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Critical Concepts

Eavesdropping at Allerton: The Recovery of Paul Lazarsfeld's Progressive Critique of Educational Broadcasting

Glenda R. Balas

This article draws from archival documents to examine Paul Lazarsfeld's participation in the 1949 Allerton Seminar, a vision-crafting conference sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation for scholars and leaders in "noncommercial, educational broadcasting." The author argues that clear linkages exist between Lazarsfeld's perspective on nonprofit media and a progressive vision of U.S. public service broadcasting. The purpose of this article is to recover some of Lazarsfeld's contributions to this concept of public media and to suggest that he sought a broad cultural project for noncommercial television that was underpinned by qualitative research, worries about class bias and class interest, and a commitment to diverse and overlapping voices.

The setting was Allerton House, Illinois, June 29-July 12, 1949; the key players a powerhouse group of mass communication scholars and educational broadcasters. Like his colleagues, Paul Lazarsfeld had traveled to the remote conference center located 26 miles from the University of Illinois to participate in vision crafting for U.S. educational television.

The conference was hosted by the University of Illinois, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, and organized by Wilbur Schramm. An invitation-only meeting, the Allerton seminar pulled together 32 men and one woman (Mary Ahern of ABC), all charged with examining the purpose and philosophy for the emerging U.S. public television service. In addition to Lazarsfeld, participants included Charles Siepmann, Chair of Communication at New York University; Donald Horton, University of Chicago; Frank Dunham and R. R. Lowdermilk, U.S. Office of Education; George Stoddard, President, University of Illinois; and five members of the Institute of Communications Research at the University of Illinois (including Schramm and Dallas Smythe). They were joined by a group of prominent educational broadcasters, including Richard Hull (WOI, Ames, Iowa), Ralph Steetle, (Louisiana State University), Harry Skornia (University of Indiana), Parker Wheatley (Lowell Institute, Boston), Seymour Siegel (WNYC, New York), and George Probst (Producer, *University of Chicago Round Table*).¹ Even today, these names stand as a list of "Who's Who" participants in the educational broadcasting movement of the 1940s and 1950s.

The primary architects of the 1949 meeting were John Marshall, Assistant Director of the Rockefeller Foundation, and Schramm, Director of the Institute of Communications Re-

search at the University of Illinois. They partnered in spring of 1949 to develop an interactive exchange between “experts” and broadcasters on issues of philosophy, practice, and effects of noncommercial media in the United States. As Schramm noted in a letter to Hull, dated May 18, 1949, the seminar would address three basic topics: the nature of public service media, the validity of mass education as an idea, and “distinctive responsibilities and opportunities” of educational broadcasters.² The larger purpose of the two-week seminar was to craft a sense of common mission and national direction for U.S. educational broadcasting. It was this challenge and opportunity that put Paul Lazarsfeld on the train to Champaign in late June of 1949 and at the table for a series of day-long (into the night) discussions of the potential role of educational broadcasting in the United States.

Hudson writes that the Allerton Seminar of 1949 was successful because it helped educational broadcasters understand that they were not “faint, isolated whispers in the broadcasting world,” but rather part of something significant and socially useful. All acknowledged, says Hudson, “their ‘stepchild’ role in American radio...and on their home campuses as well.”³ The Allerton Seminar helped these broadcasters develop not only a plan, but a new identity (at least in part), asking new questions about the future of educational broadcasting in the United States. Hudson relates that Allerton 1949 led immediately to the development of a “bicycle network” that allowed stations to share programs (up to four hours per week), as well as a second Allerton seminar (June 2-19, 1950) that focused on programming.⁴

Blakely also notes that Allerton 1949 ended dramatically with news that the FCC had, that day, announced a new allocations table that excluded educational broadcasting entirely from new licenses. At the same time, FCC Commissioner Frieda B. Hennock was proposing that 25 percent of the spectrum be set aside for educational stations; and she announced a willingness to work with educational broadcasters to develop “a unique and innovative system of public communications.”⁵ The educational broadcasting campaign for television stations had begun, with the Allerton Seminar of 1949 a clear instigator of new ideas about these possibilities. Allerton 1949 is broadly credited by public media historians as a turning point for educational broadcasters in developing the structure that stands today as contemporary public broadcasting. Although the new educational broadcasting system did not receive 25 percent of the spectrum in 1952, it was allotted 242 licenses, or 11.7 percent of all allocations.⁶

Given the importance of Allerton 1949 in these historic developments, one would expect that affiliated scholars, educators, policy-makers, and broadcasters would be included in published accounts of the seminar. Most are named; many are cited for their contributions to the event. Others were invited back in 1950 for round two. Lazarsfeld’s name and contributions appear in none of the scholarship published about Allerton 1949; nor was he a participant in 1950. Even so, a review of the seminar transcripts reveal that he not only attended the meeting in summer of 1949, but also offered new perspectives on the uses of noncommercial media that could have shifted trajectories of educational noncommercial television in the 1950s. The purpose of this essay is to recover some of those contributions and to argue that Lazarsfeld offered a progressive critique of the educational broadcasting system as it was in the 1930s and 1940s and remains today.

A Second Chance for Educational Broadcasting

The story of the 1949 Allerton House Seminar must begin in the historical context of the late 1940s and the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) freeze on new television licenses. Straubhaar, LaRose, and Davenport write that television caught on more quickly than expected following World War II. Policy makers and industry leaders had suggested that the low quality of the medium's sound and image might preclude viewership for more than "twenty minutes at a time."⁷ New technology developed during the war, however, not only improved image quality but also enhanced capabilities to create television networks. As a result, television became a booming enterprise immediately following the war, and by 1948 the FCC found itself with an old dilemma, seen earlier in 1927 with the rise of radio—too many licenses, too many stations, not enough spectrum space. The solution was to "freeze" all new applications.⁸ In late 1948, the FCC—having issued approximately 100 television licenses—ordered a halt to new licenses. As Barnouw notes, the excuses cited by the FCC were varied—interference problems, the issue with color, and the Korean War, which broke out in 1950. Like the war, the FCC freeze would last more than three years, longer than either was expected.

Barnouw calls this licensing hiatus a "strange television period—a laboratory period." It was a moment when advertisers figured out how to market goods on television (at least in New York and Los Angeles) and when film producers, book sellers, and radio hosts worried aloud about changes in audience preferences and habits (some rightfully so, as 70 movie theaters in eastern Pennsylvania closed and Bob Hope's radio ratings dropped 12 points in two years).⁹ It was also a moment when U.S. noncommercial broadcasting was given a second chance to pull together arguments, political and grassroots support, and a plan sufficient to develop "channels for education."

Leaders of several national philanthropies worried that the educational broadcasters—or "radio men," as they called themselves—would be unable to accomplish this monumental task alone. It seemed especially telling that, despite invitations from FCC Chairman Wayne Coy, no educational broadcasters appeared at Commission hearings to argue for educational television frequencies prior to the freeze. Subsequently, John Marshall (Rockefeller Foundation) and C. Scott Fletcher (Ford Foundation) stepped up, providing a visioning seminar at Allerton House in the summer of 1949 and, later, start-up funds for new educational television stations throughout the early fifties.¹⁰

What the Literature Reveals About Lazarsfeld

Lazarsfeld earned a Ph.D. in mathematics from the University of Vienna in 1925; and he formed the *Wirtschaftspsychologische Forschungsstelle*, the first of four applied research centers he would organize, in Vienna in 1929. His subsequent intellectual output was sig-

nificant, beginning with *The Unemployed of Marienthal* (1932), now considered a classic study of an unemployed community. Later work included *Radio Research* (1942, 1943, 1944; with Frank Stanton), *The People's Choice* (1944), *Radio Listening in America* (1948; with Patricia Kendall), *Continuities in Social Research* (1950), *Mathematical Thinking in the Social Sciences* (1954), *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications* (1955; with Elihu Katz), *The Academic Mind: Social Scientists in a Time of Crisis* (1958; with Wagner Thielens, Jr.), *Organizing Educational Research* (1964; with Sam D. Sieber), and *Latent Structure Analysis* (1968; with Neil W. Henry).

In 1949 Lazarsfeld was Director of the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University, a position he relinquished the following year to become Chair of Sociology at Columbia. He was named Quetelet Professor of Social Science at Columbia in 1963, a position he held until 1969; from 1970 until his death in 1976, he was Distinguished Professor at the University of Pittsburgh.¹¹

The conversation about *Personal Influence* is said to have “waxed and waned” over time, with hills and valleys of discussion and use.¹² Not so with talk about Lazarsfeld, a larger-than-life figure with scores of ardent supporters, voracious detractors, and a few circumspect in-betweeners. Even now, more than 100 years after his birth in Vienna in 1901, ink continues to flow about his take on effects (largely limited), research bureaus (often market-funded), and method: “There was a problem with those panels (in Decatur). They couldn’t find those people!”¹³

A review of associated literature reveals that a significant amount of work has addressed Lazarsfeld’s interest and influence in the areas of media effects and public opinion research, institute development, and methodology. Such a broad-based examination of Lazarsfeld’s life and work is clearly the focus of Simonson’s edited volume, which uses *Personal Influence* as a lens to re-visit Lazarsfeld’s contributions to political science, sociology, communication, public opinion, and marketing.¹⁴ Working in a similar vein, Barton explores Lazarsfeld’s role as institution inventor, first in Vienna, later in Newark, and finally at Columbia with the Bureau of Applied Social Research. Barton observes that these efforts paved the way for a “flowering of university social research institutes worldwide,” although, ironically, the BASR would close soon after Lazarsfeld’s death.¹⁵ (It should be noted that the current Institute for Social and Economic Policy Research at Columbia mirrors many of the BASR functions.) ábek reports that Lazarsfeld introduced a range of new terms and concepts to sociology, including panel research, elaboration formula, opinion leadership, and latent structure analysis.¹⁶ Cole writes that Lazarsfeld transformed “public opinion polling methods into survey research,” employing methods that allowed him to study change in attitude and behavior in new and precise ways.¹⁷ And Morrison follows Berelson¹⁷ in naming Lazarsfeld a founder of mass communications research.¹⁹ All acknowledge Lazarsfeld as a leader, pioneer, and innovator in social science research.

At the same time, critical scholars such as Gitlin and Hardt have taken Lazarsfeld to task for inadequate attention to a complete and contextualized review of communication as it relates to broad cultural practice. Hardt calls Lazarsfeld’s research topic selections a “shotgun approach” in service to administrative research; and he observes that Adorno was

“pessimistic” about Lazarsfeld’s work in radio listening, as it was limited to a study of U.S. commercial radio and did not explicitly address social or political issues. And finally, cultural theorists (particularly Horkheimer and Adorno, as discussed by Hardt) have argued that Lazarsfeld’s reliance on quantitative research and the “assiduous collecting of facts” obscured complex questions of history, politics, and economy and ignored the “real social function of philosophy” in mass communication research.²⁰ These concerns clearly resonate with Gitlin’s 1978 critique of *Personal Influence* and its promotion, said Gitlin, of a limited media effects paradigm, produced by “specifically behaviorist” methodology, narrow in scope and focused on “short-run” results.²¹ In the end, whether an evaluation of his research as groundbreaking, dangerously narrow, or “merely administrative,” the conversation about Lazarsfeld and his contributions to sociology and mass communication has been, and continues as, a rich and active debate of social and cultural theory, method, research outcomes, and personality.

Despite this energetic discussion of Lazarsfeld’s approach to audience, method, and the social uses of media, little effort has been made to tie him to the history of U.S. educational television (developed concurrently with *Personal Influence*) or to consider how his work and viewpoint might inform the contemporary study of public media. Such is the purpose of this short essay, which takes as its focus transcripts of Lazarsfeld’s oral presentations at Allerton.

Examining the Texts at Hand

Although there is no mention of Lazarsfeld’s presence at the 1949 Allerton Seminar in the published accounts of the event, the archives speak differently. Documents in special collection archives at both the University of Illinois and Wisconsin Historical Society libraries include manuscripts that not only validate Lazarsfeld’s participation in the conference but also capture two formal presentations, several off-the-cuff responses to other speakers, and his facilitation of a round-table discussion about learning via radio. What emerge from these documents are more questions than answers (even from an expert source), a critique of form and function, and a blunt delivery that, in print at least, sometimes seems close to uncivil. Importantly, these texts show that Lazarsfeld challenged the taken-for-granted assumptions of educational broadcasting, most embedded in the system since its inception in the 1920s and 1930s, and offered new ideas for new directions. As I argue later in this article, these are insights that not only resonate with contemporary public media analysis, but also counter some of the critique lobbed at Lazarsfeld over the years as methodologically narrow, ahistorical, “administrative,” and lacking a cultural-critical purpose.

Lazarsfeld’s talk on July 1, 1949, began with a disclaimer for a modest proposal:

I have nothing like a basic philosophy which I could take in regard to our common problems. When your committee asked me to make some of kind of statement here, I had the feeling that I had said all the little that I had to

say here, and have said it before and written it before, and who wants to know it anyhow?²²

With this seemingly inauspicious beginning, Lazarsfeld launched into seven key points “I wish for another twenty-four hours you would occasionally remember,” which ranged from “terrorizing your own administration” for financial support to finding a way to connect with immigrant families and recognizing educational broadcasting’s class biases.

Behind this notion of educational broadcasting is the notion that it is kind of nice when people listen to good music, and it is kind of nice when they read books, and it is kind of nice when they think about their government. Now, I use this inflection of voice because...I want you to be aware that this is a very definite middle-class notion. It is, from the standpoint...of an articulate and active democratic labor movement, silly to want the worker to read more of the books which the middle-class man uses to get a higher salary in his bank. There is not the slightest doubt that the English notion of a nice Victorian middle-class culture, which is behind a lot of this broadcasting, has definite political implications.²³

Lazarsfeld also argued that educational broadcasters must recognize the importance of audience-building, even outside the institution of radio and television; the need to meet interests of multiple publics (“There is *not* a single radio audience”); and the great value of integrating learning with other social endeavor. “...adult education, he noted, “is successful always in countries where it is tied up with other collective movements. Denmark is a capital example, where adult education is tied up with the farming cooperative group.”²⁴ Lazarsfeld closed his talk with a call for in-depth, interview-based qualitative research that examined the lived experiences and day-to-day needs of people—in this case, immigrant mothers and their “whole families.” “Maybe I am wrong, and if I am right it would give you some ideas.”²⁵

And with that, Lazarsfeld said his goodbyes, packed his bags, and caught a ride back to New York with Charles Siepmann.

What Makes This Study Useful?

A close reading of the Allerton transcripts reveals significant differences between most of the conference presentations and Lazarsfeld’s talks. Some, like Earl English (University of Missouri), focused on new technology, in his case facsimile (slow scan of image) as a new iteration of broadcast distribution.²⁶ Others addressed learning theory—“What can we learn from hearing? What can we learn by seeing? What combination of listening and seeing would be most desirable?” (Lazarsfeld admitted being “flabbergasted” by these questions posed to him, saying “...these shouldn’t be questions which I am asked. They are not ex-

actly my field. Secondly, there exists a considerable literature on this thing. And third, the question in this simple form cannot be answered at all."²⁷)

Finally, considerable effort was directed toward discussions of improving society and using television to make the individual a "better person." As Schramm noted near the end of a late afternoon talk, "We (educational broadcasters) should be in the position of communication engineer...by which I mean the engineering of consent and the engineering of learning behavior."²⁸ Such concepts of social engineering were aligned with ideas of cultural and social "uplift," clearly a part of educational radio's "teaching and training" ideology in the 1930s, and the heart of comments by Robert Lewis Shayon, shown below. Shayon was an accomplished television producer who worked closely with Edward R. Murrow in the 1940s and pioneered television shows promoting grassroots democracy such as *The Whole Town's Talking*, educational television's first national series.

You've got to have the Jesus factor that was mentioned here yesterday....You want to light a torch, you want to set people on fire, you want to make them better than they are because that's the only way you'll get a better world, not by better machines, not by better technique, but by better people. We talk a lot about what kind of people you want, but I have not heard any psychologist here give me a description of the kind of person he's trying to create. It's about time you fellows (educational broadcasters) did.²⁹

Discussions at the Allerton Seminar were dominated by individuals who not only thought television had social power but that it could be used in specific ways to improve society. To this end, these educators looked to a range of presentation strategies (repetition, reinforcement, reward) as a means of changing learning behaviors broadly. Their interests extended beyond a K-12 environment to include adult education focusing on the liberal arts—art appreciation, music, and civic involvement; and they were convinced that television programs, properly produced and promoted, could "create...the kind of people we would like to see sitting next to us...a good citizen, a God follower, a good neighbor, a good boss, a good colleague."³⁰ The seminar transcripts also suggest that most participants agreed with Siepman "that most people cannot articulate the things they need. They don't know what they want."³¹ Further, as one unnamed speaker noted during an afternoon talk by Schramm, "We as broadcasters do know what is needed, what we want said....that is the job of the broadcaster."³²

Lazarsfeld's perspective differed. The transcripts reveal that he was skeptical about the efficacy of intended messages, doubting their abilities to meet targets or change behavior. He dismissed the concept of mass audience in favor of multiple and overlapping publics; and he was outright critical of the class bias he observed in the adult education being offered up by educational broadcasters. Further, as the following three points illustrate, Lazarsfeld's concepts about noncommercial media favored a broad, bottom-up approach that privileged voices at the margin, active audiences who knew what they wanted, and participation by a range of players who had something interesting to say.

1. Multiple Publics—A stated goal of the Allerton meeting was to examine if and how a “mass medium” could educate a “mass audience.” Lazarsfeld countered by not only questioning the validity of both these terms, but also maintaining that American culture was characterized by “many types of publics to which you might want to direct your programs.” This concept of publicness—a complicated sphere with overlapping groups of people who sustained discrete needs, interests, and value systems—was mirrored in Lazarsfeld’s ideas about active and differentiated audiences:

People can push any button they want to on the radio. There is something different about people who choose to push one button that makes them different from people who choose to push another button, and different from another group that pushes a third button.... Each group of these people, they’re different.³³

In arguing for the presence of multiple competing and negotiating audiences and publics, Lazarsfeld can be seen, at least in the Allerton context, as more closely aligned with Raymond Williams than with his American contemporary, Wilbur Schramm. Williams’ rejection of the mass audience paradigm was perhaps best summed up as, “There are no masses, only ways of looking at people as masses.” Schramm, on the other hand, maintained that noncommercial broadcasting’s role centered on educating mass audiences, using electronic media to “engineer the most effective transmission line possible between message and audience.”³⁴ An implicit critique of the mass audience assumptions of many noncommercial broadcasters, Lazarsfeld’s effort was to put a human face on the concept of radio audiences, to de-essentialize the ideas of publicness, and to argue for a communication institution—in educational radio and television—that attempted to acknowledge, understand, and meet the needs of varied constituencies.

Ultimately, the 1950-51 campaign for noncommercial allocations focused on one group, American children in school. This battle for educational channels produced 914 oral and written statements, achieved 11.7 percent of the spectrum, and ushered in a television system dedicated to formal, in-school instruction. Although there were interests in and by other constituents—seen, for example, by inclusion of the Sac and Fox Tribe of Tama, Iowa, in *The Whole Town’s Talking* in 1952—such commitments to ethnic and racial diversity were largely ignored until the campaign for *public* broadcasting in 1967.³⁵ Lazarfeld’s remarks predated the drive to build a national public broadcasting service by 18 years; acknowledged, discussed, and seriously considered, they could have usefully framed early progressive practices by educational broadcasters.

Even as we consider Lazarfeld’s comments about the “various thousands of different types of publics” in U.S. society, we should also remember that he selected Decatur, Illinois, as the research site for the study of personal influence precisely because he considered the small city as “normal” and “quintessentially American” (a somewhat unilateral view of the Midwestern town).³⁶ Further, Summers notes that although Lazarsfeld’s early collaborator C. Wright Mills advocated for a broad cultural study of Decatur, Lazarfeld insisted on a

quantitative statistical approach. In the end, the project focused on a linear two-step flow of influence, not a contextualized analysis of the neighborhoods, family and friendship systems, and multiple publics of this town.³⁷ This (significant) inconsistency aside, Lazarsfeld's remarks about diverse publics presented at the Allerton Seminar could have generated a sensibility among educational broadcasters of overlapping publics with multiple interests and needs, resulting, potentially, in a more complicated structure and expectation for contemporary public television.

2. Service at the Margins—A hypothetical audience member that Lazarsfeld described during his final talk at Allerton was the immigrant mom, who sent her son off to an American high school every day. New to the United States, this parent, suggested Lazarsfeld, was also likely new to the social environment and course content of the school her child was attending. As a solution to this lack of knowledge about her son's life outside the home, and as a way to alleviate potential social tension in the family, Lazarsfeld suggested a television program about biology (a course the son was taking) and high school (his new environment).

Wouldn't it be very interesting to try to make a morning program for mothers, telling them what's going on in the high school? They really don't know. It would really be quite fascinating for them....they would be fascinated to understand what their children are talking about, because they learn biology and the mothers don't understand it. I think an understanding by [new immigrants] of the main notion of a school, of an advanced grade school or high school, might be a very interesting possibility.³⁸

This reference to the needs of a hypothetical immigrant mother was Allerton's only mention of an audience at the margins. In this case, information to enable talk and understanding in the family was the goal; Lazarsfeld's interest lay not in the narrow in-school session on biology but rather with a contextualized narrative that helped a parent understand the world of her child. As Lazarsfeld observed, the mother "possibly never went to school at all, and there develops, together with this great educational progress in the family, a real tension in families because the children are so quickly so much better educated than the parents."³⁹ An immigrant himself, Lazarsfeld understood the issues of being "other," and his efforts to lessen feelings of otherness in the household, via educational television, speak to a thoughtful and progressive analysis of this marginalized group.⁴⁰

Educational radio (1920s and 1930s), noncommercial educational television (1950s), and public television and national public radio (begun in the 1960s and early 1970s) were all framed by discussions of alternative service to underserved audiences. As the Carnegie Commission noted in 1967, "Public television programming can deepen a sense of community in local life.... It should be a forum for debate and controversy.... It should provide a voice for groups in the community that may otherwise be unheard."⁴¹ Over the years, this service to underserved audiences has been uneven at best. One can only wonder how public broadcasting might have been configured in the 1950s, 1960s, and even today, had the sys-

tem's leaders paid more attention to the broad social issues that Lazarsfeld brought to the fore in 1949. Of particular interest was his suggestion that educational broadcasters conduct in-depth interviews with immigrant families in an effort to learn more about their interests and needs. This approach—which privileges ideas, insights, and experiences of potential audience members—flies in the face of the educators' top-down stance of "Teacher Knows Best."

3. Engagement Across the Board—Public media historians recount that early rural stations were often situated in the town's feed store. People came in to buy farming supplies and stayed to talk on the radio. A later iteration (1970s) of this kind of community broadcasting was seen in Project Drum, an innovative project developed by WBUR/Boston that allocated time each week to inner-city residents. With local people acting as producers, reporters, and on-air hosts, WBUR created a "station within a station" and granted the neighborhood a place on the dial.⁴²

These examples of audience participation in production are models that would seem to cohere with Lazarsfeld's ideas about how to make educational television programs. He even (half) jokingly observed that he would like to be on TV himself, as a film and theatre critic who incorporated interviews with the plays' actors into his show. He further suggested that educational broadcasters look to "lots of intelligent faculty wives" and professors such as O.H. Mowrer (member of Institute of Communications Research and a knowledgeable and enthusiastic bird-watcher) for on-air talent. Lazarsfeld's suggested pool of potential talent was obviously limited to the professional class [and their "intelligent (unnamed) wives"] and did not extend to the larger society. He was not putting cameras in the hands of local people and asking that they tell the stories of the neighborhood. At the same time, his impulse was involvement by audience members in the performance of content they knew something about. Programming was not left solely to broadcasters; and the definition of "expert" expanded to include competent people on the ground. Importantly, said Lazarsfeld, such a practice might address a key issue facing educational broadcasting—the need for engaging content:

I think I am not too wrong if I say that by and large the programming of educational stations is run on a rather conventional base, and that a lot of possibilities for good new program ideas don't come out. And I therefore feel that it is part of the conventionality of the situation that many untapped program ideas, untapped resources in the community, are not used because in some way we all live in a very narrow sector of possible program ideas.⁴³

The critique that educational broadcasting is not engaging continues today in popular and academic discussion. Balas⁴⁴ and Day⁴⁵ both call for more interactive programs that connect with audiences throughout the country; Bullert⁴⁶ argues that political timidity has taken the edge off PBS documentary; and Jon Stewart⁴⁷ suggests that NPR is governed mostly by a "Never say anything interesting" policy. Meeting with educational broadcasters more than sixty years ago, Lazarsfeld said it first.

Final Thoughts

There is little evidence that the educational broadcasters paid much attention to Paul Lazarsfeld, who offered a different perspective on radio's social uses and questioned their ideas about the Public(s), conceptions of audience, and ability to reach out to their communities. "I am also afraid that it will not be quite easy for you to realize what we are talking about—what we really want from you—because there is a danger that you educators will have a hard time to detach yourselves from the classroom situation."⁴⁸

These worries were articulated again in 1979 by Blakely,⁴⁹ in 1980 by Avery and Pepper,⁵⁰ in 1987 by Grossman,⁵¹ and in 1993 by Rowland,⁵² and they reflect a strand of discourse that informs much contemporary research and critique of public broadcasting. Importantly, these ideas formed the basis for the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 and development, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, of innovative, community-based projects. There were clear linkages, at least at Allerton, between Lazarsfeld's perspective on nonprofit media and a progressive vision of U.S. public service broadcasting. It has been the purpose of this article to recover some of Lazarsfeld's contributions to this concept of public media. I also offer, like Katz,⁵³ a "defense" of Paul Lazarsfeld, as a scholar who sought a broad cultural project for noncommercial television that was underpinned by qualitative research, worries about class bias and class interest, and a commitment to diverse and overlapping voices. One can only speculate how U.S. noncommercial broadcasting might have developed, had educational broadcasters listened more carefully.

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