Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction 1

1. The Rhetorical Invention of “Mass Communication” 9
   In which David Sarnoff and the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) mobilize a new term, mass communication, for the public relations battle to legitimate commercial broadcasting in the 1920s and ’30s—that term enters, organizes, and strategically exits academic discourses (1930s–1990s)—the author proposes recycling “mass communication” instead of discarding it, and offers a genealogical taxonomy of its social types—introduction of the historical studies that follow and a concept that informs them.

2. Paul’s Communicative Figure 29
   In which mass communication is figured through Paul of Tarsus, community organizer and radical Jew—the communicative contexts of his youth and early adulthood—transformation from persecutor to messenger for a multicultural, messianic Jewish sect—mobile rhetorical outreach—composition of a letter that rhetorically figures a form of mass communication, organized through the Body of Christ, open across lines of human difference—preservation and subsequent uptakes of that letter, textual foundation for the Christian Mass and resource for competing heterodoxies.

3. Whitman’s Polytheistic Mass 56
   In which Walt Whitman of Brooklyn, city kid, strolling journalist, traveler, heterodox descendant of Paul, absorbs scenes and people around him (1820s–1855)—his invention of an oratorical poetry that chants bodies and souls together in a polytheistic democratic mass (1855–60)—visions of crowds, geographical places, poetry, and individual bodies as media of mass communication for heterogeneous democracies.
4. Cooley’s Transcendentalist Quest  
In which Charles Cooley of Ann Arbor finds his way from reading, rail-
ways, and dreams of oratorical greatness to the idea of “communication” 
(1870s–1890s)—makes it the foundation for social theories of transpor-
tation, society, community, and self (1890s–1920s)—and the object of a 
late-Transcendentalist faith, worked out through a profession-and-univer-
sity-based knowledge system, and periodic retreats from it—Cooley’s 
contemplative awareness of a broad, intercommunicating “Great Life,” 
which channels his moral hopes.

5. Merton’s Skeptical Faith  
In which the border-crossing Meyer Schkolnick of South Philadelphia re-
invents himself as Robert K. Merton of Columbia University and subur-
ban Hastings, New York—development of a skeptical cosmopolitan faith 
in science and sociological inquiry (1920s–1930s)—skeptical and critical 
analyses of war propaganda, celebrity, and those entities now known as 
“the media of mass communication” (1940s)—exploration of possibilities 
for interracial communication (1940s–1950s)—a debate with Marshall 
McLuhan (1966)—general abandonment of mass communication research 
and the left democratic politics that informed it (post-1949).

Afterword: Assembling through a Fair  
In which the author concludes by examining an important species of mass 
communication today, built upon civic ritual and large-scale public assem-
bly: a county fair—communicative elements of the fair and the democratic 
crowd that assembles for it—public work performed through it—revisiting 
the historical figures, faiths, and forms of mass communication featured 
in this book—questions.

Notes  
Selected Bibliography  
Index