Canned Courses:
Lecture Capture, Podcasting and the Transformations
of Academic Labor

MARK HAYWARD

The American University of Paris

In 1942, trumpet player and labor leader James Caesar Petrillo led the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) in the first of two national recording bans during which time its membership was instructed not to participate in studio sessions. Petrillo long had been concerned that the growth of recorded music during the 1930s presented a direct threat to the welfare of professional musicians across the United States. He believed the popularity of "canned music" would mean that fewer musicians would be needed to staff nightclubs and dance halls and that every copy of a recording sold would effectively make live music less appealing to the general public. Petrillo was ultimately shown to be right. And, while the dominance of recorded music could not be stopped, the effect of the 18-month strike (and the shorter strike he organized in 1948) was to win concessions from record companies and radio broadcasters that would remunerate artists for the sale of their recordings (Sanjek 1996; Wald 2009).

The story of Petrillo and the recording bans of the 1940s is an example I use when talking to my Introduction to Media Studies classes about working in the culture industries. I hope historical examples like this one help students to understand the complexity of the relationship between labor and the consumption of cultural commodities, as well as how corporations often play the interests of producers and users against each other to serve their own agendas. It's an important point to make because in my department, most of the students aspire to work in the field of communication after graduation, and many of them are in the process of moving from being primarily consumers of cultural products toward becoming underpaid (if they are paid at all) producers.

In recent years, talking to my students about the labor struggles of musicians in the 1940s has come to resonate more directly with my own activities as a university instructor as the evolution of digital media production and distribution have brought the dilemmas faced by Petrillo into the classroom. By this, I am referring to the fact that one of the ways in which universities and colleges think about "going digital" is to sponsor initiatives to record, archive and distribute educational materials online. It is unlikely that your average iTunes user is avidly awaiting a lecture on quantitative research methods or textual analysis given by a junior professor like me at a small liberal arts college. But thinking about the labor politics of recorded lectures is a reminder of the importance of reflexively applying the lessons about

critical institutional analysis and media literacy that are often seen as essential components of curricula in media and communication studies to the ongoing evolution of academic labor.

Of course, there is a long tradition of recording and archiving lectures and other education material. However, this issue deserves to be revisited with the development and implementation of recording technology and software designed for the university context as well as the creation of online platforms for the rapid, global distribution of media content such as iTunes U and YouTube.edu. Today, faculty are actively encouraged to "capture" (which is to say produce) and "share" (which is to say distribute) such materials online as an extension of their classroom responsibilities and also as part of programs intended to improve the visibility of the university among prospective students and the general public.[1] Along similar lines, guest lecturers and visiting speakers are expected to agree to be recorded during their presentations in order for the speeches to be posted online at a later date.[2]

Both the language of "capture" and the presumption that recording lectures is the norm show the degree to which video and audio recordings of lectures are often treated as works of secondary importance, an effortlessly produced derivative of the teaching and research that constitute the already agreed-upon responsibilities of faculty. Yet the "point-and-shoot" ideology that frames the production of these materials is a smokescreen that obscures the kinds of labor required to produce such materials and hides the skills necessary to transform these technologies into effective tools for disseminating knowledge (let alone effective pedagogical tools). As anybody who has worked in media production knows, producing quality media is never as simple as just hitting the record button. It is an insult to anybody who has developed a level of expertise in media production (or public speaking, for that matter) to assume that such materials are simply the automatic by-product of normal teaching activities.

To make sense of how best to understand and respond to programs to capture and distribute lectures online, it is useful to broaden the context beyond the classroom. At its most fundamental level, the recording, archiving, and distribution of course materials raises questions about how academic labor is being structured by the changing relationship between the classroom and media industries. Epistemologically and pedagogically, the idea that the university provides a stable and separate space from which to study the turbulent transformations in the cultural sphere is an appealing one that draws upon a belief in the institutional strength of the university as a place for the free and open sharing of knowledge. And, while the approach favored by "critical" communications research often positions the classroom as proximate but separate from the industries and practices that are being studied (indeed, this is a definition of "critical engagement"), it is also the case that many communication studies departments have sought to cultivate relationships with the corporate world at the request of both industry and

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1 Not to mention that such practices and technologies also contribute to the extension of surveillance and assessment of faculty. In this regard, one of the most popular packages of lecture software is "Panopto," casually bringing together the panoptic desire of the institution to ensure quality with the desire of faculty to provide a productive learning environment.

2 In both cases, presenters often have little say regarding how these recordings will be used, and usually are treated as the equivalent of what copyright law defines as "work for hire."

students, which is a contributing factor to the rise of pre-professional and vocational training as part of university degrees.

One aspect of these shifts in curriculum has been an increasingly significant investment from universities in information technology as programs struggle to remain "up-to-date." As a result, students, faculty, and educational institutions now are seen as significant consumers of technology, software, and content (with the support of student loans, start-up grants for faculty and financial support from foundations with "technology" mandates). The development of lecture-capture systems, as well as the opening of commercial platforms to educational needs, should be seen as part of this broader trend through which the university and its denizens have been transformed into a more efficiently functioning market for the consumption of information technology and the circulation of digital content. The evolution of the consumption of technology and information services in the university should serve as a reminder that these changes do not only take place at the level of the material discussed in courses, but also in terms of the infrastructure through which knowledge is shared and produced.

For this reason, it is useful to engage with the labor politics that underwrite the introduction of lecture-capture software and the distribution of recorded materials through the technology that supports it and the way that it has been implemented. It is necessary to recognize that these are discussions that all members of the university should participate in, rather than issues that can be delegated to specialists in educational technologies and the management of the university infrastructure. An important part of enabling this discussion is considering carefully the two most common responses to the widespread recording, archiving, and distribution of lectures and other course material.

At one end of the spectrum is a position that echoes the one taken by James Petrillo in the 1940s. It argues that there is a direct trade-off between labor and the circulation of recordings. The logic behind such a position is not difficult to understand: Why hire an individual to perform a task when they could be replaced by a recording? Over time, institutions would be able to supplement faculty strengths by using archived material to fill in the areas where an institution lacks expertise. Some of this material might come from outside of a particular university, but much of it might accumulate over time from faculty members who have left or retired. As was the case with recordings in the 1930s, this might not take the form of a sudden shift toward "canned courses," but rather a gradual shift in which the accumulation and circulation of these materials will have a long-term effect on decisions to hire new faculty. Such an understanding of the situation would suggest a response in line with Petrillo's in the 1940s: a ban on the use of such software. Refusing to use such technology, however, positions faculty as protectors of a conservative and ultimately elitist understanding of the university and its educational and research missions.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who argue that universities have become too closed off from the public, serving only a small number of groups who sponsor research and the relatively small number of individuals who can afford the tuition necessary to attend the institutions. Given that scholars are assumed to lead relatively privileged lives with comfortable working situations, recording and distributing lectures and other education material via the Internet is a way of giving back the knowledge to serve the common good. (At least in the case of those that work for public institutions, the people have

already paid for it through their taxes.) The democratic impulse that drives many to become teachers at universities and colleges means they also tend to be in favor of allowing more people access to knowledge. There is much in this position that is laudable, reminding us that there are public responsibilities that are a part of intellectual life. At the same time, the idea that the "free" distribution of knowledge for public consumption is an unalloyed good is problematic. At a time when many working at institutions of higher education are struggling to earn adequate salaries (if not facing salary cuts), to talk about "free" knowledge being a surplus good produced by university staff is to presume the kinds of privilege and resources enjoyed only by those who work at the most elite schools as being evenly shared across all institutions.

Since they are based on inflexible conceptual frameworks (recording equals job loss or knowledge must be free, respectively), neither of these positions offer much space for a constructive and creative engagement with technology, nor for understanding how it is changing the way labor at the university is carried out. Rather than limit the definition of what academic labor is to what it has traditionally been conceived of, or effacing the amount of labor that is necessary to make these forms of mediated education work well, the recording and distribution of lectures must be approached with an eye to how faculty and staff can work with administrators to produce the best possible outcome in terms of how this technology might be used to serve students and the public, as well as the institution. This would involve taking the recording of lectures and their distribution more seriously as a form of education proximate to, but not the same as, the classroom lecture. It also would require recognizing that, as a new platform for pedagogy, it demands recognition and remuneration for faculty and staff involved in producing these materials. Along these lines, there are three areas that should be marked out as spaces in which to engage in discussions:

1)   *A Strategic Deployment of Copyright:* One of the most important issues to challenge is the presumption that recording and circulating lectures should occur with little or no input from faculty. Such a position presumes that the introduction of programs for recording lectures and seminars is a natural and unproblematic extension of the current responsibilities of teaching staff. It is, therefore, interesting to note that many of the guides for establishing projects for recording lectures and seminars suggest that it is unclear whether faculty members retain the ownership for the materials they produce (even though legal precedent in the United States and other jurisdictions would place ownership in the hands of the institution that employs them as "work for hire"). But in the same way that Petrillo argues that recordings were not merely the passive capturing of live performances, the terms of what is expected under the terms of employment is unclear about whether it extends to the production of these kinds of recordings. As this issue has not been settled, this is a moment for discussion between faculty, administrators and technologists regarding how these recording fit into expectations for faculty and staff labor. As was noted above, such a discussion would have to make clear from the outset that the production of this material is not "simple," "easy," or "autonomous." When making the decision about whether or not to record and distribute lectures, some questions that should be asked (both collectively and individually) are: How are the costs associated with the production of these materials being paid? Would this entail a recognition that developing online course materials is the equivalent of

classroom teaching time? How should this be worked into contracts and labor agreements? These are questions that should be worked out among faculty and their institutions rather than through courts which, at least in the United States, have traditionally sided against the rights of faculty.

2)   *Publication and Assessment:* As the production of media becomes more diffuse across the university, there are non-monetary issues that also need to be addressed. Specifically, where do these materials sit with regard to systems for recognizing the publication of research and contributions to public dialogue? The elision of these recordings with classroom teaching effectively forecloses the possibility of their recognition as anything other than "normal" teaching (in much the same way that this argument forecloses payment for the production of these materials). However, if the production of these materials is taken seriously as both a form of labor and a new form of pedagogy, then they must be seen as separate from teaching and closer to publication (leaving aside questions of peer-review for the moment). In this regard, the field of communication studies has much to contribute to discussions about how these kinds of productions should be recognized in relation to professional development. Communication studies has long positioned itself as a hybrid field of research and inquiry. While disciplines like economics and sociology have sought to free themselves of more applied concerns, communication studies has remained a more heterogeneous space. It spans the pre-professional and the theoretical; it splits researchers more at home in the humanities with those in the social sciences; finally, it is not uncommon for artists and media producers (often lumped together under the not entirely useful term "practitioners") to sit on faculties with a variety of different kinds of academic researchers. As any faculty member will attest, these divides have been the source of endless meetings regarding curriculum design and how to assess the achievements of faculty for promotion. In some cases, the different perspectives have led to interesting and productive discussions about what it means to teach communications; in just as many other cases, it has led to years of discontent and schismatic disagreements. The recording, archiving and circulation of course materials online across the university means that these debates no longer are limited to those fields that have been divided between critique and production such as communication studies. Therefore, drawing on these debates in communication studies, it is important that we build upon the way in which the seemingly clear divide between the different kinds of "work" carried out by faculty has been addressed historically. Recorded lectures should not be considered as radically different from any other kind of media production and must be considered as a kind of scholarly production that requires institutional and professional recognition.

3)   *Building a Long-term Strategy for Educational Media:* It is important for faculty and university administrators to address the question of whether or not private for-profit companies should be allowed to become the primary distribution hubs for these materials, even if they do so for no charge. Often, this is viewed as a necessary off-loading of facilities at a time when most universities are unable to make major

investments in their informational infrastructure. However, the long-term effects are considerable. Apple and Google are both publicly traded companies, meaning they are subject to the will of their shareholders as much as the likes and dislikes of the audience. Thus, while the justification for allowing services such as iTunes U and YouTube.edu is that they are non-profit, it reminds us that our favorite international media conglomerates aren't so bad after all. But what does it mean for academic autonomy that these companies are such important tools for the distribution of knowledge? Also, although there is no charge for the service, it should be recognized that universities are contributing to the breadth of material of these platforms, and therefore their value to consumers and stockholders. Perhaps this is a context in which the professional Along these lines, it is useful to consider the recent discussions in the wake of the Google books decision that effectively blocked Google's plans to create a host a digital library of a massive amount of books published to date. In particular, perhaps there is guidance to be taken from Robert Darnton's suggestion that the decision be used as the impetus for forming a more comprehensive policy for a digital public library that would be publicly owned as well as open to the public.

I would like to conclude by returning to the story of the AFM and the strikes lead by Petrillo in the 1940s. It's worth making clear that the decision to strike was not taken lightly and that, over the years, Petrillo modified his feelings about the new technology recognizing that it also presented new forms of creativity that should be supported. However, the strike action did make clear to the music industry and the average music fan that recording did have human costs. While a strike on the use of these supplementary technologies would probably not be the most effective action for raising awareness about the relationship between academic labor and these new tools for teaching, it is important that the issue be raised, not merely as a question of keeping up with the times, but as one that involves ensuring that faculty are not asked to do more with less.

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Mark Hayward is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Global Communications at the American University of Paris. He has published essays in Cultural Studies, Modern Italy *and* M/C: A Journal of Media and Culture.

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