributed the general interest in decision-making in the Viennese academy to the Austro-Marxist emphasis on electoral strategy, and credited this “political climate” in turn with his own academic interest.<sup>114</sup> When preparing his very first study (of occupational choices among Austrian youth), Lazarsfeld was able to overcome certain analytical obstacles by collaborating with an unnamed student who had been trained in early American market research techniques. She was subsequently to be his “main collaborator” in the field work for the even more ambitious study of the unemployed village of Marental, and the inspiration for Lazarsfeld’s own market research studies in Vienna. Writing of this happy collaboration, Lazarsfeld remarked, as we have already had reason to notice, on “the methodological equivalence of socialist voting and the buying of soap.”<sup>115</sup> I take it that, with this deadpan statement, Lazarsfeld meant to neutralize the rhetoric of his critics precisely by indulging in it to show its harmlessness. Yes of course, he seemed to be saying, they are equivalent, *methodologically* equivalent; I make no larger claims, though this one is large enough; and so what? Quiet and ironic, he disarmed the kind of critique that charges in to find that its territory is already occupied. Such bluntness was mordant.

But other sorts of mordant commentary have come down on Austrian Social Democracy, not always so quietly. Leon Trotsky, who spent seven pre-war years in Vienna, looked the prominent Austro-Marxists over and saw, in their political marginality, something imperious:<sup>116</sup>

In the old imperial, hierarchic, vain and futile Vienna, the academic Marxists would refer to each other with a sort of sensuous delight as “Herr Doktor.”

They were incapable of speaking easily with social democratic workers, Trotsky wrote: they were knowledgeable but provincial, philistine, chauvinistic. “These people prided themselves on being realists and on being businesslike,” Trotsky wrote scornfully; but despite their ambition, they were possessed of a “ridiculous mandarin attitude.”<sup>117</sup> That an administrative point of view might emerge from such a crucible, as a way of maintaining elite status and a sense of pride in an unfavorable situation, should not be surprising. What Trotsky did not appreciate, though, were some of the real grounds for Austro-Marxism’s marginality: socially, the isolation of the Viennese working class in Austria-Hungary (and later Austria) as a whole,

and the isolation of Jews in an anti-Semitic culture,<sup>118</sup> politically, the failure of the 1918 revolution in Germany, compounding Austro-Marxism's isolation.

Trotsky summed up the pre-war Austro-Marxist stance as "self-satisfaction." By the end of World War I, though, Paul Lazarsfeld, active in the Socialist Student Movement, saw not self-satisfaction but what follows from the failure of it: defensiveness. The social democratic ideology which "proved to be decisive" for Lazarsfeld's later intellectual life was "on the defensive before the growing nationalistic wave."<sup>119</sup> And with the collapse of the Second International in 1914, and the success of Leninism in Russia in 1917, social democracy now had a Left to ward off internationally, as well as a nationalist, revanchist Right. In Vienna, though Leninism was never as significant as in Germany, social democracy still found it necessary both to pay lip service to the Marxist revolutionary ideal and to differentiate itself from Leninism; it remained, then, doubly defensive. Yet this embattled Austro-Marxism was also a major intellectual force. It monopolized sociology in the University, and it could claim serious psychological credentials in the anti-Freudian environmentalist socialism of Alfred Adler.<sup>120</sup> Adler's circle was, in fact, Lazarsfeld's "social reference group," and he was influenced by Adler's emphasis on socialist education for workers.<sup>121</sup> In all, though, the intellectual prestige of social democracy did not overcome the insecurity which Trotsky astutely recognized. Lazarsfeld summed it up this way:<sup>122</sup>

We were concerned with why our propaganda was unsuccessful, and wanted to conduct psychological studies to explain it. I remember a formula I created at the time: a fighting revolution requires economics (Marx); a victorious revolution requires engineers (Russia); a defeated revolution calls for psychology (Vienna).

And here is one link, though only one, between the Austrian social democratic ideology and positivist social science.<sup>123</sup> But while social democracy was failing cataclysmically in Europe, an uncontested capitalism in America was needing *its* engineers: it was also a revolution of a sort, against traditional social relations. From the meeting of the engineer and the psychologist, the new sociology of administration and marketing came forth.

But of course the affinity between socialist voting and the buying of soap is not only methodological. It is built into corporate capitalist society as well as into Lazarsfeld's later theoretical formulations, and into the whole thought-structure of American media research. Media ideology too is implicitly social-democratic, and that is one reason, parenthetically, why socialists are alternately repelled by and defensive about mass culture.

The marketing orientation and at least one important variant of European social democracy share a common conception of “the people,” and it is at first appearance paradoxical: they are both sovereign and passive. Indeed high-consumption capitalism justifies itself in the terms of mass satisfaction, and insists that the market is the true measure of democratic expression. The people are, in a word, consumers. They choose from among the major possibilities available, whether brand names, occupations, or political parties. When the consumers choose, they confirm the legitimacy of the suppliers. It seems that Paul Lazarsfeld’s marketing orientation coincided with his interest in the larger legitimacy that might be found in a social democratic future. To put it another way, social democracy would *require* a marketing orientation, a rigorous procedure for “giving people what they want.” This would be true for the actual marketing of goods, and it would be true for all the domains of freedom, including the question of occupational choice, on which Lazarsfeld had done his earliest work.

Social democracy would require not only a marketing orientation but an administrative point of view, for the choices would be prepared from above. It would be the responsibility of the centralized, hierarchical supplier to know what the consumers want; this is the difference, after all, between tyranny and democracy. Thus Lazarsfeld spoke of “the implications for a planned society” of his study of *Jugend und Beruf*:<sup>124</sup>

most young people do not have decided occupational plans and therefore would not mind being guided — as a matter of fact might like to be guided — to an occupational choice; it should, consequently, be easy to fill the occupational quotas established through a central economic plan.

In this logic, when people do not know what they want, they *therefore* “would not mind being guided — as a matter of fact might like to be guided.” The premise is that when people do not know, they do not object to domination: this is one of the ubiquitous ideological premises of the twentieth century. One starts out assuming that people might be sheep, and ends up working for the woolens industry. From the hypothetical social democratic state, which would know what young people want to do with their lives, to the giant broadcasting network, which insists it is giving people what they want, is not a great distance.<sup>125</sup> The transport is especially comfortable for a social science sponsored by foundations and corporations. The same model of research is required in both cases.

But in the late twenties, the time of *Jugend und Beruf*, what was probably not anticipated by Paul Lazarsfeld, nor by Marxist theory, was that a form of



capitalist society would arise that could promise to deliver – and to some degree actually deliver – a simulacrum of the pleasure and ease that all forms of socialist ideology promised: a privatized, class-bound, mutilated version, but a version nonetheless. The United States was, and remains, the most advanced homeland of that consumer society. “The commercial culture of the twenties,” as Stuart Ewen writes, “draped itself with ‘social democratic’ ideals, channeled toward the maintenance of capitalist power. The commercial culture strove to leave corporate domination of the productive process intact and at the same time speak to the demand for a richer social life.”<sup>126</sup> So Paul Lazarsfeld’s transition to American social science was not as difficult as that of other refugees, especially those of the Frankfurt Institut. American consumerism was only the transposing of the essential social-democratic theme to a new key. The invariant *Leitmotif* was the limitation of alternatives to the handful provided by authority. Again Ewen:<sup>127</sup>

Within the political ideology of consumption, *democracy* emerged as a natural expression of American industrial production – if not a by-product of the commodity system. The equation of the consumption of goods with political freedom made such a configuration possible.

One business theorist of that time spoke of “mass citizenship” predicated on “the process of ‘fact-finding’ – acquainting oneself with the variety of goods.” Another spoke of business determining “for a people what they consider worth consuming.”

Yet within each of these notions of political democracy [Ewen continues], there was an implicit acceptance of the centralization of the political process. Democracy was never treated as something that flowed out of people’s needs or desires, but was rather an expression of people’s ability to participate in and emulate the “pluralism of values” [the phrase is Max Horkheimer’s] which were paraded before people and which filtered downward from the directors of business enterprise.

And as actual political sovereignty waned, consumer sovereignty loomed larger, in fact as well as in theory. Thus the American Socialist Party of Eugene Debs, which had gotten about six percent of the popular vote in the Presidential election of 1912, sank into futile sectarianism by the end of that decade, and a combination of repression and internal weakness did away with the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World around the same time. Populism was already dead. Simultaneously, the United States came out of World War I dominating the world economy, particularly in the consumer-good industries of automobiles and electronics (radio and film).<sup>128</sup> The multiplication of such

spectacular consumer goods, along with the advertising apparatus that made it possible, conjured up what Marcus Raskin has called “the dream colony,” a new orientation toward freedom itself.<sup>129</sup> Again Ewen lucidly suggests the process by which the new conception may have developed:<sup>130</sup>

The consumer culture grew in response to [social] crisis [in the Twenties] and to the monumental growth of productive capacity with which it was interlaced. As production changed and as the social character of work became even more routinized and monotonous, the consumer culture presented itself as the realm within which gratification and excitement might be had — an alternative to more radical and anti-authoritarian prescriptions....The aim was the consolidation of a new “national character” keyed to the exigencies of expanding capitalism....

The rise of advertising and consumerism in the twenties was part of a broader change in the character of capitalist society. Commercial propaganda didn’t act as the determinant of change, but was in many ways *both* a reflection and agent of transformation. Advertising raised the banner of *consumable social democracy* in a world where monumental corporate development was eclipsing and redefining much of the space in which critical alternatives might be effectively developed....

Over the course of the twentieth century, using strategies that Ewen elaborates schematically, capitalism would work to present consumer sovereignty as the equivalent of freedom, in the common view and the common parlance. (“If you don’t like TV, turn it off.” “If you don’t like cars, don’t drive them.” “If you don’t like it here, go back to Russia.” “If you don’t like Crest, buy Gleem.” “If you don’t like Republicans, vote Democratic.”) The assumption that choice among the givens amounts to freedom then becomes the root of the worldwide rationale of the global corporations, what Richard Barnet and Ronald Müller have called the vision of “the global shopping center.”<sup>131</sup> Thus it is that a society develops in which voting and soap-buying, movie choice and political opinion, become more than methodological equivalents as objects of study; they become similarly manipulable and marginal acts that promise much while they deliver mostly preservative-stuffed “goods” that flatten the ability to taste. By ignoring the systemic and institutionalized nature of these processes, and by fusing its administrative, commercial, and social-democratic impulses, the mainstream of American media sociology has done its share to consolidate and legitimize the cornucopian regime of mid-century capitalism. That the dominant paradigm is now proving vulnerable to critique at many levels is a measure of the decline of capitalist legitimacy, commercial values, and the political self-confidence of the rulers. But that is another story.

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## NOTES

1. Daniel Bell, "The End of American Exceptionalism," *The Public Interest* Fall 1975, p. 218.
2. Some recent American departures from the dominant paradigm are the papers in Steven H. Chaffee, ed., *Political Communication* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1975); and, more basically, Oscar H. Gandy, "The Economics and Structure of Bias in Mass Media Research," paper delivered to the Leipzig meeting of the International Association for Mass Communications Research, 1976. Against the Lazarsfeldian emphasis on the limited and mediated influence of the mass media, the widespread interest in agenda-setting functions of the media (following Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of the Mass Media," *Public Opinion Quarterly* XXXVI [Summer 1972], pp. 176–187) is promising, but still too narrow and ahistorical: analytically it abstracts both media and audiences from their social and historical matrix. In England, the alternative approach of cultural studies, influenced by Marxist cultural theory and semio-logical "readings" of content, seems to me the most promising angle of analysis. For a fine example, see Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1972); the papers gathered in Cohen and Jock Young, eds., *The Manufacture of News* (London: Constable, and Beverly Hills: Sage, 1973), and Stuart Hall's essays, gathered in a forthcoming collection from Macmillan in London. See also the discussion of the field in Todd Gitlin, "'The Whole World is Watching': Mass Media and the New Left, 1965–70," unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Sociology Department, University of California, Berkeley, 1977, pp. 15–23 and Ch. 10. The Lazarsfeld paradigm retains considerable force and prestige despite all this: for a recent study in that tradition, see Thomas E. Patterson and Robert D. McClure, *The Unseeing Eye: The Myth of Television Power in National Elections* (New York: Putnam, 1976).
3. Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications* (New York: Free Press, 1955).
4. J. Arndt, "A Test of the Two-Step Flow in Diffusion of a New Product," *Journalism Quarterly* 47 (Autumn 1968), pp. 457–465.
5. Bell, loc. cit.
6. Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, *The People's Choice*, Second Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948).
7. See the following studies: Paul J. Deutschman and Wayne A. Danielson, "Diffusion of Knowledge of the Major News Story," *Journalism Quarterly* 37 (Summer 1960), pp. 345–355; V. C. Troidahl and R. Van Dam, "Face to Face Communication about Major Topics in the News," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 29 (1965), p. 634;

- V. C. Troidahl, "A Field Test of a Modified 'Two-Step Flow of Communication' Model," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 30 (Winter 1966–67), pp. 609–623; Arndt, op. cit.; I. L. Allen, "Social Relations and the Two-Step Flow: A Defense of the Tradition," *Journalism Quarterly* 46 (Autumn 1969), pp. 492–498; L. R. Bostian, "The Two-Step Flow Theory: Cross-Cultural Implications," *Journalism Quarterly* 47 (Spring 1970), pp. 109–117; and Nan Lin, "Information Flow, Influence Flow and the Decision-Making Process," *Journalism Quarterly* 48 (Spring 1971), pp. 33–40. In the Chaffee volume cited in note 2 above, Lee B. Becker, Maxwell E. McCombs and Jack M. McLeod ("Development of Political Cognitions," pp. 29–31) reinterpret data from Lazarsfeld's own *The People's Choice* and its successor, *Voting*, to show that the media are more influential than Lazarsfeld concluded. For a collation of empirical criticisms of the two-step flow, citing later studies that tend to show direct media impact especially on the poor, the isolated, and the highly anomic, see Morris Janowitz, "Mass Communication: Study," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan and The Free Press, 1968), Vol. 10, p. 51.
8. F. Z. Rosario, "The Leader in Family Planning and the Two-Step Flow Model," *Journalism Quarterly* 48 (Summer 1971), pp. 288–297, in particular.
  9. See all the other studies cited in note 7.
  10. Anthony Giddens, *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1975), p. 222.
  11. Stuart Hall, "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse," mimeographed paper, Centre for Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1973; and Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 121–127.
  12. Melvin L. DeFleur, *Theories of Mass Communication*, Second Edition (New York: McKay, 1970), pp. 112–154.
  13. Roger L. Brown, "Approaches to the Historical Development of Mass Media Studies," in Jeremy Tunstall, ed., *Media Sociology: A Reader* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), pp. 41–57.
  14. For more on "personal influence" theory as a critique of the earlier "hypodermic" theory, see Elihu Katz, "Communication Research and the Image of Society: Convergence of Two Traditions," *American Journal of Sociology* 65 (March 1960), p. 113, and DeFleur, op. cit., pp. 112–117.
  15. Katz and Lazarsfeld, op. cit. pp. 16–17.
  16. See DeFleur, loc. cit.
  17. For example, Raymond Bauer, "The Communicator and the Audience," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 2 (March 1958), p. 67: "...attempts to establish the effects of mass communication forced Lazarsfeld and his associates...to accord a larger role to informal personal influences."
  18. Katz and Lazarsfeld, op. cit., p. 18, n. 5.
  19. Ibid., p. 19, n. 6.
  20. Ibid., p. 24, n. 16.
  21. Ibid., p. 133, n. 20.
  22. Ibid., p. 163.
  23. Elihu Katz, "The Two-Step Flow of Communication: An Up-to-Date Report on an Hypothesis," *Public Opinion Quarterly* XXI (Spring 1957), pp. 61–78.
  24. Katz and Lazarsfeld, op. cit., p. 146.
  25. See especially Robert Dahl, *Who Governs?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), and Nelson Polsby, *Community Power and Political Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963). Of course the literature on pluralism and elite theory is vast. For an earlier critique of pluralist theory along the present lines, see Todd Gitlin, "Local Pluralism as Theory and Ideology," *Studies on the Left* 5 (Summer 1965) pp. 21–45. For an interesting critique of both pluralism and its

“nondecision” critique, culminating in a proposal for a “three-dimensional” approach which integrates the strengths of each, see Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1974). There arises the question of whether the structural homology between pluralism and the two-step flow reflects an actual homology in their subject matters as well as, or rather than, in the respective theoretical problematics. In other words: Is there, or was there in the Fifties, an actual plurality of communication influence-sources parallel to an actual plurality of power sources? I cannot defend my answer to this question at length within the confines of the present essay, but I do want to put it forth: the answer is a qualified No. The actual plurality of sources in both communities and media chains was actually drying up as both were becoming centralized and homogenized in the Fifties. The networks and the huge national security state were major national features of that decade: *prima facie* evidence of the growing weight of nationalizing forces and therefore of the ideological nature of the two paradigms.

26. Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, “The Two Faces of Power,” *American Political Science Review* 56 (1962), pp. 947–952, and their *Power and Poverty: Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).
27. Katz and Lazarsfeld, op. cit., pp. 107–8, 332–334.
28. Ibid., p. 138.
29. Ibid., p. 341.
30. Ibid., p. 271, n. 2.
31. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Garden City: Anchor, 1958).
32. Joseph T. Klapper, *The Effects of Mass Communication* (New York: The Free Press, 1960).
33. Thanks to William Kornhauser for pointing this out to me in conversation.
34. Joseph T. Klapper, “Mass Communication: Effects,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan and The Free Press, 1968), p. 85. Emphasis added.
35. Katz and Lazarsfeld, op. cit., p. 271n. Emphasis added.
36. Ibid., p. 276n.
37. Thanks to David Matza for putting this point to me in conversation.
38. Even at that, as we shall see on pages 219–20, the Katz-Lazarsfeld findings on “public affairs influence” are the weakest in the book *on their face*, and do not warrant the exorbitant claims later made in their name. Nor did Katz and Lazarsfeld seem interested in the distinction between marketing and public affairs “flows.” The differences might have spoken to the difference between consuming and politics.
39. Ibid., p. 319.
40. Ibid., p. 142. Emphasis in original.
41. If the 58 percent of changes involved personal contacts that took place and were later forgotten – a logical possibility, but a claim Katz and Lazarsfeld did not make, by the way – the same assumption would have to be made about other findings, therefore making hash of the theoretical conclusions drawn from these data.
42. Ibid., p. 309, quoting Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, op. cit., p. 151.
43. See Katz and Lazarsfeld, op. cit., p. 159.
44. Ibid., p. 160.
45. Ibid., p. 312, n. 4.
46. C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 52.
47. Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton, “Mass Communications, Popular Taste, and Organized Social Action,” reprinted in Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, eds., *Mass Culture* (New York: Free Press, 1957), p. 459.
48. Maurice Stein, “The Eclipse of Community: Some Glances at the Education of a

- Sociologist,” in Arthur Vidich, Joseph Bensman, and Maurice Stein, eds., *Reflections on Community Power* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1964), pp. 215-6. Thanks to Richard Gillam for alerting me to this quotation.
49. T. W. Adorno, “Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America,” in Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn, eds., *The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America, 1930–1960* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 147.
  50. In Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, Revised Edition (New York: The Free Press, 1968), pp. 578–582.
  51. I discuss the fetishism of facts, and formal and technical ways of accomplishing it in mass media, in my “Spotlights and Shadows: Television and the Culture of Politics,” *College English* 38 (April 1977), pp. 793–4. For origins of “a new world of facts” in consumerist ideology of the Twenties, see Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), pp. 51–59, 69–70. On the origins of the concept in the Frankfurt Institut’s critique of positivism, see Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), pp. 189–190.
  52. Paul F. Lazarsfeld, “An Episode in the History of Social Research: A Memoir,” in Fleming and Bailyn, eds., op. cit., pp. 277, 299.
  53. In Lazarsfeld, “Remarks on Administrative and Critical Communications Research,” *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* IX (1941), pp. 2–16.
  54. This was an actual historical decision, first proposed for RCA, the first mass broadcasting apparatus, by the young David Sarnoff in 1915. See Eugene Lyons, *David Sarnoff* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 71–73, and Eric Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel (A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Vol. 1)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 78–79.
  55. Lazarsfeld, “Memoir,” pp. 302–3.
  56. Ibid., p. 310.
  57. Ibid., p. 303.
  58. Quoted in Raymond Fosdick, *The Story of the Rockefeller Foundation* (New York: Harper, 1952), p. 202. Emphasis added.
  59. Lazarsfeld, “Memoir,” pp. 275–6. I discuss this tantalizing fact further on p. 245.
  60. Ibid., p. 276, n. 10.
  61. Ibid., pp. 305, 309.
  62. Ibid., p. 329.
  63. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, op. cit., p. xxix.
  64. Fosdick, op. cit., pp. 246–7. Emphasis added.
  65. Lazarsfeld, “Memoir,” p. 308.
  66. See Jay, op. cit., pp. 191–3.
  67. Adorno, op. cit., p. 343. Emphasis added.
  68. Lazarsfeld’s letter to Adorno is excerpted in Jay, op. cit., pp. 222–3.
  69. Lazarsfeld, “Memoir,” pp. 322, 324.
  70. Lazarsfeld, “Remarks on Administrative and Critical Communications Research.”
  71. Adorno wrote (op. cit., p. 353): “My own position in the controversy between empirical and theoretical sociology, so often misrepresented, particularly in Europe, I may sum up by saying that empirical investigations are not only legitimate but essential, even in the realm of cultural phenomena. But one must not confer autonomy upon them or regard them as a universal key. Above all, they must themselves terminate in theoretical knowledge.” It was not empirical work he opposed, in principle, but *empiricism*, though earlier in the same essay (p. 348) he wrote: “No continuum exists between critical theorems and the empirical procedures of natural science. They have entirely different historical origins and can be integrated only with the greatest effort.” But elsewhere, in the early Fifties, Horkheimer and Adorno wrote that “administrative” and “critical” research “do

not...stand in such a direct opposition. The reproduction of life under contemporary conditions does not appear to be possible at all, unless the central organs of administration are fed those precise informations about the most varied social conditions, which can be gained only by applying the techniques of empirical social research....The cult of technical specialization cannot be overcome by abstract and irrelevant humanistic demands added by way of complementary addenda. The path of true humanism leads through the midst of the specialized and technical problems, insofar as one succeeds in gaining insight into their significance within the societal whole and in drawing conclusions from this.” (Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, *Aspects of Sociology* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1972], p. 127). It must be said, then, that Adorno’s position in these matters was fluid, developing, and conflicted. His formulations were abstract enough to protect his claim to the privileges of “objective insight,” but in his actual engagement with Lazarsfeld he was unwilling to bend as far as Lazarsfeld’s synthesis required – at least far enough to make the project palatable to the Rockefeller Foundation.

72. Adorno wrote (op. cit., pp. 342–3) that the Princeton group’s work “was concerned with the collection of data, which were supposed to benefit the planning departments in the field of the mass media, whether in industry itself or in cultural advisory boards and similar bodies. For the first time, I saw ‘administrative research’ before me. I don’t now recall whether Lazarsfeld coined this phrase, or I myself in my astonishment at a practically oriented kind of science, so entirely unknown to me....”
73. Lazarsfeld, “Memoir,” p. 304.
74. *Current Biography*, “Frank Stanton,” 1965 Edition, pp. 402–4.
75. Lazarsfeld’s insecurity about being Jewish in America was well grounded in the reality of academic anti-Semitism. His memoir (pp. 300–1) gives evidence of some of the social bases of his sense of marginality. It is worth noting that John Marshall of the Rockefeller Foundation, Stanton, Lynd, and Cantril were all white Anglo-Saxon Protestants: the most reliable sponsors to accumulate.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 299.
77. Interview, Leo Lowenthal, June 4, 1976. Professor Lowenthal told me that, after publishing his justly famous critical study “Biographies in Popular Magazines” in the *Radio Research* annual of 1943, Lazarsfeld told him: “Now, Leo, you should write a book on how to write a *good* biography. You always tear down.... Show how to make it better!” Very American indeed!
78. Lazarsfeld, “Memoir,” p. 302.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 303.
80. *Ibid.*, pp. 314–5. Emphasis added.
81. Lazarsfeld, “Some Notes on the Relationships Between Radio and the Press,” *Journalism Quarterly* 18 (1941), pp. 10–13.
82. Lazarsfeld, “Memoir,” p. 315. Emphasis added.
83. *Ibid.*, p. 316. Emphasis added.
84. Merton, op. cit., pp. 504–5.
85. The details of Lazarsfeld’s institutional involvement with advertising research appear in his “Memoir,” pp. 297–299.
86. Ewen, op. cit.
87. See Emma Rothschild, *Paradise Lost: The Decline of the Auto-Industrial Age* (New York: Random House, 1973), pp. 37–40.
88. DeFleur, op. cit., p. 66.
89. See Barnouw, op. cit., pp. 78–9.
90. *Ibid.*, pp. 224, 272–3.
91. Barnouw, *The Golden Web (A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Vol. II)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 170–1, 190.

92. The convergence of the “new academic style” and the new corporate strategy is conspicuous in the memoir of one of Stanton’s famous contemporaries. Peter C. Goldmark, the inventor of long-playing records and of several major color TV processes for CBS, was hired by the same CBS Vice President who hired Stanton, at around the same time, and wrote of him: “Kesten came across Stanton, as he had me, through reading a monograph in a scientific journal. The future of CBS, he felt, belonged to the scientific method. A serious student who was used to the careful methodology of academia, Stanton added a scholarly formulation to Kesten’s lightning intuitions, and eventually brought respectability to the flashy side of show business. In 1936 the spirit of research rode high at CBS.” Peter C. Goldmark, with Lee Edson, *Maverick Inventor: My Turbulent Years at CBS* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1973), pp. 39–40.
93. For the comparable case of the automobile industry, see again Emma Rothschild’s analysis (op. cit.) of the simultaneous development of “Fordism” (production efficiency) and “Sloanism” (new marketing practices) in the Thirties.
94. Lazarsfeld had, in fact, first come to the United States thinking he had a job at the Retail Research Institute at the University of Pittsburgh. See Lazarsfeld, “Memoir,” p. 303.
95. Katz and Lazarsfeld, op. cit., p. 3; Richard Gillam, “C. Wright Mills, 1916–1948: An Intellectual Biography,” unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, History Department, Stanford University, 1972, p. 300.
96. Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel*, pp. 167–8.
97. Ibid., p. 220.
98. Lazarsfeld, “Memoir,” p. 279.
99. Merton, op. cit., pp. 505–6.
100. Gillam, op. cit., pp. 302–3.
101. Interview, Richard Gillam, June 21, 1976.
102. I was able to read this paper thanks to Richard Gillam and his files.
103. Gillam, op. cit., p. 304.
104. Ibid., p. 307n.
105. C. Wright Mills, “Mass Media and Public Opinion,” reprinted in Irving Louis Horowitz, ed., *Power, Politics and People* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1963), pp. 577–598.
106. For example, Robert Lynd, as cited in Ewen, op. cit., pp. 37, 56, 136.
107. This is the approach of Stuart Ewen’s recent book, op. cit. and of some of the Frankfurt arguments; it lies latent in the historiography of Herbert Gutman (*Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America* [New York: Knopf, 1976]), following from the work of E. P. Thompson and others in England. Ewen’s argument is stronger on assertion than on evidence for the content of working-class consciousness around the turn of the century, and he is selective in citing corporate strategists. The counter-paradigm I am advocating here will need to dive deeper and stay longer in historical materials.
108. Scarcely any studies have been published on the impacts and meanings of mass media for political and social movements and parties. For a brief discussion and citation of a few studies, see W. Phillips Davison, “Functions of Mass Communication for the Collectivity,” in Davison and Frederick T. C. Yu, eds., *Mass Communication Research: Major Issues and Future Directions* (New York: Praeger, 1974), pp. 66–82. British work on the terrain of cultural studies does not draw a sharp line between mass media “effects” and the careers of social formations including movements, and therefore is open to considering broad social constraints and consequences. For a fine example, see Stanley Cohen, op. cit. More recently, see my own “The Whole World is Watching,” and, on the feminist movement, Jo Freeman, *The Politics of Women’s Liberation* (New York: McKay, 1975), and Gaye Tuchman, “Ridicule, Advocacy and Professionalism: Newspaper



- Reporting About a Social Movement,” paper delivered at the American Sociological Association meetings, New York, August 1976.
109. Dave Morley, “Reconceptualising the Media Audience: Towards an Ethnography of Audiences,” mimeographed paper, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1974.
  110. But of course they are very fragmentary. I regret that Professor Lazarsfeld died in August 1976, before I had a chance to interview him on these matters.
  111. Joseph Buttinger, *In the Twilight of Socialism: A History of the Revolutionary Socialists of Austria* (New York: Praeger, 1953), p. 83.
  112. Lazarsfeld, “Memoir,” p. 285n.
  113. *Ibid.*, p. 275n.
  114. *Ibid.*, p. 279.
  115. *Ibid.*
  116. Leon Trotsky, *My Life* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), p. 209. First published 1929.
  117. *Ibid.*, pp. 210, 212. He includes Otto Bauer in this category. For some equally critical remarks on the Austrian Social Democrats, also see Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 188–9: “If only the Social-Democrats of Austria had had a little of the impassioned energy of the Bolsheviks of Russia! All they ever did was to sip sweet white wine in the operetta-land of the Blue Danube....” But Serge is also more sympathetic to the Austro-Marxists’ plight in isolated Vienna within an Austria still more isolated in Europe.
  118. William M. Johnston, an intellectual historian of Austria, suggests that Jewish self-hatred was central to the politics of Viktor Adler, “the father of socialism in Austria.” Johnston, *The Austrian Mind: An Intellectual and Social History, 1848–1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 99. The fascinating and thick relations of Jews, anti-Semitism and socialism in Austria await a deeper history.
  119. Lazarsfeld, “Memoir,” p. 272.
  120. No relation to Viktor Adler. On Alfred Adler’s meliorist psychology, see Russell Jacoby, *Social Amnesia* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).
  121. Lazarsfeld, “Memoir,” p. 272.
  122. *Ibid.*
  123. Because of the constraints of space, I cannot discuss here the great influence the psychological work of the Böhlers exerted on Lazarsfeld (“Memoir,” pp. 208–3), nor the impact of the positivist current (including the passion for classification) that circulated around Mach and his circle (*ibid.*, p. 273). Of the latter, Lazarsfeld wrote: “I was impressed by the idea that mere ‘clarification’ was a road to discovery.” But “clarification” is a concept itself needing clarification, especially in its relations to historical understanding.
  124. Lazarsfeld, “Memoir,” p. 280.
  125. It is worth noting, in passing, that the social democratic State was able to achieve some standing in quasi-Marxian futurology because it had the prophetic field to itself. The Marxian taboo on specifying the future organization of socialism left a vacuum that could be filled by administrative models, both Leninist and social-democratic. See the excellent discussion of this point in Carl Landauer, in collaboration with Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier and Hilde Stein Landauer, *European Socialism: A History of Ideas and Movements*, Vol. I (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), pp. 205–6.
  126. Ewen, *op. cit.*, p. 197.
  127. *Ibid.*, p. 89. Emphasis in original.
  128. For the history of the American success in radio development from 1900 on, see Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel*, and the reviews of the same material in Todd

- Gitlin, "Sixteen Notes on Television and the Movement," in George A. White and Charles Newman, eds., *Literature in Revolution* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972), pp. 336–7, and Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Schocken, 1975), pp. 14–41.
129. Marcus Raskin, *Being and Doing* (New York: Random House, 1971).
130. Ewen, op. cit., pp. 189–90. Ewen goes on (pp. 190–1): "While the contours of commercial culture were taking on a decided modernity by the 1920s, it was decades before the commodified 'good life' took hold to the degree only dreamed of in the twenties. In the period between 1920 and the end of the Second World War, American capitalism's ability to expand markets commensurate with its growing productive capacity was severely limited....With the entry of the U. S. into World War II, however, things began to change. War industries created jobs and reinvigorated domestic markets....It was in the period of postwar boom that the social policies postulated and initiated in the twenties began to make their most effective inroads upon the social landscape of American society." Media research had a roughly comparable history. The behaviorist theoretical orientation first propounded in general terms in media sociology before World War II came to flourish only in the Forties and Fifties. During the war, Carl Hovland and associates were granted the funds for their elaborate empirical studies of media "effects," and only after the war did Lazarsfeld and associates develop specific theoretical propositions like that of the "two-step flow."
131. Barnet and Müller, *Global Reach* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974).