CHAPTER 21

Podcasting
Pedagogy, and the Inheritance of Clandestine Broadcasts

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The most popular podcasts to date are shows like *Serial*, an updated approach to the true crime genre that introduced a new generation to investigative journalism, or *WTF*, hosted by comedian Marc Maron with guests from Robin Williams to Barack Obama. These shows are downloaded and streamed by millions of listeners, accompanying people washing the dishes, driving, riding public transit, cleaning their apartments, and doing other menial tasks. Shows like *S-Town* introduce audiences to the weird world of rural white culture, *Code Switch* features journalists of color exploring the news and their lives, and *One Bad Mother* invites listeners to open up about the challenges of parenting. Beyond more polished and radio-sponsored programs, podcasting has also invited average folks and non-professionals to explore their thoughts and lives with relatively low startup costs, which are often further covered by listener donations. In the car or on the commute, cleaning the bathroom or closing up shop, podcasts are providing people with unprecedented access to a personalized roster of documentaries, journalism, public lectures, political rants, and more—in short, it is a relatively convenient and free education made up of algorithms, tastes, and niche interests.

But podcasting is not all about content. On the contrary, podcasting is a new medium, creating, delivering, and shaping content and suggesting new possibilities for audiences and broadcasters alike. Radical media theorists have spent a lot of time thinking about the pedagogical dimension of technology, especially radio and film in the twentieth-century. Podcasting inherits both the potentials for domination and for liberation in these previous forms of media, and it also contains new potentials by virtue of being a new medium. Podcasting is like radio, for example, but podcasts are importantly not radio programs. To uncover what exactly is (or could be) radical and pedagogical about podcasting, a look at other forms of media and how theorists have thought about them helps to articulate continuities and discontinuities.

To investigate what podcasts inherit from older media and what they announce on their own, this essay will make a media archaeological intervention into the use of audio, radio, and clandestine broadcasts that cut against
the grain of commercial radio and state media. Media archaeology researches the history and media ecologies at the intersection of art, technology, and culture. By tracing the actual use of audio media through the sedimented history of liberation movements, this essay will make some subterranean and asynchronous connections between the media praxis of those movements and the contemporary podcasting scene. From there, we try to articulate some of the specific qualities and opportunities afforded by podcasting as a medium. Articulating a leftist media theory of podcasting, however, is not wholly speculative; on the contrary, there are a number of examples of leftist podcasts that already exist, which we briefly explore. With the history, theory, and examples in mind, we suggest that there is a dialectical relationship between “organic intellectuals” and podcasting niches, making podcasts an important front for pedagogical praxis today. The point of these connections is not to inflate the egos of leftist podcaster, but rather to give guiding pedagogical points concerning media making—or more simply to provide a Marxist theory of media praxis. If, as Derek R. Ford argues, pedagogy should name an “educational relation” rather than a precise methodology (Ford, 2016, p. 5), an understanding of the relations that inform and are created through podcasts, in the past and present, is essential for evaluating their pedagogical possibilities.

**An Archaeology of Free Radio**

“So far,” writes media critic Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1982), “there is no Marxist theory of the media” (1982, p. 47). Enzensberger makes a strong claim, but he is not entirely wrong. There is no full and coherent Marxist theory of the media, although there are Marxist theorists and media practices that function as guiding lights. In summarizing these media practices, it is possible to transmutte these practices into prominent fragments of theory. However, the connections between these fragments require digging out a few historical trenches—a false start in Europe, and then from the Caribbean to Algeria and back to Europe, the media practices of militants in liberation movements across the world offer helpful advice for leftist media makers. Through a few media archaeological excavations and connections, this section will show some of the often overlooked utopian and explicitly politically radical connections between free radio and leftist politics.

Friedrich Kittler’s (2014) analyses of the histories of media often lead to a common conclusion: technology rarely springs from the desires of everyday life, but instead from the commercial appropriation of military technology. (Kittler, 2014, pp. 152–165) Kittler, of course, is not alone in this observation.
Paul Virilio often makes a similar point and has dedicated significant space to the military beginnings of media like cinema (Virilio, 1989). Many of the same judgements that Kittler makes for television and Virilio makes for cinema can also be said of radio. In Michael Goddard’s *Guerilla Networks* (2018), he explains that radio was explicitly developed for military purposes and that “...only after World War I did it acquire entertainment uses, initially as a way to sell off radio sets no longer required by the military” (Goddard, 2018, p. 175). It is in this period that radio took on it is early DIY and amateur aesthetics.

With radio sets in the hands of amateurs and enthusiasts, the wireless transmission of the human voice, commercial interests, and governmental regulations started to deploy their social power as well. Particularly, Goddard (2018) notes the early regulatory caution of the English government’s limited broadcast licenses—a sentiment that would later lead to the establishment of the British Broadcasting Corporation (p. 177). Goddard rightly characterizes this period as a transition from bricolage to state control (p. 177). Despite the regulation of the airwaves, this is a notable moment that cements some of the future utopian sentiments regarding radio.

For example, shortly after this period of transition, Bertolt Brecht, the Marxist playwright and media theorist, crafted his masterful essay “The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication” (1993). Brecht diagnosed the political problem of radio as one of distribution. At the level of the medium, Brecht thought the radio’s problem was that it was “...one-sided when it should be two” (Brecht, 1993, pp. 15–17). In light of this critique, Brecht imagined that the radio could be put to better use if the one-sidedness was reformed into an open communication medium (1993). Brecht’s utopian aspirations for a more democratic radio map fit perfectly into what Enzensberger would come to write later in his own attempt to craft a Marxist media theory.

However, while Brecht’s imaginary radio fermented in the political, activist, and artistic milieu, across the Atlantic there was an ongoing clandestine media war, where armed revolutionary movements posited other possibilities about the democratic uses for radio. Clandestine stations, operating illegally and with an explicit political agenda, covered the globe like a fine mesh. For example, in 1949, the Clandestine station Voice of the Revolution broadcasted across the Dominican Republic and urged sympathetic listeners to overthrow the then president, Rafael Trujillo (Soley & Nichols, 1987, p. 10). *The Voice of the Revolution*, a broadcast urging revolutionary activity, still may be one-sided, but with a notably different logic of media—it is not one-to-one communication, but from the margins-to-the-margins as well as the masses. Collectives broadcasting against a dictator, like Trujillo, are democratic in an important way despite the limits of the medium.
However, not all clandestine stations can be counted among democratic experiments with radio. Coming from the margins, clandestine stations have often been misleading, false, and reactionary. Following Lawrence Soley and John Nichol’s (1987) taxonomy of clandestine radio (borrowed from the CIA), we can identify gray and black clandestine stations (Soley & Nicols, p. 10). Gray stations are radio operations that are thought to actually be operated by dissenting political movements, whereas black stations simply pose as being authentic clandestine operations—but are run as a psyop. There are numerous incidents throughout the short history of mass media where a station purportedly speaks “for the people,” but is actually for example a covert operation for the CIA. Soley and Nichol go to some length to list the most applicable examples in Iran, Vietnam, the Soviet Union, China, and so on (Soley & Nichols, 1987, p. 13).

Despite the efforts of the CIA and others, some revolutionaries caught on to this strategy and developed their own deployments of tactical media. Most notably, Ernesto “Che” Guevara developed a comprehensive guerilla theory of propaganda that emphasized the distribution of media in civilian zones, but also from guerilla zones (Soley & Nichols, 1987, p. 13). Guevara put his media theory into practice politically by establishing Radio Rebelde. Soley and Nichol (1987, p. 14) summarize the importance of media in guerilla zones saying,

> It is also from the guerrilla zone that a “free radio station” should broadcast. Guevara saw guerrilla radio as a “factor of extraordinary importance”...Guerrilla-operated stations are important because they can reach the whole nation, acting as a unifying force; because radio, unlike newspaper, does not require its users to be literate; because radio can present more immediate news than print and because it is best at communicating and stirring emotion.

Guevara’s theory and practice of media and propaganda is another democratic experiment with radio in a similar way as The Voice of the Revolution from the Dominican Republic: it was a counter-hegemonic force that helped coordinate urban and rural civilians in direct action against a dictatorial regime. Régis Debray, a French journalist and media theorist embedded within the Cuban revolutionary movement, emphasized this importance. “It is by means of radio that the guerrillas force the doors of truth and open them wide to the entire populace,” he writes, “especially if they follow the ethical precepts that guided Radio Rebelde—never broadcast inaccurate news, never conceal a defeat, never exaggerate a victory. In short, radio produces a qualitative change in the guerrilla movement” (Debray, 2017, p. 108).
Radio also played a significant role in both Algerian colonialism and in Algerian revolution. In his essay *This is the Voice of Algeria*, Frantz Fanon explains that prior to the revolution, radio connected the French colonizers occupying Algeria to an imaginary France. Radio Algeria, the established French station, linked even remote colonizers to the wider world of the French empire and colonial metropolises, a French culture and “civilization” in a “backward” land. Radio, says Fanon, “gives [the European] the feeling that colonial society is a living and palpitating reality. with its festivities, its traditions eager to establish themselves, its progress, its taking root” (Fanon, 1965, p. 71). It creates an imaginary community, where colonizers can feel “civilized” in occupied territory. By contrast, Fanon says, most Algerians did not own a radio, including those who could afford one. French control was maintained in part through the radio’s ability to distribute cultural hegemony and sovereignty through the airwaves.

But, things changed as the revolutionary opposition gained steam. As in Cuba, the revolutionary forces needed a way to expand news about their struggle, and Algerians needed a way to cut through French propaganda. “The acquisition of a radio set in Algeria, in 1955, represented the sole means of obtaining news of the Revolution from non-French sources,” Fanon writes (1965, p. 82). At the end of 1956, tracts were distributed announcing the creation of *Voice of Free Algeria*, including broadcasting schedules and wavelengths. “In a few weeks several thousand sets were sold to Algerians, who bought them as individuals, families, groups of houses, *douars*, *mechtas*,” Fanon writes (1965, p. 83). Without a fully electrified infrastructure, battery-operated receivers were in high demand, distributing a counter-hegemony to remote parts of Algeria whose airwaves previously gave comfort to occupying French colonists.

In making of the radio a primary means of resisting the increasingly overwhelming psychological and military pressures of the occupant, Algerian society made an autonomous decision to embrace the new technique and thus tune itself in on the new signaling systems brought into being by the Revolution...

Fanon explains (1965, p. 84), that French authorities ignored the phenomenon to their detriment until it was too late, when they began prohibiting the purchase of battery receivers and jamming resistance radio stations. Here, too, the radio created a unified community that drew together popular support for the struggle against French rule.¹

These struggles, among others, are examples of the ways audio media influenced the activation of the masses toward a revolutionary subjectivity. Goddard remarks (2018, p. 57) that
Guerrilla struggle is therefore inseparable from processes of mass subjectivation, both the guerrillas and the larger population must share the sense that they are able to both perceive new opportunities and to act effectively in a radical political process.

There are a number of ways that these guerrilla movements have practiced making strong connections between the armed movements and the masses, not least through free radio. Goddard relates many examples from Guevara’s campaign in the Sierra as well as Mao’s writing on guerrilla warfare. What is clear throughout both of these accounts is that popular resistance can win against a professional army, and that the countryside is where guerrilla movements ought to operate, recruit, and fight (Goddard, 2018, p. 59). However, both of these goals hinged on the instrumentalization of free radio to disseminate the messages of the guerrillas to the masses—not to just gather human resources from the countryside—but to form popular support from peasants through publishing media to tell the story of the struggle.

While Guevara and Mao emphasize the importance of the peasants in the country, these ideas did not stay in the countryside. Debray synthesized an account of the Cuban revolution into a theory of guerilla war in his book *Revolution in the Revolution?*, an important piece of this story, because it is through this work that Guevara’s theory of guerrilla warfare makes it to the cities of Europe. Goddard notes that many of these guerilla tactics resurface in political struggles in the US and Europe in 1970s revolutionary groups such as The Red Brigades, The Red Army Faction, The Weather Underground, The Black Panther Party, and *Radio Alice* (Goddard, 2018, p. 19). Each of these groups add something to the development of a revolutionary media practice, but the most relevant here is Italy’s *Radio Alice* within the student uprisings and strikes of the 1970s.

Absorbing the Guerrilla media tactics of past struggles and combining them with Félix Guattari’s media theory, *Radio Alice* practiced a media politics that demonstrated an avant garde of what was politically possible with radio. Taking its name from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, *Radio Alice* deployed Deleuzeo-Guattarian philosophical insight alongside political theatre and artistic practice to urge on the “molecular” revolutionary energies of 1977 Bologna. *Radio Alice* practiced what Guattari called “the collective arrangements of enunciation that absorb or ‘traverse’ specialities,” which means anyone can speak (Guattari, 1996, p. 75). Guattari saw that possibility as something dangerous to cultural order, explaining (p. 76),

…it puts in doubt a certain conception of the delegate, the representative, the authorized spokesman, the leader, the journalist…it is as if, in
some immense, permanent meeting place—given the size of the potential audience—anyone, even the most hesitant, those with the weakest voices, suddenly have the possibility of expressing themselves whenever they wanted. In these conditions, one can expect certain truths to find a new matter of expression.

On *Radio Alice*, one might hear complaints about the communists running the station, commentaries from queer activists, music, a telephoned-in report from the front lines of a clash with police, or fabrications of truth meant to provoke action. *Radio Alice* was a postmodern, ironic deployment of guerrilla radio that sought to decenter capitalism with reports from the margins.

The history of the political impact of radio certainly does not end there. This account could surge forward and lay out these guerilla media theories past the 70s and into the current period. Forgoing a more complete history, it is nevertheless clear that there is a non-linear history unfolding here. Yes, Brecht and other European theorists recognized a revolutionary potential in media, but the fragments of the Marxist media theory from the struggles in Cuba and Algeria demonstrate more clearly the democratic practice of mass media that would inspire a radical media praxis in Italy.

It would be just as easy to give a media history of the radio that exemplified its reactionary elements. However, the history unpacked here claims some of this space for liberatory ends. Radio, when put into the hands of those interested in liberation, can work toward the dismantling of oppressive regimes. New narratives, stories, and truths let loose across populations overturn the old narratives holding the status quo in place. The histories of radio and media present a non-linear and alternative history of mass media that has a lot to tell us today. Epistemologically, we see that the best media theorists are not the Frankfurt school theorists, or those philosophers that could still stomach politics after 1968, but instead are the revolutionaries in Cuba, Algeria, and Italy.

### Opportunities for Podcasting

To be on a commercial radio station requires one to have a license, technical training, a radio voice (whatever that is), and the capital to fund the whole endeavor. As far as we are concerned, specialists can keep commercial radio—the performance of one more morning-drive shock jock with a fart noise soundboard will not change the world. World changing endeavors are DIY projects that ought to be left up to revolutionaries. Revolutionaries usually lack the expertise that the professionals have, but their love for the revolutionary
project drives them on. Revisiting Guattari’s ideas from the last section, he says that “the way opened up by the free radio phenomenon seems to go against the whole spirit of specialization” (Guattari, 1996, p. 75). In this section, we’ll make the argument that podcasts inherit many of the same features that made radio such an integral part of twentieth-century revolutionary movements. They can cut through cultural hegemony, are largely accessible for free as long as one has a device to listen, and are open to amateurs and enthusiasts with relatively low requirements for specialized knowledge.

Though there are (to our knowledge) no guerrilla movements making podcasts from jungles or war zones, there are many revolutionary parties, movements, and governments using this new medium to cut through other political narratives. In the United States, the Party for Socialism and Liberation hosts Liberation Radio, which its website says is intended “to bring people together to fight for change and build the movement for socialism in the United States” (“About Liberation Radio,” n.d.). Many local Democratic Socialists of America chapters have podcasts that serve to amplify platforms and local messaging. Several anarchist groups and leftist coalitions also have podcasts, hosting everything from reporting on protests to interviewing authors. While not broadcasting from an embedded guerrilla movement, these efforts aim to connect a disparate left, creating a new revolutionary community, and to distribute information and educational materials that are not part of the corporate media landscape.

Some socialist states also host or fund podcasts, like TeleSUR, a media platform funded by a coalition of states in Latin America. The Communist Party of Cuba’s official newspaper, Granma, puts stories together for podcast distribution and online listening. Though Granma’s podcasts are hardly the stuff of Guevara’s Radio Rebelde, Fidel Castro was an avid user of the internet and saw its revolutionary potential. In a speech in 1998, Castro observed that “a computer connected to Internet is now a possibility to make a message, a thought, reach millions of people in the world,” adding “if the ideas are just and they’re solid, there will always be the possibility, even for the most modest economists or scientists, to transmit their message, that message that has to be the fruit of the intelligence of so many. If we want to win over people’s opinion, this is indispensable” (Castro, 1998). Two decades later, the development of podcasts provides new opportunities and challenges for that transmission.

Podcasts share several of radio’s advantages that help establish their own narratives. They have distributed authorship, with relatively low thresholds for creation. There is no ultimately centralized control of podcasts (so far), and though listeners are unable to tune into a podcast through airwaves they are able to listen to many podcasts live with an internet connection. As audio media, both podcasts and radio are not dependent on the literacy of their
audiences, which is especially important for distributing ideas and organizing in communities with low literacy rates. They also have the capacity to build a coherent group out of a fragmented one, which media theorists like Marshall McLuhan argue is a special skill of audial media (McLuhan, 1964, pp. 259–268).

In terms of distribution, podcasts are subject to far less creative control than corporate media networks, but are also in some ways more limited than guerrilla radio efforts. Podcasts are dependent on individuals seeking out and deliberately downloading or subscribing to specific shows, making visibility across multiple platforms an important strategy for building an audience. Radio, by contrast, needs only a strong enough signal, which is perhaps also why radio is subject to more legal controls than podcasting (operating a pirate radio station in the United States without the correct registration from the FCC is illegal, for example). Though anyone who can pay for hosting space on the internet can theoretically distribute a podcast without much oversight, building an audience depends on using privately owned platforms like iTunes, Google Play, Stitcher, or SoundCloud. Technically, these are gatekeepers of podcasting content and have their own terms of service, though they have been generally laissez-faire about what podcasts are permissible, usually removing podcasts for using copyrighted material rather than for their content.

However, the differences between the two media are immensely important. Podcasts rely on the infrastructure of the internet and devices like computers or smartphones, and are therefore less geographically free than, say, battery-operated radios. Podcasts are also more permanent or asynchronous, able to be downloaded and deleted over and over, not bound to a fleeting broadcast schedule. By extension, the ways podcasts and radio negotiate communality differ. Podcasts build a group out of subscribers who listen at their convenience, while radio builds a group of listeners who are all listening at the same time, whether gathered around the same device or listening alone.

Phenomenologically, too, the way one listens to a podcast is different from the way one listens to the radio. Fanon reports that Algerians listening to the revolutionary station The Voice of Algeria listened to the clandestine stations during the revolution less for the information and more to “...to be at one with the nation in its struggle” (1965, p. 86). While one certainly feels interpolated when listening to a podcast, the quality of this experience is exceedingly more individuated. Rather than listening to the radio communally through speakers, like the situation in Algeria, podcasts are usually consumed individually and intimately through headphones. Phenomenologically speaking, this isolates the individual as singular and cut off from the community of listeners (although there are instances of people hosting “listening parties” online, commenting live on podcast episodes as they all listen together). While that
individuality is certainly something to think through, there’s also a sense in which this individuality is incredibly intimate: the gesture of listening through headphones is akin to hearing the whisper of another. Voices pushed directly into one’s ear through earbuds create a unique headspace, transporting listeners to different times and places, as though they are sitting in the same room as a familiar friend or activist. Moreover, podcasts build communities through fandoms that manifest in other spaces, like Facebook groups, forums, Twitter conversations, live show tours, and more, meaning podcast communities strangely aggregate and collapse, negotiating individuality and communality as an incredibly porous boundary. The intimacy created by individual listening can make these spaces feel warm and familiar despite participants seeing each other in “real life” for the first time.

Though we might want to talk about the challenges of fandom culture and make important distinctions between fan bases and movements, podcasting provides unique advantages for revolutionary movements, including contemporary guerrilla groups. Apart from infrastructure, there is nothing stopping, say, the National Democratic Front of the Philippines from setting up a portable podcast studio in the jungle and communicating to a global audience in a way that would not have been available before the internet. The NDFP is a good example, since they already translate much of their material into English and distribute it in a somewhat blog-like format; they also manage an official twitter account (@NDFPInfoOffice).

The accessibility of podcasts offers critical and pedagogical tools that allow for the distribution of ideas and reporting outside the confines of capital and imperialist media, not to mention formal academia. People are already curating their own education outside the academy by listening to podcasts that offer a backdoor into specialized disciplines, often produced by academics themselves. Some of those academics are attached to traditional institutions, while others hold graduate degrees in a certain subject despite working in an unrelated field (symptomatic of the ongoing job scarcity for many PhD graduates). With so much information freely available, listeners are able to create highly personalized educations by selecting from a cafeteria of curricula. Podcasts are therefore a kind of para-academic force, circumventing the barriers of corporate platforms and peer review alike, for better and worse.

Podcasting as Educational Relation

If pedagogy names an educational relation, a radical understanding of podcasts entails neither writing off podcasts as frivolous nor ceding the medium
to centrist or right-wing uses. On the contrary, those committed to the liberation of all people should see podcasts as one more site of struggle. In his classic text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2016), Paulo Freire articulates a dialectical approach to liberating education premised on a dialogue between the oppressed and the forces of revolution. For Freire, education is a process done *with* the oppressed, informing and informed by them, encouraging a collective effort to name the world differently than the ideology of the oppressors. Podcasts provide a unique opportunity to realize this task, allowing people to speak without the usual gatekeeping and also instructing people without the trappings of increasingly neoliberal trends in higher education. Leftist podcasts educate their listeners while also interacting with them, disseminating information and keeping an ear to what is being implicitly broadcasted by movements themselves. This is not to suggest that podcasting is somehow the future of education, or that it is a privileged medium that will supplant all the others in a liberating project, but to say the medium affords unique opportunities for an educational relation that is explicitly directed toward the end of liberation.

Part of this educational relation depends on intentional operators intervening in their political situation using podcasts as a medium. Though one might dismiss many leftist podcasts as amateur productions, these interventions are made by individuals who aim to change their situation by understanding it more fully and propagating that understanding. Even more, this amateur ethic has predominantly been the norm in leftist media practices; podcasting is a natural extension of this impulse. Due to their low participatory ceiling, podcasts from the left can make significant progress toward unifying a fragmented community, and also reminding others that such a community is present, even if one does not know where it might be found. Following Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* (1971), we might call those who host and produce podcasts “organic intellectuals” that enunciate the existence of marginal groups.

Explaining the role and mechanism of the organic intellectual within a marginal discursive space further, Gramsci writes (p. 10),

> One of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and conquer ‘ideologically’ the traditional intellectuals, but their assimilation and conquest is made quicker and more efficacious the more the group in question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its own organic intellectuals.

While all people can be intellectuals in the sense that they use their intellect, not all people fulfill the social function of an intellectual. Intellectuals emerge
from all social classes—the function of the intellectual is to exercise their power throughout a social strata toward cementing the political hegemony of the social class. Gramsci goes on to say that organic intellectuals are the “deputies” of a hegemonic order in that they are not linked to an intellectual tradition (the church, the academy, etc.) but are specifically of and aware of the function of their social strata. Because their intellectual character comes from their material conditions, organic intellectuals from dispossessed and marginal classes are more in line with the interests of their class than bourgeois commentators.

More concretely, capitalism gives us organic intellectuals like Elon Musk and Peter Thiel—individuals trained to reproduce capitalism to the detriment of the classes they interact with. Organic intellectuals within classes that work toward a counter hegemony, on the other hand, can most adequately express the actual interests of their class because their intellect was formed within the material conditions of that class; a proletarian organic intellectual can actually articulate the interests of their social class due to their direct experience with the contradictions of capitalism.

The material and cultural conditions of capitalism, though, are different for a person formed in a digital media ecology than for a person formed in Gramsci’s 20th-century Italy. It is not that podcasting has fundamentally changed the organic intellectual, who still emerges from a particular social class. Rather, the technological trends, cultural practices, and atomization of labor have made podcasting an efficient means to communicate, and also one that might appeal naturally to those who grew up with computers, the internet, earbuds, and iPods. Digital media certainly changes how organic intellectuals communicate, in the ways that we have explored in the previous section, but the class position and interests of the organic intellectual remain decisive factors.

Whether we like it or not, podcasting as pedagogy has become a cultural force. Attending to the class interests present in podcasting as a result reveals certain fault lines in society, where we might consider the ways in which podcast hosts function as organic intellectuals themselves, wittingly or unwittingly, speaking for the interests of their class. Like other digital forms of media, the curated and personalized delivery of podcasts is both a boon and a burden to radical pedagogy, which is to say there is nothing inherently revolutionary about podcasts, just like there is nothing inherently revolutionary about the organic intellectual as a category. Listeners flocked in droves to the launch of Pod Save America, a commentary show that debuted in January 2017 hosted by three former Obama staffers. Freed from the stuffy confines of edited columns and interview segments on Fox or CNN, the hosts put a fresh face on boring liberalism. They swear, drink beer, and sound more like a sports talk show than
Anderson Cooper or Shepard Smith. The hosts have appeared on late night television, toured internationally, and hosted an HBO show covering the 2018 midterm elections in the US, providing a mouthpiece for Obama-era liberalism in the midst of the Trump administration. Due to the individualizing nature of podcast listening, Pod Save America becomes one more part of building a personal brand, unmitigated by classrooms or editors, giving the illusion that by seeking out a program of insiders who are now on the outside that one is a well-informed and critical political agent. The hosts of Pod Save America operate as organic intellectuals for the bourgeois electorate, assuring Americans after the 2016 election that the liberal order still has something to say.

Several other political shows are produced by National Public Radio, traditional corporate media outlets, and newspapers. Meanwhile, a number of more leftist podcasts have emerged. Perhaps the most noteworthy is the vaguely left-leaning comedy podcast Chapo Trap House, started in March 2016. Funded by listeners through the crowdfunding website Patreon, the show pulled in nearly $100,000 a month as of May, 2018, and remains Patreon’s highest grossing earner (“Top Patreon Creators,” n.d.). Hosts of the show are associated in part with the Democratic Socialists of America, and they have cultivated a significant fanbase.

More interesting, though, are podcasts like Revolutionary Left Radio, hosted by Brett O’Shea and affiliated with the Nebraska Left Coalition. The show explores history, current events, and ideas by inviting leftist guests from varying tendencies. Informed by a commitment to draw leftists together despite important differences, RLR exposes listeners to a wide swath of traditions, individuals, parties, authors, movements, etc. Guests have included Italian Marxist Silvia Federici, former Party for Socialism and Liberation presidential candidate Gloria La Riva, and communist theorist Jodi Dean. The show generally takes an intentionally educational line of questioning and fosters an active online community, drawing listeners into conversations and promoting other leftist podcasts and resources, functioning as a para-academic space for learning, not quite a classroom or seminar. It is a shared virtual community that remains at once open to disagreements among participants but decidedly within a leftist horizon.

RLR is not a singular example. It’s Going Down, an anarchist news and media network, hosts a weekly podcast interviewing activists and theorists and providing commentary on current events. Black Agenda Report, another leftist news network, also produces a podcast. Season of the Bitch is a socialist podcast hosted by women, and Delete Your Account explores leftist politics through interviews and discussions with popular journalists. Within the sphere of leftist podcasts, there are increasingly more niche shows as well. We, the authors,
host a podcast called *The Magnificast*, exploring the intersections of Christianity and leftist politics; another show, *Friendly Anarchism*, has a similar audience. Many of these podcasts record episodes together occasionally and promote one another, and some are linked loosely through networks that draw together a vast constellation of specialized but radical interests.

In our contemporary situation, these organic intellectuals—the hosts of the aforementioned podcasts—understand how meaning circulates in our political economy and use the advantage of new media platforms to struggle toward the dominance of leftist ideologies. Brett O’Shea of the *Revolutionary Left Radio* podcast certainly exhibits the characteristics of Gramsci’s organic intellectual in so far as he emerges from a working-class background, enunciates a collective leftist identity, disseminates leftist ideas from margins to masses, and carries these things out indiscriminate of sectarian leftist tendencies, which all speak to his commitment to the pedagogical aspect of the medium. Further, an entire community consisting of thousands of listeners have emerged because of O’Shea’s online platform. This community has given rise to vital dialogue, debate, and disagreement while still maintaining a sense of friendship and good faith. Importantly, the relationship between organic intellectuals and podcasting is dialectical. Organic intellectuals can easily take advantage of podcasting as a medium, while those listening to podcasts might emerge as organic intellectuals themselves. For example, after an informal networking of some of the leftist podcasts listed above, an emerging community of leftist podcasters banded together to form a hub to solidify their goals and cooperation. In late 2018, Critical Mediations (critmediations.com), a leftist podcast network, launched to further disseminate and strengthen a cultural hegemony in new media. Several new leftist podcasts started in response from this more formalized community.

Those interested in radical pedagogy cannot afford to ignore the deep social and existential changes inaugurated by new media. Our account here has mostly used an archaeological method to uncover the historical use and emergent theory of audio media, but there is far more work to be done on the precise technical application of podcasts in the service of liberation. One might revisit podcasting in the utopian spirit of Walter Benjamin’s famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” which explores the ideological and revolutionary potential in film. Benjamin recognizes that film is a tool for the reproduction of capital, noting the ubiquity of Mickey Mouse; but film is not exhausted by its instrumentalization by capital. On the contrary, Benjamin explores how a number of techniques in film, like close-ups and slow motion, allow people to explore their reality from unique vantage points and perspectives, revealing hidden things in our everyday practices like walking or
picking up a piece of silverware. “This is where the camera comes into play,” says Benjamin in one draft of the essay, “with all its resources for swooping and rising, disrupting and isolating, stretching or compressing a sequence, enlarging or reducing an object. It is through the camera that we first discover the optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis” (Benjamin, 2008, p. 37). Using film expropriated from capital, Benjamin argues, the proletariat would be able to explore itself for the first time.

What might it mean to put the tools of audio media in the hands of the oppressed? How might the layering of voices, the slowing down or speeding up of time, a soundtracked lecture, weekly episodes, asynchronous distribution, voice augmentation, auditory collages, multi-platformed communities, or other podcasting resources help us discover more about the audial unconscious? And how, then, might we hear ourselves and others differently? Podcasting provides new ways of naming the world alongside a global community. We have tried to articulate some of these ways here, but owing to the creativity of individuals and communities driven by a revolutionary love, no final analysis of the liberating potentials in podcasting can be offered. The fact is, though podcasts are by and large tools for the reproduction of capital and narratives of oppression, we have no idea what a podcast can do.

Note

1 For more on Fanon's theory of radio and “listening,” see Baucom (2001).

References
