

“The Fabric of Our Lives”: Relationality, Ritual, and  
Regional Resistance in American Radio Broadcasting

by

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## Abstract

A wide variety of international social movements over the course of history have utilized radio as a primary medium for political organizing. Despite media technology that has purportedly been eclipsing radio for nearly eight decades, radio continues to be a vehicle for resistance, advocacy, and contentious politics in a wide variety of communities. “‘The Fabric of Our Lives’: Relationality, Ritual, and Regional Resistance in American Radio Broadcasting” offers a theory-driven explanation for the ubiquitous implementation of radio as a resource for promoting, imagining, and attaining sociopolitical change with an emphasis on hyperlocal radio in small American communities. Utilizing a number of theoretical frameworks (materialism, objection relations, affect, localism, and social movements) I examine the oft overlooked characteristics of radio that distinguish it from other media. Ethnographic field work at two different American community radio station grounds some of the more involved theory. I ultimately posit that it is the unique psychosocial space radio occupies as a medium that has made it so pervasively viable in the development and expansion of social movements.

## Introduction

Small radio stations tend to be constructed inside of refurbished homes. The master bedroom becomes a recording studio with foam acoustic panels lining the walls from floor to ceiling; the children's bedrooms become office spaces, desks piled high with paperwork and old bookshelves full of archived vinyl. Even the bathrooms are designed according to the stations' aesthetic preferences—album posters on the wall, a vintage transistor next to the sink. The stations are externally residential spaces— establishments of domesticity, locales of hearth and familiarity and security—but internally they serve the extremely public purpose of radio production.

Telluride, Colorado's KOTO-FM and Murray, Iowa's KSOI-FM were both developed in houses. I visited these two stations during my research process, and their locations struck me as significant. I wondered what it meant that a medium so frequently straddling the line between domesticity and publicity should be broadcasting to the populace out of a home, the very setting Americans most associate with private life. As two Low Power FM stations, the populations KOTO-FM and KSOI-FM serve are geographically contained and demographically specific. Despite the critical role both stations play in informing, entertaining, and—in some sense— maintaining their local communities, when compared side by side, the demographic groups their signals reach differ tremendously.

Telluride is a mountain town— a posh getaway situated at 8,750 feet above sea level. Its year-round occupants are primarily white, liberal hikers and skiers described by KOTO's general manager as, "well-travelled people." The station does

not only reach the town of Telluride, however, and navigating the complications of accommodating the nearby towns able to pick up the frequency—areas with different politics, class dynamics, and interests—is an ongoing problem at KOTO. The station must also juggle accommodating the needs of a rapidly growing population of seasonal visitors with that of the year-round residents. Nevertheless, KOTO’s significance in its community is undeniable. From avalanche warnings to event promotion to local politics, the station is the de facto site for community information. I overheard a conversation in a coffee shop in Telluride, in which a patron suggested that a woman, “Go to KOTO” to find an item that she had misplaced. The station is a staple of the community, a platform for new voices, and, arguably, a mechanism by which the already intentionally remote community can further insulate itself.

The population KSOI reaches differs considerably from that of Telluride. Murray local Joe Hynek began the process of single-handedly building the station from the ground up in 2005. Hynek describes the region the station serves as, “a low socioeconomic area. Probably the poorest area of Iowa,” a vastly different description from the one Ben Kerr of KOTO offered. Despite the socioeconomic disparity, the stations serve similar purposes. Hynek began with the intention of creating a music station, one to supplement the one or two other stations available when he was growing up. He eventually recognized the variety of other ways in which KSOI could serve the community, and he began moving in the direction of more community-oriented content. Like, members of KOTO, broadcasters at KSOI utilize the prototypical language of non-commercial radio when they discuss their work.

Staff members speak of giving voice to the community, producing hyper-localized content, and providing vital information that is unavailable elsewhere. This emphasis on the community ear further complicates the position the stations occupy within the domestic spaces of homes. The public-private juxtaposition is a potent and powerful image when we consider the purpose of community radio on the whole.

KOTO-FM and KSOI-FM are—like many community stations—intentionally populist utilities, resources for the public good. Despite radio’s contemporary reputation as a populist medium, the lull between radio infrastructure’s establishment and the public’s ability to access to it was substantial. Before regular radio broadcasting debuted in the 1920’s, scientists and engineers had already spent thirty years utilizing the technology for their own purposes (Douglas, 2001). Though several had toyed with the idea of publicizing radio broadcasting, in 1920 KDKA in East Pittsburgh became the first government-licensed radio station in the United States (Douglas, 2001). Becoming an entity of the public sphere, not merely a scholarly privilege, was radio’s first official act in the United States as a tool of sociopolitical subversion.

Radio’s repute in American popular culture as a medium for subtle dissidence continued into its golden age in the 1930’s and 1940’s. Write Gordon Allport and Hadley Cantril in their 1935 text, *The Psychology of Radio*:

Until the advent of radio the social environment of the vast majority of the earth’s inhabitants was limited and cramped. Only kings, millionaires, and lucky adventurers were able to include within their mental horizons

experiences that the average man has long desired but never obtained. Now at last the average man may also participate... A turn of the wrist immeasurably expands his personal world. (p. 115)

To Allport and Cantril—two of America’s most prominent early-to-mid-nineteenth-century psychological scholars—radio was the solution the American underclasses had been seeking. The medium offered access to an expanded world beyond the drabness of poverty, an effortless means of social mobility. At this time, of course, radio was not intended as a serious tool of political organizing, but rather as a medium for imagining socioeconomic uniformity. Recall that radio hit its stride in the Great Depression, perhaps the direst moment of socioeconomic unrest and disunity in American history. Nevertheless, radio afforded the illusion of parity—and, for a time, this passive grasp at social equity was all it offered.

Radio in the late 1940s, however, brought something new to the table: the prospect of on-air activism. Born out of the anti-war pacifism of the late 1940s, the Pacifica Foundation was the first radio entity in the United States to attempt a listener-sponsored, alternative radio model (“Pacifica History,” n.d.) Pacifica stations at large developed into a unique tool for radical organizing. However, it should be noted that the deployment of radio as a tool for publicizing and motivating social movements does not end at our nation’s borders; indeed, the medium is an international mechanism of revolutionary organizing.

Social movements that differ in scale, purpose, methodology, participants, results, etc. have radio in common. What follows is an exploration of why radio is so



often a resource for attaining sociopolitical change and maintaining a sense of community. This work primarily takes a psychologically theoretical approach to answering this question, with an emphasis on radio located in small American communities. Though theory driven, this research includes ethnographic evidence to substantiate speculative claims. Fieldwork undertaken at KOTO-FM in Telluride, CO and KSOI-FM in Murray, IA threads together the research and provides a narrative grounding for the theory.

Radio approaches its listeners from a multiplicity of angles. It is foreground and background; social and asocial; passive and active. Inasmuch as radio is a medium with abundant—often-oppositional—meanings and functions working all at once, I approach radio as a medium of study with a wide range of disparate theories in mind. This analysis disentangles local radio's role in facilitating social change in small, socioeconomically subjugated or otherwise marginalized communities in the United States. I argue that radio is uniquely qualified for performing this work, due to several key psychological, material, and sociocultural characteristics of the particular medium. Ultimately, I hope to demonstrate that it is radio's very ability to transcend the seemingly fixed divide between the public and private sphere—and the very act of listening's ability to be both a solitary, personal, passive project and a deeply social, dialectic undertaking—that makes radio a medium fit for the mobilization of communities.

This project begins with an analysis of radio's history in the United States, with a specific emphasis on its material embodiment. Radio is an artifact whose

characteristics— both physical and abstract— have adjusted according to the changing needs of the population it serves. These periodic shifts tend to occur on a hyper-local level, given the heavily topographical nature of radio broadcasting. Lacking any singular narrative history, radio becomes a complicated artifact to conclusively historicize across a variety of American communities. Still, shifts in radio's sociocultural space have also materialized in more sweeping, cross-communal patterns— patterns in line with broader national historical and cultural changes. I depict three somewhat flexible, but ultimately discrete, eras within the progression of radio's American history: Radio of the Hearth (1920s- early 1940s), Radio of the Resistance (late 1940s- 1970s), and Radio of the Local (1970s- present). My material analysis of radio relies on Glassie's (1999) system of artifactual analysis, which examines artifacts on the basis of their assimilative, conceptual, and physical characteristics within their specific contexts. Therefore, within each of the three broadcasting eras, the radio object is contextualized according to each of Glassie's frameworks for artifactual analysis. Radio's past and contemporary positionings in the American mythos should shed light on some important moments in later sections regarding the listener-voice relationship, community connectivity via radio, and the role radio plays in facilitating collective action and social change.

Chapter Two frames radio through a lens of object relations— a psychological model of relationality— in order to examine the subjective connection established between the listener and the radio voice. Object relations deals with the link between an individual's internal self and the external experiences that shape it subconsciously

(Bainbridge & Yates, 2013). This section takes up object relations because a subjective model of relationality is the most apt theoretical approach for examining the radio relationship. This relationship is uniquely nonreciprocal, individualized, and subjectively particular. Therefore, utilizing a highly subjectified and objectifying theoretical framework is useful for demonstrating the existence of—and critically analyzing—the unique relationship between listener and voice.

In the third chapter, affect theory is utilized to explore the emotionally bound and routinized relationships constructed between listeners and radio broadcasts. This section deals with the ways in which listening becomes entrenched into the “affective rhythms” of individuals’ lived experiences. Of the various theories of emotion, affect theory is arguably the most contemporarily relevant in the world of social theory. That said, it is also the most apposite framework for dealing with radio, given its heavy emphasis on the relationship between emotion and memory, sensoriality, and embodiment. Ultimately, this section posits that the reliance radio listeners tend to develop is driven by emotional connectivity and the development of affective ritual.

In Chapter Four, I employ theories of localism to explain the ability of localized radio to reinforce and expand the limits of community. Many argue that the definition of “the local” is undergoing a paradigm shift (Torosyan & Munro, 2010). In an increasingly connected, digitized, and “borderless” world, how can we continue to understand locality? Examining localism is imperative when considering radio. In many ways, geographic locality and locally produced content are two of the primary qualities keeping radio afloat. Community-oriented work has become radio’s response

to the far-reaching appeal of audiovisual and social media. Consequently—perhaps, accidentally—radio tends to emerge as an architect of communities, a marker of citizenship. The important role “community” serves in the production of radio makes clarifying the terms of localism all the more pressing. Defining localism helps us understand what localized content should look like. In turn, understanding what localized content should look like helps us characterize and create a more functional radio.

Chapter Five considers more specifically what constitutes a productive social movement and how radio can be situated within that framework. Looking to social movement theories and scholarly work on contentious politics, I conclude by assessing how the various phenomena examined in previous chapters contribute to radio’s role as a facilitator of social activism in small American communities. Ultimately, I hope to ponder the future of radio as a twenty-first century medium. This project does not make a case against those studies speculating that radio is a “dying medium,” unable to compete with televisual and online sources of information. Rather, it argues that radio serves—or has come to serve—a different purpose entirely. If “successful” press reaches the most people, the argument that radio is unsuccessful has merit. The Internet has become an overwhelmingly effective medium, particularly when considering connectivity and networking. This research does not attempt to—and would be unable to—undo or discredit the significance of the Internet in the 21st century. Regardless of the success of other media, if we reframe notions of media success to be more qualitative, it is clear that radio occupies

a critical sector of our media landscape. The broadcaster's ability to harness the affective, relational, and communally unificatory power of the voice makes radio a unique medium— one capable of transcending sociospatial boundaries to become both a highly personal and a deeply public artifact.

## Materiality and Aurality: A Historical and Aritifactual Analysis of the Radio Object

“The little institution... has changed and improved and expanded and contracted and expanded again into something that... represents why people moved to Telluride and why they’ve stayed.”

-- Mavis Bennett in *Romancing the Radio: Fifteen Years of KOTO* (1991, p. 42)

As culture reforms, so too do the objects that compose the material structure therein. Often, however, objects endure through the vagaries of a mutating world. The materials themselves remain in their original physical forms, but they hold new significance as they wade through the world under new ownership with a new purpose. Radio is one such material: it persists despite changes in culture and changes in the media landscape. It persists despite ongoing charges that it is approaching its end. It persists due, in part, to its ability as material culture to adapt to the changing needs of a populace. As Bennett (1991) indicates in her written history of the station, KOTO-FM’s nearly half-decadal history has seen frequent shifts in programming, content changes attributable to the changing demographic population of the Colorado town. The station, writes Bennet, “mirrored the wild, undisciplined, idealistic exuberance of Telluride’s mid-70’s then, as much as it now mirrors the toned-down more responsible lives of the same people” (1991, p. 1). KOTO-FM’s material history, in other words, is marked by its changing relationship with the population it has served.

The following analysis situates radio as a cultural artifact. Artifact here is defined as a human-made object developed to serve a specific purpose (Hilpinen, 2011). This chapter explores the mythology of radio, with the acknowledgement that this mythos is entrenched in the various cultural spaces it has occupied over the course of its history. I analyze when, how, for whom and for what purposes radio acquired its contemporary reputation, while recognizing that this reputation is multifaceted, particular, and subjectively specific. This analysis is undoubtedly limited: it surveys just a few of the many characteristics of radio as it has evolved over its hundred-year stretch in the public sphere. Despite its limitations, such a delimited historical analysis can help us better unpack how radio has become assimilated as a tool and an artifact into modern American life.

Though in later chapters radio will be constructed using abstract theoretical concepts, by situating radio as an artifact, we examine radio as a physical component of the real world. According to Glassie (1999), the study of material culture is essentially the democratization of art history. Rather than examining elite modes of materiality, material culture studies invite us to analyze the mundane physical elements that comprise everyday life. The field hinges on the assumption that human culture always involves ongoing symbolic exchange and that these negotiations exist in large part in the material world (Ezell & O'Keefe, 1994). Later iterations of material culture studies propose that materials constitute their cultures just as much as cultures constitute materiality (Miller, 2003). This turn towards understanding the mutualistic, dynamic relationship between artifacts and culture lifted the presumption

of “superficiality” from conversations about material and, in so doing, lent new meaning to scholarly understandings of the human relationship with objects.

Despite Horten’s assertion that radio, “helps us discover new and intriguing aspects of the broader American story” (2002, p. 1), scholarship that contextualizes radio and views it as a subject worthy of material analysis is remarkably limited. Though not itself typically the focus of material study, radio bears several important similarities to other objects more commonly examined in the field, such as maps. Marchitello (1994) in his “Political Maps: The Production of Cartography and Chorography in Early Modern England,” calls for a reinvention of the field of cartography, demanding that scholars examine its epistemic potential and its ideologically motivated history. Marchitello criticizes the assumptions that “maps are pure descriptions of geographical reality, that maps are value free, that maps represent zero degree intervention, and that maps are true” (1994, p. 13). As maps are “always both image and narrative,” geographically situated and culturally bound, so too are radio broadcasts geographically contingent balances between narrative and voice (Marchitello, 1994, p. 5). The information—be it news, music, editorial—broadcast via the radio is not inevitable, but bound by its creators and contingent on geocultural assumptions of listenership. Radio is an object with material characteristics just as it is a medium for disseminating information. It exists—like map or text or television—in the complex space where material and media collide. Particularly because it is an object whose content is implicitly flexible—a broadcast’s composition can and should adapt to evolving listener needs—examining radio as a



malleable cultural artifact is a useful framework for understanding the communities it has historically served.

The following analysis works according to Glassie's (1999) three-tiered approach to studying artifactual context. When Glassie uses the word "context" he is not referring to the times and places in which an object exists, but rather the frameworks through which an object can be examined. In other words, though Glassie does advocate for examining an object within its historical moment, he focuses principally on analysis that emphasizes an object's various webs of meaning. Glassie (1999) argues that every artifact is examinable in assimilative, conceptual, and physical contexts. Useful as this framework may be, an analysis that imagines radio's context to be stagnant would be inadequate, given the ever-changing structure of American media and the ever-changing audience it serves. Therefore, I have divided radio's history into three distinct eras: Radio of the Hearth (1920s-1940s), Radio of the Activist (1940s-1970s), and Radio of the Local (late 1970s-present). Radio's history could be divided in many ways; Scannell (1989), for instance, divides radio's history according to music programming, writing, "[T]he history of radio, viewed in the long term, can be seen as its gradual fragmentation into different musical taste publics" (p. 138). The tripartite historic divide I introduce is based predominantly on my ethnographic research. Radio of the Hearth is based on the "Golden Age of Radio," a common periodic delineation that begins with the advent of radio broadcasting and essentially terminates with the introduction of television (Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, 2016). KOTO-FM developed as a product of Radio of the

Activist (1975) and has progressively become a Radio of the Local; KSQI-FM developed in the era of Radio of the Local and fits neatly into this framework. This contextual positioning is key if we hope to better understand radio's evolving roles in the various American communities it has served.

Glassie suggests that analyses of material culture begin with the object's inception—from this “place of beginning,” he writes, the object begins to assemble its meaning (Glassie, 1999, 59). Therefore, this analysis begins in 1920, when the first radio broadcast was delivered to the public. 1920 through about the mid-to-late 1940s represents an important moment—or series of moments—in American history. The preeminence of radio as a medium during this period is undeniable—this era is, after all, deemed “The Golden Age of Radio.” Radio existed prior to the 1920's; however, it existed solely in scientific and governmental circles, as privileged and exclusive domain. When Pittsburgh's KDKA became the first licensed radio station in the United States, the medium of the elite became the medium of the common American (Douglas, 2001). Radio broadcasting sustained its popularity throughout the 1920s and came to dominate the American media diet throughout the Great Depression and into the First World War, as a source of both information and entertainment.

The emergence of television in the 1940s forced a reconfiguration of radio's goals and a repurposing of its content (Wild, 2016). As television began to attain preeminence, radio increasingly needed to perform the work that television was unable to accomplish—that is, broadcasters needed to fill in the gaps. The sheer quantity of radio stations by 1940 outnumbered the extremely limited television

stations of the postwar era by several hundreds (Scott, 2008). There was, therefore, more space on the airwaves for alternative and experimental broadcasting than there was on television. One of the most successful attempts to fill in the televisual gaps was led by Lewis Hill, founder of The Pacifica Network (Lasar, 2000). A group of World War II pacifists founded KPFA—Pacifica's flagship station in Berkeley, CA and the first listener-supported radio station in the nation— in 1949, with the intention of democratizing the principles of nonviolence (Lasar, 2000). Hill expressed openly his commitment to relocating the informational space from the private to the public, denouncing the secluded bubbles in which American families existed. He dedicated himself to opening windows of communication between different types of people (Lasar, 2000). This, according to Hill and his colleagues, required discussions between individuals with diverse and alternative points of view (Lasar, 2000). Though its dogma evolved, Pacifica's character remained stable: it was a space for counterculture thought, one consistently ripe for collectivization and the propagation of grassroots activism.

The final transition took place in the 1970s, when radio completed its evolution into a medium dependent on an audience of community listeners. It became, in other words, a radio of, by, and for the local. Many radio historians posit that an emphasis radio's localism began in the 1950s, right as television began to take hold of American popular culture (Hilliard & Keith, 2005). Further, some make the valid argument that the Telecommunications Act of 1996 stymied the progress of localized broadcasting (Sterling, 2006). Chapter 4 addresses these timeline specifics

and explores the transition to localism in more depth, examining its origins, as well as its impact. Given its weight as a moment in radio's history, however, the local turn must first be situated within the material culture framework.

Locating contemporary objects within a study of material culture can be an effective tool for developing a better understanding of our extant culture. Analyzing artifacts provides a pseudo-objective mechanism for assessing the present self. Write Ezell and O'Keeffe, "The artifact... not only resists our critical appropriation; its very resistance presses us to acts of self-knowledge in the process of trying to understand it in the context of its culture" (1994, p. 3). Though I would push back on the notion that artifacts themselves can contain inherent, universal meaning resistant to observational and personal bias, it is true that material culture can aid us in coming to terms with our own selves in the absence of objective certainties about culture. By examining community-oriented radio as a consequential step in the progression of radio's materiality, we can better understand the influence of this type of radio. The shift to the local emerged in part as a response to the absence of televised local content, eased by the seemingly endless available broadcasting space over the airwaves. Without impeding too much upon the content of Chapter 4, I hope to assess the context that laid the groundwork for a transition towards a localized radio.

### **Assimilation Context**

The first level by which Glassie examines artifacts is the assimilative context. Assimilation asks us to examine the artifact's pragmatic utility in its particular

historical moment (Glassie, 1999). What, in other words, does the artifact do in a very literal sense? What makes it tangibly matter in its context? The assimilation context examines the concrete purposes for which an object's creators made it and the specific purpose for which its consumers utilized it.

At its establishment, radio had a variety of politically pragmatic purposes. In the 1920s-40s, radio was a facilitator of urgent information throughout unsteady moments in American history. Franklin Roosevelt's "Fireside Chats," for instance, disseminated information—for perhaps the first time—directly from the president to the homes of the citizenry. Said Roosevelt in a 1929 address:

Whereas five years ago ninety-nine out of one hundred people took their arguments from the editorials and the news columns of the daily press, today at least half of the voters sitting at their own firesides listen to the actual words of the political leaders on both sides and make their decision on what they hear rather than what they read. (Levine & Levine, 2010, p. 11)

Families grew dependent on the Fireside Chats and other radio broadcasts that provided instantaneous and direct access to information. Many families forced to part with their essential belongings—furniture, clothing, etc.—due to mounting debt opted to keep the family radio (Horten, 2002). Despite the evident prominence of radio in the rhythms of American life, there was, until about the 1940s, a significant absence of radio news and commentary (Horten, 2002).

By the mid-1940s, news content had increased its on-air presence from about five percent in the late 1930s to twenty percent of programming. Radio had evolved

into the most prominent outlet for sociopolitical news and commentary in the United States by the year 1945 (Horten, 2002). This programming shift reflects a clear adjustment in American consumption habituation—likely one that can be attributed to wartime anxiety. It also represents a shift in political tactics. Mainstream broadcasting became awash with government-implemented wartime propaganda. The radio developed into a justificatory tool of the government—a mechanism for helping Americans understand, “what their country was fighting for” (Horten, 2002, p. 43). The propaganda clarified American uncertainties over antagonism and alliance, illuminating precisely who the enemies were and why they were so inimical. Despite a widespread American skepticism towards propaganda, radio remained an essential news source throughout the 1940s. The radio brought the war—a distant abstraction for many families—into living rooms across the country (Horten, 2002). Consequently, warfare was unable to escape attention and discussion, regardless of how it concretely impacted individuals emotionally or financially; the entire country engaged with the collective trauma of the Second World War. Still, many were searching for alternative broadcast possibilities, options that countered government propaganda. The Pacifica Network was born out of this desire for dissidence.

In the mid-1940s, members of the oft-disregarded pacifist resistance to World War II developed the Pacifica Network (Lasar, 2000). Though regularly mistakenly labeled as a “liberal” or “communist” movement, the goals of the original founders were actually anarchist and anti-military in nature (Lasar, 2000). The concrete intentions of the original founders were evident: they aspired to deliver their ideology

to the masses. Pacifica became a mechanism for political organizing and disseminating information regarding protest actions. The network developed in conjunction with a new Federal Communications Commission's policy ensuring that large swaths of the FM dial were specifically designated to non-commercial public radio stations ("Overview and History," 2013). This move away from the commercialization of radio signifies another important moment in radio's democratic public influence—without corporate supervision of the news media, sources of information were, at least to some extent, independent and without ulterior fiscal motives.

The pacifist collaborators responsible for Pacifica grappled with the station's identity as an anti-communist news source amidst the Red Scare of the 1960s. Their mission underwent a discreet but significant shift: Pacifica became a platform for alternative discourse and marginalized thought beyond pacifism (Lasar, 2000). Though none of the broadcasters personally identified as communists, their general openness to communist discourse and transparent—or accused—communist guest speakers made them liable to FBI scrutiny (Lasar, 2000). Unorthodox public affairs programming did not exist across the dial. Still, its prominence as a result of the Pacifica Network nourished a newfound energy for activism in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century by providing necessary information to a burgeoning class of advocates.

Radio's most recent shift towards highlighting localized content has satisfied an underserved desire to understand the meaningful goings-on of a geographic locality. Pragmatically, this shift aids in facilitating information within communities.

At both KOTO-FM and KSOI-FM, radio is often a tool for attracting listeners to local events and endorsing local businesses. KOTO-FM contributors also noted that the station is “a voice for all the other nonprofits in town,” a place for different community groups to promote their services. In this sense, one of Radio of the Local’s primary practical purposes is as a not-for-profit tool for facilitating economic growth within communities. Beyond fiscal practicalities, many informants at KSOI-FM and KOTO-FM discussed the many other everyday advantages that come with a well-informed, connected community. The stations are some of the only sites for immediate information regarding important local happenings, particularly in crisis situations. According to General Manager Ben Kerr, emergency notification is one of the important services KOTO provides that community members cannot easily find elsewhere. He says that listeners gain from the station, “Just being able to know what’s going on on a daily basis. There’s a road closure. There’s avalanches. There’s mud slides or anything like that... If there’s elk on the highway.” The significance of local news is not strictly apparent in spiritual community connectedness or an ineffable sense of belonging. Community-oriented content is a pragmatic means of attaining necessary information while physically moving through a geographic landscape, particularly one as terrestrially unpredictable as Telluride, Colorado.

### **Conceptual Context**

Glassie (1999) further advocates for examining artifacts in their conceptual contexts. He sometimes also terms these the cultural or abstract contexts. These



analyses focus on what materials culturally represent, rather than the work they literally accomplish. According to Glassie, conceptual context is “the meanings shared, if incompletely, by the people who made the thing and those who put it to use” (1999, p. 60)—the abstract intent of the artifact’s creators and the abstract impact on the artifact’s consumers. These webs of meaning surrounding an artifact often exist somewhat separately from its actual utilitarian purposes.

Radio’s initial transition from the scientific world into American homes represents a key conceptual theme that has stuck with radio throughout its long history: the democratization of information. Radio began, as much technology does, in the hands of an elite few; it was originally a scientific tool that later transplanted itself onto American military operations (Douglas, 2001). It became a populist medium as it moved from relative secrecy—as an object of scientific and governmental inquiry—into the common domestic sphere. By the 1930’s the house radio had become the hearth of a new era, a commonplace asset for familial collectivity. Radio mirrored the symbolic role the Victorian parlor occupied in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century, for its ability to gather families around a common recreational space (Stevenson, 2001). Many scholars stress the role of the home in analyzing radio’s impact—Tacchi (1997), for instance, writes of radio as, “a part of the material culture of the home” and a contributor to “the creation of a domestic environment” (p. 26). Despite Tacchi’s convincing argument regarding radio’s pervasive domestic materiality, the domestic mythology of radio was most fitting during radio’s Golden Age. Radio was a domestic staple in the 1930s, owned by nearly half of all American

families (Smith, 2014). While its physical impact took place primarily in the home, its abstract impact was far wider. It unified its audience by uniformly educating a widespread cohort of Americans. Writes Smith:

Radio was the first truly mass medium, linking great cities and remote hamlets in the same instantaneous event... A number of programs used the town meeting motif explicitly. Some observers believed radio would draw Americans together as never before, creating the kind of informed, ideal republic imagined by the nation's founding generation." (2014, n.p.)

The proliferation of radio allowed for the democratization and domestication of political intelligence. Perhaps no use of radio was as impactful in terms of its ability to normalize inaccessible policy during the Golden Age of Radio as Franklin Roosevelt's Fireside Chats. Whether Roosevelt was advocating for the New Deal, scorning the onslaught of global fascism in the 1940s, or comforting a finance-depressed populace, his broadcasts transported a typically elite conversation into a domestic space (Smith, 2014). Such was the conceptual context of public affairs radio programming during the Golden Age; it was a medium marked by its commitment to egalitarian access to information.

By the time Franz Fanon (1959/1967) had written "This is the Voice of Algeria"—his seminal text on radio's work as a mechanism for social mobility—radio had made its mark internationally as a mechanism of pursuing grassroots activism. In certain broadcasting corners of the United States, radio—Pacifica radio in particular—represented a space for marginal ideals to be

explored in a public forum (Lasar, 2000). Founder of KOTO-FM, Jim Bedford, wanted to build a broadcasting service in Telluride under the assumption that “FM radio’s voice had come alive in the 60’s,” following the surfacing of alternative music and unorthodox discourse at radio stations on college campuses across the country (Bennett, 1991, p. 2). No longer was radio merely a mechanism for the purveyance of information; it was space for criticism and a channel for counterculture perspectives. Pacifica provided a forum for groups in the United States feeling alienated by the homogenous—and, in their view, widely propagandized—coverage of political news. The project of increasingly utilizing radio as a mechanism for purveying activist sentiment existed on an international scale in varying forms. As Fanon posits, Algerian radio—first a tool of the French colonizers to maintain their claim to stolen land— became a mechanism for resistance and activism in the hands of the Algerians (Fanon, 1959/1967). The preeminence of pirate radio—radio without a federally issued license—in British broadcasting between the 1950s and 1970s indicates the overseas development of a Radio of the Activist, or, at the very least, a Radio of the Rebellious (Bender, 1988). Regardless of whether radio actually achieved its activist aims over the course of this period, it maintained a conceptual reputation in many circles as a medium by and for ideological revolutionaries.

Radio’s conceptual context presently hinges on the importance of geographic communality. Prioritizing the goings-on of a topographical community has become critical for radio stations, particularly as the quantity of stations sharing the airwaves continues to multiply. Radio stations have become—as my informants at KSOI-FM

and KOTO-FM reported—the voices of their communities. This characterization prevails, despite the possibility that the content of broadcasting can focus on issues beyond the geographic community. The stations that have always subscribed to the Pacifica model have, in many ways, come to a crossroads. As Bennett's (1991) history of KOTO-FM suggests, a station's desire to be intentionally counterculture often stands in opposition to its responsibility to adequately serve all the members of its community. The Pacifica listenership is made up overwhelmingly of left-wing intellectuals, and the conversation is—though not entirely nationally oriented—focused specifically on large-scale news stories (Lasar, 2000). This is not to say that community oriented content cannot be geared toward activism—in fact, the opposite is true. Radio of the Local can and should be a branch of Radio of the Activist. Many hyper-local stations place a heavy emphasis on activism geared towards community building and grassroots improvement, rather than national issues and ideological radicalism.

### **Physical Context**

Finally, a material analysis would be incomplete without an assessment of how the artifact physically moves through the world. Glassie (1999) advocates for physical contextualization—an analysis of the external, visual, and tangible characteristics of an artifact. Given radio's primary sensorial quality—its audibility—examining it visually or tangibly is hardly possible, much less useful. It is much more beneficial, therefore, to examine and contextualize the utility of sound.

How, in other words, is an audible medium a different mechanism of conveying information than other media? What are its strengths and limitations, and how are these characteristics apparent throughout radio's history in the United States?

In considering radio's sensorial impact in the United States throughout the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, we must turn our attention to vocality and its relationship to the politicization of bodies. Namely, we should look to Franklin Roosevelt's use of radio as a proxy for assessing the new role of public figures in American life post-radio. Prior to the advent of radio broadcasting, the American public at large experienced public figures through the written word. Following the emergence of television (and continuing into the present day) the American public imagines its public figures on the basis of physicality—by way of stature, posture, expression, race and physical ability. Throughout the Golden Age of Radio, however, public figures were enshrined in the American mythology on the basis of voice. Particularly due to his physical disability—a paralytic illness bound him to a wheelchair for the entirety of his presidency—an emphasis on the disembodied voice was a blessing for Roosevelt. He employed radio as a tool of assuming a posture of strength without needing to actually demonstrate physical ability. Write Houck and Kiewe (2003):

He... discovered radio and used this modern technology to his benefit. Radio was a communication medium well suited for Roosevelt because it played up a resonant and assuring voice. Roosevelt had both qualities. And it was a medium that did not require physical visibility; imagery was left to the listener's imagination. (p. 53)

As a sensorial medium, radio accentuated Roosevelt's powerful voice while precluding view of his ostensibly weak body. Not only was he able to speak directly to his constituents; he was able to inspire confidence through his voice, one widely held to be a seamless blend of tonally comforting and undeniably self-assured (Houck & Kiewe, 2003). This type of broadcast was critical, particularly in the masculinized era of Roosevelt's presidency. Radio allowed him to appear strong—hence masculine, hence capable—despite his visible physical disability. More broadly, this move towards the vocal represented a shift towards a more participatory—albeit, disembodied—form of political life. Though the American public could feel incorporated in political goings-on, their participation was not associated with imagery. Rather, their political inclusion and civic engagement were solely evident through the nonreciprocal act of listening.

When activists began to take up an aural medium, they began to realize new sensorial possibilities. The audibility of radio allows it to be a medium ripe for the establishment of alternative representations of the other. Activists pushed for a more representative radio between the late 1940s and early 1970s, though not as hastily as they potentially could have. White, educated men founded Pacifica; they continued to heavily dominate its production and listenership well into its development as a station (Lasar, 2000). Nevertheless, even in its earliest stages, the audible medium—wherein dialogue was central—exposed the listening public to new discursive ideologies they were unable to experience elsewhere. Though radio began as remarkably democratic, its subtle propagandization by the end of the Second World War disillusioned the

listening public, relegating them to the spaces of political remoteness and complicity (Horten, 2002). This, many argued, was extremely politically problematic. At a conference entitled “Is Free Speech Still Free?” professor Lawrence Sears said, “Free speech as far as I’m concerned means free hearing” (Lasar, 2000, p. 107). The “right to hear”—that is, the right to engage with multiple points of view, the right to experience unorthodox dialogue—was a critical facet of being a politically active American citizen.

Despite “diversity of thought,” the utter absence of diversity among the people lending voice to Pacifica’s broadcasts cannot be ignored. The “program on Eastern thought”—which Pacifica leaders Hill, McKinney, and Moore deemed necessary to dilute their station’s evident Eurocentrism—was infused with exoticized and orientalist portrayals of the global East (Lasar, 2000). Though people of color were frequently interviewed on Pacifica in comparison to other commercial broadcasting, they were more often spoken about. Racial politics continued to play an unambiguously problematic role at the network: in a 1999 piece entitled “Race and Power at Pacifica Radio,” Rafael Renteria calls for, “the charges of racism being leveled at the KPFA group [to be] examined in the actual context in which they occur” (Renteria, 1999, n.p.). He posits that, though the network was often touted as a “bastion of free speech,” the internal workings of the organization were predicated on the suppression of marginalized voices. Despite internal glitches in progressive representation, a cursory perusal of the Pacifica archives demonstrates an early emphasis on feminism and race, even where its overall representation falters—Angela

Davis's 1977-1978 interview series, "Angela Speaks," serving as one important example (Pacifica Radio Archives, n.d.). Pacifica, by many historical accounts, did not take full advantage of its role as a platform for diverse voices. Still, it maintained a material reputation at the time as a source of inclusive discourse.

Finally, radio's transition to the local sphere as an auditory medium is a remarkable one, specifically when the community it reaches is closely linked. When radio is created of, by, and for a tightly knit geographic community, the voices of those on the airwaves often become identifiable. One of my interviewees from KSOI-FM—a DNR Conservation Officer with a weekly three-minute broadcast about hunting and fishing—noted that community members began publicly identifying him through his voice alone. He has acquired a pseudo-celebrity status locally.

"Somebody will corner me at the Casey's," he told me, in order to tell him that they recognize his voice. He is amazed by how many people listen to the station and shocked by the frequency with which people approach him to comment on his "three-minute click." Vocality is not generally a point of recognition in the same way that visuality is. Nevertheless, in a population as small as that of Southern Iowa, voice can be a key identifier. The sense of familiarity to the point of recognition one attains from regularly listening to a voice is only truly available in a small community. This notion of aural connectedness is further evidence for the incredible power of broadcasting locally produced and oriented content to an intimate community.



## **Conclusion**

Material culture studies are not meant to be fetishizations of material worlds (Miller, 2003). The discipline does not imagine that materialism is a social good, nor does it posit that artifacts always accomplish their explicit or implicit cultural objectives. Rather, material culture studies attempt to disentangle an artifact's various mythic representations in order to extrapolate about the individuals and societies that have historically utilized and continue to utilize the object. Similarly, I do not, by exploring representations of the radio object, mean to argue that radio has always been deployed for the objectives I have specified nor that it has dependably achieved its outlined objectives. This analysis situates radio in its various contexts and uses these periodic assignments to better appreciate radio's contemporary cultural character and how it came to be.

Perhaps even more noticeably than other artifacts, radio is deeply rooted in and influenced by nearly every significant sociopolitical movement that has occurred since it entered the public sphere. It is necessary to flag here that "significant moment" is itself a subjective classification, a characterization heavily dependent on whom is speaking, where that individual looks, and what they want to see. In the communities I examined—admittedly, extremely white communities—the three eras of Hearth, Activist, and Local proved to be distinct and individually significant. This delineation is surely not consistent across all community audiences, even within the United States. Still, these periods each demonstrate relatively pervasive themes in

terms of the mythic role radio has historically played in the communities it has served—as both communal and collectivizing as well as domestic and privatized.

Between the 1920s and mid-1940s, radio was—for all intents and purposes—in its Golden Age. As a source of public affairs programming, it was geared towards the democratization of previously privileged and privatized information. By relocating the voice of public figures to the space of the home, broadcasters were able to accomplish two separate but critical goals: distribute propaganda in national moments of strife and reconfigure the public roles of some of the most prominent cultural personalities. Radio's centrality as a source of instantaneous news operated throughout this era as both a blessing and a curse, as it served to create a—largely illusory—sense of political participation while covertly propagandizing the listening public. Still, the era represents a sea change in American political life, in which information became readily accessible to wider swaths of the American people with new urgency. Political life was simultaneously publicized and domesticated, transforming it into an institution available to a far larger subset of the American public.

By the late 1940s, radio in the US had evolved into a mechanism for pursuing activism, specifically by way of the pacifist network, Pacifica. Pacifica represents one of radio producers' many necessary adaptations to the popularity and pervasiveness of television. From a practical standpoint, Pacifica provided a discursive outlet to an emerging cohort of listening activists. It brought counterculture ideology to the national stage, through a medium increasingly marked by government

issued propaganda. Pacifica and its affiliated stations had the potential to truly represent marginalized voices; they missed the mark slightly in terms of diversity beyond ideological variability. Still, this period laid the foundation for the possibility of on-air activism, by opening up the airwaves to progressive discourse. It represented a turn away from the incubated, domestic sphere in which radio had previously existed towards a more deregulated, politically active media space.

More recently, the shift towards hyper-localized radio content represents still another transition, both in radio's artifactual significance and in broader cultural conceptions of communality. Stations have recently begun moving away from the Pacifica activist model and towards a radio of community-oriented journalism. For KOTO, this shift occurred in the early 1980's, as a new general manager was tasked with bringing "radio into the community" (Bennett, 1991, p. 24). The new hire was not placed in charge of the station to move the conversation further to the ideological left, nor to spark new dialogue about national issues. Rather, she was responsible for meeting the needs of her geographic community. She believed that, "a community radio station had to reflect the ideals of the community. It had to be dynamic, not static" (Bennett, 1991, p. 27).

A shift towards the local is arguably radio's only appropriate response to the advent of new media—a landscape marked by increasingly borderless, non-geographic connectivity. This great strength of the Internet—the ability to connect two or more individuals regardless of location—represents one of the principle weaknesses of radio broadcasting. At the risk of stating the obvious, radio

is—by its most basic material composition—unable to extend beyond a certain geographical distance, and is, therefore, only reasonably capable of reaching those within that radius. As an artifact, it is now responsible for competing with media that reaches anyone with access to the Internet, despite only reaching a small fraction of these individuals. As Chapter 4 demonstrates, this material limitation does not solely need to be perceived as a weakness. Rather, it represents an exciting possibility for the direction of public affairs content as local stations progress in a technologically shifting world.

## The Aural Other: Evaluating Radio Through Object Relations Theories

“We give a voice to everybody. If anybody wants to come in... they can come.”

—Ben Kerr, General Manager of KOTO Telluride

The concept of “giving voice” emerged frequently throughout my ethnographic research in Telluride and Murray. The saying also surfaces constantly throughout literature on radio history and radio’s impact. Clearly, the use of the saying “giving voice” is not unintentional. The play-on-words here is almost too obvious to plainly state, but it feels significant that I do so: radio is both a medium of vocal sound and a platform for expression, particularly for “the [otherwise] voiceless,” as the saying often goes. I am fascinated by this convergent space between the dual definitions of voice—the literal sound of speech and the more metaphysical notion of voice as power, agency, and influence. Sometimes, the broadcasters I spoke to discussed the physical voice—the broadcaster at KSOI in Iowa, for instance, who has achieved a sort of celebrity status on the basis of his vocal cadence alone. Often, however, the broadcasters spoke of a more metaphorical voice—the “voice of the valley” was how the News Director for KOTO described the station, implying that the station serves as a kind of proxy for the community at large. Further, the idea of “giving voice” has a third key meaning when dealing with radio: the broadcaster literally gives their voice—almost as a physical benefaction—to the audience.

Unpacking the radio voice in such a way leaves us with a tangled clutter of disparate webs of meaning. Is the voice of the broadcaster a sensory experience? An abstract symbol of power? A tangible entity able to be offered, received, and exchanged? Yes, yes, and yes.

In this section, the radio voice's relationship with the listener is addressed using various theories of object relations. The camaraderie between the listener and broadcaster is a unique one. It is a relationship generally lacking in reciprocity, emotional labor, and—by its traditional definition—social interaction. Nevertheless, the bond between listener and disembodied voice is a relationship in its own right. We become acquainted with broadcasters and come to understand their traits and values. We anticipate their voices and can recognize the cadence. We experience a sense of loss or disappointment when we hear a different voice in place of the one we know. What accounts for this distinct connection with a disembodied voice?

Object relations theory provides an appropriate framework for understanding the radio relationship for a number of key reasons. The first is serendipitous, though not inconsequential. In 1939, D.W. Winnicott—one of the key theorists behind object relations—brought his theories into the public sphere via a series of BBC radio broadcast (Ades, 2016). The series outlines some key components of Winnicott's contribution to object relations theory (Ades, 2016). The fact that Winnicott situated himself within the broadcasting realm reflects his intentions as a psychologist to bring the language and theory of psychological science into the public sphere (Farley,

2012). It even suggests that Winnicott was more cognizant of how fluidly his theories translated to radio work than he may have let on.

Admittedly, this direct correlation between the medium of radio and the work of an object relations theorist is probably purely incidental. Object relations theory is also a useful approach for a number of reasons beyond sheer happenstance. Though object relations theory is far from perfect, of the various models of examining relationships the field of psychology has to offer, it is the most relevant to assessing the radio bond. There were certainly other psycho-sociological approaches I could have selected to examine the relationship between listener and broadcaster. For instance, I could have utilized Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory or compared theories of conformity. Foundational to these theories, however, is an emphasis on the relationship in its entirety. They are predicated on assessing the labor and affective influence of each relational party. A model that examines each relationship in its totality does not account for a relationship that—like the camaraderie between broadcaster and listener—is not grounded in reciprocity or shared meaning or even contact. Conversely, object relations theories are based on the experience of the subject—a singular participant in a relationship. This framework for understanding radio interprets the subjective experience of the listener without imagining that the listener is somehow mutually or even noticeably impacting the broadcaster. Such a theory is the only kind that can satisfactorily account for the nuances of this exceptional relationship.

Before proceeding to make connections between these two invisible forces—relations between objects and the human voice—object relations theory warrants definitional specificity. The term refers to a model for understanding human relations separate and distinct from drive theory, ego psychology, and self-psychology (Flanagan, 2011). One of the primary assumptions of object relations theory surrounds the essential existence of an internal, unconscious network of relationships separate from lived, external reality. These internal relationships are with objects (Flanagan, 2011). Unlike in other social sciences, in psychology, the term “object” refers to a human other rather than an inanimate entity. Psychology juxtaposes the self—the subject—to the other—the object. Naturally, the use of the word “object” rather than “other” raises meaningful philological questions about dehumanizing the other in our discussions of human interaction. While the argument of objectification is valid, this lexical choice is imperative, as it differentiates the study of object relations from other relationship-oriented research.

An object relation is not a relationship per se, as it explicitly emphasizes the experience of the *subject* as it is impacted by the relationship with the object (Flanagan, 2011). To a certain extent, the use of the word “object” is intentionally dehumanizing. The term forces us to consider the nonhuman roles human others tend to embody for the self: objects of desire, objects of reverence, objects of disgust, etc. This is not to imply that we necessarily do away with what makes the object an individual. Rather, we seek to understand how the object’s unique characteristics become a part of the subject, introjected and conjoined with the psyche of the self.



The theory relies heavily on the notion that the self does not exist without the other and that, particularly in early childhood, the fullness of inner life depends on the construction of relationships (Flanagan, 2011).

Donald Winnicott was one theorist who took center stage at the height of object relations theory's prominence in psychological discourse. Winnicott's theory of object relations emphasizes early childhood and places the burden almost absolutely on the mother. "There is no such thing as a baby," Winnicott famously wrote, insinuating that the infant does not exist as an entity separate from its mother (Wright, 1996). Perhaps Winnicott's most significant development was his concept of the transitional object. He describes the transitional object as a physical entity that aids the child as it moves towards a state of separateness from the external world (Flanagan, 2011). Central to this theory is the notion that babies have both a limited sense of self-object differentiation and a developing capacity for object constancy (Meissner, 2000). Object constancy—a term coined by Hans Hartmann—explains the infant's gradual realization that an absent object may eventually come back (Balick, 2013). Further, the infant eventually comes to understand themselves as disconnected from their surrounding environment, particularly the object of the mother (Flanagan, 2011).

According to Winnicott, an essential gateway into healthy human growth is the development of a balanced sense of independent self (Wright, 1996). In order to make this possible, the mother needs only to be "good enough"—present for the child enough to satisfy its needs, but sufficiently absent to allow for the infant's

development as an individual (Wright, 1996). Winnicott posits that the “transitional object” in conjunction with occasional maternal absence, is often responsible for facilitating this environmental detachment and personal growth. The transitional object is a physical, non-human embodiment of a human object that represents the creation of a bridge between child and maternal object (Flanagan, 2011). Writes Winnicott in *Playing and Reality* (1971):

When symbolism is employed the infant is already clearly distinguishing between fantasy and fact, between inner objects and external objects, between primary creativity and perception. But the term transitional object, according to my suggestion, gives room for the process of becoming able to accept difference and similarity... it seems to me that the transitional object (piece of blanket, etc.) is what we see of this journey of progress towards experiencing. (p. 6)

We should not, Winnicott argues, expect the child to individuate instantaneously. Rather, a child should acquire an understanding of the world gradually and in small doses.

Clearly, the traditional theories of object relations place an undue burden on the mother and are predicated on normative assumptions about motherhood, domesticity, and kinship. I would be remiss if I carelessly accepted these theories of maternity without incorporating any critique. Despite the ostensible authority of Winnicott’s effeminate radio voice, his take on motherhood—as a man who, according to the binary presented by his own theories, can never be a mother

himself—should be accepted with a great deal of skepticism<sup>1</sup>. Numerous feminist theorists have made critiques along these lines. The critique I want to particularly focus on does not fault the foundational premises of traditional object relations scholarship. Rather, it offers an explanation of the sociocultural forces that make these theories true. Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976) and Nancy Chodorow (1999), for instance, acknowledge that the mother *is* the primary caregiver, but posit that this responsibility is instilled in the child by the parents in infancy and early childhood. Therefore, the legitimacy of maternal responsibility is demonstrated to the child through the behavior of the child’s primary and secondary caregiver. Writes Dinnerstein, “The universal exploitation of women is rooted in our attitudes toward very early parental figures and will go on until these figures are male as well as female” (1976, p. 102). Notions of maternal attachment and paternal distance, therefore, are mutable cultural conceptions, not biological facts. Like Chodorow and Dinnerstein, I argue that despite the obvious problematic features of traditional strains of object relations, these theories are effective frameworks for comprehending the mechanics of certain interpersonal relationships.

Before connecting radio to the human listener using object relations, we should examine the role the voice plays in theories of the unconscious generally. In psychodynamic scholarship, the importance of the voice is largely tacit, either glazed over by visual or tactile sensory experiences or addressed indirectly (Lagaay, 2008).

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<sup>1</sup> It is key that I recognize and refute some of the primary assumptions made by object relations, particularly with regards to theories of motherhood: that not all mothers are married to fathers; that not all people who give birth are mothers; that not all developmentally sound children are raised by mothers; and—though I have not even delved into the problematic world of the Oedipus complex and maternal versus paternal attachment—that not all children are the gender assigned to them at birth.

The voice is often perceived as the gateway to the subconscious, an entryway to attaining a deeper understanding of meaning (Lagaay, 2008). This notion of voice is critical in Freudian psychoanalysis. The disembodied voice of the analyst is intended to not only mirror the soothing maternal voice of infancy, but also to occupy a “discursive space” that is neither fantasy nor reality, neither objective nor subjective (Breton, 2013, p. 78). The role of psychologists, therefore, is to transform experience into narrative utilizing their own voices as a bridge (Farley, 2012).

The association between object relations and the radio voice primarily deals with the ways in which the voice can be a useful transitional object. This theory is twofold: the radio voice is valuable as a container and as a mechanism for continuity (Karpf, 2013). Containment is the more technical and clinical of these functions. A prerequisite for a “good object”—a term coined by object relations theorist Melanie Klein—is that the object be a resilient thing onto which an infant may project its feelings of anxiety (Karpf, 2013). Importantly, fetuses are capable of hearing twenty-eight weeks post-conception (Karpf, 2013). Therefore, the disembodied voice of the mother—not her shape or touch—is the first method the unseeing infant has of differentiating presence and absence (Karpf, 2013). Numerous studies demonstrate the ability of the fetus to hear and recognize the maternal voice (see Kisilevsky et al., 2003). The maternal voice is the original aural container, considered something of an “umbilical chord” for its significance in infantile development (Karpf, 2013).

Additionally, the voice is capable of becoming a “sonorous envelope” in its omnipotent, all-encompassing scope (Karpf, 2013, p. 12). Karpf posits that the

omniscience of an audible—rather than audiovisual—medium becomes increasingly powerful as society continuously progress towards an overwhelming emphasis on the visual. Regardless of its relative power, it stands to reason that the disembodied voice is capable of becoming an effective container for emotion, due to a) its similarity to the maternal, and, therefore, analyst voice and b) its encircling omnipresence.

Furthermore, the fact that radio is *regular*—occurring at the same time, with the same voice or voices, in a reliable format—reflects its effectiveness as a transitional object. It creates, in other words, a sense of “ontological continuity” with which listeners can structure their internal lives (Karpf, 2013). A transitional object needs to be routinely there for a subject—present in the absence of a physical other on a basis that, if not continuous, is at least regularly scheduled to fulfill certain needs. Moreover, the object needs to be composed of consistent physical, tangible, and aural elemental features. Winnicott (1971) writes that “[the object] must never change unless changed by the infant” (p. 5). Indeed, he posits that any small change to the object’s state of being—rinsing off dirt, sewing a tear, inscribing the child’s name on the tag etc.—represents a fundamental modification in the object’s constancy, and therefore a potential break in the child’s bond with it.

Radio broadcasting is, ideally, repetitive almost to the point of tedium. Scannell (1996) contests that “dailiness” is in fact the cornerstone of broadcasting. Further, she argues that the timestamps of the media we consume demarcate the very programming of life itself. Indeed, a schedule adjustment or a new broadcaster can prove noticeable-at-best, cataclysmic-at-worst for regular radio listeners. Listeners

know the jingle that will wake them when their alarm sounds in the morning, the show they will listen to on their drive to work, and the voice they will hear while they cook dinner in the evening. Such dependability makes radio into a reliable object capable of providing a sense of presence in the absence of a physical other.

## **Conclusion**

To any regular radio listener, this exhaustive justification for the claim that the relationship listeners develop with their broadcasters is indeed a relationship would seem ludicrous. “Of *course* Robert Siegel and Amy Goodman are my friends,” they would tell you. Nevertheless, it is important to examine precisely why this relationship is capable of existing—the psychological forces that make it possible. These phenomena can be brought to light by assessing radio through the lens of object relations. Treating the radio—the voice in particular—as an objective other rather than an inanimate, sterile artifact helps to clarify the relationship that develops between listener and broadcaster. In doing so, we can understand the critical role radio plays in the lives of its most loyal listeners. This relationship-oriented chapter contains one clear but intentional omission: limited attention is given to *emotion*, a key feature of any interpersonal relationship. The section that follows explores affective connectivity within the radio relationship in more substantial depth.

## Affective Connectivity in Effective Radio

“[KSOI] feels like part of the fabric of our life.”

—Bill Trickey, KSOI Member

In performing my fieldwork, not once did members of either KSOI-FM or KOTO-FM define the sensation of listening to their community station as “good” or “bad,” “pleasant” or “unpleasant,” “exciting” or “dull.” Their experience, in other words, was not so affectively finite, so concretely emotional. They instead conveyed that the sensation existed somewhere in between extremes, in the humdrum spaces of everyday existence. Instead of naming or specifying their emotional experiences, they typically described listening as the ineffable perception that they were a part of something larger, a community beyond the self. But how could this be? How could a typically solitary, domestic activity come to represent the connectivity of a collective? What work does radio do to become an integral seam in the fabric of both domestic and communal life?

### **Tomkins Traditionalism to Contemporary Criticism: An Affect Theory**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter considers how affect contributes to and is impacted by the subjective listening experience. Chapter 2 explored radio’s ability to create nonsocial but nonetheless faithful and intimate relationships between listeners and broadcasters. Here, I shift to examining the result of these relationships—and the incentive for

prolonging them. The motivation for ongoing connections to radio can be located in embodied affectivity. Through the establishment of a sonic routine, radio becomes an emotionally significant element of listeners' everyday lived experiences. The integration of radio into a daily routine and into everyday, domestic spaces protracts relationships between listeners and radio. Tacchi (2009) terms such everyday, habitual experiences and the soundscapes that demarcate them "affective rhythms." I hold that the affective rhythms radio produces have meaningful consequences for the listener in terms of the connection they feel to the radio and, importantly, to disconnected or absent others.

Affect theory provides a practicable theoretical framework for assessing emotionality via radio, due to its emphasis on associating emotion with memory and experience. The emergence of affect theory—first in the realm of psychological science and later in critical sociocultural theoretical work—marked a significant shift in scholarly understandings of motivation, subjectivity, and embodiment. Silvan Tomkins is credited as the founder of affect theory, a cogent theory of emotion independent of psychodynamic drive theories and cognition scholarship (Demos, 1995). He aimed to navigate the space between the three disparate schools of psychological science that were competing for dominance at the time: experimental, clinical, and applied psychology (Sedgwick, 2003). Rather than treat affect as a subset of one of these previously theorized systems of human existence, Tomkins established it as a class of research all its own, alongside homeostatic, drive, cognition, and motor systems (Demos, 1995). Traditionalist—that is, Tomkinsian—strains of affect theory



are based on nine unique categories of basic affect, such as joy and shame, which are experienced in different gradations at different circumstantial moments.

Feminist theorists who have taken up affect have needed to negotiate the evident essentialism of Tomkins's nine “inherent” affects. In feminist and queer theory, essentialism and biologism are, for all intents and purposes, two sides of the same repugnant coin. Pseudo-scientifically rooted assumptions of universality have historically colored—and continue to impact—the perpetuation of the white, male idealized human model. It is almost inconceivable, consequently, that any critical theorist worth their salt would be able to seriously consider such scholarship outside of a purely critical context. Therefore, those examining affect utilizing Tomkins’s framework must proceed with some caution. Sedgwick (2003), for instance, takes up Tomkins despite, and perhaps because of the pseudo-biological core of his work. She speaks of a complex type of essentialism, a, “periodic table of the infinitely recombinable elements of the affect system, a complex, multilayered phyllo dough of the analog and the digital: these are the models that Tomkins’s work makes us eager to deploy” (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 114). In other words, she holds that Tomkins’s is an essentialism that is mutable, but necessarily structured in order to present some logical truth. Sedgwick takes a post-deconstructionalist perspective on traditionalist affect theory, as she utilizes Tomkins’s work despite its problematics and works beyond idle critique.

Tomkins demonstrates affect’s significance but delineates it categorically from Freud’s concepts of drive and cognition. In doing so, he allows for motivation and

impulse to exist in spaces other than the provocation of base drives (Shmurak, 2006). Affect is, then, the fundamental system we use to register pleasure and pain, understanding, of course, that experiences of pleasure and pain do not arise solely when survival is at stake. Plainly stated, in order to feel good—whatever this may mean to us subjectively<sup>2</sup>—we create emotional memories of and affective expectations for different moments of conscious activity (Shmurak, 2006). We come to align experiences with the feelings they provoke, and we use this information as a prognostic to help us predict how different moments will make us feel. Of course, our experiences—even routine, mundane experiences—are layered with circumstantial dimensions beyond affect. Psychological, biological, material, and cognitive factors beyond intrinsic emotion help to inform our emotional states. Consequently, no two affective experiences can be precisely the same. Still, moments, memories, times of day, etc. become intrinsically tied to the ways they make us feel.

In contemporary analysis, affect theory is often removed from its original context. The theory rapidly maneuvered its way to the forefront of post-humanist discourse, as scholars began seriously turning back to experience and embodiment. Clough (2007) terms this transition “the affective turn.” Affect theory develops into a useful tool for assessing the social body, insofar as the body is capable of affecting and being affected by others. The sociability of affect is critical to bear in mind as we move forward to assess radio’s role in informing the subjective experience of a community. Clough also theorizes affect in terms of its relationship to emerging

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<sup>2</sup> I should note here that there are compelling features to the negativist arguments that people actually do seek out negative affects for a variety of reasons (see Brady, 2012).

technologies (2007). She cites Hansen's work on affect and new media, suggesting that the experience of engaging with cinematic media specifically leads the subject to a sort of "nonlived collective memory" (Clough, 2007, 6). This theory regarding the influence of media on the formation of a collective proves especially useful when probing the human relationship to radio.

### **Affective Rhythmicity and the Sonic Routine**

Affect theories—both traditionalist Tomkinsian interpretations and more contemporary ones—are useful in crafting a better understanding of how community radio comes to "feel like the fabric of our lives." The present discussion is confined mainly to exploring radio in terms of what Tacchi (2009) terms "affective rhythm." I argue that this sentiment is not necessarily limited to the domestic sphere, per Tacchi's argument, as it is capable of transcending the individual by becoming an emotionally connective medium between disconnected social bodies.

Tacchi's work on radio affect is relevant here, as it theorizes the relationship between radio and individuals in their private lives. She grounds this theoretical work in "affective rhythms," examining the ways in which mood and routine become interlaced and embodied (Tacchi, 2009). While limited scholarly work has been conducted to link affective experience to radio listening, a significant body of scholarship exists regarding the relationship between music listening and affect. Radio studies and musicology differ in a number of key ways, yet they resemble one another in their examination of a purely sonic medium. One of the primary

differences between the two fields is that music is more flexible in terms of its cross-situational propriety. That is, music is appropriate in a wide variety of contexts, as both background and foreground. On the other hand, radio—talk radio in particular—is not necessarily functional as anything but foreground. Radio’s situational stagnancy—that is, its limited sphere of acceptable usage, at least in comparison to music—makes it an easier target for determining widespread associable affect. Therefore, despite differences between the two disciplines, musicological work that employs affect theory is an ultimately useful tool for grounding an affect-driven analysis of radio.

Tacchi defines affects as the, “feeling-filled aspects of everyday living” (2009, p. 174). Though this assessment is arguably an oversimplification of what affect is capable of, it is useful to employ a streamlined definition that demarcates “sensation”— which typically signifies a conscious provocation—from what Stewart (2007) would term “ordinary affects”—the affective qualities of the mundane and everyday. Tacchi characterizes the affective relationship reliable listeners develop as one tied to its routineness and its rhythmicity. This theory assumes a natural human reliance on periodic rhythms—those that are regular and timely. The routine established by rhythm, Tacchi argues, is part and parcel of a larger human project described as, “the struggle for a dynamic and affective equilibrium” (Tacchi, 2009, p. 176). Tacchi subverts a conversation about “the emotions” (joy, shame, etc.) to discuss an indefinable stabilizing response employed to maintain steadiness in the face of uncertainty.

Tacchi (2009) constrains her analysis of radio's efficacy to the domestic. She acknowledges that her work is only totally applicable to, "contemporary, Western, English-speaking—possibly only British—domestic life," situating her notion of domesticity as a culturally specific and exclusive one (Tacchi, 2009, p 176). Tacchi's definition of domestic is not purely confined to the home per se, but rather to the *familiar*. The family car, for instance, can be a domestic space according to this definition of domesticity. Domestic objects are the objects with which we interact in the everyday. Despite limiting radio's possibilities to the domestic sphere, Tacchi does not shy away from theorizing the social. The social relationships she explores, however, do not exceed the domestic sphere—relationships between partners, relationships between parent and child, relationships with broadcaster, relationships with oneself.

Further, Tacchi speaks of a literal routine that radio helps individuals maintain—for instance Neil, a regular radio listener, compares listening to the radio in the morning to "brushing his teeth" (Tacchi, 2009, p. 177). Radio is both a nurturing form of care and one present unconditionally. The emotional labor one must undertake to develop a relationship with a show is limited at most. Tacchi makes the case that, "radio offers... comfort without demanding anything" (2009, p. 178). Therefore, the medium's characteristic regularity becomes a useful and unique means of maintaining a sort of socio-affective equilibrium. Consistency is a tremendously critical aspect of homeostasis maintenance. According to Noordewier and Stapel (2010), studies repeatedly demonstrate that consistency—though not necessarily a

desirable end in and of itself—is a necessary means of reassuring oneself that the world is manageable and bearable. Further, radio is utilized to create a comfortable domestic environment defined by its sonic routine, in which domestic relationships are capable of forming and flourishing (Tacchi, 2009). The sociability of radio, according to Tacchi’s work, is therefore grounded primarily in a) the relationship between broadcaster and listener (as detailed in Chapter 1) and b) the domestic and private relationships formed between listeners engaging with the medium in tandem, presumably in a shared home or other familial space. What, then, of the relationships formed beyond the domestic space? How can this affectivity be transferred into a broader context to prescribe the energy and connectivity of a community?

To answer these questions, it is beneficial to turn to musicologists, who suggest that audible form cannot and should not be limited to a prescribed sociocultural space. DeNora (2000) defines musical forms as “devices for the organization of experience, as referents for action, feeling and knowledge formation” (p. 24). Perhaps, the same could be said for the ways in which we situate radio and its cross-situational distinctions. DeNora dismantles the dichotomy between medium and affect (medium generates affect, e.g.) in order to assess the influence and reach of music on a more subjective and culturally specific level of analysis. There is no room, therefore, for the argument that certain music belongs in certain spaces by its nature; DeNora suggests fluidity in music itself, but rigidity in the way a society comes to position it. Meaning, she writes, “can be stabilized through ritual procedures and practices over time” (DeNora, 2000, p. 32). She aims to observe the influence of

musical work in a cultural context, rather than assuming a limited sphere of impact. The affective space in which we situate pop music, for instance—at a wedding, say, but not at a funeral—is not inherent, but culturally constructed. Perhaps for Tacchi’s (2009) ethnographic subjects, the affective space radio occupies is locatable exclusively in the domestic. Still, it is critical that we understand this positioning as a cultural conception, not an unyielding fact, of radio’s affective localized potential.

In my ethnographic work, I found that radio’s affective potential can extend beyond the reaches of the home, becoming a part of communal life more broadly. The affective experience for individuals I spoke to was the embodied sense that they were part of a community, regardless of whether the experience of listening involved socialization. Ben Kerr of KOTO told me that he believes the station is providing the community with, “the sense of the community... The pulse of the community.” After the death of a beloved community member, according to Cara Pallone of KOTO, “people came to KOTO for not only just their information, but to be comforted.” Pallone told me initially that she believes the duties of the station are, in her mind, to “to inform, to engage, [and] to entertain.” Nevertheless, her assessment of the station’s responsibilities in a moment of community crisis suggests an alternative onus: to create a communally affective space, a holding place for collective emotion. Radio, in these spaces, exists in part to comfort members of the community in unity and in solidarity.

Affect is always social—that is, no less than two bodies experience affect, either by affecting or being affected (Thompson & Biddle, 2013). It is easy to notice

the ways in which the radio object may impact the listener, easier still to see the ways in which two or more individuals listening to the radio in the same embodied physical space may be affectively impacting one another. Yet, it is more challenging to demonstrate that members of a community could be sharing affect with one another in separate physical spaces while engaging with the same broadcast. Nevertheless, I argue that the subjective *sense* that others in a community are mutually listening—that the listening experience is not domestic or restricted, but public and communal—is affective in its own right. This is tied to Clough’s (2007) concept of collective affect and transhistorical memory. Collective memory theorizing typically deals with inherited memory, particularly inherited trauma. However, Clough makes the case that technological media allows disparate individuals to share a common recollected experience, and—according to Tomkins’s understanding of the close relationship between memory and affect—a common emotional experience. Communality, in the case of radio, is brought about by the “nonlived collective memory” (Clough, 2007, p. 6) that a community shares, even while not directly interfacing with real others.

## **Conclusion**

Though Bill Tricky describes KSOI as the “fabric of our lives,” Joe Hyneck, the General Manager and founder of the station, never intended or expected for it to become a foundational instrument in shaping and expanding his community. The station he built was explicitly a music station, with infrequent and brief voice breaks.



KSOI-FM is absent of politicized content—“because it’s just a lot of extra paperwork,” according to Hyneck. The station was designed, not with political or community-oriented intentions, but with a mind to introduce the region of Southern Iowa to a variety of new and alternative music.

“[T]he community aspect was never something I thought about,” Hyneck said. “But we play... things that all help keep the community connected and together.” The reinforcement of communality was something of an inevitable outcome of his work. The affective sonic rhythms that spark and perpetuate a pattern of routine listening are—at least in the cases of KOTO and KSOI—tied to the belief that this comfortable routine is a shared one. According to Tomkins’s original theorizing, the affects we repeatedly experience in our subjective moments become inseparably tied to our memories of and expectations for these moments (Demos, 1995). As DeNora (2000) posits in her musicological work, these affects are constructions of their cultural contexts—communal creations that can be located, not in the actual content of the work, but in the affective spirit and character of a collective. The spirit and character of the communities KSOI and KOTO reach is such that the stations are—intentionally or accidentally—spaces of communal affect. Though radio enjoys the ability to soothe its regular listeners and to connect audiences within a common home, its real affective power lies in its potential to bind the spatially disparate.

## Community Connectivity and The Localism Paradigm in Practice

“It’s, like, very community news. Featuring the people who live in our community, and the community issues that people care about.”

-- Cara Pallone, KOTO

“Localism” has anchored itself to the American media landscape with a strength that few other characteristics have been able to so consistently sustain. The importance of the local harkens back to Jeffersonian notions of decentralization (Ali, 2017). However, its ongoing preeminence as a media attribute lends continuity to the notion that “community” is both “a geographic entity and... the incubator for local values, culture, and tradition” (Ali, 2017, p. 8). An emphasis on the local, in other words, locates community within geographic bounds. Since its establishment, radio has been a medium with some stake in the local ethos. Autonomous local radio began as a pragmatic necessity for stations lacking the resources to partner with other stations (Stavinsky, 1994). Following a brief hiatus from a local focus, radio returned to its roots when television began to dominate the media landscape, and—at least reputationally, if not tangibly— this is the space in which it has generally remained (Hilliard & Keith, 2005).

Bearing in mind the material implications of a local radio—the assimilative, conceptual, and physical frameworks through which radio was examined in Chapter 1—we now move towards a more comprehensive exploration of radio localism. Localism as a political framework has a number of objectives: governmental,

environmental, relational, etc. Its role in radio broadcasting has been, according to Torosyan and Munro (2010), paradigmatic in nature; that is, its functions and principles are “universally accepted by a community of practitioners” (p. 34), and it serves as a useful proxy for answering complex but common questions regarding human activity. “Localism” exists as a facet of community radio as almost an inexorable given circumstance. Radio’s creators touted the medium for its localized content at its inception, then again when it returned to a localized model following the advent of television (Hilliard & Keith, 2005). Despite the local emphasis, the actual characteristics of localism frequently go undefined in conversations about radio.

The following chapter initially establishes a working definition of radio localism, examining who are “local,” what geographic proximity “local” encompasses, and to what ends “local” content is produced. Later on, this section compares my two sites for collecting ethnographic data—KOTO-FM and KSOI-FM, two community radio stations similar in their shared heavy emphases on localism but extremely different in their localist objectives. Guided by Anderson’s (2006) theory of imagined communities, I consider the ways in which localities are constructed and deconstructed through radio broadcasting—how radio is used, in other words, to establish whichever borders suit a community’s political and social objectives. Ultimately, I suggest that an emphasis on localism as a framework for creating radio programming addresses the interests of a wide variety of communities and plays a key role in the organization of locally-oriented social movements.

## **The Perimeter of Localism and the Limits of Citizenship**

An analysis of localism requires specificity, as the term itself holds diverse meanings. For instance, localism has been heralded as the “cornerstone of environmentalism in the 21st century,” as environmental activists turn to local goods and community based projects as sites for advocacy (Newton, 2013, n.p.). Media localism holds manifold definitions, complex in their subjectivities and cultural contexts. Such subjectivity, writes Christopher Ali, “complicates regulatory attempts to study and protect local voices” (2017, p. 7). Nevertheless, localism can be defined loosely and incompletely as the obligation imposed on broadcasters to act in the interest of their respective communities. What defines “community,” however, is a constantly unresolved question.

Similarly, the argument that localism is a quality worth preserving perpetuates the assumption that there is some essential significance to a place-based community. This premise is instrumental in reinforcing the salience of territory, border, and spatially oriented exceptionalism (Ali, 2017). New technology, in the view of many, has made possible the burgeoning of non-geographically situated communities, invalidating some aspects of the argument for localism altogether. The localism doctrine comes with added problems as well, including the pseudo-imperialism imposed by larger urban entities in the interest of promoting “the local voice” (Ali, 2017). The neocolonial project of “modernizing” rural communities, poor communities, and communities of color under the pretext of highlighting local voice is an oft overlooked element of the localization mandate. Of course, the media

localism that many supporters tend to favor expects that legitimate localism derives from within the communities themselves. Still, this expectation brings with it a host of other paradoxical problems, particularly questions of access. As Scannell (1989) suggests, access to radio is a major problem in both less affluent areas of cities and “sparsely populated, remote regions” (p. 137). If a community lacks access to the resources for creating and/or accessing localized content, is it then denied the ability to even begin partaking in this project? This question demands some degree of attention in a study on localism. To abandon consideration of the various problems of defining localism is to fall into what Ali (2017) terms “default localism,” market-based definitions of localism that neglect structural concerns of what local-making actually entails.

Another urgent issue regards the supposedly changing face of localism, described by Stavinsky (1994) as a shift from a “spatial emphasis—based on traditional geographic notions of community—to a social conception in which community is defined in terms of shared interests, tastes, and values” (p. 19). Ali (2017) defines the conflict between socio-spatial and sociocultural communality as the “epistemological question of the local” (p. 19). A stint in the traditionally putative localist paradigm of this magnitude invokes new, more complex questions about the contemporary human connection to place, namely: Does it even still exist?

Despite the consequence of this question philosophically, it is possible that the impulses of geospatial localism skeptics are, at least in part, overstated. According to Torosyan and Munro’s (2010) study intended to assess the legitimacy of concerns

about a loss of geographic connectivity, local radio—defined by the study as *proximate* radio—still serves a unique and important function in the lives of community members. The researchers’ criteria for local radio merge the supposedly competing localist camps, by expecting that a local broadcasting be *of* (that is, in the fiscal, political, and social interest of); *by* (that is, produced, voiced, and written by); and *for* (that is, relevant to) a geographic community of listeners (Torosyan & Munroe, 2010). According to the subjects of the study, “local” meant, “news from their town, the community where they live, work, and drive on a regular basis” (Torosyan & Munroe, 2010, p. 41). Indeed, they found that-- even given the researchers’ purportedly dated definition of “local”-- listeners deeply valued their local radio stations. When presented with more contemporary alternatives to local radio—digital music players, for instance—one-tenth of subjects indicated that nothing could adequately replace their local radio stations (Torosyan & Monroe, 2010).

Hood’s (2007) study echoes this finding, but addresses a marginally different logical dilemma: is it more important that local radio include local voices or that it include content of significance to a local population? The study is a reaction to the Telecommunications Act of 1996, legislation that allowed for station ownership to be consolidated on a grand scale. The passage of the Telecommunications Act came at various significant costs, many of which are well-documented. Sterling (2006) notes that the law has forced radio into something of a “crisis of self-confidence” (p. 600), as a result of homogenized music programming and limited public affairs options.

Hood (2007) addresses the legislation differently, by examining the impact of outsourcing the production of supposedly local content, another unintended result of the law's passage. Content outsourcing allows a station beyond the confines of the broadcasting region to create the local news of a geographic community. Though listeners have been demonstrating an ongoing—and in some cases, growing—interest in hearing local content on the radio, the practice itself has diminished over time, due in part to the proliferation of outsourced content (Hood, 2007).

The question of outsourcing raises broader conceptual questions about the consequences of a nonlocal actor directing the flow of knowledge in a locality. In the community that Hood (2007) studied, an outsourced reporter produced newscasts that emphasized potential conflict surrounding an event rather than the event itself. Though there is no way to know how the results would have differed given local reporters' involvement, the resulting crisis-oriented narrative— as opposed to a narrative that emphasize the event itself— is unsurprising given the remote broadcaster's priorities. By examining same-day broadcasts produced by non-remote news outlets, Hood (2007) concluded that the broadcasts produced by actual “locals” focused less on conflict and more on providing details and context. Geertz's (1983) notion of “local knowledge” becomes a factor here. Like the ethnographer Geertz (1983) critiques, remote newscasters infiltrate an unknown community and attempt to understand its specific needs through the lens of an expert. The outsourced broadcaster will always take an “experience-distant” approach to collecting their information; that is, they will always be at least slightly unable— due to their

commitment to hermeneutic, fiscal, or anthropological goals— to fully infiltrate the locality and produce the local news that is of significance to the residents. Therefore, the question of whether true “local radio” is radio produced by members of a community or radio produced with the interests of a community in mind is, at least to a certain extent, a redundant question. On some level, the two factors are one in the same— truly effective local radio is intrinsically created both by *and* for the locality.

### **Localism as Inclusion and Localism as Exclusion: A Comparative Ethnography**

Though a number of studies deal with the relative importance, historically and contemporaneously, of localism in broadcast media, few examine how localism differs in practice within different communities. If localism does truly foster a sense of communal connectivity—or, at the very least, a shared set of values and knowledges—which parties become incorporated and which denied access? Is localism ultimately a project of inclusion or exclusion? And what does the answer to this question imply about the form social change takes in different communities?

Here, I turn principally to the ethnographic data I collected at KOTO-FM and KSOI-FM to guide my analysis. The two communities in which I conducted fieldwork are both essentially homogeneously white communities—this according to both interviewees and census data<sup>3</sup>. This detail was one I grappled with significantly in beginning my data collection. I had sincere doubts about my work’s ability to be even remotely complete without the inclusion of a community of color, and I still

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<sup>3</sup> According to the 2010 Census, Telluride, CO was over 90% white in 2010 while Murray City was over 98% white (United States Census Bureau, 2010).



believe that there are a number of serious gaps in my data attributable to the overall absence of participants of color. Nevertheless, in reviewing my interviews and field notes, I found some substantial differences between the two communities. The topic of localism brought these discrepancies to light in unexpected and particularly remarkable ways.

As has been mentioned in previous chapters, community-oriented content is a bedrock feature at both KSOI-FM and KOTO-FM. Throughout my interviews at both stations, “community” appeared to be many of my informants’ primary motivation for making radio. Given its evident weight to those responsible for creating local radio, a working definition of the ambiguous term “community” is imperative. Though Anderson (2006) deploys the term “imagined community” to define the process of nation building, its foundational principles hold when discussing essentially any space delineated by geographic borders. According to Anderson’s work, such communities are “imagined” insofar as they always include individuals who have never met, but nonetheless feel a sort of camaraderie and solidarity by virtue of their group membership. Further, an imagined community is inherently limited—lines delineate it from other sovereign imagined communities (Anderson, 2006). The community is then ultimately constructed on the basis of how its members conceive of it. This construction, argues Anderson, derives principally from the spread of print-capitalism, “which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways” (Anderson, 2006, p. 36). The spread of information by way of print—and later by

way of new technologies, such as radio—bolstered nation building and reinforced the subjective divides separating one community from its neighbors.

The arbitrarily drawn borders of a community operate according to the needs of those within them; therefore, cross-locational conceptions of “community outreach” and other models of community connectivity differ significantly based on the demands of community residents. KOTO-FM and KSOI-FM both rely on a hyper-local model of broadcasting—one designed by, for, and of the community. Still, their methodologies for reaching, growing, and creating change within their localities differ vastly. I attribute this distinction primarily to a difference in the current— as well as the aspirational—social composition of the two communities.

### *KOTO-FM*

Though KOTO-FM is produced in Telluride, its radius extends beyond the town’s borders relatively far west, according to the station’s general manager. He told me, “We primarily serve Telluride, but we also serve all of the outlying communities like... Placerville and Norwood and... Sawpit and Trout Lake.” The station members note, however, that these “outlying communities” bear many significant differences to the town they call home. Telluride is “progressive” and full of “well-travelled people.” The area surrounding Telluride, on the other hand, is “a bit more conservative than this end,” and notably, “a ranching community—that mentality.” My interviewees even noted that listeners outside of the town felt a sort of resentment towards Telluride, or, more specifically, “the things that happen on this end of the

canyon.” Even while Norwood, Placerville, Sawpit, and Trout Lake have access to KOTO, their responses to the content—political content, particularly—generally lean negative. In this way, KOTO-FM represents a line in the sand, a clear expression of difference. Though it leaks into other spaces by virtue of its technological configuration, its ultimate obligation to its own community remains constant.

This analysis should not be misconstrued as a value judgment or an accusation of intentional exclusivity, but rather as recognition of the work KOTO is accomplishing for its *specific* community. In fact, station managers do make a conscious effort to include other counties in the work. All informants I spoke to discussed various actual or hypothetical approaches to bridging the divide between Telluride and the outlying communities. General Manager, Ben Kerr, posed the possibility of attaining a satellite studio in the West End. This solution would mend the geographic complications involved in asking Norwood residents to drive to Telluride should they want to produce a show. Even featuring the opinions of conservative thinkers can be tough, due to the large population of progressives living in Telluride. Though she admits that attempts to include “that other side” can be challenging, News Director, Cara Pallone adamantly reaches out to residents on the west side of the county when she feels that an alternative voice is absent from the conversation.

“But yeah,” Pallone admits. “In our county, it’s hard to find conservatives. It just is.” What she demonstrates by accepting the tension between KOTO’s intended community and the broader listenership it reaches is that KOTO-FM is not a service

necessarily intended to cross Telluride's border. Or, perhaps, it is intended to exceed these limitations and reach other communities, if only for the purpose of reinforcing difference. Telluride is a secluded progressive and affluent town, and KOTO serves as an important marker of the intentional community its residents strive to create.

Though the board members stressed their attempts at outreach, the station depends to some extent on the exclusion of the outlying communities in order to fulfill its mission fully.

### *KSOI-FM*

KSOI-FM, on the other hand, is a station looking to expand its reach.

According to the station's manager, the region of Southern Iowa KSOI reaches is "probably the poorest in Iowa." Another informant reported that the population is increasingly aging, which is the root of some fiscal anxiety within the community.

One termed this change a general "period of transition" noticeable across rural America. In this region of Iowa, the desire for expansion is ongoing, and reaching more people is a pressing concern. The residents I spoke to expressed that there is an urgent need to broaden— not restrict— their conception of the local. For this reason, KSOI-FM's General Manager Joe Hynek has been attempting to increase the height of his station's tower since it was first built.

"We would try to go up higher if we could" he says. "I just keep waiting for someone to back us so we can... like there's a station up north, and if they ever go under we'll try to expand." Further, Hynek noted that his station is more appealing to

Millenials and Gen-Xers than other stations, and— though he made no direct reference to the problems of aging to which other staff members alluded— this serves as another expansive component of the station’s appeal. Despite the fact that Hynek himself admits that older residents— many of the actual residents of the listening vicinity— were not particularly drawn to the new music he was promoting on his station, his intention was primarily to appeal to a younger audience. Hynek is confident in his station’s ability to serve members of his community and members of communities beyond his immediate reach. This expansive, non-isolationist ethos is in his community’s interest; therefore, outreach, rather than insulation, is the proper service for radio to offer to Southern Iowa.

The difference here is essentially one of community unification versus community expansion. KOTO-FM wants to continue the project of maintaining a utopic intentional community of like-minded (and like-moneyed) people. KSOI-FM, conversely, has the great responsibility of spearheading an effort towards expanding a community, opening its doors to other sorts of people. These projects are both tied to localism—they both demand the existence of locally produced and locally oriented content. However, the missions are ultimately almost oppositional.

## **Conclusion**

Though many are skeptical of the ongoing necessity for localized radio, studies have repeatedly demonstrated its salience in a variety of communities. There are various problematic characteristics associated with the localism doctrine, and it is

presently facing challenges associated with consolidation and the ascendance of new media. Still, community oriented radio allows the opportunity for local affective connectivity and the proliferation of local knowledge. Furthermore, the ways in which a community defines “citizenship” can be reproduced and perpetuated through the purveyance of specific voice and content through the radio. Different communities have the ability to harness the local and utilize it to suit their own individual interests. Localism, therefore, looks different in different communities. The next section will explore how the localist doctrine can become channeled into localized social change.

## Radio Resistance: Examining Listening Through Social Movement Theories

“I don’t know how I’m going to do [it] but... the roads in Murray are terrible... And it’s almost like the community needs someone to reach out and pull them up. If I could use the radio station to help with that, that would be amazing. The other thing is to keep the school going in Murray. It’s a really small school and there’s a lot of push to consolidate things everywhere... I can use our radio station to keep that open and to at least get our fair share for the roads and help getting them fixed.”

—Joe Hyneck, General Manager and Founder of KSOI-FM

Joe Hyneck’s ambitions for KSOI extend far beyond the walls of the house on Maple Street in which he constructed his studio. He believes that his station can conceivably be an apparatus for substantial change in his community— whether these changes involve resource redistribution, an increased attention to the population’s evolving needs, or infrastructural transformation. When I asked Hyneck what he understands KSOI’s role to be in facilitating these changes, he expressed a view that the station is a mechanism for documentation and archiving, as well as a medium for education. Perhaps, however, Hyneck is also alluding to the ineffable relationship between radio and community mobilization—a relationship frequently broached in radio histories, but not one generally taken up as a phenomenon in and of itself. In this final chapter, I hope to develop a working explanation for the existence of the

relationship between radio broadcasting and community connectivity, mobilization and evolution.

This section applies historical anecdote, ethnographic data, and the theories previously discussed to select tenets of social movement theories in order to demonstrate that radio—due to the unique phenomena examined in earlier chapters—is a particularly suitable medium for the establishment of social movements. Social movements are composed of a variety of networked groups and individual actors; nevertheless, they are marked by some specific and explicit ideology that unifies and guides collective action (Johnston, 2014). Until now, this research has been predicated on a heretofore-implicit premise: that radio is essentially an artifact with some relationship to the production of social mobilization. This framework is typically how scholars assessing radio activism understand this relationship: the mere fact that radio has historically been a medium for facilitating collective action has tended to justify its continued use. That is to say, many radio scholars and radio historians have neglected to analyze the psychological, sociocultural, and sensory differences between radio and other media that could account for the patterned relationship between social mobilization and radio broadcasting. These accounts have generally omitted analyses of how and why this relationship is built and how the—seemingly quite efficacious—partnership may continue to be implemented. An historical analysis is necessary to contextualize the relationship between radio and social movements. However, this type of examination paints an incomplete picture. In the following section, I situate radio within social



movement scholarship and history—as it has been analyzed before— while also analyzing it through psychological and sociocultural theory. This more comprehensive analysis can help us better understand the origins and possibilities of the relationship between radio and localized social change.

The following chapter contains four sections. First, I take a material approach to radio, examining the various spaces the medium has occupied historically in relation to social movements. Then, I return to the discussion of radio voice as object, while attempting to parse the significance of subjective individuation in the development of collective action. Thirdly, I revisit affective radio. I look at the role of emotion in social movement theory—a role that, until recently, has been heavily overlooked—and tie this emotionality to radio listening. Also examined is the role of ritual, repetitive practice, and affective rhythm in the production of community oriented change. Finally, questions of citizenship and belonging are connected to radio’s implicitly localist character in order to determine the role radio plays in shaping the voice of a community.

### **A (Very Abridged) History of Radio and Social Mobilization**

As was examined in Chapter 1, radio is an artifactual product with historical precedent. According to Thompson and Tapscott (2010), “historical context is essential to understanding the interplay between internal and global dynamics” (p. 13). Therefore, I begin this analysis by situating radio as an established channel for activism and contentious politics through a brief overview of its history. A discussion

of radio activism would be incomplete without tribute to Frantz Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism*, published in French in 1959 and translated by Haakon Chevalier in 1967. The text is a detailed account of the Algerian war, paying particular attention to the Algerian people's rejection of French imperialism. In Algeria, the radio was once, "essentially the instrument of colonial society and its values," as it was both physically transported by the French and intended to advance an imperial agenda (Fanon, 1959/1967). However, in the 1950s, radio became essentially the sole means of obtaining information from a non-French source. Algerians appropriated the airwaves for their own purposes, transforming radio from an oppressive apparatus into a medium for their own communication, communality, and truth. Writes Fanon:

The radio set was no longer a part of the occupier's arsenal of cultural oppression. In making of the radio a primary means of resisting the... occupant, Algerian society made an autonomous decision to embrace the new technique and thus tune itself in on the new signaling systems brought into being by the Revolution (Fanon, 1959/1967, p. 84).

The Algerians were performing what Pratt (1991) would term "autoethnography"—that is, they—the colonized—utilized a primary communicative mechanism and sociocultural instrument of the dominant culture in order to disseminate an anticolonial narrative. Listeners, according to Fanon (1959/1967), needed to piece fragmented stories together when the French government created technical interference during the Arab-language broadcasts. Baucom (2001) recognizes this practice as a dynamic listening, listening representative of, "a politics

of collective, ‘collaborative,’ ‘creative’ listening and remixing,” (p. 37). Kushner (1974) makes a similar argument about African liberation groups’ reliance on radio communication. Well-documented decolonization movements across the continent throughout the 1960s and 70s relied on broadcasting to mobilize their revolutions. Initially, the employment of radio derived out of necessity: broadcasters felt an obligation to serve the “largely illiterate masses” (Kushner, 1974, p. 299). Soon, insurgent broadcasts in Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana, Tanzania, and many other African nations became the leading media of the revolution (Kushner, 1974).

Fanon (1959/1967) also indicates that radio’s power derives in part from its ability to allow a marginalized group to declare linguistic independence from its colonizer. Attending to a different setting, Dolores Inés Casillas, in *¡Sounds of Belonging!* (2014), examines the influence of Spanish-language radio on the Spanish-speaking population of immigrants in the United States. The non-English element of the broadcasts affords listeners, “an audible, familiar semblance of ‘home’” (Casillas, 2014, p. 5). Furthermore, the proliferation of information in Spanish diminishes a prevalent fear of government surveillance, allowing the airwaves to become a semi-secure platform for disseminating critical information to the undocumented community (Casillas, 2014). Spanish-language broadcasts complicate traditional definitions of citizenship by affording undocumented citizens—and documented citizens with an oft-complex American identity—resources and access to a “mobile symbolic habitat,” a flexible sense of domestic place (Casillas, 2014, p. 4).

Narratives of contentious politics via radio exist on smaller, non-national scales as well. Radio played a critical role in the southern labor movements of the 1930s (Roscigno & Danaher, 2001). The organization of North and South Carolinian textile workers—which famously culminated in the General Textile Workers Strike of 1934—was facilitated in part by direct access to political information, via broadcasts such as Roosevelt’s Fireside Chats. The organizing was also made possible by the organizers’ ability to communicate directly with their fellow workers over the airwaves, through both the dissemination of protest action information and the spread of music dealing with workers’ rights (Roscigno & Danaher, 2001). Another example of localized radio liberation is explored in Smith’s (2006) study of KLND-FM, or, Wolakota Wiconi Waste, the Lakota radio station on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in northwest South Dakota. KLND-FM is just one of several American Indian stations (the Hopi nation’s KUYI-FM being another example) serving a variety of important purposes in its community (Smith, 2006). As with Fanon’s (1959/1967) Algeria and Caillas’s (2014) Spanish-language radio, Wolakota Wiconi Waste is—in addition to its influence on communal solidarity and connectivity—a means of preserving native language and ensuring institutional linguistic longevity (Smith, 2006). Stations like KLND-FM are frequently “sole service” establishments, meaning they are either a) the only available station within range of the reservation or b) the only station specifically dedicated to serving the needs of the Native community (Smith, 2006). Both KLND-FM and the deployment of broadcasting for the advancement of labor reform movements serve as two smaller-scale (though no less

significant) examples of marginalized American communities energized and connected via localized radio.

The historical examples above are limited in number yet wide-ranging in variety. The movements vary in their purposes, participants, scope, and methodologies. Despite their differences, they are alike in that they disseminate a message principally through radio broadcasting. Moving through the theory that has previously been discussed, we analyze the root of this key parallel.

### **Voice, Agency, and Leadership: Social Movements and Object Relations**

Due to the prominence of collective behavior theories (a school of thought that stresses the significance of group identity as it relates to social movements), many social movement scholars have tended to gloss over the importance of individual voice, agency, and leadership in their analyses of social movements (Chesters & Welsh, 2011). More recently, some social movement scholars have begun to push back on the concept of collective identity, looking instead at the individuals interested in pursuing community mobilization and the ways they contribute differently to the cause. Collective behaviorism examines identity within a group as a fixed condition of existence. On the other hand, terms like “groupness”— which, according to Dugan and Reger (2006) suggest a more individualized experience of belonging to a larger cohort— allow for a more flexible understanding of group membership that leaves space for subjective individuation and agency.

Recall the argument advanced in Chapter 2: that the communality of a radio

audience derives from the relationships individual listeners construct with the broadcasting voice. This relationship was assessed using theories of object relations, which posit that individual subjects have internalized relationships with objects that are essential for the creation and maintenance of a sense of self. I stressed the singular importance of the disembodied voice in the creation of this relationship, and the important role radio plays as both a transitional object for the individual and a unifying feature for a community of individuals. Scholars have made similar arguments about the significance of voice for the purpose of collective action (Dugan & Reger, 2006). Though the “voice of the movement” these researchers explore is largely metaphorical, its representation in these texts bears many similarities to the radio voice. Dugan and Reger (2006) define “the voice” as the clear and unified ambitions and purposes of an organization. Scholars have historically defined agency when applied to activism as the quantity of effort exerted by individuals in their commitment to a cause (McCarthy & Wolfson, 1996). The notion that individuals themselves are capable of influencing change is critical for the development of this agency. They write, “When their state of internal relations allow organizations to clearly articulate their organizational goals to potential members (i.e., a unified voice) and emerge as important actors (i.e., strong sense of agency)... we find that SMOs are more likely to accomplish goals than those who do not.” (Dugan & Reger, 2006, p. 479).

An individual’s capacity to subjectively distinguish the self from others (that is, to be an agent with a voice of their own) while simultaneously identifying with a

collective voice and achieving a sense of groupness is critical for the development of a social movement. The relationship listeners establish with the radio voice aids in this important work: it both subjectively distinguishes the self from the other and helps listeners to form connections with absent listening others. Furthermore, once self-individuation is established and social group membership can become an element of self-identification, the potent constitution of a new type of other— a discrete, oppositional other against which the movement positions itself— can take place (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991). A listener builds its relationship with the voice and with other listeners on the dissemination of information and the dialectic formulation of a shared knowledge via listening and responding. The creation of a system of shared beliefs—a “cognitive praxis,” as social movement scholars would tend to call it—can be the defining feature of a social movement (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991). Therefore, locating the source of this knowledge is useful for understanding the foundation of a movement’s cognitive praxis. In the cases I have examined, the medium of dissemination is the radio broadcast; what, then, is the broadcasting voice? And how do we parse the unique relationship between listener and voice?

There are several approaches we might take to examining the dialectic relationship broadcasters and listeners establish in order to augment their beliefs and develop their praxis. The most obvious individual actor in a social movement is the “leader,” and it could seem appropriate to classify the broadcasting voice as a movement leader. However, such a label implicitly positions the broadcast voice at the apex of a hierarchy. This dichotomous denomination may both overestimate the

dominion the broadcaster has over its listeners and oversimplify their relationship (Aminzade et al., 2001). Therefore, “movement intellectual” is perhaps a more apt term. Write Eyerman and Jamison (1991), “All activists in social movements are, in some sense, ‘movement intellectuals’ because through their activism they contribute to the formation of the movement’s collective identity”(p. 94). Despite the fact that the title is, to some extent, all-inclusive, Eyerman and Jamison (1991) conceded that some members of a movement play more significant roles in the articulation of group "knowledge interests and cognitive identity" than others (p. 98). Broadcasters seeking to mobilize listeners become in control of the movement’s discursive messaging; nonetheless, building a shared praxis means crafting a relationship reliant on dialogue with an active listenership. Once the praxis is developed, listeners can then develop relations with one another by way of their shared message.

### **Emotionality and Ritual: Affect Theory and Social Movements**

Like voice and agency, affect has historically been absent from the social movement theory literature. Once again, this absence stems in part from a pervasive emphasis on collective behaviorism, a model that tends to examine communal emotion as irrational and artificially constructed by the energy of a crowd (Chesters & Welsh, 2011). More significantly, the silence surrounding emotion is a testament to the deeply Western political imperative of “rational” and “dispassionate” decision-making (Aminzade & McAdam, 2001). Rational politics, according to past scholars, are categorically delineated from the question of affect (Aminzade &



McAdam, 2001). Fortunately, social theorists have spent several decades pushing back on the false dichotomy between reason and emotion, arguing that emotion can be understood as a “language of the self—a code for statements about intentions, actions, and social relations” (Lutz & White, 1986, p. 417). Still, in navigating this false binary, theorists must be cautious not to empiricize the study of emotions, ensuring that they are creating space for the subjective and the episodic (Beatty, 2014). Social movement theorists have also begun to acknowledge the critical role emotions play in the organization of protest movements and the maintenance of contentious politics. The development of a mobilized resistance requires the exertion of significant emotional labor. Once a resistance is developed, space is created for marginalized members of the resistant community to express previously unavailable or taboo emotions (e.g. “angry housewives or proud gays and lesbians”) (Aminzade & McAdam, 2001). Emotional connectivity to a cause, however, does not emerge spontaneously. Insofar as radio exists in a community as a primary tool for communication, it can also become a resource for community organizers seeking to collectivize via affect.

Explorations of affect and radio (refer to Chapter 3) indicate that individuals are affectively tied to the radio through the ritualistic listening habits they establish over periods of time. Radio becomes a fixed piece of listeners’ everyday experiences, hinges itself to specific affective sensations, and aids in the development of a stabilized sense of equilibrium (Tacchi, 2009). Repetitive practice in the interest of sustained emotional connectivity to a cause is crucial for the successful mobilization

of a community. In sociocultural theory, ritual is tied to emotion in varied, sometimes oppositional ways (e.g. some posit that ritual is a representation of emotionality while others argue that it is a displacement of emotionality) (Lutz & White, 1986).

Regardless, scholars tend to agree on the existence of some meaningful link between repetitive cultural practice, emotional continuity, and the mobilization of a community. Write Aminzade and McAdam (2001), “The emotional power of rituals helps to account for their widespread use in protest movements... rituals can serve as a means of dramatizing injustice, discharging distressing emotions, generating emotional energy, building solidarity, and affirming identity” (p. 41). These scholars also stress the significance of affective connectivity, which radio is also capable of providing to its communal listenership (Aminzade & McAdam, 2001). Perhaps, by situating radio as ritual, we can understand broadcasting’s ability to affectively tie community members to social movements by way of repetitive practice and emotional continuity. Radio becomes, then, one of the many customs connecting individuals to a cause and uniting individuals with one another. Though typically physically independent of one another, listeners take part in the same emotionally significant ritual, united through their shared experience of the broadcaster’s emotional performance.

### **Localism and Defining Citizenship**

A pervasive—yet diminishingly pressing—issue in the study of social movements and contentious politics is that of whether individual participants will be

able to be copresent in a space. This “time-distance” conundrum has been somewhat alleviated by the proliferation of mass communication, which allows information to spread well beyond one’s geographic sphere (Sewell, 2001). Still, in many communities, the possibility of organizing on a non-local scale remains nonexistent. This problem of access falls in line with resource mobilization theory, a framework positing that the availability of resources (e.g. space) is a primary motivational factor for the success of an social movement (Chesters & Welsh, 2011). For example, writes Sewell (2001), “The local or grass-roots organization of most movements of poor people is largely a consequence of their concentration in certain neighborhoods... but also of their relatively restricted mobility and limited access to communications technology” (p. 79). Of course, “communications technology” extends to radio; even in American communities, ready access to a radio station is not always a given circumstance, particularly for an underfunded resistance organization. Still, the implicitly geographically local character of radio broadcasting leaves it available for groups aiming—either deliberately or obligatorily—to create community-based change on a local level.

Perhaps more notably than the organization of the grassroots, however, is radio’s capacity to define the limits of citizenship. Chapter 4 took up this paradigm, exploring how communities can utilize hyper-local radio to expand, condense, or maintain their communal conception of local belonging. Due to radio’s implicit geographic limitations, its political and cultural message is always geospacially bound, making it a medium structurally implicated in the production and reproduction

of cultural citizenship. The establishment of these borders is, in and of itself, a project of social change. Explains Kabeer (2005) in *Inclusive Citizenship: Meanings and Expressions*, the values of citizenship dictated by a wide variety of marginalized groups (i.e. justice, recognition, self-determination, and solidarity) demonstrate a “vision of what a more inclusive society might imply” (p. 3). In other words, a perception of place-based belonging has the potential to create a more thorough sense of sociocultural equity. The entrenched relationship between radio and, if not entire, at least geographic citizenship underscores another facet of radio’s potential as a medium for establishing social change.

### **The Limits of Radio**

I do not argue—as some have—that radio is a panacea for problems of social inequity. This analysis is not intended to appear overly optimistic or idealistic about radio’s egalitarian potential. At radio’s inception in the 1920’s, its reputation as a means of promoting social equity proved a somewhat insidious notion. Particularly to the bourgeois class, radio was extolled as a mechanism able to unify the poorest and wealthiest segments of America through common understanding alone (Craig, 2000). Samuel Rothafel and Raymond Yates, for instance, described radio as, “a magic fluid that finds its way into every crevice of human life” (Craig, 2000, 211). In reality, radio’s very reputation as an equalizer allowed the elite to gesture towards equity without genuine follow through. Writes Craig (2000):

Despite their promises of a more inclusive community united and educated by

radio, interwar broadcasters constantly refused to challenge the marginalization of those considered to be problem or unimportant groups within American society. Preferring instead to view immigrants, farmers, women, and African Americans through an economic prism, which valued audiences only in terms of their attractiveness to advertisers, broadcasters chose not to question this hierarchy of wealth and cultural agency. (p. 211)

Ultimately, radio is a viable mechanism for social change for the same reasons that it is a viable mechanism for the subjugation and silencing of marginalized groups. As was discussed in the previous chapter, radio's ability to define the limits of citizenship allow it to be both a vehicle for exclusion as well as a vehicle for inclusion. Writes David Hendy (2000) in *Radio in the Global Age*, "[R]adio is just as likely to be an instrument of terror as a force for democratization" (p. 202). Though this argument is valid, I would push back on the negativistic tone Hendy utilizes; this argument is actually not categorically different than the argument Fanon (1959/1967) advances in "This is the Voice of Algeria," which actually addresses this reservation and skepticism. Fanon (1959/1967) posits that the radio is a tool originally constructed by the colonizer, and is, therefore, not a universal social good. In imperial hands, radio is the antithesis of populist. However, Fanon suggests that a tool of the colonizer powerfully appropriated by the colonized can become an instrument of mobilization and inverted political power.

There are broadcasters committed in full to the egalitarian mission of radio; there are also violent shock jocks seeking to intentionally offend—or even merely

well-intentioned neoliberals engaging in the project of modernizing and civilizing coded as “education.” However, this should not diminish the potential of radio to be a powerful medium for the spread of contentious politics. Rather, it should be viewed as a demonstration of the legitimate power of radio activism. Writes Brecht:

The increasing concentration of mechanical means and the increasingly specialized training ... call for a kind of resistance by the listener, and for his mobilization and redrafting as a producer... When I say that the radio or the theatre “could” do so-and-so, I am aware that these vast institutions cannot do all they “could”, and not even all they want. (Brecht, 1964)

What is significant, according to Brecht, is not the viability of radio to be used as a mechanism for social dominance. Nearly all media have, at one time or another, been utilized for this purpose. Instead of evaluating radio according to this impossible standard, we should be examining its precedent for subversive action and its potential for such action in the future. This perspective is particularly useful in our contemporary moment, in which the extent of radio’s power is so frequently called into question.

## **Conclusion**

Despite community mobilizers’ frequent reliance on radio as a resource for contentious politics and protest, very limited scholarly research is dedicated to investigating the relationship between the medium and social change. This chapter attempts to unravel—however incompletely—the complicated threads of meaning

tying radio to localized resistance and community-based change.

The mere fact of radio's artifactual history as a mechanism associated with resistance has afforded it a reputation that perpetuates this practice. However, the ties between radio and activism are also rooted in psychological and sociocultural theory. For instance, the relationship individuals establish with the broadcasting voice allows them to experience both a personal sense of agency and a connection to a larger collective. This sense of voice—one that is both subjective and communal—is critical, according to social movement theorists, for successful community mobilization. Radio is also an effective means of collectivizing affect, an aspect of community organizing heavily underemphasized until recently. As both a collectivized and individualized affective ritual, radio is able to tie listeners to a cause through emotionality. Finally, radio is significant in that it exists on a hyper-local, geographically specific level. This quality allows radio to either include or exclude through the allotment of geosocial citizenship. Radio's potential as a mechanism for social change is obviously not all encompassing and omnipresent. Nevertheless, radio's unwavering involvement in localized social movements—even as radio has ceased to be a primary medium of the public sphere—is evident. Such a persistent pattern demands investigation and rationalization.

## Conclusion

Many doubt radio's ongoing ability to serve a society that technologically eclipsed the medium 70 years ago. Despite the validity of these reservations, focusing on the devaluation of radio in the modern age is an argument lacking in nuance and creativity. If radio has continued to be an international mechanism of community mobilization and social change despite the onset of new media, there is evidently something unique about the medium itself. Claims about the viability of podcasting as a replacement mechanism for the FM dial are rife in the public discourse. Through this work, I hope to offer an alternative perspective— one that values the persistent viability of the local despite a rapidly globalizing media landscape. Radio has prevailed despite ongoing threats to its continuity—threats that continue to loom large over the future viability of audio broadcasting. Still, competing forms of media are fundamentally different from radio in some (if not all) of the key psychological phenomena explored in the preceding chapters. Therefore, while these media may be viable for purposes more numerous than that of local public radio, they cannot ultimately replace it.

This project has attempted to parse and illuminate some of radio's unique but oft overlooked characteristics in the current moment. It has also shifted attention towards radio's historically ubiquitous relationship with the organization of social movements. Though acknowledgement of this connection is well-trodden territory in radio scholarship, the pattern is rarely examined as a phenomenon in and of itself.



The material significance of radio has shifted significantly throughout time, as a reflection of both the changing media landscape and the changing needs of an American citizenship. Consequently, understanding contemporary radio requires acknowledging its history as an artifact and the evolving spaces it has occupied in the American mythology. Still, comprehensive analyses of radio must move beyond the purely archival to engage with other scholarship, specifically sociocultural and psychological theory. The listener's subjective and affective relationship to the radio voice, for instance, is a cornerstone of the listening experience that demands some psychological exploration. Both qualities feature heavily in radio's role as a vehicle for social change, because they both address the complex position radio occupies between self and other. Moreover, the inherent geographic limitations of radio make it a medium capable of establishing the limitations of communal citizenship. Radio's participation in the process of community making is yet another advantage it has as a mechanism for the production of social change.

As radio becomes increasingly incorporated into the fabric of communal life, its ability to serve a dynamic community grows stronger. The medium's capacity to transgress the public-private binarism makes it a medium valuable to organizers looking to effectively communicate a message and collectivize a disparate population. Radio's ability to bolster the "local voice" should be considered profoundly valuable—even in an expanding media landscape—to communities looking to progress, evolve, and improve.

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