

"Our Unseen Friend": Early Radio and the Tuning In of Woody Guthrie's Performing Persona

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Al Richmond, founder and editor of *The Daily People's World* Communist newspaper, was introduced to folksinger Woody Guthrie in 1939, after Guthrie had been co-hosting a daily radio show in Los Angeles for nearly two years. Richmond remembers "the hillbilly" offering to write a column for the paper. Richmond asked for some writing samples. "They were good," he recalled, and Guthrie was hired to write a small daily editorial called "Woozy Sez." But initially the work still gave Richmond pause. "Being suspicious of folksiness and words misspelled for comic effect," he said, "I wondered at first: is this columnist phony or genuine?"¹

That was a legitimate question throughout Guthrie's career as a radio personality, a newspaper columnist, and a songwriter. The answer is a little of both — or, more precisely, mostly genuine by virtue of a little phoniness. Though he was known and is now remembered as an authentic representation of a particular segment of downtrodden Americans struggling through the Great Depression, namely migrant workers and displaced "Okies," Guthrie's image was partly a persona constructed during a two-year tenure as a Los Angeles radio personality in order to maintain a certain kind of relationship with his listening audience.

Even if one knows little of his work beyond the song "This Land Is Your Land," many are aware that Guthrie was a native Oklahoman; at the very least, most identify him with the Okies. This is not necessarily because history has done an exceptional job of educating us about him; it's because Guthrie himself carefully chiseled out this identity and successfully hammered it into public consciousness. Though he was born and raised in east-central Oklahoma, in an oil-boom town called Okemah, Guthrie left the state as a teenager and only returned much later for fleeting visits. He barely experienced rural Oklahoma as an adult, and he lived (well, for a perennial wanderer like Woody, let's say he was *based*) in the urban centers of New York City and Los Angeles for more than half of his life. In those cities, however, Guthrie continued to dress largely as he had in Okemah; he exaggerated and chewed his native accent; and he groomed and emphasized a well-trained folk wit. Will Kaufman points out that Guthrie "worked very hard at building a mythic persona of Woody Guthrie, Country Boy. He spent more time in cities than he ever did in the country."² Nonetheless, Woody was an Okie — a "fact," a trope repeated and reconstructed both literally and figuratively throughout his various portrayals in both media and

scholarship. He did not, however, become an Okie (as opposed to an Oklahoman) by the simple virtue of being born in Oklahoma at a particular moment in history nor by traveling the byways among others for whom the original pejorative was coined. The Okie identity we understand Woody to have presented was consciously crafted as a performing character. It was a role that took shape during his years on L.A. radio — and because of them.

My examination here is from a perspective in communication studies, with an intent to provide an interdisciplinary and historical consideration of radio's emerging institutional contexts as they were relevant to the construction of the Woody Guthrie persona. I am analyzing Guthrie's particular relationship with his Los Angeles radio audience in the late 1930s, largely in the evolving context of Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl's theory of para-social interaction between media figures and their audiences, including the continuing development of their concept throughout a variety of media-effects studies ranging from reality television to internet content.³ Most such studies, however, have focused on how the para-social relationship affects the audience; I am interested instead in its reflexive effect on the performer — in order to determine not how the *audience* is affected by the relationship but to suggest how Guthrie *himself* was changed by such interactions.

In this article, I first discuss the struggle of radio's first generation of on-air talent to craft the skills required to successfully negotiate a new type of performer-audience relationship within a new mass communication medium. Next, I outline the introduction and development of para-social communication theories, specifically as they relate back to early radio programming. I then show how Guthrie's radio performances adhered to these emerging models, highlighting the ways in which Guthrie himself was affected by these ongoing interactions with his audience — an entity he referred to as his "Unseen Friend" — via the forms of asynchronous feedback then available to him and other radio personalities. I conclude that the easygoing, down-home persona Guthrie utilized throughout his later career (and which became cemented as the chief signifier within his eventual status as a cultural legend) is based chiefly on the results of these nascent negotiations.

The historical frame examined here is about two and a half years, from mid-1937 to the end of 1939. After being raised in Okemah and living for nearly six years in Pampa, Texas, Guthrie spent much of 1936 and early 1937 traveling and hitchhiking throughout the southern plains and the southwest. He began his travels with a set of paints and brushes, intending to support himself on the road with itinerant sign-painting work, but learned that his guitar better provided for him; not only did he earn a more steady keep by singing old folk songs for often impromptu audiences of rootless migrant workers, the obvious affective experience of these songs on those

audiences impressed Guthrie deeply.⁴ In the summer of 1937, he hitchhiked to Los Angeles, where he and his cousin Jack Guthrie landed a radio show, "The Oklahoma and Woody Show," on station KFVD, 1020 AM. Jack Guthrie left the show in September and was replaced by a family friend, Maxine "Lefty Lou" Crissman; the show was rechristened *The Woody and Lefty Lou Show*. Guthrie and Crissman partnered on the radio through June 1938, on KFVD except for a month's stint at a Tijuana border-blaster station, XELO, at the beginning of that year. Following Crissman's departure from the show the following summer, Guthrie continued on his own, his program retitled "The Lone Wolf," through the end of 1939, at which time he relocated to New York City. The KFVD gigs were Guthrie's only regular employment as a radio host,⁵ and this essay explores the correlation between the late formative years of a mass communication medium and the peak formative years of a singular American entertainer.

New rules for new media

When we say "new media" today, we're referring to a specific historical category of electronic and on-demand communication channels. The new media of a century ago, however, were mass-market newspapers and radio programming. To claim that these analog media of old had as tumultuous an impact on society as have today's internet technologies is hardly hyperbole.⁶ Media in any age, however, do not appear fully formed, nor do they arrive bearing ready-made manuals or well-answered FAQs. Professionals and, eventually, everyday consumer-users have experienced learning curves in both acquiring, establishing, and teaching the skills of any new media, whether posting visual content online or delivering an on-air sound broadcast. When Woody stepped into his first radio studio, he — like most of his predecessors and peers working in the still relatively new medium — had some figurin' to do.

By Woody's arrival at KFVD in 1937, radio had established itself as a dominant mass communication medium. Daniel J. Czitrom marks the beginning of "radio mania" in 1922, when more than 300 broadcast licenses were granted and 100,000 receivers sold; by 1930, more than 600 stations were broadcasting to 12 million homes, or 40 percent of U.S. families.⁷ By the end of the '20s, the medium's content delivery system had developed into the relations between advertisers, broadcasters, and listeners we still recognize; the general template of programming had been established, too, with comedy and music variety shows dominating news, sports, game shows, and various dramas on programming schedules.⁸

Talking to someone who's not there

During these formative years, managers hired announcers and entertainers to provide and host that content, and their hiring decisions initially were off-the-cuff and based on whatever information instinct provided them about the requirements of the new medium. George H. Douglas, in his "informal history," *The Early Days of Radio Broadcasting*, asks where, after all, radio announcers came from: "In 1920, there was no such animal and there obviously was no training school or apprenticeship program to supply the need when it arose. The first announcers simply fell into their jobs or were tagged for the chore when they hung around the transmitting apparatus for a bit too long."⁹ Douglas describes a steady stream of early on-air personalities at stations in New York and Pittsburg who had been "arbitrarily chosen" from various office departments: "Qualifications? Nobody had the slightest idea in those days what the qualifications of a radio announcer would be — just someone willing and able to talk over the air," he observes.¹⁰

If, as seemed to be the case, the announcer was verbally addressing a person or people who could not be seen, he or she applied what they already knew about unmediated interpersonal exchange to the new medium in order to tailor their speech for the best possible communication success. Successful communication competence requires a clear-as-possible perception of both self and the other to whom one is speaking.¹¹ Radio complicated the already complex process of interpersonal communication by removing the audience from the speaker's immediate sensory perception and limiting that audience's ability to provide direct feedback. Announcers thus made their initial decisions about how to speak through the medium based on little to no information about to whom they were speaking. So announcers began adjusting their speech patterns and styles to accommodate the audience they had in mind.

That last part should be stressed — what they had *in mind*. As Allan Bell's radio studies later found, most radio announcers "will alter their style of speech depending upon who they *think* is listening."¹² But on what basis could announcers find an idea of who they were speaking to? Empirical audience research was still at least two decades away when radio began broadcasting; therefore, the only feedback and audience metrics available to early announcers were the result of direct solicitations for listener contributions via the mail. Brian Emmett, head of the BBC's Audience Research Dept., lamented that lack of data, noting that "social science was really in its infancy in the late '30s, and our own department didn't begin until 1939."¹³

So announcers and entertainers used creative means to solicit listener feedback — fan mail. As host of the BBC program *Music for the Ordinary*

Listener in the late '20s, musician Sir Walford Davis asked for listeners to send him musical compositions they'd written, which he would select and perform on the show.¹⁴ *Vox Pop*, a national person-on-the-street interview show (1932-1948), used contests to solicit questions for its interviews, and quiz shows such as "Information Please" and "Beat the Band" were structured around questions sent in by listeners. Charlene Simmons's survey of early radio fan mail and its uses finds that postal feedback from listeners, belated though it could be, played an important role in allowing stations and networks to learn about audience demographics — to estimate the size of the audience, the geographical reach of the station's signal, and the preferences of those listeners.¹⁵

New ways of speaking

As these skeletal notions of audience identity began to take shape, radio broadcasters also began a process of streamlining diction, dialect, and speaking styles in order to communicate most clearly to the audience in mind. That meant neither ratcheting up the diction nor dragging it down into slang; rather, an easily recognizable and understandable middle ground was sought and practiced. Frank H. Vizetelly, head of CBS radio in the early '30s, "was no admirer of 'Oxford English,' but instead was bent on 'spreading the best traditions of American speech'" via his broadcasts.¹⁶ A handbook was created for NBC announcers that outlined a pattern of speech called "General American."¹⁷ As radio's reach became national, such social engineering efforts to unify an overall dialect affected a political dimension to localized speech; in Britain, the BBC's efforts to

provide a standard of correct undifferentiated speech ... was in fact originally egalitarian in its aims. It derived from a much earlier idea that if you could get rid of dialect variations in speech you could get rid of social class; and class differentiations in the '20s and '30s pervaded the whole of English life.¹⁸

In America, speaking like the radio — using "correct," non-accented English — became a ticket to the middle class for immigrants, while radio's streamlining of speech "worked to cast into cultural disrepute the colorful variety not only of languages, but of accents and regional dialects whose possessors now found themselves to be 'different.'" This "correct" English, however, was not high-falutin': "A breezy, slang-filled style of speech soon became the preferred radio mode, and networks and other bastions of 'correct English' fought a losing battle to preserve the finer points of diction and pronunciation. Local announcers and hosts brought regional and personal variations to the mike."¹⁹

Beyond simple elocution, however, were adjustments in the broader sense of style, including dialect. Beginning with Edward Sapir's important essay about speech styles as indicative of personality (1927),²⁰ the field of sociolinguistics has pursued a lengthy and continuously evolving study of the reasons for and results of adapting one's speech patterns when transmitting messages (interpersonally or via mediated channels) to a particular sender or audience.²¹ In a linchpin study of radio announcers, during which topic, setting, degree of attention, and other factors were altered, the only nonpersonal variable that affected a shift in speech style was audience — that is, the announcer's *perception* of who that audience is and how best they might receive his or her message.²² Any alteration in style for the purpose of suiting an audience is motivated by a psychological desire for convergence and is intended as a positive accommodation.²³ This reaction is heightened within the extra pressures of mass media, and radio talk is especially a natural channel for increased stylization. Nikolas Coupland observes how "much radio talk involves overtly motivated selections from preexisting stylistic repertoires, addressed to enculturated audiences" and that "radio presenters may be expected to project preferred personas rather than, in any simple sense, 'their real selves'."²⁴ Announcers are thus "styling the other to define the self."²⁵ That is, without complete data to form a schema of the other, announcers concentrated more energy on crafting a schema of their selves.

Bell even suggests that alteration of speech style is a form of "audience design."²⁶ Listeners, Bell claims, move from program to program and choose those that match the style of speech they prefer to hear; thus, presentation of style is itself an advertisement for a particular type of audience. He adds that "a broadcaster who misjudges the style for an intended audience may get not that intended audience, but another audience that suits the style. The style may not shift to suit the audience, but the audience shifts to suit the style."²⁷ Thus, stylization can be a "knowing deployment of culturally familiar styles and identities that are marked as deviating from those predictably associated with the current speaking context."²⁸ Stylization, as a conscious act and with an intended audience, is thus an aspect of performance rather than mere behavior,²⁹ and of social practice itself rather than a studied alteration of norms.³⁰

Stylizing one's delivery and dialect, however, does not imply dishonesty or inauthenticity. In fact, exaggerating one's dialect for effect actually can enhance one's perceived authenticity and believability. Stylization of dialect is a performance in which the speaker, particularly on radio, selects from a repertoire of dialects the one he or she determines to be culturally appropriate to the context of the communication. Transparency is the key. While the simple act of performing implies a certain degree of artificiality and inauthenticity, Coupland argues in his astute study of Welsh radio

speakers, if radio announcers or entertainers “make it clear to their audience that the images they manufacture ... are ‘put on,’ ‘for now,’ and ‘for show’” then their overt stylization of dialect also “can potentially deliver forms of personal and cultural authenticity that transcend local playfulness, so that the identificational effect is neither mere play nor outright parody.”³¹ The audience recognizes the performance as play, but in getting it right, so to speak, the artifice implies a transcendent art. Listeners may recognize that the performer is not one of them, culturally speaking; however, if the performer captures and delivers a style of speaking that listeners recognize as their own (and the performer does not cross a line into offensive stereotyping), then the resulting communication is “reflexive,” “metacommunicative,” and can be analyzed as “strategic inauthenticity, with complex implications for personal and cultural authenticity in general.”³² Cultural identity thus not only is unharmed by broadcast stylization but actually is an achievement of it.

From stage to studio

This analysis thus far has focused on how announcers and entertainers new to radio — and possibly to performance itself — adjusted their communication style to suit their perceptions of the new medium. By the 1930s, however, a seasoned group of performers was beginning to migrate to the medium: vaudeville entertainers. These performers — lured by the promise of larger audiences within the new mass medium as well as the desire to escape dwindling theater receipts — adapted their own models of performance to the new medium. In so doing, their stages-to-studios influx helped establish radio’s program formatting and accepted communication style throughout the 1930s.

Vaudevillians were naturals for radio, at least in that they were performers already well-seasoned in the art of filling time and adapting their performance to a wide variety of audience types. Most of them, however, reacted sharply to the restraints of the new medium. For loose, wise-cracking, ad-libbing former stage performers, the aforementioned slowness or lack of audience feedback, for instance, was uncomfortable. “Radio’s coldness shocked vaudevillians ... who were accustomed to interaction between audience and performer,”³³ and as a result vaudevillians sought to incorporate audience feedback and participation whenever and however possible.

Vaudevillians, though, fulfilled a prime job requirement for radio entertainment. Early radio announcers had to be versatile — able to talk and read as well as possibly entertain with singing and storytelling — and flexible. They had to wing it without losing composure. On-air time was loosely scheduled, and scheduled acts often didn’t show. The gift of gab was

"a sterling gift indeed in those early days of radio," as was being something of a renaissance talent.³⁴ Graham McNamee at WEA, for instance, was "an all-purpose announcer and performer. He announced, he talked, he sang; he acted as his own programmer."³⁵ One afternoon in the early '20s, WJZ announcer Norman Brokenshire struggled to fill time after three acts in a row stiffed him; he did so by singing, playing the ukulele and, at his wit's end, famously sticking the microphone out the window for a few minutes with the introduction, "Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the sounds of New York."³⁶

Vaudeville acts tended to come in pairs, too, which aided in the creation of time-filling banter. Billy Jones and Ernie Hare began broadcasting as a duo on WJZ in 1921; they were "typical vaudevillians" who "offered both comic songs and sentimental ballads," a "harmony team" who sang "ballads and sentimental tunes, and told jokes of the kind then published in railway time tables, seed catalogues and family magazines. They were decidedly mellow, genial, homespun, and above all tepid and inoffensive."³⁷ As they developed, the humor of shows like these often was "based on verbal misunderstandings, rooted in stories of family life and the underdog," relying on music and the "relaxed whimsy of the minstrel show."³⁸ The popular BBC program *Children's Hour* started in 1924 with a format that was loose, often improvised, "a family party" with music and comic bits: "But the thing was to be natural, to be homely, and amusing if you could be."³⁹

Music thrived in this loose, friendly radio stream. Folk music, in particular — and depending on how one defines it — flourished through the new medium. The arrival of "commercial hillbilly music" to radio programs, however, met with greater acceptance among listeners than jazz, largely "because there was a big tradition of folk music behind it, which gave it an aroma of heartland respectability and folksiness."⁴⁰ Country, hillbilly, or "old-time" music began eking out time on radio in the South. The Chicago-based *WLS Barn Dance* program, which started in 1924 and reached listeners across the country, was among the first to begin establishing widespread celebrity within the genres. Czitrom thus notes:

Radio did more than any other medium to publicize and commercialize previously isolated kinds of American folk music, such as country and western and blues. For both artist and audience, radio broke down the formidable geographical and racial barriers that had separated the various rich veins of American folk music. Radio accelerated the process that produced an incredibly fruitful cross-fertilization of all types of American musics.⁴¹

Folk music in America and in England had been declining in the years leading up to radio. Maud Karpeles, an assistant to British folklorist Cecil Sharp, claimed: "At the beginning of the century I would say that folksong, or the practice of folksong, had almost disappeared.... There can be no question that radio has completely changed the scene and added to the popularity of folksong. It has had a most beneficial effect, especially on the traditional singer, because it has restored to him the confidence in the songs...."⁴² Her observation is especially of note here because she focuses on the impact radio had on the *performer* — a restoration of the artist's confidence — not the reception of the audience. Radio saved not only the existence and circulation of the music itself but, by way of enhancing its presentation via radio's mass communication, also saved and fortified folk singers' image of themselves — and who they could be.

The evolution of parasocial communication

A youth leader quoted in Alasdair Clayre's BBC retrospective (1973) describes observed differences in communication between young people's interpersonal exchanges and their consumption of mass media: "They engage in, not a dialogue, it's a monologue; it comes from the box to them and they can't return anything which is reacted on by the box — the box doesn't receive anything, it just gives out information. Whereas if they have to do this with another person, you do get a dialogue."⁴³ His statement embodies numerous true and false characteristics of the parasocial interactions inherent in broadcast mass media.

Parasocial interactions and relationships were identified by Horton and Wohl at a time when communication study was still wresting itself from a linear transmission perspective. Much of communication scholarship was spurred by wartime fears of propaganda and began from assumptions that mass communication is one-way, with active messengers speaking to passive audiences. Horton and Wohl's 1956 study was groundbreaking in many ways, not the least of which was their early suggestion that media audiences are not so passive, after all.⁴⁴

The transition from entertainment on stage to entertainment via electronic mass media required much of the performers. Published mass media was largely impersonal, its messages written in a style that spoke to the broadest possible readership. Stage entertainers usually kept up the pretense of a "fourth wall," but the presence of the audience (and its immediate feedback, to which actors could make adjustments in real time) was always immediately evident. Not so in a radio studio. Gathered in often small and makeshift studios — the first "studios" at Pittsburgh's pioneering station KDKA were a tent on the roof of the building, followed by a partition in the women's cloakroom — entertainers had no immediate

perception of a present audience but naturally felt intimate and private in the space. The audience, however, was present — *somewhere* out there, beyond the studio, beyond the microphone. Attempts by hosts to keep both parties unified led to what Horton and Wohl would call "intimacy at a distance."⁴⁵

Horton and Wohl coined the term for this particular mode of communication: *parasocial* interactions and relationships. The new electronic media of the twentieth century, they said, "give the illusion of face-to-face relationship with the performer," and responses between audience and performer were similar to those within a social "primary group," using Charles Horton Cooley's much earlier concept of intimate mediators (1909).⁴⁶ Despite the delay in feedback, this mediated interaction bears many of the same characteristics of ordinary social engagement, yet Horton and Wohl were careful to refer to the interaction as a "*simulacrum* of conversational give and take,"⁴⁷ as others have pointed out that parasocial interactions are not real, *per se*, but exist only in the perception of the listener or viewer.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, "the greatest pains are taken by the persona to create an illusion of intimacy," employing methods such as crafting the "milieu of an informal face-to-face gathering," "casualness," maintenance by the performer of "the flow of small talk which gives the impression that he is responding to and sustaining the contributions of an invisible interlocutor," by "continually referring to and addressing the home audience as a third party to the program," and they add: "such references remind the spectator of his own independent identity. The only illusion maintained is that of directness and immediacy of participation."⁴⁹ The most successful means of blurring the line between distant performance and intimate sociability "is for the persona to treat his supporting cast as a group of close intimates" so that the viewer "tends to believe that this fellowship includes him by extension." Indeed, Horton and Wohl claim that the skill of maintaining this illusion of intimacy is the mass media performer's "main attribute."⁵⁰

Though much communication scholarship discusses these skills as fact, rarely are they analyzed from a pedagogical perspective beyond a smattering of anecdotes. How were these skills learned and shared? Even Horton and Wohl cite Dave Garroway, a popular TV host who started in radio, describing the make-it-up-as-you-go development and professionalization of hapless early radio performers, particularly how such extemporaneous efforts began skewing toward an intimate relationship: "Most talk on the radio in those days was formal and usually a little stiff. But I just rambled along, saying whatever came into my mind. I was introspective. I tried to pretend that I was chatting with a friend over a highball late in the evening."⁵¹ Like this and other previously cited examples, the anecdotal evidence at least points toward a common denominator: early radio performers were not only conditioned by the

elements of their new medium, they shaped their mode of address based on the only prior and possibly relevant experience they had to draw from — interpersonal, conversational communication.

Within the evolution of this theory is the frequent suggestion that the interpersonal nature of the parasocial relationship may not be as illusory as Horton and Wohl originally stressed — that parasocial interactions have effects that are nearly as significant as “real” interpersonal exchanges. Horton and Wohl’s parasocial concept appeared with television’s emergence as a dominant medium, was applied to that medium, and has remained a primary feature of TV scholarship. Its basic tenets of interaction and relationship, however, are applied easily to other media, namely radio, especially as the theory has developed since the 1950s. As the theory was widely employed in the 1980s, a scale was developed to measure an audience’s specific level of parasocial interaction,⁵² and studies found that parasocial relationships chiefly counted as acquaintances, not as close friends.⁵³ Significantly, the give-and-take experience in a parasocial relationship, however asynchronous its communication may be, has been found to be a factor of social development and identity formation in a manner similar to interpersonal contact.⁵⁴ Indeed, Susanna Annese’s more recent study of individual identity formation within parasocial relationships concluded that media consumers “co-construct their own identity in the social space” of the particular media content, in this case television.⁵⁵ Again, each of these studies deals strictly with the parasocial impact on the audience. The key word in Annese’s analysis is *co-construct*, with an important prefix implying that the audience is not the only participant in the parasocial relationship constructing an identity.

This construction is not exclusive to the duration of the broadcast. Horton and Wohl discuss the parasocial process as one that continues offline, as it were: “The experience does not end with the program itself. On the contrary, it may be only after the program has ended that it is submitted to intellectual analysis and integrated into, or rejected by, the self.”⁵⁶ This, too, is about the audience’s experience, but it seems logical to assume that the identification process with the persona is submitted to the same analysis and integration by the performer. Indeed, in Bell’s theory of audience design, the performer is the individual most in control of the speech being stylized for the purpose of attracting a certain audience: “They use style as an expressive instrument, a declaration of identity, saying to the audience ‘you and I are in a group’.”⁵⁷ Much research has looked at the “you” in that equation, less so on the “I.” What is the effect of such a declaration by a performer and his or her persona?

Guthrie as parasocial radio pioneer

Horton and Wohl published their seminal study nearly twenty years after Guthrie and Crissman took to the radio in 1937. As mentioned, only a few snatches of transcripts from *The Woody and Lefty Lou Show* survive.⁵⁸ Two of those, in particular, neatly knit together the previously discussed efforts by radio announcers to solicit feedback that would help them form ideas about who their audience was, as well as Guthrie’s astute understanding of exactly how Horton and Wohl’s model of parasocial relationships was constructed — and whether or not it was indeed as illusory as they claimed.

On nearly every show, Guthrie and Crissman performed “Woody and Lefty Lou’s Theme Song,” of which one of many lyrics sheets exists in the Woody Guthrie Archives.⁵⁹ The song is divided into two parts, an opening theme and a closing theme. The opener is delineated on the archived lyrics sheet with Guthrie’s folksy stage notes as “what we sing when we’re cranking up and a-fixin’ to come onto the air waves.” The words to this part of the song, a mere two stanzas, encourage intimacy and familiarity, inviting listeners to “Drop whatever you are doing / Stop your work and worry, too; / Sit right down and take it easy” before, in the second verse, soliciting the fan mail and song requests so crucial to gathering audience data and facilitating the parasocial interaction — “You just drop a card or letter, / We will sing a song for you” — before assuring listeners of the pair’s approachability and authenticity: “We’re easy goin’ country people / Plain ole Woody and Lefty Lou.” For the song’s show-closing verses — the ones sung, Woody noted, “after we have thoroughly [sic] wrecked the studio” — the solicitation for postal correspondence is again stressed, with a plea for song requests in the first verse (“If you’ve got a favorite number, / Write to Woody and Lefty Lou”) and one for general fan mail in the second (“If you like our kind of singing, / I’m gonna tell you what to do, / Get your pencil and your paper / Write to Woody and Lefty Lou”). The final verses appeal to listeners who are “sad and lonely” and even equate the act of tuning in to that of a listener proceeding to “Hitch your bay mare to your buggy” in order to “Come see Woody and Lefty Lou” (the visual verb, as opposed to an auditory one, is striking). The relationship described in the theme song is cemented by a vow to continue thinking of each other outside the parameters of the scheduled program: “Don’t forget us in the morning, / We won’t be forgettin’ you.”

Guthrie frequently jotted explanatory and anecdotal notes at the bottom of his typed lyric sheets; at the bottom of this archived sheet are a few such paragraphs that read as if they are words Guthrie spoke on the air (whether he captured these in type as a record of a previous performance or typed them up as a script to use in future ones, we don’t know). After a sentence explaining that he wrote down the lyrics because “I ain’t got this here song

memorized yet," Guthrie again pushes the correspondence between host and audience: "Write us a letter, 'cause we shore git a big kick out of you writin'." The yokely misspellings and written dialect are notable in the context of a script; however, Guthrie made several hand-crafted songbooks, which he often sent to KFVD listeners, and likely was conscious of these writings as semi-published, public documents. So the exaggerated dialect and prose style are themselves as performative as his on-air persona.

The third and final paragraph of this amended text contains not only yet another solicitation for fan mail but an extraordinary metaphor for parasocial communication: "The first night you aint got nuthin to do, set down and write us and let us know how you're gettin along. We like to hear from you. We call you our Unseen Friend. But of course we got a picher of you sorta in our minds — jest like you got one about us."⁶⁰ Guthrie again leans on the visual sense and/or the imagination of both host and listener in order to suggest intimacy and strength of relationship. Not only can the audience hear the voices of Guthrie and Crissman, he claims, but they can imagine what they look like. In addition, importantly, Guthrie says that the imagining is an active, two-way enterprise. The host, dear listener, is also picturing you.

Guthrie's idea of audience identity

But what exactly *was* Guthrie imagining? What was the "picher" he had of his unseen friends?

The other common trope in Guthrie reportage and scholarship goes like this: Guthrie and Crissman's show, especially their performance of the old-time music, was a balm for displaced Okies, a crucial lifeline to the comfort of homes from which these people had been uprooted, a nostalgic saving grace. Guthrie's first biography ably sets that tone in describing the context of Guthrie's first KFVD show:

The warm, homespun style of the show found a natural audience in Los Angeles. The city was filled with people who missed their old lives on the farm, who found urban life just a bit too fast, who busily organized themselves into home-state societies — clubs for natives of Iowa, Oklahoma, and so forth — that held regular meetings in the downtown cafeterias and massive annual picnics. They were an older, emotional, and unpretentious audience, who quickly adopted Woody and Lefty Lou as members of the family.⁶¹

What data, if any, this is based on is unclear; Joe Klein's notes refer to some peripheral music and history sources but mostly cite his interviews with Crissman. Ed Cray's biography (2004) avoids such romance in setting the

scene. Peter La Chapelle's account (2007) ably lays out what could have possibly been known about the KFVD audience at the time Guthrie and Crissman began their show in 1937.⁶²

Capitalism had tightened its control of radio formatting throughout the decade, creating the entertainment-advertising balance we still recognize today; however, as La Chapelle notes, in the late '30s pockets of expression, dissent, and political discussion still existed. KFVD was such a station. Its schedule was a "smorgasbord," and its shows were "unscripted" and sometimes "amateurish."⁶³ KFVD is described in the WPA guide to Los Angeles as a station that "centers its programs around political events, and frequently gives free time to liberal causes";⁶⁴ an industry guide mentions that KFVD was, at least in the decade following Guthrie's show, "the most consistent money maker in the market and is local in character."⁶⁵ Programs like that of Guthrie and Crissman were popular with low-income, working-class listeners, and a 1939 study cited by La Chapelle found that lower-income listeners were twice as likely to tune into hillbilly music. The only data on Guthrie and Crissman's actual audience is that to be gleaned from the fan mail, and while the duo received the most mail at the station at the time, very little still survives. Those letters that do appear to be, by virtue of grammar and topics discussed, from lower-class listeners.⁶⁶ That is, this was not the kind of deep-pocketed demographic desired by advertisers.

Guthrie himself was not of lower-class origins. His father had been quite well off in Okemah; however, the family fortunes crumbled as Guthrie grew into his teens. Many writers have framed this transition as Guthrie's ticket to Okie authenticity — this despite the fact that Guthrie lived in urban areas nearly all of his adult life, that he performed none of the farm labor he wrote about so eloquently, and that nearly every mile of his "hard travelin'" was entirely voluntary. Guthrie nevertheless took root as an authentic voice for down-trodden migrants by virtue of "the family tragedies that set him on the road at a young age and the suffering he witnessed among the migrants," all of which provided his resumé, as it were, with the necessary "firsthand experience that enabled him to present himself and to be seen as an authentic bard of the people."⁶⁷ Guthrie and Crissman weren't exactly Okies, but they fit the bill as working poor who were in California seeking a better life for themselves and their families, like the rest of the Okies. Regardless of backgrounds, they were *honorary* Okies.

Guthrie, it should be noted, was never comfortable with the word "Okie." The word does not appear in any of the songs on *Dust Bowl Ballads*, comprised of songs written about the Okie experience during Guthrie's tenure at KFVD and recorded in New York immediately after leaving Los Angeles. In an essay he wrote as an introduction to the album, Guthrie used his own spelling of the term, but only in a string of other pejorative classifications: "Oakies, Arkies, Texies, Mexies, Chinees, Japees,

Dixies, and even a lot of New Yorkies.”⁶⁸ These were people he doesn’t fully claim as kinfolk; they were people he had been “in the process of a lookin’ for,” in a reportorial sense. (Indeed, Guthrie did considerable information-gathering about Dust Bowl migrants, and not only during his pre-L.A. travels among them. During the final year of his KFVD tenure, station owner Frank Burke launched his own newspaper, *The Light*, and hired Guthrie as a special “hobo correspondent” writing reports about the plight of displaced Okies in the region.⁶⁹ He did identify some personal parallels, though, describing these folks, in a letter from Los Angeles to his younger sister Mary Jo back in Texas, as, “The people like you and me, that have always been poor and always had very little.”⁷⁰

Still, Guthrie’s own relationship to the Okies seems to be one squarely as a performer, as one putting forth an appearance of kin more than actually feeling the root kinship. Michael Denning, in his landmark history of Popular Front political entertainment, describes the journalistic tone of *Dust Bowl Ballads* by observing that the songs were performances “for the migrants,” not of them. Guthrie even seems to wrestle with the term “refugee”: “Indeed, the song ‘Dust Bowl Refugee’ is torn between its desire to narrate the lives of ‘we ... rambles’ and its palpable refusal of the identity: ‘I’m a Dust Bowl refugee / And I wonder will I always / Be a Dust Bowl refugee’.”⁷¹

If, underneath the written identification with the poor Okies, Guthrie felt something of a shortfall in his authenticity, then his exaggeration of his persona may have been an effort to authenticate himself and design an audience for himself. His persona may have been an exaggeration of Okie identity, but it was also an affirmation of it, a presentation that not only provided his audience with an identifiable persona but himself one, as well.

Guthrie’s way of speaking

In addition to a middle-class background, Guthrie also was quite well-educated, even though much of it had been autodidactic. This fact highlights the ways he played with and, in a sense, “dumbed down” his speech and dialect for effect — something he seems to have perfected on his KFVD radio shows.

Guthrie’s concept of his audience included not only their socioeconomic conditions but their particular linguistic positioning. In a 1941 letter to folklorist and mentor Alan Lomax, he characterized his audience as being “full of people that work and talk a working man’s lingo.”⁷² Speaking honestly and authentically — to be understood — was a sticking point for Guthrie in many realms of his life. He frequently criticized those who put on airs, particularly via language. In a notebook entry reflecting on one of the heroes from his self-education, he knocked Walt Whitman for failing to

write "in the sorts of words my people think, talk, dance, and sing."⁷³ In 1939, Guthrie made quite a stink about a *Los Angeles Times* columnist, Kenneth Crist, who had written a piece dismissive of Okies. Guthrie denounced Crist in a homemade pamphlet, accusing him of fabricating his interviews with Okies, claiming "he must have made it up, cause it wasent no more the Oklahoma lingo than it was Mexican."⁷⁴

In order to sound authentically Okie, at least on the radio, Guthrie spoke "in a slightly exaggerated Oklahoma drawl that turned 'pardner,' Woody's title of address for everyone, into 'pahdna'."⁷⁵ Granted, much of Guthrie's style was exaggerated, if not occasionally comically overblown. Klein refers to it as "overdone hillbilly blab," citing an example from a radio transcript: "Of course, even when I'm gossippin about gossipers I realize that I'm a-gossippin myself, but I sorta figure that the only real gossippin that needs to be done is about gossipers."⁷⁶ He was usually quoted in the news media speaking this way — "Heck, I'm already a-broadcasting on the 22nd floor," from an interview in the *New York Sun* (1940)⁷⁷ — and often wrote this way himself — "Sending youse my latest fotoe which came out in yasstidys new yahky times," from a letter to his sister.⁷⁸

Guthrie also employed his self-described "cornpone" speaking style in his media duties, both as a writer and a radio host. When he began writing columns for the Communist newspaper *The People's World* while in Los Angeles, he was introduced to readers "as an Oklahoma rustic," a guise Woody continued, "peppering his columns and cartoons with folksy themes and telling anecdotes."⁷⁹ Likewise, on each KFVD show, Guthrie yammered a bit, telling tales in a segment he called his "Cornpone Philosophy," in which he "played at sounding like an utter yokel, a device that enabled him to get off some good licks not only at the city slickers but also at the narrow-mindedness and insularity of country folk."⁸⁰

The freewheelin' Woody Guthrie

As to the looseness of the program and how well that fit into vaudeville-inspired patterns of patter, those with even a cursory familiarity with Guthrie's gee-whiz persona might have a difficult time imagining his radio program being anything other than informal. La Chapelle notes that the duo was "given latitude by station managers" at KFVD,⁸¹ and Klein's biography describes, via Crissman's recollection, Guthrie's lack of inhibition and conversational nonchalance in the studio — "He'd just step up to the microphone, say 'Howdy' to the folks, start singing" — as well as the improvisational nature of each show: "no scripts, no song lists; in between numbers they'd chat amiably about what to sing next, or read a letter from a listener requesting a certain song."⁸² The easygoing chatter also contributed to the parasocial experience for listeners who felt they were a bit more than

by-standers, possibly even part of the coffee klatch. Sometimes Guthrie would "just talk for periods ranging up to fifteen minutes."⁸³

Much of that talk was reacting to and begging for audience feedback. The parasocial interactions between Guthrie and his radio audience were almost completely reliant on the only form of feedback readily available to radio at the time: fan mail. This is why much of what's been quoted thus far, especially the two direct entreaties in the "Unseen Friend" monologue, contains some kind of solicitation or acknowledgment of reader letters. The easy feedback endemic to today's networked electronic media channels may be more instantaneous, but it does not necessarily foster mediated relationships (or intimacy at a distance) with stronger interactivity than the belated response of listeners' letters. The mail was slower, sure; but, like the dimensions of interactivity applied to today's new media, the exchange of letters from listener to radio host still provided sufficient feedback, allowing listeners to critique the broadcasts, provide content suggestions and requests, even the simple satisfaction of talking back to the individual with whom they believed they had a Horton and Wohl-esque distant-intimate relationship.⁸⁴ Guthrie's begging for letters wasn't simply to satisfy his ego; the asynchronous feedback actually affected his performance, the development of his persona, and the content of the program.

It first must be emphasized how successful Guthrie's solicitations were. Guthrie and Crissman's program was judged to be an instant hit at KFVD based on the amount of mail received in the its first month on the air: more than 500 letters. During the months that followed, more than 20,000 pieces of mail were addressed directly to Guthrie and Crissman, a rate of nearly a thousand a month. That was more than any other program at the station.⁸⁵ Station owner Frank Burke told the pair, "You're reaching people," a statement based on the volume of mail; the mail also provided Burke the confidence to offer the duo a yearlong contract. Sponsors lined up — sponsors that "did not care how good you were" but instead judged the commercial potential of the program by asking, as Crissman recalled, "How much mail do you get?"⁸⁶ Online media today are judged similarly by their web metrics and page views but also by the number of comments received in interactive forums.

Amid the informal chatting described above, listeners didn't just jump to conclusions that they were part of the Guthrie family setting. Guthrie and Crissman actively included their audience in this collective imaginary. "During their broadcasts, they spoke of their audiences as 'family' or intimate and informal friends,"⁸⁷ often reading listener's names on the air and answering song requests live during the show. The success in this tactic is evident not only in the volume of mail described above but in its content. Listeners wrote to Guthrie and Crissman "as if they were kin, extending invitations to home-cooked chicken dinners."⁸⁸ In the letters, one sees the

only evidence remaining of the demographics and affective responses of Guthrie and Crissman's audience — the source of the often-assumed notion of these listeners being largely homesick Okies. Klein quotes a selection of passages from the surviving letters that effectively service this idea, including one listener who neatly sums up the parasocial theory behind this very study: "When you sing, it seems as though you are singing to each of your listeners individually."⁸⁹

Guthrie responded directly to some individual letter writers, resulting not only in alterations to the content of the program but improvements to his own (or his persona's) character. On one evening's show, he introduced a harmonica tune by its original nineteenth-century title, "Run, Nigger, Run." A listener wrote a letter: "I am a Negro, a young Negro in college and I certainly resented your remark. No person, or person of any intelligence uses that word over the radio today ..." Guthrie was rattled. He apologized on-air and excised the tune from future program schedules and songbooks. He even "from then on spoke of 'colored men'."⁹⁰

Guthrie also responded by applying his boundless creativity to the process of maintaining his parasocial relationship with the audience. He crafted contests based on fan mail — prizes for the letter received from the farthest distance, prizes for the best colorful story, etc. — and would even mail notes, letters, and gifts back to listeners. Guthrie and Crissman even assembled a typed songbook, featuring selections from the show's semi-regular repertoire as well as more than a few of Woody's jokes. About 400 copies were printed and employed as mail bait for listeners, and two more books followed. Klein describes Guthrie (again, via Crissman's recollections) throwing himself so heartily into the work of this parasocial relationship maintenance, going as far as framing it as a preference for precisely Horton and Wohl's intimacy at a distance. Klein claims that, after spending a couple of years traveling with and singing to live audiences, from box cars to bars, Guthrie was thus trained to relate to his audiences as temporary, fleeting subjects. The new structures of radio as a mass medium, complete with its retarded feedback channels by mail, provided a more comfortable and even preferred distance: "It was even easier to love them by mail."⁹¹

Conclusion

Guthrie found his audience easier to love *because of* the distance of their intimacy. Somewhat unusual for radio shows in the '30s, the *Woody and Lefty Lou* program was not performed before a live studio audience; thus, the friends were indeed unseen. That situation did not make the relationships any less real — those relationships weren't as fully illusory as Horton and Wohl stressed, as evidenced by Guthrie's response to using the

racial epithet, reacting with an immediacy and force that might indicate the exchange had occurred one-to-one and face-to-face — but the situation did slow the interactive feedback between performer and audience. As a result, both sides had more time to consider their responses, and style them according to the idea they had in mind of the message's receiver. As in interpersonal exchanges, these asynchronous messages still influenced the formation of Guthrie's performing identity, updating his persona with each instance. What came next — during Guthrie's golden years in the early 1940s and his establishment as a pivotal cultural figure — bears the direct mark of this experience on Los Angeles radio in the years immediately prior, including the content of the resulting *Dust Bowl Ballads* album (and its studious avoidance of the "Okie" label) and the content of his autobiographical novel, *Bound for Glory*, which followed shortly after (1943). Even in that latter text, one can "hear" the stylization of his "voice" in the folksy written dialect and obvious narrative exaggerations — it all sounds great when read aloud. In that book, too, as later described by Gordon Friesen, a fellow Almanac Singer and Guthrie's housemate while he was writing it day and night, there is "a deep and unshakable conviction that man can change things — drastically — for the better, once he decides to do so."⁹² The demands of parasocial interaction contributed to this perspective. The artist must persistently encourage the audience to action, to be proactive in making their voices heard, to be relentless in making their presence known to anyone who cannot (or will not) visualize them. This became Guthrie's model for seeing the world: when the people speak up, those in power react.

Stylization for the radio audience also was an initial move toward what later became a more clearly defined Marxist political framework for Guthrie's performance content. Prior to radio, Guthrie's stance on issues — those for which we now identify him, anyway — had not been overt; he had been performing with "no hint of sectarian politics."⁹³ But in an autobiographical piece written in 1947, Guthrie looked back on his KFVD days as sufficiently political, locating those politics in the selected music by saying, "Lefty Lou and me took quite a hand in politics and sung some of our first political and religious songs of our own making right then and there."⁹⁴ La Chapelle describes Guthrie's efforts on the radio show as distinctly political moves, with Guthrie "developing an early and politically cogent counterimage of the Dust Bowl migrant that often promoted leftist and populist political causes."⁹⁵

Guthrie was laying the foundation of those politics by casting himself as the aw-shucks Okie, not cynically but as a studied means of communicating in a way that the greatest possible number of people could understand. This meant playing a bit of the rube — but a rube possessed with an ancient wisdom of sorts, a Lao Tzu-like figure speaking childishly on the surface

but deeply upon analysis. That extended the universality of his project. Throughout his life and career, Guthrie spoke and wrote about the importance of musical communication being able to speak for and especially to any audience. "Music has got to say what we're all trying to say," he wrote in a 1943 *New York Times* column titled "America Singing."⁹⁶ Rather than complicating Bell's theory of stylization for the purpose of audience design, however, Guthrie's concept of "the People" was less a universal union than one that "identified the 'workers' as 'Real Honest to Goodness People' and reduced the 'Rich folks,' the clergy, and the police to purveyors of false consciousness."⁹⁷ Guthrie concluded the *Times* column by assuring its (elite?) readers that "the people know. The people always know"⁹⁸ — suggesting that the common man and woman have some kind of built-in b.s.-detector and, by virtue of his speaking on their behalf, he was in the clear on that score. He'd learned how to speak *to* them, and thus, *for* them.

NOTES

¹ Al Richmond quoted in Will Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie, American Radical* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), p. 16

² Will Kaufman quoted in Bruce Walsh, "Will Kaufman: This Land Is a Long Story," *Metro* (Philadelphia), 18 August 2011. Available at <http://www.metro.us/entertainment/will-kaufman-this-land-is-a-long-story/tmWkhr---13sDcD6OYzld6/>. Accessed 2 April 2015.

³ Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl, "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations of Intimacy at a Distance" (1956), in John Durham Peters and Peter Simonson, eds., *Mass Communication and American Social Thought: Key Texts, 1919-1968* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004): 373-386.

⁴ Joe Klein, *Woody Guthrie: A Life* (New York: Delta, 1980); Ed Cray, *Ramblin' Man: The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004).

⁵ Guthrie appeared as a radio guest numerous times, of course, beginning on WDAG and KPND in the Texas panhandle in 1936 and including appearances later on New York's WNYC. A planned weekly program for the Almanac Singers, of which Guthrie was a member, was scrapped by WCBS before airing in 1942. He had a brief run (December 1944 to February 1945) hosting a 15-minute weekly program on WNEW in New York City, for which the opening show produced his oft-quoted homily about uplifting people's songs ("I hate a song that makes you think you're not any good...").

⁶ See Paul DiMaggio et al., "Social Implications of the Internet," *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 307-336; John A. Bargh and Katelyn Y. A. McKenna, "The Internet and Social Life," *Annual Review of Psychology* 55 (2004): 573-590; Lawrence Grossberg, *Mediamaking: Mass Media in Popular Culture* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006); Martin Spinelli, "Radio Lessons for the Internet," *Postmodern Culture: An Electronic Journal of Interdisciplinary Criticism* 6:2 (1996): <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/pmc.1996.0010>.

⁷ Daniel J. Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

⁸ James Monaco, *How to Read a Film: Movies, Media, and Beyond* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁹ George H. Douglas, *The Early Days of Radio Broadcasting* (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 1987), p. 52.

¹⁰ Douglas, pp. 53, 55.

¹¹ J. Dan Rothwell, *In the Company of Others: An Introduction to Communication* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

- ¹² Allan Bell, "Radio: The Style of News Language," *Journal of Communication* 32:1 (1982): 150-164 (p. 150, emphasis added).
- ¹³ Alasdair Clayre, *The Impact of Broadcasting; or, Mrs. Buckle's Wall Is Singing* (Compton Chamberlayne: Compton Russell, 1973), p. 36.
- ¹⁴ Clayre, p. 36.
- ¹⁵ Charlene Simmons, "Dear Radio Broadcaster: Fan Mail as a Form of Perceived Interactivity," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 53: 3 (2009): 444-459.
- ¹⁶ Douglas, p. 64.
- ¹⁷ Douglas, p. 65.
- ¹⁸ Clayre, p. 78.
- ¹⁹ Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 19.
- ²⁰ Edward Sapir, "Speech as a Personality Trait," *American Journal of Sociology* 32:6 (1927): 892-905.
- ²¹ See William Labov, *The Social Stratification of English in New York City* (Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1966); Labov, *Sociolinguistic Patterns* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972); Carol M. Scotton, "Explaining Linguistic Choices as Identity Negotiations," in Howard Giles et al., eds., *Language: Social and Psychological Perspectives* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980): 359-366; Philip M. Smith, "Sociolinguistics: A Social Psychological Perspective," in R. N. St. Clair and Howard Giles, eds., *The Social and Psychological Contexts of Language* (Hillside: Erlbaum, 1980): 283-298; Nikolas Coupland, "Accommodation at Work: Some Phonological Data and Their Implication," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 46 (1984): 49-70; Coupland, "Language, Situation and the Relational Self: Theorising Dialect Style in Sociolinguistics," in Penelope Eckert and John Rickford, eds., *Style and Sociolinguistic Variation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 185-210.
- ²² Bell, "Radio."
- ²³ Jitendra N. Thakerar et al., "Psychological and Linguistic Parameters of Speech Accommodation Theory," in C. Fraser and K. R. Scherer, eds., *Advances in the Social Psychology of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982): 205-255.
- ²⁴ Nikolas Coupland, "Dialect Stylization in Radio Talk," *Language in Society* 30: 3 (2001): 345-375 (p. 351).
- ²⁵ Allan Bell, "Styling the Other to Define the Self: A Study in New Zealand Identity Making," *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 3:4 (1999): 523-541 (p. 523).
- ²⁶ Allan Bell, "Language Style as Audience Design," *Language in Society* 13:2 (1984): 145-204.
- ²⁷ Bell, "Radio," p. 156.
- ²⁸ Coupland, "Dialect Stylization," p. 345.
- ²⁹ See Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Long Grove: Waveland, 1977); Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).
- ³⁰ Coupland, "Dialect Stylization."
- ³¹ Coupland, "Dialect Stylization," p. 347.
- ³² Coupland, "Dialect Stylization," p. 350.
- ³³ Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920-1934* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), p. 121.
- ³⁴ Douglas, p. 63.
- ³⁵ Douglas, p. 59.
- ³⁶ Douglas, p. 63. Although Smulyan notes that by the '30s radio was tightening its scripts for advertising space, she's referring largely to the big networks. A "new emphasis on advertising meant that programming became more rigid.... Scripts became ever more elaborate and choreographed" to accommodate ad time (p. 119). Smulyan dates this streamlining of entertainment programs to the debut of Eddie Cantor as host of the *Chase and Sanborn Hour* in 1931. The smaller stations like KFVD remained scrappy, anything-goes outlets well into Woody's arrival in 1937.
- ³⁷ Douglas, p.172.
- ³⁸ Smulyan, pp. 119-120.
- ³⁹ Clayre, p. 13.
- ⁴⁰ Douglas, p. 177.
- ⁴¹ Czitrom, p. 85.
- ⁴² Maud Karpeles quoted in Clayre, p. 41.

⁴³ Clayre, p. 18.

⁴⁴ Ronald D. Cohen, "Woody the Red?" in Robert Santelli and Emily Davidson, eds., *Hard Travelin': The Life and Legacy of Woody Guthrie* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 2009): 138-152; Keren Eyal and Alan M. Rubin, "Viewer Aggression and Homily, Identification, and Parasocial Relationships with Television Characters," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 47 (2003): 77-98.

⁴⁵ Horton and Wohl.

⁴⁶ Charles Horton Cooley, *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909).

⁴⁷ Horton and Wohl, p. 374, emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Edward Schiappa et al., "Parasocial Relationships and Television: a Meta-Analysis of the Effects," in Raymond W. Preiss et al., eds., *Mass Media Effects Research: Advances through Meta-Analysis* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2007): 301-314.

⁴⁹ Horton and Wohl, pp. 375, 377.

⁵⁰ Horton and Wohl, pp. 376, 384.

⁵¹ Dave Garroway quoted in Horton and Wohl, p. 376.

⁵² Alan M. Rubin et al., "Loneliness, Para-Social Interaction, and Local Television News Viewing," *Human Communication Research* 12: 2 (1985): 155-180.

⁵³ Frederick Koenig and Gloria Lessan, "Viewers' Relations to Television Personalities," *Psychological Reports* 57: 1 (1985): 263-266.

⁵⁴ Henri Tajfel, "Experiments in a Vacuum," in Joachim Israel and Henri Tajfel, eds., *The Context of Social Psychology: A Critical Assessment* (London: Academic Press, 1972): 19-38; Sonia M. Livingstone and Peter Kenneth Lunt, *Talk on Television: Audience Participation and Public Debate* (London Routledge, 1994).

⁵⁵ Susanna Annese, "Mediated Identity in the Parasocial Interaction of TV," *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research* 4: 4 (2004): 371-388 (p. 385).

⁵⁶ Horton and Wohl, p. 379.

⁵⁷ Bell, "Language Style as Audience Design," p. 192.

⁵⁸ It is indeed ironic that so little of this crucial first mass-media expression survives, given that the Woody Guthrie Archives today are practically bursting at the door jambs with the rest of the singer's stockpiled notebooks, songbooks, lyric sheets, other audio recordings, film and video, photographs, artwork, scribbblings, jottings, and all manner of documents and artefacts that Guthrie consistently and rather relentlessly produced for posterity.

⁵⁹ Woody Guthrie, *Pastures of Plenty*, ed. Dave Marsh and Harold Leventhal (New York: HarperPerennial, 1990), pp. 16-17.

⁶⁰ Guthrie, p. 17.

⁶¹ Klein, pp. 92-93.

⁶² Cray; Peter La Chapelle, *Proud to Be an Okie: Cultural Politics, Country Music, and Migration to Southern California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

⁶³ La Chapelle, pp. 51, 55.

⁶⁴ Anon., "Radio," in *Los Angeles in the 1930s: The WPA Guide to the City of Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011): 98-102 (p. 101). First published 1939.

⁶⁵ David Glickman, "Los Angeles," in *A Continuing Study of Major Radio Markets: Study No. 5* (New York: NBC Television/National Broadcasting Co., 1948): 3-10 (p. 8).

⁶⁶ La Chapelle, pp. 59-60.

⁶⁷ Charles F. McGovern, "Woody Guthrie's American Century," in Santelli and Davidson, eds., *Hard Travelin'*: 111-127 (p. 122).

⁶⁸ Guthrie, p. 42.

⁶⁹ Cray, p. 127.

⁷⁰ Guthrie, p. 27.

⁷¹ Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front* (New York: Verso, 1997), p. 272.

⁷² Guthrie quoted in La Chapelle, p. 68.

⁷³ Guthrie quoted in Craig Werner, "Democratic Visions, Democratic Voices: Woody as Writer," in Santelli and Davidson, eds.: 69-82 (p. 71).

⁷⁴ Guthrie quoted in La Chapelle, p. 45).

⁷⁵ Cray, p. 108.

⁷⁶ Klein, p. 99.

⁷⁷ Anon., "Wrath's Grapes Turn to Wine: Woody Guthrie and Git-tar Give It a Bouquet," *New York Sun*, 10 December, 1940.

Woody Guthrie Annual, 1 (2015): Conner, "Our Unseen Friend"

- ⁷⁸ Guthrie to Mary Jo Edgmon, n.d. (but 1949). Woody Guthrie Archives, Tulsa, Oklahoma: Woody Guthrie Correspondence 1, Box 1, Folder 14.
- ⁷⁹ Cohen, p. 142.
- ⁸⁰ Klein, p. 92.
- ⁸¹ La Chapelle, p. 59.
- ⁸² Klein, pp. 91, 92.
- ⁸³ Klein, p. 99.
- ⁸⁴ Simmons, "Dear Radio Broadcaster."
- ⁸⁵ La Chapelle.
- ⁸⁶ Cray, pp. 112-113.
- ⁸⁷ La Chapelle, p. 60.
- ⁸⁸ La Chapelle, p. 48.
- ⁸⁹ Klein, p. 93.
- ⁹⁰ Cray, p. 109.
- ⁹¹ Klein, p. 100.
- ⁹² Agnes "Sis" Cunningham and Gordon Friesen, *Red Dust and Broadsides: A Joint Autobiography* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), p. 217.
- ⁹³ Cohen, p. 142.
- ⁹⁴ Guthrie, *Pastures of Plenty*, p. 7.
- ⁹⁵ La Chapelle, p. 59.
- ⁹⁶ Guthrie, *Pastures of Plenty*, p. 115.
- ⁹⁷ Bryan K. Garman, *A Race of Singers: Whitman's Working-Class Hero from Guthrie to Springsteen* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) p. 117.
- ⁹⁸ Guthrie, *Pastures of Plenty*, p. 117.