

Welcome back listeners: locating nostalgia, domesticity and shared listening practices in Contemporary horror podcasting.

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Introduction: Why Podcasts, Why Horror, and Why Now?

The origin of this thesis is, like many others before it, born from a sense of disjuncture between what I heard about something, and what I experienced of it. The ‘something’ in question is what is increasingly, and I believe somewhat erroneously, termed as ‘new audio culture’. By this I refer to all scholarly and popular talk and activity concerning iPods, MP3s, headphones, and podcasts: everything which we may understand as being tethered to an older history of audio-media, yet which is more often defined almost exclusively by its digital parameters. Within this definition lies a dominant narrative, both popular and academic, which ties the digital to the anti-social. From the popularisation of the MP3 player (and in particular the iPod) onwards, digital or ‘new’ audio culture and technology has been more and more vociferously associated with the breakdown of shared social spirit, and a silencing of (assumedly) previously vibrantly social public and private spaces (Phagura, 2004; Mason, 2006; Bull, 2007; King, 2009). Certainly, earbuds and MP3s soon began to fascinate both mainstream and academic press, and to populate the cultural imagination with images of isolated, ignorant, socially untethered ‘iPodders’ and iPod ‘zombies’. In popular press, the iPod formed the nexus of moral panics as varied as iPod-prompted muggings, traffic accidents and academic disengagement (as students plugged-in during classes), yet with a clear emphasis on the issue of anti-social, individualistic behaviour (de Castella, 2011; Wattanajantra, 2010). New audio-media is understood as both eliciting, and exemplary of, contemporary breakdowns in traditional societal values. In totality, popular discussion of new audio media has largely aligned developing digital audio technology with a new audio culture which seemingly threatens the very fabric of our society.

We might expect a more balanced view from scholarly discussion. Yet, as in its popular press counterparts, scholarly discussion of new audio culture emerges as apparently irreconcilable with collective community values. Headphones, earbuds, play-lists and on-demand listening are repeatedly argued to forge disconnect both from listeners' surrounding physical world, and from the connective, collective ties of traditional live radio (Wittkower et al, 2008; Levy, 2006; Bull, 2007). A brief example of early academic and 'mainstream' dialogues of iPods and earbuds shows both the pessimism concerning new audio culture's social properties, and the extent to which discussion of it was dominated by externalised, exterior perspectives. Andrew Sullivan's apocalyptically-titled 'Society is Dead, We Have Retreated into the iWorld' (2005) depicts 'the iPod people': '[t]hey walk down the street in their own MP3 cocoon, bumping into others, deaf to small social cues, shutting out anyone not in their bubble.' Despite confessing iPod ownership, Sullivan offers a starkly exterior viewpoint on this zombie nation, saying, '[i]t's strange to be among so many people and hear so little. Except that each one is hearing so much.' (2005) Regina Arnold tells us, '[w]e're all familiar with the sight of individuals people plugged into iPods; buds sprouting from their ears like wire vines off flesh trellises, locking each individual consciousness into its own private media landscape.' (2008, 205 sic) New social conventions and etiquettes soon arose as the earplug signaled desired social distance: 'in a way it's saying I'm with you people, but I don't want to deal with you.' (Wayne Coyne cited in Levy 2006, 123) Indeed for Pitt, the iPod fosters 'what seems to be the ideal environment for the social solipsist' (Pitt: 2006, 161). According to Pitt, 'it has turned iPod users into anti-social beings, those who avoid human interaction' (ibid). D. E. Wittkower even wonders the extent to which the audio content truly matters so much as the barrier that the iPod allows between user and Other: 'Maybe when we listen to our iPods we do so in order to close ourselves off from a world that

we find threatening, strange, annoying, exhausting or simply dull' (2008, xii). New audio media seems to have created a highly visible world of auditory outsiders and insiders, yet in which the insiders are not a collective, exclusive unit but rather are fragmented, distanced, and purposefully so - each happily alone.

Such pessimistic critical perspective is based perhaps not so much in new audio media's facilitation of 'on-the-go' headphone listening, or in the iPod specifically; prior to the iPod's release in October 2001, portable MP3 players had already existed for several years, and before that precedent came the Sony Walkman. Rather, such pessimism's centrality to academic and popular understanding and discussion of new audio culture and media may in fact be understood as a continuation, even fruition, of pre-existing social fears and critical opinions concerning increasing media trends towards individualisation and privatisation. In the last few decades perhaps the most identifiable, technologically-induced phobia of the Western world has been that of individualism gone too far. The development and wide-spread popularisation of portable and personalised digital technologies has produced a sense of rapid alteration in the ways in which we inhabit shared social or public space, bringing fears of social skills and traditional community values being jettisoned and lost in favor of privatised, personalised, entertainment and communications technologies. There may be no better icon for such modern fears than the mobile audio player. Certainly, the earbuds, pre-recorded playlists, mobile devices, and public, urban listening habits associated with new audio media are variously defined as indicative of, or causal to, a decreased sense of local and national community, and heightened desires for privacy, isolation and independence.

Such claims are largely defended through comparison of ‘new’ audio media and listening cultures with their ‘old’, or ‘traditional’, counterparts. If traditional radio conjures ideas of intimate liveness and connectivity, community and nation-building, and families sat around the fire-side, then the lone earbud listener navigating urban streets in absolute indifference and ignorance to the voices and sounds ‘outside’ of their personal soundscape cuts a very different figure. iPod users and their ever-present headphones, we are told, ‘banish the contingency of daily life through immersing themselves within their own private utopia in which they do not speak, but listen, silenced and silencing’ (Bull 2007, 68). This is where my issue, and the desired intervention of this project, emerges. Although I do not deny the role of new audio media in allowing privacy and solitude in an increasingly connected and populated world, there are, a number of reasons to dispute the totality of such claims, and in this thesis I seek to provide an alternate understanding of new audio media, and the listening cultures which it apparently enables and encourages, through exploration of Horror fiction podcasting.

Horror fiction podcasting frequently evidences a continued preoccupation with, and desire to connect to, older audio media technologies and cultures, in particular (though not exclusively) Golden Era (i.e. 1920s-50s) or ‘Old Time Radio’ (OTR). This is demonstrated through repeated, prominent tropes such as: aesthetic re-mediation of the podcast as older audio technology; re-make, homage and re-imagining of older audio texts and programmes; imaginative audience (re)location to domestic and shared settings; digital community building and co-imagined listening cultures; and revival and evolution of open-studio audio-theatre and in-house ‘radio’ audience. In these features, these programmes indisputably complicate, and arguably refute in totality, the notion of new audio media’s inherent disassociation with traditional audio cultures, and culmination in anti-social, individualistic and ‘anti-traditional’

listening cultures. Through the exploration of horror podcasting's engagement with older audio technologies and cultures, then, this thesis argues that we may understand numerous, often competing, anxieties, desires and tensions within new audio media culture which take us beyond the commonly levied traits of antisocial, individualistic and privatised urban mindsets.

There has never been a more pressing need to re-address new audio media and listening cultures, and in particular, to explore the import and impact of podcasting within these. Despite an initial dearth in podcast popularity and material, recent years have witnessed what is popularly termed a podcast 'renaissance' (Wolcott, 2016). As Oliver Smith reports, 2017 is '[t]he year podcasts broke into the mainstream', noting that, '[w]hile the first podcasts can be traced all the way back to 2004, it's in the last five years that the medium has really gained traction.' (2017) Smith, among many others, accredits such up-kick to a smaller number of 'hit' podcast shows, and a significant development in the quality of podcast streaming and sharing technology. Of course this rapidly developing entertainment medium has attracted advertisers, and so increased financial support to podcast creators (Meola, 2016). This study shall address the particular relevance of advertisement within horror podcasting within its concluding section. For now it will suffice to acknowledge that, by 2017, we find high-profile programmes, such as *Serial* and, bringing both new listeners and advertisers to the podcast medium, enabling a rise in the quality of podcasting, which itself is accessible through significantly simpler and more effective technology. Likewise, making a podcast is easier than ever before, requiring little more than a laptop and an internet connection. As Natalie Clarkson explains: '[e]veryone has a podcast these days – at least that's how it seems.' (2017) Certainly, podcasting no longer exists in the margins: Alec Baldwin; Anna Faris; Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant; Brett Easton Ellis;

and Snoop Dog are among the ever-amassing number of podcasters to which Clarkson refers. In short, you don't have to be a geek to listen to, or create, podcasts anymore.

This is not to suggest a universality to podcast listening - this is still a developing, burgeoning, mass media form, yet it *is* developing. A 2017 report from Edison Research and Triton Digital entitled 'The Podcast Consumer 2017' found that podcast awareness and listening among the American public evidences a steady increase each year since their study began in 2008 (Grinapol, 2017). Now, 60% of Americans interviewed had heard the term podcasting, while 40% had listened to a podcast. This evidences an over 100% growth since 2008. In 2017, it is estimated that 57 million Americans listen to podcasts monthly (Layton, 2017). Among the various styles and genres of podcasting which are emerging, including chat and discussion (encompassing topics as varied as science, diet, politics, history, and serial murder); film and book reviews; comedy; cooking; and religious services, drama and fiction are often prominent figures. iTunes top 'hits' charts and audio-form awards regularly feature drama and narrative podcasting, and horror, Gothic and 'thrilling' fiction is increasingly leading the way, and evidencing alternate ways of understanding new audio culture than have hitherto been broached. Indeed, historically, horror and Gothic fiction has repeatedly offered important insight into the anxieties and fantasies that new media forms and technologies bring (Sconce, 2000; Wheatley, 2006) - we might consider the genre as a voice-box for such social negotiation.

Here then I hope to demonstrate the equally valid and far-too overlooked presence of 'new' audio cultures wherein 'traditional' audio media and culture are actively evoked, emulated, re-imagined and in some instances fully restored, and wherein community, connectivity and communication is frequently seen to be at the heart of such endeavor. In doing so, I hope not only to enrich existing horror scholarship by the addition of the first concentrated

study of podcast genre fiction – in fact, as shall be explored below, this is something of a lesser concern. I hope to use this genre study of the cultures and forms of podcast horror to challenge existing modes of thought concerning new audio media and culture, and to offer an alternate perspective on new audio media, and perhaps digital culture more widely; to assert the importance of podcasting as a valuable area of new media and audio media study, and to assert the importance of digital and fan cultures, and the ‘internal’ perspectives that they may offer, to the study and conceptualization of new media.

Literature Review

Critical discussion of contemporary audio culture taps into a common, and far more wide-ranging, social anxiety concerning the post-Enlightenment digital era's increased focus on individualisation and fragmentation. This locates our discussion not only as being applicable to and engaged with the broader field of sound study, but also of new media study; historical media study; social media and digital culture study; fandom; and genre – both in terms of the horror genre's role as a reflection and exploration of prevalent social fears, and in its importance within both historical and contemporary audio culture.

Sound studies overall, and particularly within the field of media-scholarship, has often been perceived as an over-looked (a phrase which in itself carries visually-weighted significance) and under-utilised area. For Michael Bull and Les Back, this disparity lies in a philosophically Western pre-occupation with visual spectacle, as

[s]copic metaphors are routinely invoked when thinking about how and what it is we know. In these terms knowledge is a quest for 'enlightenment' or 'illumination' and understanding is identified with seeing. (2003, 1)

However, whilst the topics of television and film have largely dominated both technological and cultural media study, this is not to suggest that many fine critical works concerning the cultural import of sound-based media are not available. Indeed, the above quotation comes from Bull and Back's edited collection *The Auditory Culture Reader* (2003), a work whose rich and varied contents offer not simply confrontation with sound's side-lining within the study of media and

culture, but more importantly with the wrongfulness of such side-lining itself. Of particular interest to this study are Jo Tacchi's 'Nostalgia and Radio Sound', and Fran Tonkiss' 'Aural Postcards: Sound, Memory and the City'. Tacchi explores radio's sound as being specifically flavoured by notions of pastness, comfort and the domestic, whilst Tonkiss argues the import of sound to a city's wild and exciting identity, wherein 'not listening [via headphones etc.] ... makes spaces smaller, tamer, more predictable' (2003, 305). Read together, these essays example the extent to which sound and sound technologies hold the ability to emotionally, imaginatively, and physiologically shape the human state of mind, and sense of place. Furthermore, whilst highlight the extent to which radio and new audio media appear to reside in two highly polarised spheres of the cultural imagination, there is a suggestion that new audio media can 'tame' or domesticise the city scape. We shall return to Tacchi's work below, but here shall simply conclude that in exploring the histories, philosophies, anthropologies, politics and practicalities of sound's place within human culture, the collection offers stark insight into the extent to which wittingly or not, we are often defined and shaped by and through our interaction with sound.

The history of recorded sound may well then be considered as a history of modern media culture: origins of the modern internet are found in telephone technology; globalised communications were forged in the discovery and harnessing of radio waves; sound film irrevocably altered the role of cinema as both an industry and entertainment form; inventions such as the telephone, phonograph and radio signify the beginnings of the modern era's collapse of time and space; radio was the first truly mass and globalised media. In his history of recorded sound, *The Audible Past* (2003), Jonathan Sterne thus argues there to be a 'heady audacity to the claim that vision is the social chart of modernity.' (ibid, 3) Whilst Sterne concedes that '[t]here is no doubt that the philosophical literature of the Enlightenment – as well as many people's every

day speech – is littered with light and sight metaphors for truth and understanding’, and that ‘sight is in some ways the privileged sense in European philosophical discourse since the Enlightenment’, for him this is not an issue of the actual import and actuality of sound’s radical cultural significance, but more of critical assertiveness (ibid 4; 5). For Sterne, sound’s continued import in human thought and action is a readily available and philosophically disruptive fact, and ‘[t]o take seriously the role of sound and hearing in modern life is to trouble the visualist definition of *modernity*.’ (ibid, 3)

If sound’s role within human culture is under-valued in academic thought, Sterne argues this to be the fault of its scholars, as ‘[b]ecause scholarship on sound has not consistently gestured toward more fundamental and synthetic theoretical, cultural and historical questions, it has not been able to bring broader philosophical questions to bear on the various intellectual fields that it inhabits.’ (ibid, 5) If sound scholars have too-long failed to clarify and assert the level to which sound impacts upon ‘other related work or with larger intellectual domains’, Sterne posits that ‘[t]he challenge, then, is to imagine sound as a problem that moves beyond its immediate empirical context.’ (ibid, 5) In short, if sound study is to be noticed, it is time to start arguing and developing an awareness of its interactivity and omnipresence. Sound is at its base an invisible yet often defining presence, which seeps into and alters our world in the guise of film scores, noise pollution, telephone calls, ringtones, doorbells, birdsong, sea-squall and even silence: the key is to start exploring the value which this ever-present phantom affects each and every situation in which it appears.

Paul du Gay et al’s study, *Doing Cultural Studies: the Story of the Sony Walkman* (1997), offers an example of such thought at work. As a text which seeks to clarify the meaning and processes of cultural study, highlights the significance of recorded sound and audio media within

modern culture by positing the Sony Walkman as a highly pertinent artifact of cultural examination and understanding. For du Gay et al, 'to study the Sony Walkman 'culturally' is therefore, in part, to use it as a clue to the study of modern culture in general.' (1997, 11)

Exploring such aspects as syntactical articulation and promotion, design, production and popular usage, the study offers thorough exploration of the act and importance of cultural study itself, and the ways in which human relationships to objects and technologies offers critical insight to this, but also of the Walkman's idiosyncratic role within this context. In particular relevance to this study, du Gay et al argue the role of the Sony Walkman in disrupting notions of public and private space and behaviors associated with these, as through user appropriation and individualisation of its technology 'Walkman plays a special role in changing people's perceptions or consciousness by enabling them to escape the confines of a particular ordering of the urban environment.' (ibid, 106). Such observations are deeply relevant to the nature of this study and forerun later discussed exploration of the Apple iPod and portable MP3 listening devices. For now, it is sufficient to note that here du Gay et al make plain the extent to which, through its alterations of public and private spaces and activities, sound and sound-media study is inherently expansive into the realms of wider cultural study.

Beyond highlighting the role of the Walkman as a precursor to modern mobile audio technologies, du Gay et al's study also brings to light also the extent to which all conceptualisations of modern or contemporary culture tie us irrevocably to our understandings of older or historical culture. Within the study, the Sony Walkman emerges as one part in an almost intractably inseverable chain of meaning-making and cultural development which by its very nature of being demands understanding (or at least acknowledgement) of that which came before it:

Every time you trace a meaning back to what preceded it - from 'headphone' to 'wireless' for example – it refers us back to something which went before it. We seem to step from meaning to meaning along a chain of meanings without beginning or end. So, we represent the new by 'mapping' it to what we already know. (ibid, 14)

When we discuss 'new' culture, we are always to some extent discussing 'old' culture.

Concerning media specifically, this sentiment is possibly no more plainly expressed than in Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey Pingree's edited collection *New Media 1740-1915: Media in Transition* (2003). In this work the conceptualisation of 'new' media itself is challenged as the authors seek not only to problematise the idea of 'new' media as inherently related to digital media, but also explore the actuality of every media form having a moment of newness itself in which meaning is negotiated and developed. In doing so, the various authors collectively assert the level to which all 'new' media are typically defined and fixed in meaning through association and comparison with that which come before them. Thus '[t]here is a moment before the material means and the conceptual modes of new media have become fixed, when such media have not yet been accepted as natural, when their own meanings are in flux' (2003, xii) This in turn may alter the meanings and understandings of those older media themselves as 'new media briefly acknowledge and question the mythic character and ritualized conventions of existing media, while they are themselves defined within a perceptual and semiotic economy that they then help transform.' (ibid, xii) Already the relevance to dominant perceptions of new audio media are plain: in the fears that new audio media is disrupting and destroying 'traditional' modes of society and audio culture, meanings of both 'new' and 'old' media are negotiated and re-defined.

Such renegotiation is plainly evidenced within in the field of radio studies, especially in the wake of digital audio media such as online radio. However, whilst the impact and meaning of

‘new’ audio media and culture is commonly discussed as being both itself in flux, and potentially instigative of the redefining of prior-held conceptions of what radio *is*, such discussion itself tends toward the idea that traditional notions of radio media and culture are made somewhat obsolete in the wake of digital audio. Tacchi’s earlier noted study ‘Nostalgia and Radio Sound’ explores the inherent domesticity of radio and through methodology interviews connects radio to the creation of mood, space, and to a sense of nostalgia. Herein the actual sound and acoustic rhythms of radio technology, rather than its content or verbal meaning, holds deep emotional resonance for listeners, as ‘radio sound can be seen to mediate between individuals in the home and wider world’, and to facilitate memories and a sense of connectivity with the past that can transcend listeners’ immediate moment and location (2003, 281). She thus asserts that

radio sound is integrated into daily life in an intimate way and can be understood as forming an important part of domestic environs or soundscapes, that hold meaning and significance that reaches beyond the immediate context and physical confines fo the home. (ibid, 281)

Tacchi contends that ‘radio consumption appears to hold the power to connect across time and memories. Radio sound can be seen to play a connecting role for individuals and groups of people’, allowing ‘a sense of community’ to be gained from its listening whilst also allowing more personal connections with memory (ibid, 282). Whilst this study relates only to radio in its ‘traditional’, pre-digital sense, and does not explore radio’s meaning for a listening generation who may not have experienced radio as an acoustic staple of the home, Tacchi’s work goes some way towards showing the extent to which radio is not forgotten in the digital era. In fact, Tacchi shows that radio’s anachronism is often its attractive feature, allowing connection to past communities, spaces and moments.

In *Domesticating the Airwaves: Broadcasting, Domesticity and Femininity* (2012)

Maggie Andrews traces the domestic history and affiliation of radio through a Feminist lens. Exploring the technological assimilation of radio to meet the domestic aesthetic, from its earliest messy DIY origins to the polished, proudly displayed Wireless set, alongside the growth of professional, nationally networked programming, Andrews shows the ways in which radio developed from a tool of personal communications, towards becoming the throbbing heart of the home and nation. Likewise, in looking at radio programming itself, Andrews not only defines the extent to which radio timetables both emulated and shaped the domestic day, but also worked to assert a connectivity between listeners on both local and national levels, and through its liveness, to allow potentially isolated housewives a sense of 'real-time' connectivity to the world beyond the home. Radio again is thus seen to reorder time, space, and connectivity. Whilst Andrews' study focusses upon British radio, her findings are applicable to US and Westernised Global trends, in which this domestication may also be witnessed. Likewise, although Andrews' focus is upon feminist readings of radio's cultural history, and its role within feminist history, from her detailed exploration of radio's locus within the domestic framework, we may assert that radio holds broadly domestic affiliations and implications which are implicit across Westernised culture.

Throughout modern radio scholarship traditional radio is depicted as in a state of breakdown or redefinition which removes it from such long-held associations with the domestic, collective and social. In Jason Loviglio and Michele Hilmes' edited collection, *Radio's New Wave: Global Sound in the Digital Era* (2013), we find complex discussion of radio's redefinition within the digital age. Kate Lacey neatly encapsulates these conceptualisations of new auditory cultures as replacing that which previously defined radio: 'Radio in the digital age is

arguably becoming more public, more fragmented, more manipulable, more mobile, more global, more personal' (2013, 9). Karen Bjisterveld and Jose van Djick, argue such developments as seemingly inevitable, saying that 'recording devices, from the radio cassette player to the apple iPod, epitomize the inclination of people to create personalised auditory realms whilst moving through urban spaces.' (2009, 18) Certainly, this is recollective of du Gay et al's earlier comments on the Sony Walkman, and yet there is an assumption suggested that one form of audio culture necessarily excludes the other. Rather than exploring contemporary digital audio culture, media and technology as a connective and interactive relationship between the 'old' and 'new', radio scholarship more often promotes an understanding of 'real' radio having been replaced by digital audio media. There is a presupposition that with digital radio comes a jettison of all that traditionally defines radio (the domestic, collective, community-based and the live) which this project seeks to reassess.

Exploration of horror podcasts and their associated listening cultures will not only expand our understanding of new audio cultures, but also of audio histories, particularly radio, and the importance which it holds in our understanding and development of modern culture. Both in its 'traditional' and digital incarnations radio has a history of being critically ignored and forgotten. Despite being 'arguably the most important electronic invention of the [20th] century' radio has long become characterised by its 'secondariness' (Douglass 1999, 9). This secondariness is both physical (in that we often listen to radio whilst focusing on other tasks) and also cultural, as Martin Shingler observes, 'in the sense that [radio] has been superseded by television as the primary source of entertainment and information within modern Western society' (1998, x). Entertainment used to be radio's gambit and drama was its specialty. At the height of its Golden Era radio pumped out hundreds of radio dramas, encompassing comedy, sci-fi, horror, Western,

mystery and thriller genres, many of which hold lasting sway. Richard Hand and Mary Traynor observe that '[n]ot only were many of the genres and formats created by early radio unproblematically adopted by television: they remain unchanged in the twenty-first century' (2011, 13). Radio drama is the untapped source of media studies.

However, radio is notoriously transient, and even disregarding an arguably visually-oriented culture its early materials have often been difficult to obtain and explore. Few of early radio's listeners and creators still survive, and their programmes are piecemeal in their availability as archived critical resources. Earliest broadcast radio was unrecorded, with all speech and music performed live at the microphone. Later 'Golden Era' performances were first recorded using magnetized wire, rendering copies which were difficult to store, depreciated in sound quality, and - given their size and necessitated storage space - often recorded over. Scripts and show notes were frequently discarded after a performance. There are perhaps many great works of radio which will never be heard, or heard of, again, and there are many which we can only know of via (sometimes only partially) surviving scripts, anecdotal remembrances, and old press-release materials and reviews. Thus, with 'one of the spottiest, most ephemeral historical records in all of the mass media' radio drama has largely become consigned to neglect (Douglass 2004, 9). Introducing *Radio - The Forgotten Medium* (1994), Edward Pease and Everette Dennis note, 'it is not uncommon for media critics to ignore radio altogether in their treatment of the larger modern media mix' (xv). Similarly, Loviglio and Hilmes locate radio 'outside the boundaries of modern scholarship', and Susan Douglas explains, 'it's as if radio fell off the planet after television' (2013, 9; 2004, xv).

This thesis argues the podcast as a crucial means by which radio's history is being preserved, remembered and reimagined within contemporary society. Douglas partly explains

radio's cultural and critical oversight through the lack of an appropriate form by which to preserve and explore its past glory, and continued impact:

radio is ... hard for our culture to remember properly. We enshrine and relive our history through images - TV documentaries, movies, museum exhibits, and magazines - or through books. Except for the rare radio documentary, there is simply no form in which the medium's enormous impact on American life can be properly conveyed. Radio, therefore, drops out of all too many stories told about our past. (2004, 10)

The sound-centric world of podcasts offer a form by which radio's 'enormous impact on American life can be properly conveyed', and a means by which radio may not only enter stories of America's past, but may form the very basis of them. This thesis thus explores the ways in which radio's cultural presence is being i) archived, ii) remembered and iii) reimagined in contemporary society, through podcasting, arguing that in new audio technologies radio's cultural impact is asserted as ongoing and very much alive.

Despite radio's status as clearly a marginalised area of media and sound study, in the exploration of new sound cultures and technologies I am hardly working in a vacuum. In the last two decades sound study, especially concerning media and culture, has been increasingly present within the wider academic fields to which it relates, and has demonstrated preoccupation with sound as connected to urban space, mobility, fragmentation (aesthetic, political and social) and personalisation. I would suggest this to be directly related to the extent to which listening has become a conversely visible spectacle within the modern world, namely through the popularisation of the Apple iPod. Despite pre-existent technological developments in mobile MP3-player technology, the iPod set the standard for new audio media technology and function, and it arguably defines the culture. As such, many social and critical commentaries on the iPod

may be transferrable to broader study of new audio media and culture; certainly they are applicable to this study. This is hardly to claim iPod as translatable to ‘all new audio technology and culture’, there are many distinctions within this field which shall be discussed throughout this study. Still, because of the iPod’s lasting influence and impression within the broader developments of new audio media and culture, studies such as those discussed below provide a firm bedrock for academic progression beyond the iPod. As such, I shall not amend each and every mention of iPod within this study to include ‘new audio media culture’, as the two terms have come to be if not transferable, then certainly highly related in meaning.

Released in 2001, the iPod swiftly became an audio-device which was, conversely, largely discussed through its visibility. As a part of the Apple brand, the iPod was designed to be seen as well as heard: bright white headphones, a smooth wheel interface and slim-line, perfectly pocket-sized structure set the iPod apart from other MP3 devices as something which was not only acoustically superior but stylistically unique, desirable and noticeable. As a device designed for mobile usage, the iPod’s steady growth in popularity was a development which was innately public and note-worthy. Thus, if the iPod’s facilitation of on-the-go privatised listening is not particularly novel in itself, then we may say that perhaps because of the exclusivity of iPod - the ‘cult-ness’ of Apple branding - the iPod suddenly made mobile, privatised listening a social statement. As the iPod’s longevity and increased popularity became apparent, a number of detailed academic studies dedicated to the iPod (and its cultural significance) emerged. These include Steven Levy’s *The Perfect Thing: How the iPod became the defining object of the 21st Century* (2006); Michael Bull’s *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience* (2007); and D. E. Wittkower et al’s edited collection *iPod and Philosophy: iCon of an ePoch* (2008).

Levy offers an industry-based history of the iPod which explores the object's rise in cultural importance and desirability, offering anecdotal evidence from his background as a journalist to argue the iPod's increased affiliation with contemporary trends of individualism and time-shift. Drawing upon Sony Walkman and VCR technology as precedents for the iPod, Levy offers an optimistic reading of iPod culture, which foregrounds notions of creativity - as enabled through the creation of playlists, and choice – as through mobilised, 'on-demand' headphone listening iPod users are able to mold their environments to better suit their needs. However, whilst crediting previous technologies as offering similar features, Levy's study is largely fixated upon the newness of iPod and offers little suggestion of the presence of broader historical audio culture, in particular radio, within this new world of iPod.

Similarly, whilst *iPod and Philosophy* offers a brilliantly varied and intelligent array of mediations upon the philosophical meaning and implication of the iPod, there is a tendency herein to view the iPod almost within a vacuum of its own novelty. Scott F. Parker's entry 'Philosophy by iPod: Wisdom to the People' explores the connectivity which iPod may allow users, through the sharing of playlists, and the mobility of personalised listening collections, yet does not connect this to the sense of broadcast or shared radio networks. Pitt's earlier cited inclusion, 'Don't Talk to Me', discusses iPod as an almost original artifact which has silenced the public spaces of a generation. Similarly, Donald Turner's contribution, 'Listening with the Other: Listening to the Other', whilst acknowledging the potential in iPod speaker bays to share the previously hyper-personal technology, contends this ultimately to end in failure as often playlists are too personalised to suit, and shared use of and addition to an iPod's music collection is (in his experience and consideration) more often intrusive and divisive than harmonious and connective. Likewise, Marc Lombardo's contribution 'Is the Podcast a Public-Sphere

Institution?’ (which shall be returned to shortly) begins with an optimistic positioning of the podcast as a uniquely interactive mass media, which allows almost egalitarian conversation between listener and producer, yet which he ultimately sees as destined to failure and disconnection. In ‘Don’t Delete these Memories: iPod and Materiality’ Andrew Garner explores the role of the iPod as a repository of sound, which allows users emotional connectivity to songs and by association memories wherever they may be, yet does not explore the possibility of a more wider-reaching cultural memory such as is suggested in the above discussions of technological connectivity and new technologies’ insistence upon the past. Whilst undoubtedly a superb collection, there does seem to be something missing in such a tight focus upon novelty. Overall, the collection is typified by an attitude of the iPod as being indicative of individualistic, fragmented and hyper-immediate culture.

Arguably the most important, and influential, study of new audio culture is Bull’s aforementioned *Sound Moves* (2007). Certainly, Bull’s work offers the most detailed analysis of new audio culture this far, offering a persuasive, deeply informative and culturally resonant exploration of the extent to which iPod users rely on the iPods for a sense of privacy and comfort in the urban world, for a sense of temporal control over an increasingly regulated schedule, and - perhaps most importantly - for an explicit sense of remove from other humans. Bull proposes that ‘[the] Apple iPod represents a Western narrative of increasing mobility and privatisation ... an acoustic history of increasingly mobile privatised sound’ (2007, 1-2). Bull has defined the iPod through its ‘enveloping acoustics’ and its users through accordant acts of ‘privatised listening’ and the cultivation of ‘mobile auditory worlds’. (ibid, 111) Bull further asserts that:

The power to create a privatised auditory world of the user's making cannot be overestimated. Users often describe feeling divorced from the sound world and activities of others around them'. (ibid, 117-118)

Bull's observations oscillate around perceptions of new audio cultures as embodied by necessarily isolated, urban listening practices which he proposes are adopted to navigate transient and socially 'cold' spaces.

There are any number of fascinating and compelling points within Bull's study, and I shall return to his argument in more detail throughout this work, yet it is also crucial to observe that there are also important elements of iPod listening, and broader audio culture, that Bull's study leaves untouched. This is perhaps no surprise - that Bull's work is now over ten years old, alongside the fact that the last ten years have seen enormous growth within the field of new audio media, should already suggest that Bull's work is no-longer exhaustive or even truly representative. Yet beyond age, there are other reasons to query the totality of Bull's vision. Firstly, the interview material of his study is, by his own admission, sourced from a rather small cross-section of society. Of Bull's interview subjects, all are described as being 'professionals' or middle class, with most working within the media or humanities, and a number of them being Bull's friends. In part this perhaps reflects, to an extent, the early days of iPod use - when their expense and novelty might limit them to people of a particular income-bracket, or media/tech interest. Clearly, given the iPod's broad popularity and highly imitated function, this is no longer the case. For a large part, iPods have not only become cheaper, but less unique; furthermore mobile, privatised listening has been overtaken by smartphone listening. To partake in new audio culture has thus become not only much more affordable, but also more culturally dispersed: everyone that owns a smartphone now has the means to listen as they go.

Moreover, while Bull's interviews enable an 'inside scoop' on the otherwise exteriorised viewpoint of new audio culture, his study is highly music-centric, with scarce-to-no mention of spoken word or podcast listening. Again, this is perhaps indicative of the era in which Bull researched his study, when podcast listening (as shall be discussed shortly) was a somewhat niche activity. Yet it is important to note that there is a great distinction between listening to music, and listening to a voice tell a story, or two people enacting a scene, or a whole sound-rich audio drama complete with sound effects and score. When we listen to a voice speaking to us, we are already engaged in a different social arrangement than if we are listening to music, and what that voice says to us, and how, can vastly alter the extent to which we consider ourselves alone or isolated. Likewise, listening to a story or a play requires different levels of concentration to music, and may also alter our public listening experience quite significantly. If Bull's subjects report feeling as though the world around them becomes like a music video, moving in time to the rhythm of their music (3), what might a listener of horror podcasting report?

Bull's study is far from alone in being music-centric; at the time of beginning writing (2014), there were no extended studies of new audio media and/or culture which explored podcast or spoken word listening, beyond those which assess the effectiveness of podcasting as an educative tool. Levy's above-noted study of the iPod's cultural presence, *The Perfect Thing*, contributes a fascinating chapter to the discussion of podcasting, yet this is more concerned with the technological evolution of the podcast than its cultural ramifications. At the time of Levy's writing, the latter topic could only be guessed at. Similarly, in Wittkower et al's edited collection, the podcast claims only one chapter, and this is more concerned with the podcast's potentializing of a decentralised media form. Herein the notion of fictional podcasting was utterly absent with Lombardo offering a more rhetorical, abstracted discussion of the podcast as

a potentially non-hierarchical mass media. While this itself is a highly pertinent topic, and shall be further discussed within this study, the point remains that if few people had discussed the topic of podcasts, fewer still had discussed their content, or their distinct listening cultures.

This noted, interest is growing. In 2018, Dario Llinares, Neil Fox and Richard Berry shall release their edited collection *Podcasting: New Aural Cultures and Digital Media*, to which some of the work of this thesis contributes, and which overall promises to open fresh conversations on the social and cultural role of the podcast as a specific media form. Also, in 2017 - during the writing of this thesis - one collection emerged which discussed narrative if not fictional podcasting, or more specifically one narrative podcast, namely Sarah Koenig's 2014 hit *Serial* - a programme which holds thematic, aesthetic and formal links to the horror podcasting genre and shall be discussed throughout this study. As one of the most successful podcasts ever to air, Koenig's 'true-life' investigation of a 1990s murder case was pivotal in bringing podcast listening (and creation) from the more 'niche' or esoteric corners of fringe culture, to a burgeoning mainstream industry. *Serial* established not only a public interest in podcasting, but also an academic one, and was the first podcast to boast a critical anthology devoted to its study. Ellen McCracken's edited collection, *The Serial Podcast and Storytelling in the Digital Age* (2017), explores topics as varied as journalistic truth and aesthetic fiction; the history of serialised narrative; and authenticity. However, no authors explored the notion of audio-culture, community or historical connectivity within the series – a point which shall be explored further in this study. Furthermore, while the collection offers a varied and often enjoyable selection of perspectives on *Serial*'s prominence, value and form, the volume also brings to light the extent to which we lack a cohesive, coherent, academic understanding of what podcasting is, of its histories and variations, and of its technical and cultural forms.

When considering listening cultures and communities, we step into the academic realm of fan studies – an area which itself is intensely concerned with the digital era, and the visibility that online interactivity has brought to previously covert or at least overlooked activities of consumption or reception. Henry Jenkins is here a pioneering and central figure, having released numerous works on the topic including his seminal (and here most pertinent) work *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2008). Herein Jenkins explores the role of early internet sub-cultures and fan art/fiction in the development of a new interactivity between producers and ‘consumers’. Here the committed or emotionally-invested consumer, demarcated by Jenkins as a ‘fan’, is understood to lay claim to texts, characters, worlds and meanings of fiction in ways which are new, but which are perhaps newly understood by the media industry. We may term the study of this behaviour as an ‘online ethnography’ – a term which I shall expand upon shortly, but here shall simply explain as the ordered, intentional and focussed study of online cultures displayed through digital forums, blogs etc. Both in its theory and methodology then, Jenkins’ text is discussed and drawn upon throughout this work, allowing a lens through which to understand the role of the podcast listener in the shaping of podcast culture and content, and particularly in the ideas of fluidity between creator and listener that such a grassroots media form enables.

If Jenkins’ work may be agreed to be central, and in many ways cataclysmic, to contemporary digital fandom study, it is certainly not exhaustive and this study reaches beyond his works in its efforts to engage with and reflect upon the concept of audience communities and fandoms. Cornell Sandvoss’ *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption* (2005) offers an exciting exploration of fandom which seeks to argue the role of fandoms as enabling types of community which may not be supplied in contemporary society. Sandvoss explores fandom both as a ‘mass’

community, looking at how fandom is shared and spread among both digital and ‘real world’ meeting spaces, and also as an individual phenomena and identity. Yet despite exposing the sometimes very personal sense of identity and selfhood which self-identification as a fan may bring, for Sandvoss, community is the very purpose of fandom, and is itself evidence of the attendant lack of such collective intimacy in ‘real’ life:

The balance between structure and agency is also crucial to the academic analysis of fandom ... In both approaches fandom is interpreted as a consequence of mass culture needing to compensate for a lack of intimacy, community and identity. (ibid, 2)

Thus, Sandvoss suggests, the perhaps somewhat heightened responses of fans act always as a reflection of the reasons why we as humans ‘consume’ media texts, allowing researchers a deeply valuable insight into the emotive, social and psychological meanings surrounding entertainment media. It is hoped that this thesis will contribute to the flourishing field of digital fan study, most obviously in its proposal of conscious nostalgia and counter-cultural ‘return’ in listening behaviours and communities, but also in its positioning of audio-culture as a vitally significant aspect of the wider field.

Finally, whilst being more broadly concerned with the wider cultural concerns of new audio culture, this study *is* based in the horror genre and seeks to contribute to the almost equally overlooked field of audio horror. Sound, voice, and noise are essential to both the horror and Gothic genres. If you have ever heard a footfall when you were sure of being alone, or a strange sound in the dead of night, or an utterance with no discernible source, then you know the horror that sound can bring. Though often conceived of as a background or supporting feature of Gothic and horror fiction, sound carries its own distinct narratives, potentials and aesthetics of terror. In particular, Golden Era horror radio has contributed to many now-integral tropes, structures and

aesthetics of the horror genre, not to mention - as it shall be argued here - to the development of the rising field of horror podcasting. Furthermore, podcasting itself breathes fresh life to audio-horror, and, by extension, the horror genre. Podcast technology and culture is, in itself, a valuable asset to the horror genre, allowing fresh experiences and uses of voice, noise, and music. Yet podcast horror remains almost un-discussed within academia, and horror radio remains ‘the most unjustifiably neglected’ of the horror genre’s forms (Hand 2006, 3). Thus far, only two extended academic studies of horror radio exist: Hand’s *Terror on the Air! Horror Radio in America 1931-1952* (2006), and the same author’s *Listen in terror: British Horror Radio from the Advent of Broadcasting to the Digital Age* (2014), both of which offer compelling histories of horror radio’s development (and decline) in Western culture. Whilst both of these studies shall be drawn upon considerably within this work, and although the latter study broaches the beginnings of digital audio horror, neither works address American horror podcasting as a genre, or its implications for wider audio culture, which as yet remains largely absent from critical study.

This noted, the last few years have evidenced a rise in scholarly attention to the relationship between sound and horror and Gothic forms, to which work from this study itself contributes. In Autumn 2017, Isabella van Elferen published an edited collection in the *Horror Studies Journal*, dedicated to the study of sound and horror. In 2018 horror journal *Revenant* also devoted their third edition to Gothic sound, entitled *Fearful Sounds: Cross-Platform Studies of Sonic Audio and Horror* and edited by Danielle Barios-O’Neill. In 2018 Jeffrey Weinstock will release his edited collection *Critical Approaches to Welcome to Night Vale: Podcasting between the Weather and the Void*. Although I am the only author to broach podcasting within Barios-O’Neill and van Elferen’s edited collections, Weinstock’s works plainly highlights the growing

interest in and import of the area, and that this much overdue acknowledgement of sound's import to the fictions of fear should come following a rise in public interest in horror podcasting seems indicative of the import of this genre case study.

In totality, this thesis offers an incomplete, but much needed, contribution to the history and theoretical conceptualisation of the podcast. In its scholarly neglect, the history of the emergence and establishment of podcast media, and our capacity to develop a theoretical language by which to discuss it, is in danger of being overlooked. Yet as podcasting rises in popularity and cultural importance, it is ever more important to understand the origins and evolutions of this most distinct media form. Without a bedrock of understanding concerning the podcast itself as a historically rooted, complex and culturally significant media type within its own right, we cannot hope to understand, discuss or meditate its current resurgence and future potentials. I hope that this study may go some small way towards contributing to such a bedrock. Perhaps, if only we might peer beyond headphones, earbuds and purely physical listening environments, we might find that new audio culture is not eradicating collective, community-based and shared listening culture, but rather re-inventing it. In short, perhaps we need to stop looking at new audio media and culture and start listening to it.

Methodology

This project's methodology is originated in, and indicative of, its intellectual development. I first began listening to horror podcasting in 2012, through an invitation to a 'fireside radio-party'. Herein, myself and a few friends gathered around an iPod speaker bay and a two-bar gas fire, dimmed the lights, and settled in for an evening of spooky audio drama. Whilst physically settled in the cosy domestic darkness, we were able to let our imaginations drift into the unknown and uncomfortable, enjoying together the comparative pleasure of our darkened yet comfortable setting against the horror worlds sounding through the air. Sharing occasional glances of mutual appreciation and thrill, we retained an occasional tether to one another's reassuring presence. Yet in the darkness of our mind's eye we each journeyed alone to a peculiarly individualised imagining of what we all heard being described. When the play was concluded, and the lights flickered us back to reality, one of the most enjoyable aspects was to compare notes on how each of us had 'seen' each particular horror, character, or space. For us, the drama came alive not simply in its individual hearing, but in its shared reception – a phenomenon which Frances Gray links directly to Golden Era radio culture wherein 'audience' was only truly achieved and enacted in the discussions and comparisons individual listeners made with one another after their necessarily unique receptions of a show (2003, 254) .

The parallels between our actions, and the often-romanticised domestic listening norms of radio's Golden Era were not lost on me – indeed when several of my fellow listeners pulled out knitting projects I began to wonder if I'd wandered into a 1950s time-warp. As I later explored the wider extent of Gothic and horror podcast fiction available, it occurred to me that within this genre perhaps the previously somewhat dust-gathering realm of 'traditional' radio drama and culture was in fact entering a stage of renewal and growth. Certainly, as the podcast

media form continued to grow, so too did a disproportionately large corpus of horror and Gothic fiction. While chat and comedy dominated the non-fiction side of podcasting, horror and Gothic were consistently leading the slowly developing fiction-based iTunes' charts. (Indeed, by 2016, Wired.com's Charley Locke offered the joyful proclamation: 'Podcast fiction is finally a thing! Thank you Sci-fi and Horror!') As such when I first began researching this thesis it was with the sole intention of addressing the absence of scholarly critical work concerning the revival and re-development of audio horror fiction and drama as presented by the rapidly developing genre of podcast horror. I hoped that, in noting and analysing the digital wave of new horror audio drama and fiction, I might both supplement and 'update' the generally neglected field of audio horror studies, and in doing so meet an identified need and lack within the fields of both horror and audio-media studies respectively.

Yet as I continued to listen and research the genre, I began to observe an underlying thread of what may be collectively termed as 'traditionalism'; a recurrent insistence upon and preoccupation with ideas such as community, domesticity, even technological and cultural nostalgia. Regardless of the individual podcast content and style, there was frequently suggested, implied, or even encouraged in its audience a collective, communal, often domesticated and/or consciously dated listening culture. It occurred to me that such actualised old-fashioned listening behaviour as I had experienced first-hand and labelled as the fruit of one event, reflective only of one group of people, some of which I was aware of as having distinctly anachronistic interests and tastes, may in fact be a more widely present and significant element of the genre overall. As my research and personal listening developed, it became apparent that this was no longer a project whose focus lay solely within genre study, but rather, one whose case study happened to be within a certain genre. Furthermore, the significance of this within the broader field of new

media (and particularly new audio media) study became increasingly apparent. The deeper I delved into the material and culture of horror podcasting, and the more I engaged with surrounding critical works concerning broader audio culture, the clearer it became that there existed a vast disjuncture between academic discussion of new audio-culture, and new audio culture itself. As I explored not only Gothic and horror podcasts themselves, but also the listening cultures which emerged around them, I found myself increasingly at odds with dominant critical narratives of new audio medias' anti-social, fragmentary, and anti-traditionalist properties.

To me, this was not a world of individualistic, mobile, and emphatically post-Radio culture. This was in fact a world of enthusiastic chatter and communication, of creatively shared listening, of imaginatively nostalgic, and overwhelmingly social interaction with often self-consciously and emphatically historically-rooted audio fictions. In both its primary materials and surrounding listening culture, horror podcasting offered generous evidence of an ingeniously digitally adapted engagement with and reconstruction of 'traditional' audio culture. Repeatedly, research seemed to suggest that here was a new media culture decisively and wilfully rooted in all of those elements of collectively and almost provincial community that the digital era was presumed to exceed and obscure. Thus it became clear that the heart of this project lay not simply in the *type* of podcasts being created and engaged with, but in the *way* that these things were being done.

Perhaps then horror and Gothic, as genres which are often understood as intrinsically concerned with the forgotten, dead and decaying past, may have a unique rationale for such concern with radio history. Yet as I looked beyond the confines of genre, I found that horror podcasting was not exclusive in these traits. Instead it seemed that the genre offered a

particularly vibrant and well-developed example of a broader phenomenon of socialised, shared, and frequently traditionalistic audio culture; one which could also be witnessed across podcast genres inclusive of sci-fi, comedy, historical-fiction, drama, and docu-drama. It became clear that this project was not researching one branch of an audio-genre, but a far more pervasive and socially-significant audio-culture. In truth, I was finding unexpected elements which may be better described not so much as simply ‘new audio culture’, but as ‘new audio community’. the case for new audio medias’ sociable, and often nostalgic, side could likely be made through reference to many podcast types - from chat, to review, to sci-fi or fantasy or fan-fiction drama. Indeed, I hope that some of the work published from this thesis may spur such excavation of podcasting’s already considerable archives. However, we must start somewhere; likewise boundaries must be drawn in any project. I have decided to draw mine around the always dark, frequently funny, and sumptuously scream-ridden world of the horror podcast genre. Within this I shall focus on roughly the first ten years of horror podcasting (2005- 2015), seeking to allow an understanding of the origins and evolutions of the form and its attendant listening culture, up to its emergence and establishment within broader, ‘mainstream’ audio culture. Once we begin to probe even this tiny segment of alternate, non-musically based audio culture, I have no doubt that further complexities and nuances will be revealed.

Beyond my own experiential and academic interests, there are several reasons for choosing horror fiction podcasts as a means to illuminate an alternate understanding of new audio culture. As one of the earliest established and leading genres of podcast fiction, horror podcasting has sustained over ten years of evolution and offers in this a rich corpus of archival materials, spanning the entirety of podcast fiction’s development, to draw upon. Furthermore, Horror and Gothic now represent the most popular fiction podcast genres, with numerous horror

podcasts having featured in iTunes' top download charts and achieving noted podcasting and audio-fiction awards. Indeed, the most popular, and first 'break out hit' podcast, comes from the Horror and Gothic traditions. The darkly comic horror series *Welcome to Night Vale* (2012-) represents the first narrative podcast to boast substantial commercial success and international notoriety. Ostensibly a public service broadcast from a local radio station somewhere in the American Southwest, *Welcome to Night Vale* departs from reality in framing the bizarre and troubling events of its community within the guise of mundanity. Credited as 'the world's most popular podcast ... one of the biggest success stories for the podcasting era' and 'the most popular radio-drama series of the decade [that has] never been on the radio', *Welcome to Night Vale* arguably brought podcasting from the niche corners of the Internet to global recognition (Virtue 2014; Saunders 2015).

In 2015, *Welcome to Night Vale* reached number one 'download spots' on Apple iTunes in America, Britain and Australia, ousting the relative podcast giants *Radiolab* (2005-) and the long-established radio affiliates *This American Life* (2006-) and outselling Beyoncé in iTunes' album downloads. The show also sold out its world-wide tour and released a successful novel, collected scripts, audiobook, Youtube channel and merchandise store. Alongside regular coverage in mainstream Western press, *Welcome to Night Vale* boasts numerous fan-fiction podcasts, Tumblr.com accounts, reddit.com stories and artworks. 2016 saw the release of the creators' first 'spin off' series *Alice Isn't Dead*, which represented the first in their now strongly established podcast network of fiction shows created both by themselves and affiliated artists. As the genre's leading figure. In many ways, *Welcome to Night Vale* has acted as an aesthetic, economic, and cultural modal and catalyst for fictional (and arguably non-fictional) podcasting. *Welcome to Night Vale* both offers a necessary gateway to understanding podcasting's alternate

audio culture and highlights the importance of horror and Gothic as a starting point of study. As such it shall be used as a case study, which shall be offered at the end of each chapter to develop a detailed examination and exempling of the ideas discussed more broadly in each.

Of course, that begs the question, ‘what *is* a horror podcast?’ Horror podcasting is here understood as a pre-recorded, audio horror fiction form which is available for on-the-go download and listening through mobile audio devices such as iPods and Smartphones. I shall define ‘podcasts’ as shareable MP3 sound-files of fictional, narrative audio horror which may be understood either as ‘pure’ drama, or as oral storytelling, but which may be distinguished from audio-book form in their use of music, sound effects and sound-scaping, hosting, alternate acting voices, or otherwise explained means. It is worth noting that, increasingly, and particularly with the rising popularity of audio-book company Audible (which now incorporates music, alternating actors, and sometimes sound effects into its products), the properties of audiobook and audio-drama are beginning to merge. Still, while fascinating in itself, and surely indicative of a broader interest in audio-fiction, this is as yet at early stages and does not alter the fact that within the podcasts discussed here there is a clear distinction between the two forms.

How ‘horror’ itself may be defined in the podcasts offered is perhaps more complex, given the fluidity and historical contestation of such a title’s parameters. Certainly it would be difficult if not impossible to ever hope to fully disentangle elements of sci-fi, the Gothic, and fantasy from horror. Such encroach upon others’, and excess of one’s own boundaries, rather showcases the idea of horror itself anyway, calling to mind Mikhail Bakhtin’s perennially influential notions of the excessive, intrusive grotesque body (1993). Still there is a core to horror - a recognizable, gut-reaction, identifiable core which allows us to use the term ‘horror’ with any kind of intelligibility. I would agree with many scholars before me in asserting horror to

be a genre form which is rooted in notions of shock, viscosity, explicit exposure of bodily or biologically damaged, disfigured, or monstrous depictions, and ultimately, as author Neil Gaiman puts it in one interview, ‘mood’:

Horror wants to scare you, horror wants to creep you out. Horror wants to revolt you, to shake you up, to attack your preconceptions. Good horror does, and bad horror will normally achieve it anyway, whether it’s trying to or not. (2013)

In particular within this work, I allow more interplay between conceptions of ‘Gothic’ and ‘horror’ than some scholars before me, yet this is with the understanding of hybridity rather than interchangeability being at play. Gothic and horror are not synonymous but are perhaps siblings, both seeking to thrill and disturb in their own way, and often, within the realms of horror, the more psychologically-routed aspects of the Gothic – such as melodrama, paranoia, symbolism, and setting, are adopted within the frameworks of a more dominant horror approach, and vice versa. Here then, I have chosen to define as a ‘horror’ podcast that which either defines itself as such, (or - in the case of shows which feign radio identity - as ‘horror’ radio at least), or that which is defined as such (in media reviews, interviews, fan and listener discussion etc.), or that which appears to seek a plain affiliation with the horror tradition through its aesthetic and content.

In terms of locating such case studies, this has been done through a mixture of key-word searches, wherein ‘horror’, ‘Gothic’, ‘spooky’, and ‘scary’ have been applied alongside ‘podcast’, ‘audio-drama’ and ‘radio-drama’ (and then of course discerned in their actual relevance through listening), and also through simply following the threads of recommendations and reviews. In this way, my research has been somewhat organic, and representative of the sociability of the horror podcast field itself, which frequently relies on word-of-mouth and shared

social circles for promotion, in place of more mainstream forms of advertising. Thus, one podcast may in its introduction or close, or through its webpage, promote another podcast for listeners to try. Likewise, listeners themselves frequently seek and supply recommendations through forums and comments sections, and reviewers often offer further suggestions for related listening. Finally, iTunes, podbay and other podcast-listening apps and programmes generally offer genre-based searches and recommendations. Whilst this methodology cannot claim to offer a fully exhaustive listing of every horror podcast fiction available, especially given the speed and number with which new programmes appear, it certainly allows for a clear overview of the most prominent and popularized shows within the field.

Having thus defined and delineated my case studies in terms of era and genre, I shall seek to embed my analysis of the ‘raw data’ of the podcasts and their paratexts themselves within a broader-reaching, triangulated, methodology. Thus I shall incorporate close reading of podcasts and their paratexts and contexts (websites, advertisements, logos etc.), alongside secondary data analysis of media reviews, interviews etc., and with further examination of industry interview and fan and listener feedback in the form of online comments threads, forums, vlogs and blogs, and fan-fiction or homage. Once again, this material has been sourced largely through key word searches as exemplified above, and also through an immersive, digital, anthropological approach. Herein, I have entered into any online forums and interactive discussion spaces (such as reddit.com, Tumblr, Facebook and twitter) which are explicitly concerned with those podcasts that I have elected to study, and have organised my searches and materials through more specific topics such as ‘community’, ‘listening’ (such as how and when people prefer to listen), ‘nostalgia’, ‘radio’, ‘alone’, ‘OTR’, ‘together’, etc.

Who, specifically, listens to podcasts is difficult to discern - by and large podcast listenerships remain invisible in their consumption. This invisibility is being addressed by growing sponsor and advertisement companies, who need to understand the audience types to which their messages are being directed and thus who frequently request (through podcast host segments) that listeners fill out brief online questionnaires, as a means to support the podcasts which they listen to for free. This of course is an imperfect and only newly emerging field of podcast audience study. However, what we may say, through the presence of online blogs, vlogs, forums and comment fields, and furthermore through the highly visible presence of audience found at live shows, is that podcasting has very large number of interactive listeners, whom following the logic of Sandvoss, may be understood as fans. For Sandvoss, fandom may be defined as 'the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text' (2005, 8). This does risk overlooking other fans, as there may be many listeners who simply do not engage with such visible acts of response, who listen to the show without comment or live-tour attendance, yet who do so regularly and still consider themselves to hold emotional attachment to the programme. Thus what I am discussing here is not necessarily reflective of the genre's entire fandom overall, but rather reflects the programme's most active and visible fan community - a collective based in the appreciation, discussion and verbal or creative response of and to a particular work. This fanbase is the heart of this project, as a collective of interactive listeners who use podcasts both to find and forge community.

In summation then, in considering how I may define a 'fan' from an occasional or casual 'listener' here, I have chosen to adhere with Jenkins and Sandvoss, in understanding the fan as a listener whom is interactive with the podcast. Here, this may be enacted either through their creation and publication of fan fiction or artwork, contribution to forums or comments threads,

release or interaction with blogs or Tumblr pages etc. which discuss, analyse or promote their chosen podcast, or through self-identification as such when discussing attendance at live shows, Q and A events etc.. For me, a fan is a listener who in their interaction considers themselves as in some way connected to the podcast, and thus shapes understanding of the podcast, or indeed in some instances seeks to shape the culture and perhaps even creative form/world of the podcast which they listen to.

In my early research I joined some closed discussion groups and announced myself as a researcher requesting consent to use any materials found and was met with welcome and ready agreement. However, as my project progressed more towards an interest in how listeners behaved with podcasts rather than how they personally considered and conceptualised podcast genre, it became more appropriate to simply remain ‘quiet’ and to observe and record discussion as it developed more naturally, within public or ‘open’ discussion spaces. Furthermore, as the age of my subjects may not be readily determined or ascertained through a user profile or avatar, direct interview/ questioning became undesirable also. (Given that my research developed alongside the quickly evolving, more mainstream and publicly-located protocols and attitudes of social media itself, this became a more natural research space anyway.) Of course, this approach (which may colloquially be termed ‘lurking’), may be contentious and certainly requires some ethical consideration. As such I have excluded any materials which are not fully available through the public domain and have chosen to anonymize where clear pseudonyms were not already used. In terms of later publication, full anonymity will be considered, even in the case of pseudonyms (though given that a simple full-phrase search would immediately yield the original posts, this may represent a symbolic rather than practical action). Full ethical clearance for this approach has been approved.

A more structured approach of interviews or discussion-groups with listeners was deemed inappropriate for this study, not only because of my desire to observe listener behavior as it developed, but also because it would limit the demographics of listeners sampled. Likewise, where I have attended live horror podcast events, I have chosen not to interview fellow attendees, but simply to observe behaviour, dress, etc., and to synthesise such personal observances alongside such accounts and reviews of other live events as were posted online either as webzine articles or as comments/threads within fan communities or listener forums. In short, I prefer to draw listener and fan perspectives from such arguably secondary sources as forums and comments fields largely because I believe this to provide more accurate understanding of the listening cultures surrounding these podcasts, offering a natural and global digital ethnography as opposed to a more coerced and restrictive interview setting.

This approach is fitting, given this project's interest in digital forms of community, within which comments and threads may be understood as the bedrock. In this light, comments and threads are increasingly noted as worthy sources of cultural study, as Joseph M. Reagle observes,

comment is a genre of communication ... Our world is permeated by comment, and we are the source of its judgement and the object of its scrutiny. There is little novelty in the form of the comment itself, but its contemporary ubiquity makes it worthy of careful consideration. (2015, 2)

Indeed, as social tools comments offer the digital realm an easily overlooked means of intimacy and community as, '[t]he positive power of online comment is that it allows people to connect with and support another, even if briefly and from afar.' (ibid, 123)

In *Uncovering Online Commenting Culture Trolls, Fanboys and Lurkers* (2018), Renee Barnes argues comment in be a clear form of participatory culture, and one deserving of more rigorous study. Barnes posits that to investigate comment through a lens of fan studies ‘offers much towards understanding the playful, committed and emotional engagements that can be generated in an online community.’ (2018, 28) Likewise, she suggests that in shifting the researcher’s gaze from the object of fandom to its expression, we may discern more of fan communities’ broader importance as human behaviour, and of wider meanings and implications of online behaviour. Certainly, I hope that this study will offer some further support for her assertions, both in the importance of comment itself as a genre of communication, and its particular pertinence to the study of online community.

Comment is arguably useful also in its disconnect from myself as researcher. In their comments and online interactions, listeners are not trying to please or inform me, or to shape their experiences around my questions. Instead they are behaving as naturalistically as any online communication allows, within a stream of continuity and connectivity, and often with the added element of ‘real world’ anonymity. In such publications and interactions, I am able to observe the broader ‘shape’ of listening communities than the isolated pockets that focus groups, interviews or questionnaires might allow.

In terms of layout, this study shall begin with a brief history of the horror podcast, allowing the reader a firmer understanding of the manner in which horror podcasting has not only shaped and accelerated the wider world of podcast fiction, but how it has from the beginnings reached back toward radio history and form. Section One shall then establish the extent to which mobile and privatised listening alters the audio-horror experience, before discussing the trend of ‘re-mediation’ within horror podcasting. Through close reading of horror

podcast scripts, acoustics, and paratextual imagery, this section argues that many horror podcasts utilise their medium's apparent 'transparency' to re-mediate their technological frameworks to adopt the more temporally connective, domestically-spaced and physically-shared guise of traditional radio and allowing listeners the sensations of having 'tuned in' to a 'genuine' OTR broadcast experience.

Having ascertained the extent to which horror podcasting frequently seeks to assure listeners of alternate mediations, Section Two explores the extent to which the genre further asserts alternative listening cultures, this time through the revival of horror hosting within podcast horror. The section begins by discussing the role of the OTR horror host as a relocatory device, arguing that herein the listener is often aligned with a domestic, intimate audience stance through invitation to 'enter' the host's domestic space among a collective of friends. The section then discusses the extent to which the horror podcasting genre explicitly appropriates this framework and aesthetic to both acknowledge and subvert contemporaneous mobile, privatised listening traits, crafting a mobilised, 'shared' domestic space in which the seclusion of 'ear-bud listening' plays as great a part as the imagination and the auditory.

Section Three explores the extent to which podcast listeners actively 'share' their listening experiences and spaces through imagined and digital communities which are frequently traditionalistic, sometimes openly nostalgic for imagined OTR cultures, and always highly connective and social. Looking at a wide range of podcasts and their associated listening and fan cultures, this section argues that just because horror podcast listeners are not together, does not mean that they are alone. Section Four explores the extent to which digital and imagined listening cultures may be seen to 'literalise' in the horror podcast genre's highly popular revival of live audio theatre. Following a discussion of the aesthetics of theatrical audio horror, and the

comparative lack of OTR audience-attended performances, this section outlines the extent to which these live podcast tours both enact great innovation within the horror genre, and yet also enforce return to more traditional oral horror forms. Through exploration of a number of successful live podcast horror dramatic tours, and the fan and audience cultures which surround them, this section explores the extent to which these shows may be seen to enact a cumulative disavowal of readings of new audio culture as purposefully isolating, anti-social, jettison of traditional audio cultures.

Finally, this thesis conclusion explores the contemporary developments and potential future of horror podcasting, and the ways in which the genre is now developing its own, unique media identity and auditory culture. Here it shall be argued that, as it moves beyond its first decade, horror podcasting is beginning to establish its own media-identity, and to experiment with more openly contemporary forms of audience collectivity, audio-community, and interactivity between speakers and listeners. While each of the previous sections will offer both a broad range of close readings and textual examples from different horror podcasts, alongside a concluding case study of *Welcome to Night Vale*, in this concluding section I shall reach beyond *Welcome to Night Vale* to explore more immediately contemporary and developing horror podcast productions, before addressing the wider field of podcasting itself - and this study's intended progeny of interest. In the entirety of this work, then, I hope first and foremost to instigate new conversations about new types of listening, and also to identify the birth of the horror podcast genre as a key moment, not only within its own generic field of eerie whispers and ominous creaks, but within the whole, diverse, noisy and wonderfully fertile world of new audio media.

A Brief History of (horror) Podcasting

While it is difficult to say exactly when podcasting (and perhaps any media form) first emerged, most media histories date podcasting's solidification from swapped and downloaded sound files to a recognizable mass media form to 2005. In 2005 *The New Oxford English Dictionary* selected 'podcast' as its word of the year; Adam Curry released iPodder, 'the [pod]catcher that started it all' (Tee, Tomasi, and Terra 2008, 22); and Apple released iTunes 4.9, which openly accommodated podcast formats. Since then, Western culture has undergone a personal acoustic media revival. Riding the tube, jogging, walking the streets: Arnold notes 'we're all familiar with the sight of individuals plugged into iPods; buds sprouting from their ears like wire vines off flesh trellises' (2008, 205). Whilst these technologies were originally marketed as music players they actually play any MP3 file, an aspect which did not go long unutilised. iPods and MP3players were soon playing host to a new form grassroots talk and fiction audio media which were rapidly being produced and distributed online. These isolated, digital sound files carried content spanning from amateur run chat shows to radio drama epics.

Moreover, digital sound file sharing enabled an explicit archiving and airing of radio's past. That the separation between digital or 'new', and traditional and OTR audio is not so distinct as dominant dialogues suggest is evident from the early stages of mass online MP3 file sharing. In fact, from the offset, online MP3 sharing and publication has been invaluable in the preservation, archiving, and dissemination of otherwise obscure or physically degrading OTR materials. Through early MP3 sharing and audio-archive websites, digital audio technology and culture's emergence was implicitly tied to the revival, remembrance, and assertion of its radio 'heritage'. Online projects such as *OTRCat.com*, *OldRadioWorld.com*, *Internet Archive*, *Relic Radio*, *Escape and Suspense!* and *The Monster Club* all release and share OTR material on the

internet for free, frequently offering these materials in digitally restored or recovered forms and very often alongside attendant press materials, scripts and anecdotal contexts. On listening to these recordings, the potential of new audio media to, as Douglas puts it, ‘enshrine and relive [American] history’, becomes evident.

Alongside showcasing specific 1930s, ‘40s and ‘50s radio programmes these recordings also bring to light the surrounding data of adverts, station and show-host patter, sponsor segments, public service announcements and references to upcoming programming. Radio’s potential as a mass communicator and nation-builder has been recognized since its early development to broadcast, and as radio became increasingly financially reliant upon commercialisation and advertising-funded programming, the medium’s ‘secondary’ materials reflected in ever-wider perspectives the concerns of its particular cultural moment. War-time advertisements for weight-gain and pep pills voice the every-day worries of listeners alongside more dramatic announcements detailing the need for thrift, public security, selflessness and bravery against a common enemy. Marshall McLuhan argues that ‘[h]istorians and archaeologists will one day discover that the ads of our time are the richest and most faithful daily reflections any society ever made of its whole range of activities’, if this is so then as one of the earliest and most enthusiastic proponents of mass advertising, radio promises rich fruit (McLuhan cited in Kovarik: 2011, 163). From a show’s surrounding materials, contemporary listeners may gain deeper understanding of the show itself, and the narratives that mattered to listeners of the Golden Era. Intermission spiels regarding war-time nutrition, security, and distraction potentialise a different perspective on, say, a spy-based mystery play than if a listener were only to hear the play itself. Thus as the sound-structures and cultural contexts which contained, interrupted and defined Golden Era radio programmes remain alongside them,

listeners are immersed not in one singular radio play or programme but rather within the wider media, culture, and moment in which they existed. By releasing Golden Era radio programmes complete with their surrounding ephemera archival pod-sites preserve so much more than just OTR programming, offering modern listeners insight into the worlds that Golden Era radio was constructed for,

Besides the archive and display of OTR programming, such sites frequently cultivate educative worth. *Escape and Suspense!* self-defines as ‘specializing in the study of individual episodes’ of those programmes which it releases, with commentaries, articles and essays accompanying each sound file. Alongside ‘thousands of Old Time Radio shows’, *OTRCat.com* provides articles on the history, cultural context and reception of radio genres and programmes; recommendations for, and brief synopsis of, academic and pop-culture texts about OTR; and listening guides and recommendations. *Relic Radio* offers playlists oriented around series, eras or genres of OTR, many of which include introductory background information.

As online audio file-sharing came to incorporate and harness the potentials of RSS feeds and mobile listening devices, and to constitute the more formally recognizable field of podcasting, so too did certain formalities of style and presentation. Thus, rather than simply sharing ‘raw’ digital copies of OTR recordings online, for individualized listening and download, there now also emerged audio-webzine (or ‘podzine’) projects which delivered OTR material to listeners within a broader structure of contemporary radio-esque chat, interview and contextualisation. Podzines such as *Haunted Radio*, *Horror Theatre.com*, *The Great Detectives of Old Time Radio.com*, and *The Zombie Astronaut’s Frequency of Fear* all augment OTR material from its original contexts and reclaim and integrate it within newer audio structures and contexts. An episode of *The Strange Dr Weird* (1944-1945) might follow a discussion of the

week's latest horror movie, a dirge metal song, or an original piece of audio drama. These projects produce much more fluid listening experience whereby an OTR 'novice' may encounter 'classic' radio drama for the first time among more familiar materials. Eventually these media forms were sanctioned as members of the iPod family: titled as 'podcasts', the files were now accommodated within and distributed through the Apple iTunes store.

From such unruly grass-roots springs the horror podcast. Though it has been too-little discussed in the study of all things horrible, horror podcasting is not new. It has existed for at least ten years, almost as long as podcasting itself. In ten years the genre has developed substantially. Lone, amateur voices reading ghost stories to the accompaniment of stock sound effects and spooky music have given way to full-fledged audio dramas, complete with live Foley (hand-created sound effects) and orchestral accompaniment. Acoustic forms which have lain largely dormant since radio's Golden Era are being revived and reinvented, and people *are* listening. In 2015 zombie-podcast *We're Alive* (2009-) claimed 40 million downloads whilst Glass Eye Pix's pay-per-listen *Tales from Beyond the Pale* (2010-) entered a third profitable season. Paranormal 'reality' show *The Black Tapes* (2015-) boasts over 20, 000 listeners per month (Edgar: 2016). After a long period of visual domination the Gothic properties of sound and sound technologies are under reconsideration and it is time to lend a critical ear.

Given the Gothic and horror genre's intrinsic (if at times under-valued) relationship with sound and voice (Saglia, 2014; Whittington, 2014; van Elferen, 2014; Hand, 2014; Briggs, 2012; Verma, 2012; Street, 2011; Sipos, 2010; Hannan, 2009; Coyle and Hayward, 2009; Coyle, 2009; Hand, 2006; LeDoux, 1998), it is perhaps unsurprising that new audio media technologies led to a new Gothic form. Just as horror represented one of OTR drama's earliest and most popular genres, so too did early narrative podcasting generate a rapidly proliferating Gothic horror genre.

While as the first ‘hit’ fictional podcast, *Welcome to Night Vale* shall here serve as a useful primary, running case-study, allowing us to understand the import and meaning of the wider genre and to ground this study within its most prominent work, it is crucial to also explore the enormity of its horror podcast contemporaries and precursors. It is often suggested within the journalistic press that *Welcome to Night Vale* emerged from a vacuum, before which podcast fiction simply did not exist (Locke, 2016; Locker, 2016). In fact, many horror fiction podcasts predate *Welcome to Night Vale*, including *Pseudopod* (August 2006-), *The Drabblecast* (February 2007-), *19 Nocturne Boulevard* (October 2008-), *We’re Alive* (May 2009-), *Tales from Beyond the Pale* (October 2010-), *The NoSleep Podcast* (June 2011-), *Campfire Radio Theater* (December 2011-) and *Tales to Terrify* (January 2012-). *Earbud Theater* narrowly follows *Welcome to Night Vale* with a release date only a week later (June 2012-).

Although these shows have not yet achieved the international critical and popular success of *Welcome to Night Vale*, they have wide circulation, critical acclaim, and popular appeal. Their sustained production and steady increase in downloads suggest a horror genre that has been growing from the recognized advent of podcasting. In 2015, *The NoSleep Podcast* reported 600,000 downloads; in 2016, *We’re Alive* reached 50 million downloads. All of the above-listed titles are either nominees or winners of audio-fiction awards Parsec or Audio Verse. Indeed, while decrying media claims of *Welcome to Night Vale*’s ‘creation’ of podcast fiction, journalist and tech-blogger Tee Morris argues that ‘Podcasting Fiction is not some ‘new trend’ or literary revolution that occurred overnight. Authors were sharing speculative fiction audio within the first year of podcasting’s inception’ (2016). With horror fiction writers adopting podcast form as early as 2005, then, and explicitly, self-identified horror podcast shows forming from 2006, we

see that from the podcast's first boom period, podcast horror fiction has been growing. Podcast horror has existed almost as long as the podcast itself.

Still, technology journalist and podcast commentator Charlie Locke's claims that new horror (and sci-fi) programs are leading the way in developing and popularising the form are persuasive. Locke cites a flurry of emergent horror podcasts in recent years, which are bringing fiction podcasting increased cultural and critical recognition, including *The Black Tapes* (September, 2015-), *Archive 81* (April, 2016-), *The Deep Vault* (September, 2016-), *The Bright Sessions* (October, 2015-) and *Within the Wires* (June, 2016-). I would add *TANIS* (October, 2015-), *Lime Town* (July, 2015-), *The Message* (October, 2015-), *The Box* (August, 2016), and *Rabbits* (March, 2017) to this list. Journalist Jason Boog asserts that 2015, when many of the above podcasts debuted, 'will be remembered as a major year in horror podcast history' (2015); in its first decade the genre clearly made considerable developments. Furthermore, rising interest in podcast fiction may be attributed not only to *Welcome to Night Vale*'s continued success, but also to *Serial*, which, though not Gothic in aesthetic, was certainly a program focused on murder and mystery. Yet we may also conclude that this outcome was somewhat inevitable, given that horror podcasting has now been building, evolving and spreading for over a decade, and with it, an entirely distinct form of audio culture than has thus far been recognized.

Section One: Re-mediating the Horror Podcast

In 'Remediation', J. David Bolter and Richard A. Grusin propose the term 'remediation' to identify acts such as 'faithful' cinematic representation of a novel without explicit reference to the original medium, i.e. in which '[t]he content has been borrowed, but the medium has not been appropriated' (1996, 338). For Bolter and Grusin this remediation, whilst historically preceded from the illustration of Biblical texts onward, is highly indicative of the digital era. Herein, they assert, immediacy is paramount as '[o]ur culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying technologies of mediation' (1996, 313). Such desire to overcome the presence of mediation is discussed by Bolter and Grusin with specific application to visual computer interfaces. Through hypermediation, technologies such as Virtual Reality forge a 'transparency' of medium, allowing for an immediate and direct sense of intimacy between user and content. Concerning new personal and mobile audio technologies, such desired transparency is also broadly evident. iPods, Smartphones, and mobile MP3 players travel with their users, cordless, near-weightless and perfectly mobilised. Digital radio 'was first sold on the promise of superior sound', evidencing a desire for as close to a 'true' unmediated listening experience as possible (Lacey, 9). Headsets have (largely) given way to more corporeally intertwined earbuds, allowing a sense of sound 'appearing' immediately within our ears. Indeed, 'wireless' headsets now transmit sound through the body, allowing listeners the experience of their own bodies being mediatory devices. The new audio media experience is, generally speaking, one which continually seeks to provide the sense of an unmediated listening experience - not even as though the audio we heard were being

performed in front of us, but rather ‘within’ us, realised right within our bodies and moving as we move.

The podcast’s ‘transparency’ thus not only enables mobile, solitary, and privatised listening, it also allows for a mutability of its own media-form, and a pretence of another - what is here termed ‘re-mediation’. This section shall explore horror podcasts which seek to re-instill a conscious sense of mediation in their works, and to embed their programme within an older audio technology. Within many horror podcasts, it shall be seen, transparency of medium is both appropriated and subverted, with the podcast’s negotiable sense of presence being used to allow the sense and emphasis of an alternate, older mediation. I refer to this as ‘re-mediation’ because it does not seek to recreate an existing work within another medium, but rather to re-instill a sense of alternate mediation on an original work. This section will first establish the differentiations between podcast mediation and podcast media identity and ‘traditional’ and early broadcast radio, before exploring horror podcast works which seek to bleed between such lines. Via exploration of a number of different horror podcast types, including remakes of, and homages to, OTR horror narratives, to entirely original and/or broadly contemporary narrative works, and, finally, a case study of *Welcome to Night Vale*, it shall be argued that horror podcasting effects re-mediation through: the creation and use of OTR and wireless sound-structures and acoustic aesthetics; implicated ‘liveness’; wireless ‘noise’; and through paratextual visual digital interface. Through such re-mediation I assert that the horror podcasting genre enacts a significant rejection of new audio technologies and listening cultures, to create a horror form which is specifically located within Golden Era aesthetics, imagined technologies, and listening cultures.

We must not underestimate the extent to which horror podcasting appreciates and utilises its idiosyncrasies of mediation. Podcast horror is a Gothic which permeates the everyday experience in a manner arguably more effective than any other Gothic form. From Freud's *Unheimliche* on, the Gothic has been recognized to implicitly disrupt and engage with the 'ordinary' world. How a podcast is typically listened to innately charges the horror podcast form with new aspects of intrusion upon the everyday. This facet develops from the podcast's mobile, privatizing, acoustic properties. Unlike most other Gothic forms, the horror podcast moves with us, occludes the external aural world, and speaks to us wherever we may go: a companion for traversing a mundane world. We could argue that horror cassette tapes, listened to via a 'Walkman', would allow a similar Gothic intrusion. Yet whilst horror cassette tapes were certainly existent, and representative of a fascinating beginning of mobile, solitary horror-listening, they were sadly not so widespread and popularised as to be considered as more than a supporting role in audio horror's great history.

The podcast's role as a portable, 'invisible' acoustic alter-world is paramount. Bull's study of iPod music-listening culture notes repeatedly the distancing effect of mobile audio-media. 'Geographical space becomes recessed, as the speaker inhabits 'another space,'" yet it also becomes charged with the mood or thematic of the mobile listener's audio content (2007, 84; 41). 'The walking listener uses [headphones] not only to protect himself from the sonic aggressions of the city but also to filter and enhance the events that give the place its meaning' (Jean-Paul Thibaud 2003, 330). When we alter our acoustic environment, we alter our perspective upon, and perceived place within, the surrounding physical space: we alter the everyday. If Bull's interviewees reported their music-listening as affecting their perceived world, making the environment around them move in time to their music, or reflect their chosen sound-

scape's emotional flavor, then the horror podcast can be understood to operate with similar infiltrating habits. *The NoSleep Podcast* producer David Cummings notes that:

Most people listen [to horror podcasts] via their phones through headphones and that sense of audio isolation and immersion into the sound and music creates a potent environment which can make listening even on a crowded bus or in a sunny park a frightening experience. If a particular story matches the listener's real-life setting, (e.g., a story about a security guard in a haunted building being listened to by an actual security guard alone in a building) the overlap being fiction and reality can be particularly unnerving. (cited in O'Donoghue, 2016)

Furthermore, the earbud or headphone listener's necessary 'deafness' to the sounds and potential dangers beyond the podcast adds a further element of tension. Our ears are very often our 'guard dogs', warning us of unseen dangers around us. One can only imagine the experience of Cumming's proposed security guard, not only imaginatively tethered to a haunted variation on his own setting, but furthermore, being unable to hear the warning sounds of his physical reality. The horror podcast both offers 'refuge' from the real around us, yet also potentializes a Gothicization of that world from our perspective. 'The medium is the message', or, alternately, mediation changes media.

Of course, OTR horror filtered auditory Gothic worlds into the listener's physical space, and early Crystal set headphones potentialized acoustically-divorced perspective on that space - and a similar sense of vulnerability to the obscured sound-world beyond the headphones. However, such experiences were not only physically static (being tied to immobile technological apparatus), but also temporally static. If, by horror radio's popularisation, Crystal radio's isolating technologies were giving way to communal, 'wireless' technology, such programs were

also ingrained within wider broadcast protocols of scheduling. Thus listeners were offered acoustic horror experiences which were also constrained within protected parameters of space *and* time. Indeed, notions of set scheduling were often paramount to OTR horror aesthetics. The opening segues of shows including *Appointment with Fear* (1943), *Suspense* (1943) and *Lights Out!* (1934) all enforce awareness of the temporary interruption of the non-Gothic ‘everyday’ with the commencement of the show’s particular ‘witching hour.’ The particulars of such opening sections shall be explored in Section Two, for now we shall simply state that OTR horror broached the mundane, domestic space, but only for and at a set time and in a static space.

The podcast liberates the audio horror experience from its analogue tethers, allowing listeners to alter any space at any time. Indeed, the mobility of podcast Gothic and horror extends beyond the simple ease with which a mobile audio-device may be transported—it relates also to the seeming autonomy with which new material uploads itself (generally for free) to such devices through the podcast’s RSS stream, and the capacity of new audio players to hold vast amounts of audio content. *The NoSleep Podcast*’s Cummings notes, ‘the immediacy of the podcasting medium as an advantage, where people haul their phones and iPods around with them and consume media constantly as opposed to in discrete chunks’ (cited in O’Donoghue, 2015). The podcast is always with us, and may play and replay whenever and for as long as we desire, bringing audio horror beyond the parameters of radio scheduling, and also beyond the constraints of how many cassette tapes/CDs we can carry or afford to bring along with us.

Besides transparency of medium, the aspects which most crucially define the podcast medium from broadcast radio are that it is an isolated audio form, which may be repeated, paused and replayed as the listener desires, and which transmits ‘directly’ to the listener without analogue interference. As has been noted, these facets are commonly discussed in terms of

privatised listening, as podcasting allows the listener to access audio content on an individual timeframe. Thus podcasting diverges from the communal ‘live’ stream of pre-digital radio, in which one must listen at the same time as others, as part of a wider collective. Furthermore, in traditional radio broadcast listening, listeners must not only adhere to shared and enforced radio scheduling, but are also subject to regular reinforcements of shared locality and temporal reality through advertisements, news and weather breaks and presenter talk. These materials, which formed a significant amount of OTR broadcast material, would further enforce parameters of time and structure upon the listener through regularly reminding listeners of the time, the day, the happenings of other people, and their own place in a wider society and world. Such reminders were, to an extent, non-negotiable - in Golden Era radio especially, advertising and sponsor plugs were the economic lifeblood to free listening. We have already noted the extent to which these may instill notions of national identity and shared contemporaneous events and culture; when sponsorship was supplied by local businesses, or news bulletins and public service announcements concerned local affairs, obviously such collectivisation took place at a local level.

Podcasting and new audio media are seen to remove such social tethers. Lacey thus conflates the privacy of the earphone and the autonomy of self-programming one’s listening material, stating: ‘[t]he techniques of producing personalised programming and the rise of earphone culture together privilege listening as an intensely private, rather than a public, activity’ (2013, 19). Bull further argues that in providing this autonomy that ‘iPod culture represents, a distinctive a new ‘temporal sensibility’ on the part of the subject. This ‘temporal sensibility’ reflects an attempt to break away and overcome the structured rhythms of contemporary life’ (2007, 146). Whereas radio was punctuated with reminders of listener’s shared space, time, and

national or local identity and concerns, new audio media offers each listener the scope to create their own sense of individuated time.

While Bull examples this disruption of a shared, linear temporality in users' design of individual musical playlists, we may just as easily make to jump to podcasts. Indeed, where podcast-fiction is concerned we may argue further, that as listeners tune-out from the social connections afforded by radio, and the broader world beyond the headphones, and plug-in to a narrative world removed from their own both in time and space, that the sense of removal from the milieu is more potent. Regardless of the audio content, users design their own playlists and order, experiencing their audio-consumption at their own speed as 'iPod time represents time away from others' (ibid 146; 147).

In particular, Bull suggests new audio media, and its facilitation of individually-programmed listening time, to reveal not only a desire to disconnect from the shared streams of radio, but a pronounced distaste for the forms and structures of those streams. One of Bull's subjects identifies iPod listening as 'elimination of waste', such as 'commercials', 'drivel' (i.e. host/dj patter), 'unwanted music' and 'other' (cited in ibid, 153-154). Bull concludes that the iPod (and, by extension, those new mobile audio media which follow in its wake) offers empowerment which 'manifests itself in the rescheduling of the auditory day, *resulting in the elimination of any unwanted material*' (ibid, 153 my emphasis). Such empowerment is thus understood as necessarily, and perhaps willfully, isolating as users remove all that is not strictly of interest/use to them. In self-orchestrated programming the listener extracts their self from the flow of consciously shared, live 'old' medias, and embraces the personal, manipulatable, and emphatically 'new' realms of the MP3. (Of course, this overlooks such pre-digital technologies such as the cassette tape and LP, who have long predated digital modes of time-shift. We shall

explore these technologies below, having noted it here, we may otherwise accept Bull's assertion that MP3 allows remove from radio's traditionally conceived liveness and collective address/information).

With these essential differences (and proposed hierarchies) of 'traditional' and new-audio media in mind, it is all the more striking that horror podcasting frequently and consistently appropriate and emulate the sounds, forms, and structures of earlier audio media. From one-off episodes within broader original fiction series, to stand-alone works, horror podcasting often recalls, reconstructs, and claims radio 'heritage' through direct and clearly counter-cultural re-mediations and re-creations, and through 'remakes' of not simply Golden Era material, but of Golden Era mediation. Herein elements such as advertisements, sound-effect styles and creation, vocal aesthetic, 'liveness', and continuity all form as essential ingredients to the programmes as narrative and performance. In so blatantly remembering and recreating OTR materials, cultures and technologies, horror podcasting evidences a significant nostalgia for, and interest in, older listening technologies and associated listening cultures which is thus far missing from social readings of new audio media.

One of the most common means by which horror podcasts effect re-mediation is acoustically. Despite, as Lacey explains, digital audio being developed and marketed upon the premise that it 'would eliminate the static, hiss, pops and fades associated with analogue radio', in horror (and sci-fi) podcasting we are often confronted with the undesirable sounds of OTR technology: the static-crackles, warps, and interruptions so innate to the sounds of Golden Era listening. (Or, rather, what we might expect such a broadcast to sound like; in fact, many of the pops and hisses associated with OTR broadcast are the result of poor recording technology.) The recreation of these sounds offers a marked rejection of digital broadcast and suggests an unlikely

creative nostalgia for a perhaps more Gothically archaic kind of media. There is innate and unique horror potential in the sounds of OTR. The disruptive sounds of wireless reception allow an uncertainty of reception and an awareness of audio's potential for anonymous communication that podcasting, in its smooth, clear-cut 'directness', so commonly seeks to avoid. While we shall discuss below the more nostalgic, perversely-comforting effects of re-mediation within the horror podcast genre, we may also see that in many ways horror podcasting also engages with the discomfiting and unhomely, or *unheimlich*, aspects of radio's domestic history.

Hand explains Thomas Edison's early experiments with 'spirit-catcher' technology which attempted radio communication with the dead, as 'the beginning of an interpretation of sound technology as a vehicle or conduit to the supernatural, the other worldly, and the paranormal' (2015, 21). Likewise, Gregory Whitehead's described OTR listening experience exposes the potentiality of all audio broadcast as a true transmitter of the disembodied and dead:

When I turn my radio on, I hear a whole chorus of death rattles ... from voices that have been severed from the body for so long that none can remember who they belong to, or whether we belong to anyone at all. (cited in *ibid*, 22)

Whitehead's comments recall the ambiguity of broadcast voices as either remnants of a dead speaker, kept ceaselessly alive in technology's grasp, or simply as severed phenomena that take a life of their own, beyond the body that projected them. Such interpretations are understandable in the early Golden Era, when to discover or be discovered by an unknown radio signal was a regular part of radio use. Many domestic radio users regarded wireless technology as beyond their full control and understanding, a reflection of 'the power of radio as, simultaneously, a technological achievement in science and yet something that continues to seem uncanny and 'unexplained' (*ibid*, 22). Indeed, the fear of infiltration and unwanted

communication loomed throughout Golden Era radio use, as wartime radio restrictions banned amateur radio broadcast throughout both World Wars for fear of miscommunication and signal interception.

New audio media and the podcast are largely identified through their exclusion of unwanted transmission. Levy recalls blogger Doc Searls' early recognition of the podcast's potential as a new audio media option:

Podcasting will shift much of our time away from an old medium where we wait for what we might want to hear to a new medium where we choose what we want to hear, when we want to hear it ... (Searls cited in Levy: 2006, 272)

This aspect of empowerment is further identified by Marc Lombardo who argues that,

... what radically sets the podcast apart from the vast majority of forms of mass media is that the aspect of personal control extends far beyond the context in which the media is consumed, and beyond the relatively unprecedented level of decision-making regarding what media is to be consumed and how and when it is consumed. (2008, 223)

For Lombardo, control is key to the podcast form as listeners may not only choose what to hear and when, but may also create podcasts, easily and cheaply. In such aspects, the podcast becomes a media which is oriented in listener control. The re-mediatory opening and concluding frames of *The Phantom Frequency* offer keen insight into this dualistic power-dynamic, acting to re-configure the podcast from something which is, supposedly, by essence controlled by the listener, to something which is chaotic, unpredictable and controlling, and which re-situates the podcast itself within older, more 'autonomous' and uncertain audio media.

As the show's title suggests, *The Phantom Frequency* denies its podcast medium, and this is primarily achieved within its hosting frames' representation as analogue radio transmission. The show's opening is heavily crowded with hisses and crackles of static and broken strains of other broadcasts which populate suggested 'surrounding' airwaves. Stations 'switch' between the static to the accompaniment of a pronounced dial 'click', intimating a turning wireless dial, and indistinct voices fade in and out of focus alongside brief fragments of The Platters' 1955 hit 'Only You'. These sounds offer obvious rejection of digital media, and in doing so act to re-negotiate the podcast listener's sense of control over and containment of their digital audio media, and to re-situate the lone podcast listener within a position of static vulnerability in comparison to an ever-mobile, uncontained and uncontrollable wireless media.

If early radio was frequently aligned with the potential to accidentally connect strange voices to unknown ears, either through ham radio fishing or its more otherworldly, Spiritualist counterpart, podcasting is identifiable through its absolute exclusion of unwanted voices. Yet such aspects of choice and selection which so frequently define the podcast experience are undercut in *The Phantom Frequency*'s shifting channels and disembodied dial clicks, and the listener is placed in an unfamiliar space of waiting and uncertainty as to what they *will* end up hearing. Indeed, as voices shift in and out of audibility the podcast's direct, individualistic communication channel is displaced by a multi-vocal ether; an ever-present, straining mass of concurrent voices that seek to reach a willing ear. Rather than assimilating the listener within a listening collective, then, *The Phantom Frequency* presents a speaking collective, whose odd, snatched phrases recall and repurpose early radio anxieties: rather than an infiltration or 'invasion' of the domestic sphere, the podcast listener is subjected to an infiltration of the

technological and personal sphere - the protective 'sound bubble' of new audio media is perforated by radio's untethered, roaming voices.

As the voice begins to speak, this reappropriation is further developed as the listener is directly addressed and re-situated not within a domestic host sphere but rather as a lone target (a point which the earlier strains of 'Only You' seem to underscore) situated within the 'broadcast's' expanse: 'Through the airwaves. Beneath the static. It's here. We've finally broken through, and found you.' ('The Damned Thing') Herein, then, notions of listener mobility and choice are subverted, as the listener is presented almost as a sitting duck for the active, hunting and highly mobilised energy of the radio broadcast. The 'broadcast', it is suggested, has navigated its own path to the listener, enforcing the listener's (comparatively) physically located status through contrast with the broadcast's mobile infiltration of their new audio technology. While in its automatic uploads the podcast may be considered a highly autonomous form, in its containment within each listener's device, and concurrent adherence to listener-enforced 'play', 're-play' and 'pause', it may also be considered somewhat inert and powerless.

The 'frequency's empowerment (alongside the listener's disempowerment) through this re-mediation is further emphasised through its invisibility and autonomy. Unlike the more 'controlled' and 'visible' podcast form, which the listener consciously selects and manipulates on their listening device, this supposed radio 'frequency' is able to see and find that which may not see and find them. This sensation is reinforced in the host's farewell:

Regrettably, our broadcast signal is weakening ... we will transmit again tomorrow with another tale to [static] your ears. And don't worry about finding us, we'll find you. (ibid)

Through re-mediation then, the podcast listener is thus left 'blind', isolated and surrounded by a media form which by its very essence is omnipresent, uncontainable and able to slip into even the most private of spaces.

In its implementation of radio form *The Phantom Frequency* does not so much offer an OTR 'listening experience' as an OTR 'takeover', wherein the power of radio is presented as starkly alive, or 'undead', and co-present alongside new media technologies. There is a sense that podcast/iPod technology has been over-ridden or commandeered by the older radio form, that the airwaves remain there to be ridden and may still find their way to listener's ears regardless of updated, 'privatising' audio equipment. Indeed, if new audio media can be seen to 'revive' many long-dormant audio-arts, most notably the audio dramatic form, then *The Phantom Frequency* suggests that radio has been keenly awaiting such opportunity. There is a reminder in this re-mediatory frame of radio's continued presence, and a suggestion that podcast technology has not truly surpassed radio forms, but rather invites their uncanny return.

It is not only through sound that horror podcasting evidences re-mediatory urges. One of the most neglected idiosyncrasies of podcast form is that it is dualistically acoustic and visual. Subscription to a podcast's RSS feed does allow 'untethered,' transparent listening experiences, but first the podcast must be sourced through the highly visual contexts of a home or host website. This embedded format represents a bold step away from the 'invisibility' with which audio media is commonly aligned. Hilmes offers that 'today, radio happens when you access a website, or activate an app, click on a 'play' icon or touch an icon ... these screen interfaces are radio, as much as the audio stream itself' (2013, 49). In many horror podcasts, this multi-sensory facet innately informs and shapes the acoustic horror experience. Logos, artworks, interactive and narratively-tied webpages create paratexts and contexts which extend beyond, and often

integrate with, the acoustic. Thus, while we may be told that 'nothing that [radio] deals with is visual,' in podcasting the visual dimension frequently represents a deeply meaningful aspect of the horror experience (Crisell: 1986, 9).

In many early horror podcasts, these hyper-modern screen interfaces are used to suggest older technologies, times, and listening cultures. Examples of this trait vary from richly somewhat sparse, albeit effective, static images of wireless receivers and speakers, or domestic listening environments (*Radio Grimm*; *The Phantom Frequency*; *Icebox Radio Theatre*; *19 Nocturne Boulevard*), to more richly interactive virtual environments. Anthology drama *Tales from Beyond the Pale* offers a key example of such embellished visual re-mediation. The show's website homepage explains the programme as a conscious recollection of Golden Era anthology horror; as 'radio plays for the digital age'. Indeed, this explanation implies a permanence to the OTR horror mediation: in the creators' conception, the website's plays remain as *radio* plays rather than dramatic podcasts or internet audio-streams, suggesting that audio-horror's radio medium remains unchanged, and that it is simply the era that has shifted. A subsequent elaboration on the podcast's aims further implies a desire for the listener to engage in an imaginative *temporal* return also:

These Tales are a loving homage to a time when horror and suspense were manifested in the minds of the audience, just as much as they were in the performances themselves. We hope you will take a journey with us, one that hasn't been traversed since the days of Orson Welles, Boris Karloff, and Vincent Price. (*Tales From Beyond the Pale* homepage)

Tales from Beyond the Pale seeks to find realisation as an homage through imaginative audience collaboration which leans strongly on the suggestion of imaginative, nostalgic audience time-travel or relocation to the Golden Era. For Svetlana Boym, 'nostalgia remains an intermediary

between collective and individual memory'; it is a necessarily collective act as wider cultural understandings of the past, themselves often presented and preserved through media, merge with our individual longing for and imagining of that past (2001, 54). It is possible that many of *Tales from Beyond the Pale*'s listeners will never have experienced Golden Era horror first hand, but the podcast operates on an assumption of shared cultural memory, and knowledge of iconic horror figures such as Karloff and Price. In this assumed knowledge any listener can draw upon a 'memory' of past American horror forms to re-experience that past 'not the way it was, but for the past the way it could have been' (Boym: 2001, 351). For Boym it is only technology which can enact this fusion between present and reconstructed past as whilst 'fundamentally, both nostalgia and technology are about mediation', 'nostalgia mourns distances and disjunctures between times and spaces, never bridging them, technology offers solutions and builds bridges' (2001, 346).

The homepage visually enforces these desired ties to an older, more traditional style of audio reception throughout its mediatory interface. The show's website is a richly interactive, visual experience which explicitly situates the podcast within the reanimated corpse of OTR, and the listener within a particular virtual listening space. Battered wireless radios, a rotting hand proffering an outdated microphone, black and white film reels, and invitations to drive-through movies suffuse the website's homepage, recalling a consciously exhumed, '(un)dead' American culture. The podcast's icon, the zombie-hand and anachronistic microphone, recalls two pasts: both the human corpse-figure, and outmoded 'dead' technology. Both are reanimated to forge a new horror from old material as the corpse reaches to communicate with us through his outmoded mic. Indeed, 'dead' technology is iconic of human transience - the modern era is constantly pushed back by technology's progress, and engagement with old machines reinstates

that even the ‘*new new media*’ of podcast will one day be a relic of supposed ‘now-ness’. We are reminded of our place in history as one component rather than the end point, and the ‘journey’ begins. To listen to the website’s free episode showcase, the user must click on a glowing, antiquated wireless. This ‘takes’ the user to the ‘listening room’, a wooden, cabin-like space dominated by two wireless sets, whose dials must be turned (i.e. clicked upon) to begin podcast play. These ephemera lay upon a table which visually extends from the listener’s keyboard, linking the physical and virtual listening spaces and, as the audio begins to play, surrounding the listener within a visual and acoustic horror space. With a Frankensteinian mix of electricity and exhumation, the web page brings OTR culture and technology disturbingly and disruptively back to life and places the listener explicitly within it.

The room’s contents bear examination. The radios, cassette tapes, LPs, cinematic apparatus and books create a collage of horror-sound history, reminding us both of the Gothic’s tendency to disrupt linear temporality, as ‘Gothic atmospheres ... have repeatedly signaled the disturbing return of pasts upon presents,’ and also that ‘the history of sound contains multiple temporalities, and a varying of intersecting chronologies’ (Botting: 1999, 1; Sterne: 2003, 341). The 1950s is explicitly evoked through cinematic reference to *The Werewolf* (1956). The Werewolf’s mask hangs on the wall, coaxing an intriguing meditation on the demise of old visual horror aesthetics. Today *The Werewolf* would likely comply with Bert Coules’ articulation of ‘[t]he disappointing man-in-a-rubber-suit movie monster’, a statement which recalls J. Halberstam’s discussion of the ‘limit of visibility’, wherein the visually defined monster will always fail to live up to the individuated offerings of imagination (Coules cited in Hand: 2015, 4; Halberstam: 1995, 39). (Of course, there is a strong case to be made for radio horror sidestepping such restraints, a point which shall be returned to throughout this thesis’ entirety.) Here in the

listening room the Werewolf's fearsomeness is perhaps more effectively invoked in his deathly poise and eyes that occasionally, softly, glow. The 'classic' horror forms are not quite dead in this space but rather co-present in the formation of newer, digital evolutions. Likewise, a copy of John Robert Colombo's *The Wendigo* (1983), a compilation of North American and Canadian folklore of a cannibalistic ice giant, lies in a pile of books by one radio, evoking the historical transition of horror from unstable orality to authored text, and also gesturing toward Fessenden's 2001 cinematic interpretation of the tale. In this 'book' the transient inhabitant of the room is again reminded of horror's continuous rebuke of temporal linearity. In horror, stories do not often die: they resurface and return again and again, like so many resilient zombies, to face another age.

Listening whilst 'situated' in the room not only reinstates this horror world as a regressive space, in which eras of Americana are layered upon one another, but as a space which refutes the casual mobility of Bull's theories of urban listening. Here audio-horror is more than sound, it is space and setting. As the listener settles down for the tale they are in a space that is both cosy and disquieting, which is familiar in its cluttered visual collage of not just the old, but the different stages of old that have made up American horror. In this virtual room, to engage with new audio horror is to necessarily engage with an ancient tradition of horror storytelling. Records are piled among tape cassettes and devil puppets hang from the walls: the images of bygone listening technologies are firmly merged with both American horror history, both dramatic, cinematic and literary, and with the contemporary podcast offerings of Fessenden. The past does not fade here, it nestles in among itself, story upon story and mediation upon mediation. Indeed the 'room' staunchly refutes stable identification with its own era and role as a digital space. Engagement with the electrical is conversely minimised, candlelight digitally

flickers from a human skull as all electrical presence is concentrated upon the two radios, imbuing them with an older, Gothic, sense of mystery and Otherness for their electrical power. That the show's creators have taken the time to craft such a visual space, and that it is firmly (Un)homely in its realisation, anchors the show's audio-content within a visualized imaginative dislocation of the listener from mobile new media cultures. To fully engage with Fessenden's audio horror the listener must engage with a particular setting and aesthetic of listening, one which is both nostalgic and destabilising in its portrayal of old and domestic technologies as remaining, embedded within the new media era, as gateways to the horrific and supernatural.

There are further uses of website imagery in horror podcasting which, whilst not directly contributing to a sense of re-mediation, bear discussion for their evidenced interactivity with OTR and older listening eras and cultures. Such a means by which horror podcasts use visibility to connect to the Golden Era is in the widespread use of posters which are displayed on the shows' websites which both implicate and revive OTR horror's rich 'material' history. Horror podcasts including *Tales to Terrify*; *Drabblecast*; *Campfire Radio Theatre*; *Earbud Theater*; and *The Thrilling Adventure Hour* all offer such artworks, the vast majority of which feature cartoonish 1950's artwork reminiscent of both Golden era radio advertisement and comic book adaptations/accompaniments, and also of the 1950-60s Universal Studios horror-film teaser posters. These posters suggest an alternate proposition to Hilmes' assertion that 'radio's present era is marked by a transformative new materiality, as digital platforms finally overcome the ephemerality that once made radio so hard to capture and assess as a cultural form ... based on the lack of any kind of permanent visible and material record of radio's presence aside from the numbers on the dial' (2013, 44-43; 47). In horror podcasting we may argue that digital platforms

do not only overcome actual broadcast's ephemerality, but also assert and appropriate its overlooked paratextual materiality.

Whilst OTR and pre-digital radio forms were largely characterised by the elusive nature and 'intractable immateriality' of actual broadcast, the form was never fully without paratextual materiality (Hilmes: 2013, 47). OTR horror extended beyond its invisible and fleeting sound base to more find a 'more permanent visible and material record' of its presence in radio magazine reviews and coverage, commercially-released LP transcription, teaser posters and visual advertisements, and companion comic books. This practice was instilled from OTR horror's beginnings in Alonzo Dean Cole's seminal horror anthology show *The Witch's Tale* (1931-1938), which regularly advertised with artistic teaser posters, released an LP of its episodes, and ran a successful comic companion series. Such materiality continued throughout OTR horror, and in this sense there has always been an element of visibility to OTR horror, which many horror podcast paratexts evidently, starkly, recall. While not strictly exemplifying remediation, there is a definite sense of digital rejection in these artworks, of overriding aspects of transparency of medium to reinstate an awareness of the horror podcast's cultural radio past.

To differing yet recognizable degrees horror podcast webpage interfaces are consistently used to strengthen associations with past technology and/or domestic spaces, directing listeners toward the *imagined* act of located and shared listening if not the actual. However, it bears noting that the importance of the webpage in the majority of these podcasts' presentation suggests a practical enforcement of situated listening, wherein the computer replaces and replicates the wireless' traditional role as a domestically situated listening technology. Just as people sat around their radio, many horror podcasts clearly aim, in their various mission statements and visual realisations, for listeners to sit before their computers in physically located if

imaginatively shared acts of horror listening. Certainly, the presence of detailed visual elements within the podcasts' paratextual listener engagement do not suggest entirely mobile suppositions of listener placement. These interfaces are not suited to the jogger or commuting urban navigator that Bull and his critical contemporaries present us with, they require multi-sensory attention, and stationary engagement with the podcast that such secondary levels of engagement do not allow. Even if we were to allow that a listener may engage with such visual interfaces only fleetingly, to download podcast audio for later mobile listening, the essence of location and older technological mediation is instilled, as an aspect to be cultivated within both horror hosting frames and the main body of programming.

Another means by which the horror podcast genre re-mediate itself is through deliberate replication of the connective sound-structures of OTR broadcast. Here we find recreation of 'traditional' radio's 'dead air' or - as Bull's subject puts it - 'waste' materials and 'drivel', such as advertisements, DJ spiels, and public service announcements often segued together to create a semblance of radio's 'rhetoric of liveness' and continuance (Crisell: 1986, 11). *The Thrilling Adventure Hour*, *Red Panda Adventures*, *Harry Strange*, *Black Jack Justice*, *The Incomparable Radio Theatre*, *We are not Alone*, *Fireside Mystery Theatre*, *Horrorgasm*, *The Atlanta Radio Theatre Company*, *It's All Been Done Radio Hour*, and *The Fitzrovia Radio Hour* are among many podcast audio dramas which offer original audio dramas in the style of Golden Era programming; or rather, in the style of what Golden Era programming may be imagined and desired to sound like from a nostalgic, yet culturally and technologically 'advanced' perspective. Herein podcasting reaches an atavistic overdrive as smooth-talking detectives, leering hosts, campy advertisements and po-faced public announcements all feign to burst back to life from long-dead 'airwaves'. These creative, sentimental, and often tongue-in cheek period shows do

not so much showcase Golden Era radio's history as its meaning and place in contemporary cultural imagination, aspects which are, to no small degree cultivated by the podcasts themselves. On one hand, then, these shows operate as simulacra constructed from assorted wisps of reference, memory and parody which, in their cultural precedence to that which they signify, may threaten to eclipse the original truth. On the other hand, they are vital means by which that near-forgotten truth may continue to live, and grow, in popular cultural imagination.

The Thrilling Adventure Hour, an anthology drama show which identifies in each episode's opening as 'the nation's favourite New Time podcast in the style of Old Time Radio', provides a highly successful and representative example of such OTR-styled podcasting, and the ways in which it both produces and preserves, a cultural memory of OTR. Beginning as a live stage production with a radio conceit in 2005, *The Thrilling Adventure Hour* began releasing in podcast form in 2011 and continued in that format until its conclusion in 2015. Since evolving to podcast form *The Thrilling Adventure Hour* proved enormously popular, spawning comic-book and graphic novel spin-offs, and boasting a wide array of 'A-list' celebrity guest stars, including Joseph Gordon Levitt, Jon Hamm, and Emily Blunt. Typical of its contemporaries, the show is presented throughout as an hour of radio broadcast, in this case from 'The Thrilling Adventure Hour Station Network'. Herein several different 'shows' are segued together by the station announcer, each emulating a popular Golden Era genre or style, such as Noir, Adventure, Sci-fi or Horror, and demarcated by advertisement breaks for fictitious show sponsors 'Work Juice Coffee' and the gleefully outmoded 'Patriot Cigarettes'. Through these various aspects the show forms a collage of pastiche, in which odds and ends of radio's 'real' past are collected together, and variously enlarged, emphasised, collided and upturned, to create a new history for Old Time Radio.

One of *The Thrilling Adventure Hour*'s most popular and enduring 'shows' is 'Beyond Belief'. This monster-of-the-week anthology series follows jaunty 1940s-styled socialites Frank and Sadie Doyle, a married duo of high-class alcoholics with paranormal investigative powers. The series offers a clear example of *The Thrilling Adventure Hour*'s creation of a 'style' of OTR which both speaks to, and cultivates, a cultural awareness of OTR forms, contexts and conventions, beginning with the show's standard introduction. 'Beyond Belief' is generally introduced by *The Thrilling Adventure Hour*'s 'station' announcer as the evening's final feature, and recollects the Golden Era's tradition and rationale of late night horror programming:

Station Host: [1920s-style swing music] Recorded live at Largo at the Coronet in Hollywood California, America! Tonight's episode, 'Beyond Belief' - Gorey Gorey Hallelujah! Starring Paul F. Thompson and Paget Brewster as those married mediums, the Doyles!

Beyond Belief Host: [organ music] It's time to send the little ones to dream-land, and set your radio's dial to spooky. Bolt the doors, lock your windows, and steel yourself for mysterious suspense, as we take you to 'Beyond Belief'. (Beyond Belief, *Gorey Gorey Hallelujah*)

While this sequence takes less than one minute to deliver, it performs several effective re-mediatory functions, firstly by implying a broader broadcast stream. That 'Beyond Belief' is first introduced by a connective or 'station-style' host, who is then 'met' by a different, specifically horror-world host, recalls OTR's 'frame conventions' or 'boundary rituals', by which the medium's 'invisibility' and connected stream of form were demarcated. Yet a station host is also a connective facet, whose presence maintains a relationship between each feature with the overall show's 'broadcast' station. This acoustic relay, the hosts' dated vocabulary, (a very

different announcement style that we would expect even of contemporary radio, in which ‘delivery has become much less formal, more intimate’) and the use of swing music and ‘classic’ horror organ music, intimates a sense of continuous, ongoing radio than individualised, play-on-demand podcast.

Beyond implication of the podcast as ongoing broadcast, this opening section also makes nuanced but effective claims at embodying an older reception technology. Both announcers speech is not only verbally dated, but also acoustically - being exclamatory, highly precise and loud and what is colloquially termed ‘Transatlantic’ in accent. The Transatlantic accent, acutely described by Youtube’s Jonathan Strickland as ‘that tinny, clipped tone of yesteryear’, is not a regional accent but rather one which is acquired, and which holds particular relationship with older media technologies (2014). It was frequently taught to actors in the 1930s and 1940s and died away in the 1950s - a time-span which is popularly attributed the accent’s origins in early radio and ‘talkies’, wherein bass tones were near-inaudible. Thus the accent itself acts as a signifier of age and technology. Similarly, early OTR delivery was often more theatrical and exaggerated, not solely as a facet of contemporaneous culture, but also in concession towards wireless technology. Andrew Crisell observes, ‘In the days of wireless the indifferent quality of the reception and the group nature of the audience tended to encourage a somewhat declamatory style of delivery’ (1986, 12). Wireless reception quality was often unreliable and frequently offered an impoverished sound quality, indicative of the great physical distance between announcer and listener, and requiring vocal effort on the presenter’s part in order to maintain a sense of connection with the listener. Presenters often had to ‘speak up’ to ensure being heard and to garner a sense of relationship with their listeners, and this lead to a more over-emphasised ‘announcer’ style. Besides recalling the OTR era through both adherence to traditional

segmented radio form, and a formal, archaic language style, the announcers' speech style specifically recalls wireless technology and the wireless listening experience.

This sequence offers a further level of re-mediation through the implication of liveness and scheduling. Late-night scheduling of OTR horror shows was comprehensive, eventually representing not simply an atmospheric choice, but an attempt to protect 'innocent' ears from the increasingly gruesome exploits of horror radio (and radio writers from the increasing restrictions of on-air censorship). In 1947 KFI released the following statement:

Murder and mystery shows provide thrilling entertainment for adults, but are not the type of program best suited for the youngsters. That's why we have gone to quite some trouble to rearrange our programming so that all of our 'who-done-it' shows are released after 9 o'clock at night. That way the adults can enjoy well-written, exciting mystery dramas, and the kids don't have to hear them. (cited in Grams, 2004)

'Beyond Belief's' positioning as the show's final section, and the host's directive that it's 'time' to send children to bed and to set the 'radio' dial to spooky, thus slickly imply both liveness and OTR mediatory technology, and further emulate OTR watershed practice recollecting the 'traditional' media, and morals, of American yesteryear. These are, self-consciously, the sounds of an past listening era, implying a break or transition in wider, ongoing and shared radio broadcast rather than the introduction of an isolated and 'personal' podcast. Before 'Beyond Belief' even begins, the engaged and imaginatively responsive listener is constructed in antithesis of mobile, solitary iPod culture, and relocated within a nostalgic, domestic environment, listening to a Golden Era wireless.

Throughout ‘Beyond Belief’’s inner narratives the acoustic conventions of ‘classic’ radio drama and horror are also playfully yet diligently revived. Almost tongue-twisting Transatlantic accents, painfully melodramatic creaking doors, over-emphatic Hammond chords, and conspicuously-heavy footsteps across ubiquitously wooden floorboards form much of the show’s dark humour. Yet whilst these elements are consciously exaggerated ‘Beyond Belief’’s over-egged acoustics, and their use of footsteps in particular, often echo OTR director Earle McGill’s comments: ‘What a temptation to put footsteps into a radio play! If one were to believe the radio producers, this is the most uncarpeted nation in the world’ (cited in Verma 2012, 30). Footsteps were a favourite in OTR as they allowed for un-narrated character movement and plot development, allowing scenes to develop more ‘naturally’ before the listener’s ears. Leather soles upon hard-wood floors swiftly became ubiquitous features of audio drama. Accordingly, ‘Beyond Belief’ exaggerates this already notable convention, positing standard shoe-falls as the ‘radio’ set’s only acoustic accompaniment:

Sadie: Ready yourself my darling dear, for the noise of us walking, leaving, utilising an elevator, and exiting via revolving door!

Frank: Give me just a moment...

[sound of shoes walking across wooden floorboards, followed by extended silence]

Sadie: Very close!

[sudden thumping sound]

Frank: I detected the suggestion of a revolution!

Sadie: Ladies and gentlemen, that will be added, as they say, in post! (*Hell is the Loneliest Number*)

In over-playing these conventions ‘Beyond Belief’ both draws on a truthful memory of radio’s conventions and limitations, and hyperbolizes this memory to create a humorous memorial of the efforts of entertainment past.

‘Beyond Belief’ continues to emulate and revive ‘true’ radio history in its narrative premise, through which the ‘greats’ of OTR are actively recalled and signposted. ‘Beyond Belief’’s opening segue makes a playful homage to one of Golden Era radio’s most-loved mystery shows *The Shadow* (1937-1954), which, in its formative years, famously began each episode with Orson Welles chuckling before offering the eerie line: ‘Who knows what evil lurks in the heart of men?’. Meanwhile, ‘Beyond Belief’’s ‘hero’ Frank opens every show with the tweaked catchphrase, ‘Who cares what evil lurks in the heart of men?’, to which Sadie neatly rejoins, ‘So long as Evil’s carrying the Martini tray darling’. Whilst this playful send-up of Welles’ once-chilling line makes somewhat ludicrous that which was for a long time presented in deadly earnest tones, it still calls to mind that which it teases. Indeed, the wider ‘Beyond Belief’ set up forges a playful homage to *The Shadow*. Just as city high-fliers Frank and Sadie follow their 6th senses to thwart evil, *The Shadow* told the story of a wealthy socialite-cum-psychic Lamont Cranston, who, alongside his quick-witted and glamorous ‘companion’ Margot Lane, used his powers of telepathy, hypnotism and invisibility to fight urban evils under the pseudonym ‘The Shadow’. In *The Thrilling Adventure Hour*’s over familiar catchphrases and high-society psychics not simply the sounds and structures of OTR, but the stories too are (however teasingly) revived.

In this respect, 'Beyond Belief' is no one-trick pony and frequently collapses crime, mystery and horror genre types into one (a further recollection of the Golden Era, wherein 'horror', 'mystery', 'crime', and 'suspense' genres were often all represented in the same anthology shows). As a duo of drunk but impeccably dressed and mannered mediums fighting crime from the supernatural underworld, the Doyles not only present a parodic counterpart to 'The Shadows' but also Dashiell Hammett's Nick and Nora Charles. Initially the stars of Hammett's novel *The Thin Man*, the Charles were a married detective pair who spawned film, television and radio off-shoots, the last of which ran for almost ten years. This itself, on occasion, crossed over into the 'horror' territories, being occasionally showcased by the ghoulish *Inner Sanctum Mysteries*. Indeed the Doyles and Charles are often so similar as to be almost indistinguishable. Whilst 'those married mediums' the Doyles are psychic, they are also rich, witty, madly in love, and emphatically yet charmingly inebriated - a depiction which could stand equally for 'the happiest married couple in radio' the Charles, who NPR describe as 'rich, witty and in love', adding, '[t]hey also drank a lot.' In both shows the couple's banter and spats of loving jealousy form much of the entertainment. Even details concerning the couple's lifestyles are mirrored, with each couple living in luxurious city penthouses, and depending upon each wife's independent income to support their doing so; a point emphasised as Sadie's slow sophisticate drawl echoes, almost uncannily, that of Nora.

Indeed, if 'Beyond Belief's opening set-up may be accredited to *The Shadow*, the show's standard exposition sequence could almost be taken from an old *Thin Man* script. *The Thin Man* series always opened with a reiteration of the show's stars and musicians, before 'taking' the listener to the Charles' apartment:

Announcer: It's the Front Line Theatre! [musical intro] Today we're bringing you are real thriller, 'The Strange Case of Professor Wainger', and here's our extra-special guest of honour, Tommy Dorsey and his orchestra [music] ...in New York night has fallen, and in the apartment of Nick and Nora Charles a friend discusses his new job [Fade into dialogue] ('The Strange Case of Professor Waigner')

The Doyles follow a near-identical preamble as the announcer introduces the show's stars and orchestra before describing the episode's setting:

Announcer: Join the Doyles as they walk beyond belief in tonight's dark episode: 'Hell is the Loneliest Number'. Our story begins high above Manhattan, in a luxurious penthouse suite in the famed plaza hotel, where Frank and Sadie make their home and their martinis, and ask the most bedevilling questions [fade to dialogue] (*Hell is the Loneliest Number*)

In both shows this routine exposition readies the listener for an inevitable knock upon their respective heroes' door. *The Thin Man* generally began each episode with the Charles answering an unexpected knock at the door of their lush New York apartment, a knock which invariably brought trouble and mystery to their lives. In 'Beyond Belief' this trope is often toyed with as the Doyles forget or refuse to open their door until it is impossible to do otherwise. In one instance, following Frank's waking from a disturbing dream, the Doyles joke at the initial absence of an 'unexpected' visitor to explain its occurrence:

Frank: [...] Thank goodness it was all just a dream. [pause] Thank even more goodness that no one has just now called nor come knocking to reveal it was not just a dream.

[the couple begin a jigsaw puzzle, which forms a vision of Frank's nightmare]

SFX: Ominous knocks at door

Sadie: Oh! Good, perhaps a visitor will take your mind off your horror.

Frank: Right you are! I'll just reach cheerfully for the knob and with neither care nor worry, open this door we've got and...

SFX: Door Opening

Frank: You!

SFX: Dramatic music (*Wishing Hell*)

As with the programme's shoe-falls and host introductions, in its consistent mimicry of *The Thin Man*'s characters, structures and motifs 'Beyond Belief' reveals itself to be more than (as it claims) simply 'in the style of Old Time Radio', representing instead an almost seamless mesh of references, homage, parody and interactions with radio's Golden Era. Whilst not all listeners may appreciate the exact source of pastiche, both theatre and audio-only audiences are able to appreciate the source of humour as radio's somewhat motheaten yet endearing past.

Fictional sponsor advertising forms a further, integral facet within *The Thrilling Adventure Hour*'s segmented, sequential sound structure - allowing for both intelligibility between different drama sections and also, importantly, presenting the show as an 'authentic' return to OTR programming. Unlike the 'real' adverts and sponsor plugs more commonly found in later podcasting, which can be fast-forwarded without compromising the desired main feature 'cast', these aspects represent desired, cultivated elements of OTR aesthetic and narrative which seek implicitly to redefine the podcast *as* broadcast. Crisell explains that 'the evident aim of ... segmentation is to homogenise the output in order to make the commercial breaks and the informational content seem as entertaining as the pop songs and rock 'n' roll tracks' (1986, 72). Thus, radio adverts developed to sound much like features in their own right, and quickly began

to cultivate presentation as a secondary form of entertainment; herein a ‘vital connection between consumerism and many popular programmes [developed]; on the air advertising and entertainment were often inseparable’ (Lenthal 2007, 63). As ‘listeners came to equate people and entertainment with the goods they advertised’, celebrity endorsement, dramatic scenes and musical features all became regular tropes within Golden Era radio advertisement (ibid, 64).

The Thrilling Adventure Hour’s advertising segments emulate such attempts to acoustically incorporate advertising within the entertainment aspect of radio - they are introduced by the ‘station’ host as a feature rather than interruption, and include short dramatic acts, jingles, and ‘celebrity’ endorsement of (fictional) sponsors ‘Patriot Brand Cigarettes’.

Beyond cultivating a sense of ongoing broadcast, and a distinctly period aesthetic, the show’s various advertisements frequently impart a radio-esque sense of liveness, and an awareness of mediation, through deft manipulation of the ‘at home’ and ‘live’ audiences. This is well-exemplified in the following ‘Patriot’ cigarettes plug:

Ladies and gentlemen, we are about to bring out a mystery celebrity to speak on behalf of Patriot Brand Cigarettes. Home audience, try to guess who it is from only her voice ... (A Word From Patriot Brand Cigarettes)

Direct address of the ‘home audience’ forges an effective reinstatement of the show’s imaginatively adopted wireless medium, reinforcing both the listener’s domestic status, and the degree of physical separation between listener and broadcast. Meanwhile, address of the ‘home audience’ naturally recalls the theatre audience, and their actual temporal and physical immediacy to the show. This dualistic address implicates a liveness to the proceedings, as though the ‘home audience’ is indeed joining the ongoing theatrical proceedings ‘directly’ through the

wireless. This sensation of live radio broadcast is strengthened as the mystery guest appears, and toys with the ‘at-home’ audience, to the audible amusement of their ‘in-house’ counterparts.

Of course *The Thrilling Adventure Hour*’s advertisement breaks’ most iconic sense of difference from contemporary podcasting, and ‘return’ to Golden Era broadcasting, is in their subject of cigarettes. Cigarette advertising is now banned on American radio, and has become taboo across all US media industries - predominantly remaining through cinematic and televisual product placement and never as a direct, self-proclaimed advertisement. The Golden Era, however, was characterised by cigarette industry sponsorship, for whom radio was the largest advertising medium. That *The Thrilling Adventure Hour* pretends sponsorship by a cigarette company both deliberately recalls the segmented sound of sponsored OTR broadcasting, and the moralities and conventions of an older America. The cigarette is not only glamorised through ‘celebrity’ endorsement (and is tied to older forms of American glamour in the mentions of cigarette holders, and the ludicrous claim that each cigarette comes in a Tiffany’s box), but also tied to strength and, most importantly nation. The *Patriot Brand* cigarette is a hyperbolic reconstruction of all that Golden Era cigarette sponsorship represented - national audiences, national icons and (encouraged) national desires. *The Thrilling Adventure Hour*’s regular inclusion of *Patriot Brand Cigarettes* ‘advertisement’ within its podcast actively serves to replicate the OTR broadcast sound, to construct/imagine a traditional, national and domestic ‘home audience’, and re-situate the podcast in an older, highly recognizable, cultural era and mediatory technology.

‘Beyond Belief’’s constant volley of recollections, and the playful knowingness of their delivery, is reflective of the wider *The Thrilling Adventure Hour* show (and indeed, of the developing ‘old-style’ podcast genre as a whole). Yet whilst recollecting the habits and

characters of OTR, and undoubtedly displaying a desire for temporary ‘return’ to an older America, ‘Beyond Belief’ repeatedly puts the past firmly in its place, as something which is often funny only through maintained and highlighted awareness of its comparable naivety, juvenility, or insufficiency to modern tastes. *The Thrilling Adventure Hour* asks of its audience two things: ‘is it not marvelous how we used to be able to entertain ourselves?’, and, ‘is it not marvelous how these things used to entertain us? Through podcast reimaginations radio’s Golden Era is often presented as a period of simplicity, both wholesome and naive. A time when every hero had a catchphrase, children went to bed on time, and sponsor brand cigarettes could be depended on for healthy lungs and T-zone comfort.

These elements offer not so much the true ‘style’ of OTR as those specific elements which, to a modern audience, so consciously mark it as old. Rather than mimesis, *The Thrilling Adventure Hour* presents and cultivates the podcast generation’s nostalgic, ‘sophisticate’ imaginings of what its crackling and hissing analogue predecessor might have been. In its exploration and mutation of radio’s past *The Thrilling Adventure Hour* exhibits well the state of nostalgia as inhabiting and yearning not necessarily the factual past, but rather an idea of the past that suits our needs. In this case a supplemented desire for community and traditionalism often eulogised and lamented in contemporary culture meets with affirmation of the present moment’s technological and cultural progression. Yet through these perhaps hyperbolic, and fanciful works, very real aspects of the Golden Era are revived and preserved for public consideration. The artistic value of skills and actions that ostensibly died with Golden Era radio are reclaimed as live Foley artistry, audio scripting and acting and, perhaps most importantly, the art of listening return through these works. Similarly, whilst these works creatively portray radio’s Golden Era, the narratives and characters which are presented frequently recall and/or make

reference to original, near-forgotten OTR figures, forging if not an actualised memorial of such elements of OTR, then at least creating a sense of connection to, and assertion of, their presence in contemporary culture.

In other instances, the actual materials of Golden Era broadcast are reconstructed to explicitly offer listeners the ‘experience’ of listening to ‘genuine’ Golden Era radio. In contrast to such self-consciously post-modern and playful embodiments of the Golden Era as discussed above, works such as *Campfire Radio Theatre*’s ‘The Dentist’ (2013) and ‘The Haunted Cell’ (2012), and *The NoSleep Podcast*’s Old Time Radio Season Specials offer highly detailed one-off ‘re-makes’ of ‘classic’ radio dramas. which consciously seek to revel in the original work’s age, cultural context and original mediation, regardless of (and often seemingly because of) their difference from contemporary culture and media. Generally, remakes are associated with the contemporary rather than historical moment, updating an original text to ‘match’ a newer audience. Markers of age and anachronism are expunged to create works more reflective of and thus ostensibly relevant to the world which contemporary audiences inhabit. A text’s historical context thus represents an unnecessary impediment to a newer audience’s engagement with a story. As Thomas Leitch observes, ‘a remake [...] takes what is presented as a classic, timeless story and updates it - partly by the paradoxical attempt to remove all markers of any historical period whatever’ (2002, 52). Such ‘markers’ may range from the social - such as fashion, slang/language, and treatment of gender, disability or race - to the technical, such as shooting a previously black-and-white film in colour. Thus remakes often represent corrective measures, as an undesirable past is jettisoned in favor of contemporary norms and expectations. Podcasting frequently rebukes this tradition, and *The NoSleep Podcast*, one of the most popular, prolific and

long-running of horror fiction podcasts, offers a particularly fruitful example of this in their Old Time Radio Season Specials (titled 'Old Time Radio Volume 1', etc.).

'Volume 1' remakes *Lights Out*'s 'Death Robbery' and 'Murder Castle'. 'Volume 2' deals with *Suspense* 'classics' 'Sorry, Wrong Number' and 'The House in Cypress Canyon'. These Season Specials invite listeners - many of whom, given the show's stated youthful demographic, may be assumed never to have heard Golden Era radio before - to 'Gather round and listen as The NoSleep Players recreate the old time radio experience!' (*The NoSleep Podcast*, 'Old Time Radio Season Special: Volume 1'; Cummings in Pers. Corr. 2015). Already, in the instruction to 'gather round', we find the suggestion of older mediatory forms and listening cultures, and it is likewise important to note the term 'experience'. The idea of an OTR 'experience' is the key to understanding podcast remakes, which operate much like living-museums for the ears. Herein aspects of the past (desirable and otherwise) are *not* replaced or obscured, but carefully replicated and showcased, and the podcast listener invited to engage in temporary, 'authentic', and often educative acts of imaginative return to America's lost audio age.

From the shows' offset, the listener is acoustically immersed in the re-created past as both the scripts of OTR, and the sounds, are 'brought to life'. In a style which becomes typical of the following 'Volumes', 'Volume 1' opens with a few moments of crackling static. Eventually a slow, off-key Hammond organ crescendo sounds, rising in tone. It peaks then falls in diminuendo and repeats, creating a perturbing and decidedly grim atmospheric tune, reminiscent of Golden Era radio horror conventions. The music recalls van Elferen's observation of Gothic music's 'over signifiers ... cliqués [which] scream but one thing: 'this music is SPOOKY!' (2012, 6). As van Elferen notes, by '[d]rawing listener's attention to nothing but their own empty surface, such musical formulas perform an expenditure of referentiality'; they act to speak of

something beyond themselves (ibid, 7). In this case, we might argue, *The NoSleep Podcast*'s opening organ speaks not only to its genre but to its *age*, and even a listener inexperienced in OTR horror formulae will likely recognize that this music is not only SPOOKY, but also OLD!

This referentiality continues as vocals are added to the show's acoustic mix, and the podcast makes an imaginative and aesthetic leap from podcast, to broadcast. Following the static and initial Hammond tones, the voice of host and producer Cummings' begins to speak over the music. However, rather than using his usual, informal, address, and welcoming listeners to the podcast, Cummings instead adopts a clipped Transatlantic accent, and welcomes listeners to the 'NoSleep Radio Network'. Besides the rather obvious significance of Cumming's claim regarding his form of mediation, his speech style - like that of *The Thrilling Adventure Hour* hosts (and actors) - implies an older culture and media form. In addition to this, Cumming's voice initially sounds thin and a little distant, suggesting a physical gulf between listener and speaker - a sound-feature which podcasting and digital radio technologies have all but eradicated in their clarity and quality. This stark sense of distance not only implies older radio technologies which must be tuned to 'bring' the voices of the ether closer, but perhaps also cultivates a sense of physical, and even temporal, distance between speaker and listener which is being breached through the the 'NoSleep Radio Network''s mysterious reach.

The voice, combined with the arcane organ strains, the 'static', and the host's identification of the show as belonging to the '*The NoSleep Radio Network*' achieve the impression of the podcast having morphed into an OTR broadcast. That this sequence mirrors the podcast's usual, contemporary opening, in which the listener is welcomed to *The NoSleep Podcast*, by the self-identified host David Cummings creates an overall effect of time-travelling media, as if the listener had somehow 'tuned in' to the podcast's earlier incarnation. Moreover,

in establishing himself as the ‘broadcast’ announcer Cummings not only recreates the accent and language-style of OTR, but the structures too, as he ‘revives’ the OTR technique of framing horror, suspense and mystery dramas with a creepy host. We will focus more comprehensively on this figure in the following section, but for now it is enough to recognise that, throughout radio’s Golden Era the horror host was an essential element of horror radio, acting as Richard Hand notes as a ‘conduit’ to ‘the impossible or incredible worlds of horror’ represented in the show’s play (2006, 25). As a conscious echo of the Golden Era, we might say that horror host Cummings ushers listeners not only to the ‘incredible’ realm of horror, but also to the equally foreign realm of the past.

Through Cumming’s appropriation of OTR horror host frames the past itself is presented almost as a horror house, the entry to which listeners are implored to prepare themselves. Having identified himself as the broadcast ‘announcer’, and offered some brief, educative facts about the works about to be re-made before our very ears, Cummings then locates his ‘broadcast’ in ‘the radio days of yore’, a time:

before the internet, before television, a time when families would gather around the radio and listen to tales of adventure, [SFX: glass breaking], spine-tingling suspense [SFX woman’s sharp gasp], and, of course, of horror [SFX woman’s prolonged scream]. (‘Old Time Radio Season Special: Volume 1’)

As, to the accompaniment of the show’s unsettling, archaic score, Cummings smoothly interweaves his descriptions of the past with viscerally surprising and sudden, yet consciously outdated sound effects, there is created the effect of travelling backwards in time, of going deeper into the world that he describes and which the programme, increasingly, acoustically represents. Thus in Cummings’ introduction listeners are removed from the present day, and the

‘upcoming’ past rather than the upcoming story is configured as the new enjoyably ‘threatening’ space. As Cummings instructs listeners to ‘turn of your electronic distractions, turn off the lights, and turn off any hope of making it out alive’, the compliant audience imaginatively extracts themselves from the security and connectivity of their particular moment, and allows themselves to be encased within the dimly known, and enjoyably uncertain past (ibid).

Whilst the surrounding acoustic environs of *The NoSleep Podcast*’s remakes are playfully hyperbolic and creative in re-creating a sense of pastness, in terms of script their main productions are rigidly faithful to their originals. This faithfulness allows a culture-clash between contemporary listener and OTR material as, though the texts detail timeless horror subjects of insanity, greed, mortality and monstrosity, their approach to these topics are frequently dated. Outmoded language survives intact with almost archival reverence: ‘perfectly rottens’, and ‘simply awfuls’ abound. References to outmoded technologies and the plays’ original surrounding events, such as World War Two, are retained. Furthermore, the cultural values expressed within these works may jarr with Millennial listeners’ own. ‘Death Robbery’’s Ruth and David represent an idyllic 1930s couple - David is successful in the masculine world of science, and Ruth provides the nurturing support required for his work. As David discusses Ruth with his friend Ed, the play’s age shows:

Ed: Ruth's a wonderful girl, David. Must be a big help to you in your work.

David: Don't know what I'd do without her. But if she ever gets too interested in pure science [laughs] I'm gonna - I'm - I'm gon-- I'm gonna lock her out of the lab and just make her go back to being a wife!

To a podcast audience this exchange is likely ludicrously dated. The play offers an unwitting revelation of women's past societal value: a point developed as Ruth dies, is reanimated by David and Ed, and is then killed again by David. Ruth's body is made the plaything of over-ambitious men, and when her reanimation does not meet with David's desire for his once perfect wife, she is murdered. Such anachronisms are evident throughout all of *The NoSleep Podcast's* remakes, particularly regarding gender roles but also including topics of mental illness and class. *The NoSleep Podcast* makes no attempt to deny or remove these markers, portraying the Golden Era 'warts and all' and offering listeners a chance to 'experience' the normative cultural values of Golden Era America.

Through sound, script and structure, *The NoSleep Podcast's* doppelganger remakes offer alternative means than archival podcast sites for listeners to meet with American radio history, offering an immersive, earnestly faithful and subtly educative OTR 'experience' for podcast listeners who may not have sought out, or even heard of, Golden Era radio-drama. This potentiality is acknowledged in one fan's (far from atypical) comment on the show's Facebook page:

I would have never believed I would have enjoyed the old time stories but after listening I loved it! I've since started listening to some of the old time radio podcasts and apps.

Thanks Nosleep for broadening my horizons :) (anonymous, 2016)

Indeed, *The NoSleep Podcast's* remakes are geared wholly towards acknowledging, enticing, and being accessible to listeners of the contemporary moment. Herein, the past is thus cast not as an undesirable impediment to contemporary audience engagement with older narratives, but as a part and parcel of the spectacle itself. In doing so, *The NoSleep Podcast's* historically informed

OTR 'experience' preserves and remembers a previously dwindling and overlooked OTR history and seeks actively to reinstate that history within the digital audio era.

Case Study Part 1

‘That’s What Makes it Public Radio!’: The Cult of Re-mediation in *Welcome to Night Vale*

Like the studies above, *Welcome to Night Vale* consciously returns to the traditions of American radio broadcasting, using re-mediation to negotiate the podcast’s situation as a discreet and self-contained audio-file, and to relocate itself within more traditional, shared structures of analogue radio programming. While also presented as though the listener had tuned into a show embedded within a more continuous stream of radio programming, in this case *Welcome to Night Vale* takes the form of a community radio show, for the mysterious desert town of Night Vale. Herein, co-creator Fink explains, ‘everything’s weird, but the weirdness is just part of day-to-day life. It’s not weird for the people who live there’ (cited in Edidin, 2013). Angels, missing children and blood-stone circles are as regular features of the news cycle as PTA meetings and bake sales. The show is hosted by life-long Night Vale resident Cecil, and directed toward, of course, the citizens of Night Vale (which include both residents discussed by Cecil and, apparently, the podcast listener). Recollective of, among others, David Lynch’s *Twin Peaks* (1990-) and Garrison Keller’s *Lake Woebegon* (1974-), *Welcome to Night Vale* uses an awareness of podcast form and radio history to bring new life to an American tradition of small town strange. Unlike the studies above, *Welcome to Night Vale* does not feign to belong to an older time frame than the podcast, rather, it re-locates traditional radio within a consciously digital, contemporary era. References to smartphones, social media, internet culture and all other aspects of modern American life mesh perfectly with the show’s plainly nostalgic, small-town community radio ‘mediation’ and form. Furthermore, the show’s horror and Gothic aspects underpin much of the programme’s attitude towards, and representation of, its mediation. As a ‘community radio’ programme for a fictional town where ‘every conspiracy theory is true’, *Welcome to Night Vale*

enacts an Uncanny sense of de/familiarising re-mediation, replicating the traditional, mundane sounds and structures of community radio for a community where horrific and inexplicable occurrences are everyday (Cranor cited in Murphy, 2014). *Welcome to Night Vale* is more than a horror drama constructed from sound, wherein listeners' awareness of audio-mediation is intended to recede as they engage with the play's story. Rather, *Welcome to Night Vale* is often a horror drama *about* sound and the ways in which it physically and emotionally reaches, and has reached, listeners through the ages. In the following pages we shall explore the ways in which *Welcome to Night Vale* takes those disparate aspects of re-mediation discussed above, to form an iconic, and edifying example of horror podcast genre's relationship with 'traditional' radio mediation and form.

Discussing transition between analogue and globalised digital radio, Hilmes observes 'the decline of that traditional backbone of US radio broadcasting, the local station' (2013, 43). *Welcome to Night Vale*'s appropriation of this somewhat antiquated, highly connective, social and traditional media form not only forges a clear relationship between the podcast, and its broadcast history, but, in the show's immense popularity, suggests a willing audience for such connections. The significance of the show's community form will be discussed more thoroughly in this study's latter sections, for now it is sufficient to note that in adopting such a guise, *Welcome to Night Vale* offers the most complete example of remediation, comprising not of opening aesthetics and framing devices, re-make, or even - as in *The Thrilling Adventure Hour* - prolonged homage. Rather, *Welcome to Night Vale* in effect uses re-mediation to create an ongoing, potentially endless narrative based solely around the everyday events of a not-so-everyday community, and which asks of its podcast listeners to imagine themselves not only

listening to live, traditional radio, but listening to radio as part of a small, local community of listeners.

The show's visual identity embodies this strange provinciality well. *Welcome to Night Vale* is a largely transient, ephemeral podcast - whilst its creators have a website this does not include a listening 'space', rather all podcasts must be accessed through mediatory 'pod-bay' websites. If this lack of visual interface emphasises *Welcome to Night Vale*'s 'return' to the ephemeral radio form, the programme's iconography does engage visual tactics to impress a sense of domestic reception and pre-digital broadcast. *Welcome to Night Vale*'s 'main' podcast icon shows a white, moon-like eye, or eye-like moon, against a purple night sky, which hovers high above a small, silhouetted house, with its aerial receiver in prominent outline. Other versions of the image include the town's radio mast, telephone wires, or an extended view of the town which includes a broader expanse of houses. Either way an unsettling message is made clear, one of domestic listening, township, media-infiltration, invisible communications and perhaps surveillance.

In structure, *Welcome to Night Vale* is an absolute composite of all that podcasting and new audio media more broadly is supposed to have left behind. *Welcome to Night Vale* does not simply feature adverts, sponsor plugs and other such radio 'waste' around a more defined dramatic feature, but rather offers a dramatic feature entirely *composed of* that 'waste' that Bull's study identifies as undesirable. Episodes are often introduced with sponsor adverts, sometimes fictional and sometime real, and the programme itself is entirely constructed from a segmented sequence of news and events bulletins, 'local' advertisement announcements, musical interludes referred to as 'the weather' and regular traffic updates.

However, such over-familiar mundanities are, in *Night Vale*, infused with a special brand of weird. *Welcome to Night Vale* takes the ‘waste’ product of traditional radio to create an audio horror both familiar in its sequencing and format and disturbingly unfamiliar in its content: the listener is placed in an unfamiliar setting, yet one which operates within a distinctly known American culture:

Traffic time, listeners.

Now, police are issuing warnings about ghost cars out on the highways, those cars only visible in the distance reaching unimaginable speeds leaving destinations unknown for destinations more unknown. They would like to remind you that you should not set your speed by these apparitions, and doing so will not be considered ‘following the flow of traffic.’ However, they do say that it’s probably safe to match speed with the mysterious lights in the sky, as whatever entities or organizations responsible appear to be cautious and reasonable drivers.

And now, the weather. (‘Pilot’)

Beyond the humorously warped aspect to the show’s various sections, I wish to note the particular rhythm that such brief, segmented reports offers. Hilmes observes that ‘digital platforms can extend and deepen audio-resources far beyond the usually limited time-slots of streaming radio ... there are few length or space restrictions for digital material: no ‘news hole’ or three minute limit’ (2013, 50). Yet *Welcome to Night Vale* actively imposes such restrictions upon itself to deliberately disguise and undermine the podcast’s ‘desirable’ status as an isolated and individually accessed audio form, yet also to build a unique storytelling format. The show incorporates the sound-structures of pre-digital and traditional radio broadcasting into its

narrative structure, closely replicating Crisell's identified acoustic 'segmentation' of radio to create a narrative form from the debris of radio's past (1986, 72). Crisell distinguishes the acoustic delineations found in segmented, traditional radio form as 'much more apparent, more discreet and detachable than those which cooperate in a 'built' programme such as a play or documentary. To a far greater extent they can be added, subtracted or reordered without discernable damage to the whole' (ibid, 72). The segmentation of *Welcome to Night Vale* largely accords with this definition as the show builds its sense of narrative and place through a bricolage of disturbing, often darkly humorous and self-contained articles - the weather, traffic, news and events articles are clearly demarcated from one another, could be read in any order, or indeed subtracted without rendering the whole unintelligible or obviously incomplete.

Through its segmented design, *Welcome to Night Vale* reconstructs not the specific OTR horror genre, but the wider traditional radio context. Each week the show contains the same basic structures, made up of the same basic components - sponsor advertisement, local news and events, weather, traffic, followed by more local news and events and concluded with sponsor advertisements. The programme's predictability of form, and its scheduled weekly episodic release, reflects an aesthetic *and* actualised return to shared, scheduled public broadcasts of the pre-digital era. Hilmes articulates the function of predictability within pre-digital radio, explaining that 'one way that early network seriality had coped with [its] ephemerality was its insistence on seriality: radio programmes were produced as long-running series, scheduled at the same day and time each week, substituting predictability for tangibility, repetition for materiality' (2013, 47). Here the isolated, 'uncluttered' and spontaneous podcast sound is rejected, and sounds of community broadcast radio re-appropriated to share and develop a uniquely disturbing and immersive horror world through a familiar and nostalgic media form.

Precisely through harnessing the ignored, unwanted, everyday sounds of radio's background noise, *Welcome to Night Vale* offer us invitation to a distorted mundane.

Welcome to Night Vale's punctuated form also cultivates narrative tension, particularly in the ever-present 'Weather' segment. 'The Weather' is a single song which generally interrupts a moment of narrative strife or revelation wherein 'live' events are unfolding before our ears. Indeed in an episode that this fails to occur Cecil notes the strangeness, saying 'Usually, after 'The Weather', I am here to tell you about how we have been saved from some world-ending danger – that, for whatever reason, has failed again to end our world' ('The Woman from Italy'). This section is the show's most disputed among fans with some finding it 'pointless' and disruptive of the story (Fanshelpmesleep, 2016; rosenrantzlives, 2015; self.nightvale, 2014). Skipping the segment altogether is ill-afforded by the podcast's design, and as it is never certain how long a song will play for un-enthused listeners generally report 'tuning out' for its duration (ibid). 'The Weather', then, actively revives community radio structures whereby listeners must often tolerate less-relevant or desired material. This is noted by many listeners as adding to the radio 'experience':

At least half the songs I would never consider listening to, if they were unmarried from the medium, but it totally breaks all sorts of immersion in my head to even contemplate skipping forward. It is pretending to be a radio format, after all, and part of radio is being okay with an okay song ... (chorus42, 2015)

When I first began listening to WTNV I always made a point to kind of put myself into the world of the show and imagine that I actually was a citizen of Night Vale listening to my local community radio. I always enjoyed the weather because I would imagine the

music actually playing to the whole town and it really solidified the whole radio experience for me ... (StarBurningCold, 2015)

As TugboatThomas puts it, '[t]hat's what makes it public radio.' (2014) Moreover, a listener's inattention to, or frustration with, 'The Weather' arguably further serves the segment's dramatic positioning. The revelations that generally follow or interrupt 'The Weather' arguably generate all the more thrill for the preceding drop in narrative tempo.

In its episodic conclusions, *Welcome to Night Vale*'s appropriation of radio's structures often conversely emphasises and de-familiarizes the show's true nature as a podcast, and the show's actual discretion from 'real', continuous, radio broadcast. At each show's ending Cecil often invites listeners to stay tuned for the following broadcast, whose topic or content invariably reflects the acoustic abyss which actually surrounds his show. Sometimes the 'upcoming broadcast' reflects the extent to which *Welcome to Night Vale* is dependent upon each listener's mind for imaginative realisation, as in the previously noted 'broadcast' of the listener's thoughts. In other occasions Cecil gestures toward the show's imagined positioning within an otherwise abandoned technology, such as when he asks listeners to '[s]tay tuned now for an hour of dead air with the occasional hiss and crackle' ('Pyramid'). These descriptions of the upcoming broadcast reflect the voids surrounding the show's actual positioning as a podcast, and its feigned positioning as a radio broadcast in a town where radio is very strange. Thus the programme toys with the parameters of its own form, making strange the empty silences which surround each podcast, and yet harking to radio broadcast's days of empty static and dead air. *Welcome to Night Vale*, it is suggested, always exists as a solitary segment of sound,

appearing out of an otherwise uncompromised nothingness and returning to that emptiness until the next ‘broadcast’.

In the acoustic patchwork that forms Cecil’s show we often find familiar elements of our own world, nestled among the odd and unearthly and operating in disconcertingly unfamiliar ways. From ‘Subway Sandwiches’, to ‘Audible.com’ (a favourite sponsor of the cyber-audio age), *Welcome to Night Vale* frequently incorporates iconic brands with darkly comic adjustments. In ‘Coca Cola’s’ advertisement slot the conventions of advertising language and form are inverted:

And now a message from our sponsors.

I took a walk on the cool sand dunes, brittle grass overgrown, and above me in the night sky above me I saw. Bitter taste of unripe peaches and a smell I could not place nor could I escape.

I remembered other times that I could not escape. I remembered other smells.

The moon slunk like a wounded animal. The world spun like it had lost control.

Concentrate only on breathing, and let go of ideas you had about nutrition and alarm clocks.

I took a walk on the cool sand dunes, brittle grass overgrown, and above me in the night sky above me I saw.

This message was brought to you by Coca Cola. (‘Glow Cloud’)

Whilst the advert employs traditional verbal and acoustic structures of framed sponsor advertisement ('a word from'; 'This message was brought to you by'), the surreal poetics which these contain offer a warped reconstruction of American broadcast expectations and nostalgias. The message is perhaps non-sensical yet it *is* arresting - as all good adverts should be. It is delivered 'straight' and in this delivery achieves coherence as a communication of the unsettling, shrouded influence of mass advertising. The listener is 'stopped', captivated by a brief and repetitive message and then gently, but firmly, reminded of the brand's name.

'Normal' advertising is further subverted by giving the brand a 'true' voice. Rather than ceaselessly repeating slogans or imploring custom 'Coca Cola' is able to speak 'from the heart'; to voice poetic expression and to attempt a deeper level of communication with its listener. Given the propensity of 'real' radio listeners to ignore (or seek to ignore) adverts these communicative efforts are funny and yet somewhat unsettling. In the spaces of listener inattention and disinterest *Welcome to Night Vale* voices emotional and artistic appeal for recognition and understanding, suggesting a secret and sentient life in the margins of radio. Furthermore by giving such a voice to the nostalgic 'household' name of Coca Cola - a brand with a long history of radio advertising and a propensity towards 1950s nostalgia within its own contemporary advertising campaigns - *Welcome to Night Vale* firmly situates its listeners within an acoustic aesthetic of alternate yet recognizable American radio culture.

Welcome to Night Vale recreates the live radio listening experience through adhering to the conventions of local and community radio address to allow a pretense of what Hilmes has termed 'live listening' (2013, 47). If local radio, by its definition, is a self-consciously shared and unifying media, then it is also one which almost entirely resides in the notion of liveness. The

local traffic, weather and news reports which make up much of local radio's content are not only geographically and culturally oriented and directed, but temporally too. Few people would have use for a day-old traffic update. As has been noted, the main body of *Welcome to Night Vale*'s programming takes form in the speech of Cecil, Night Vale's community radio host. Cecil's listeners are addressed throughout as members of the Night Vale community, and the show develops around the listener's constructed interest in, and contextual knowledge of, 'their' community's news and events. Cecil's address is always presented as live, and he often interrupts his dialogue with breaking news articles which largely serve to construct and propel the show's loose, over-arching, sense of narrative structure and to instate a sense of shared temporality between Cecil and his 'community' of listeners. It is the audience's imaginative engagement as a live and 'local' listener to a shared radio broadcast that makes these scenes effective, allowing Cecil to build a world of spontaneous horror wherein anything, from a scarlet envelope announcing their mandatory sign-up to the local 'blood scout' branch, to an encroaching and apparently deadly forest, may impact upon the unfortunate listener at any time. In *Welcome to Night Vale*, the essence of liveness is the essence of tension: here, radio mediation is not only an aesthetic, it is a narrative art form.

Re-mediation is an integral aspect to many horror podcasts. Though varied and creative means the horror podcasts discussed here re-purpose the transparency of their new audio medium in order to relocate their podcasts within older audio technologies, cultures, and listening spaces. These re-mediations offer sharp contrast to the dominant contemporary audio media readings evidenced in works such as Bull and Lacey's, in which new audio media cultures are defined by the extrapolation of audio material from wider broadcasting sounds to form streamlined and personalised (generally musical) playlists. Horror podcasting revels in the sounds of continued

radio broadcasting which Lenthall, Hand and Traynor, and Hand bring to notice, and actively utilise their positions as new media forms to redirect listeners toward a technologically and culturally nostalgic and regressive listening experience (2007; 2011; 2006). Through sound-structure and demarcation, noise, 'advertisement' and visual imagery the horror podcasts discussed disrupt presumed transparency of mediation in acts of non-negotiable cultural and technological return.

Section Two: The Evolution and Revival of the Audio-Horror Host.

i) The OTR Horror Host

Welcome, Friends of the Inner Sanctum, this is your host Raymond, welcoming you once more through the squeaking door.

Raymond, *Inner Sanctum Mysteries* (1941)

Welcome, friends, to the nook. This is your host, Larry Santoro. Come in, come in.

Larry Santoro, *Tales to Terrify* (2014)

The horror host is one of radio's greatest contributions to the domestic horror genre. Particularly in its television and cinematic evolutions, the horror host comprises a highly recognizable facet of the wider genre: a parodically sinister yet solicitous figure, typically found at a film or an anthology show's opening and close who offers atmospheric greeting and introduction to the 'main feature', followed by comment upon said feature, and farewell. The trope incorporates characters as varied as *The Vampira Show's* (1954-1955) eponymous goodtime-ghoul; *Creature Feature's* (1971-1984) cigar-chomping Bob Wilkins; *Tales from the Crypt's* (1989-1996) mouldering Crypt Keeper; *Monster Madhouse's* (2006-) irreverent rock-and-roll rotter Karlos

Barloff. If such characters evidence both the horror host's variety, and its sustained cultural presence, then they also point to a distinct *modus operandus*. Whether grinning ghoul or vampiric babe, the horror host exists as an almost inherently parodic, referential pastiche of horror traditions; a living intersection of the genre's dominant tropes. Indeed, 'straight' horror hosting is barely distinguishable from its parodies, including *Cinema Insomnia*'s Mr Lobo (2001-), *Elvira: Mistress of the Dark* (1988) and *The Simpsons*' yearly 'Treehouse of Horror' Hallowe'en anthologies (1989-). Moreover, even in these brief examples, there emerges a distinct connection between domestic media, the horror host, and the mediated home-space, as so often these hosts welcome audiences as 'guests' to their morbid homes. The Crypt Keeper, Wilkins, Vampira, and their parodic counterparts all greet viewers from their moth-eaten mansions. Likewise, to the backdrop of a lightning-lit ruin, Vincent Price bid his viewers 'welcome where the sun won't shine, to the castle of Count Frightenstein', and Italian-American 'vampire' Svengooli opened his shows from the comfort of his coffin bed ('The Hilarious House of Frightenstein'; 'Svengooli'). Indeed Vampira's sardonic home-tips and 'recipes' for 'Vampire Cocktails' offer a teasing Gothicisation of TV's (and formerly radio's) various domestic goddesses. Thus, while there are numerous guises to the horror host, perhaps the most popular and enduring is the host-at-home.

The following section begins by tracing such subverted domesticity to the OTR host. Through exploring the ways in which OTR horror used the host to establish and maintain a framework of 'spooky', yet plainly homely, listening culture within its audience, I argue this to articulate and utilise contemporaneous anxieties regarding radio technology's domestic 'invasion'. In defining the OTR horror host as consciously functioning around concepts of home, domesticity, and collective audience, we form an academic platform from which to query the

ways in which such traits are being repeatedly evoked and developed in supposedly mobile and private contemporary podcast cultures. Indeed, if the quotations which introduce this section suggest revival, or emulation, of traditional radio's framing devices in first-wave podcast horror fiction, then they also suggest deliberate adherence to its strongly domestic properties. In doing so, it is suggested, these hosts explore and expose current anxieties regarding new audio-medias' supposed severance from domestic, traditional listening cultures. As such this section's latter chapters address the extent to which a broad selection of horror podcasts employ traditional horror hosting frames and characters to cultivate explicitly domestic and collective sensitivities within their purportedly transient and isolated listenerships.

Albeit being 'one of the trademarks of Golden Age horror radio as a whole', and despite its resonant impression on the wider horror genre, OTR horror hosting has received scant critical attention (Hand: 2006, 72). Hand thus far offers the only scholarly discussion on the OTR horror host as a trope. Herein the host is located within theatrical 'master of ceremonies' or ringmaster traditions, acting primarily as narrative gatekeeper and suspenseful audience 'hook' (ibid, 25). Thus, 'rather than the conventional framing storytellers of fiction, the horror radio host belongs, more consciously, to a theatrical tradition' (ibid, 25). Hand distinguishes OTR horror hosts, who bear little relevance to their particular inner drama (often referring to them in one or two sentences alone) from the framing narrators of Gothic literature, in whom a more organic connection with the inner drama can be discerned. Whilst the outer 'frame' of, say, Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) is, in voice, setting and form, quite distinct from the governess' inner epistolary fiction, the outer-narrator's introductory chapter acts to inform that which follows to the degree of affecting possible readings of the further text, and if removed would alter reader understanding of the inner-story (and narrator) to a significant degree. However,

Matthew Killmeier's brief detailing of radio's first horror host, Old Nancy, observes that she 'always invoked darkness within her opening frame ... evoking a premodern mode of storytelling and listening' (2012, 76). Of course, pre-modern storytelling may engender theatrical, oral performance, and the dimming of house-lights generally introduces theatrical performance, yet Killmeier's comments also support a further understanding of the OTR host, one which this chapter seeks to propose.

This section argues that the host's theatrical association, whilst highly important to its function and intelligibility for early radio listeners, operates alongside that domestic sensibility which we have observed to be so recognizable within horror hosting overall. I believe this domesticity to reflect important differences of radio and theatre mediation, with the homely setting representing integral, functional characteristics and actions of much OTR horror hosting. Firstly then, the audio-horror host is explored as a purposefully domestic, un/familiar character who operates uncannily, through the discordant associations of radio as a domesticated mass-media. Secondly, it is offered that alongside their domestic location and role, the host constructs and locates a specifically domestic and collective sense of audience identity, which resides *consciously* within the anonymity and disparity of mass radio audience. Thus the horror host is argued to utilise radio's ambiguous medium, repeatedly and through a variety of means, to embody the originary, oral storyteller; seeking to forge a shared domestic space with their audience, and in doing so, bringing the strange/r into the home, and the homely toward the strange/r.

In observing the OTR host's theatrical origins, or blueprint, we may discern that, regardless of media, the horror host always represents a deceptively complex, almost meta-textual function, permeating boundaries of story *and* audience. As is suggested in the opening

sample of TV's various characters, horror hosts most often take on aspects of stock horror characters (vampires, witches, ghouls and mad scientists are common), yet imbue such characters with an often-humorous awareness of genre and form to offer comment and distanced appraisal of the stories, plays and films that their characters were inspired and informed by. In a segue continued in television's domestically-entrenched Addams and Munster families, the horror hosts of radio effectively exploit horror 'stock' to make Gothic and horror's most terrifying figures likeable and funny. The horror host is seldom 'purely' a vampire, or zombie etc., but rather embodies *elements* of such figures within a more ambiguous or playfully insincere and self-knowing psychology and aesthetic. Always a composite of oppositions - both human/ised and fantastical; welcoming whilst menacing; otherworldly and yet often rigidly attendant to social detail - the host is discernible neither as truly non-fictional, and sharing our extra-diegetic reality, nor fictional, and sharing that of the horror drama.

Noting the radio horror host's location 'outside of the play, distanced with an almost extemporary style compared to the world of the play', and their importance in 'hooking' and exciting the audience, Hand provides Oscar Méténier's pre-show speeches to the Grand Guignol Theatre as a comparison for the OTR host (2006, 25-27). Before each evening's show, Méténier would stand before the theatre doors, recounting famous true-crime cases and delivering warnings of each night's horror-production. As such Méténier provided an entertaining gateway to the inner theatrical spectacle: both enticing the brave and 'discouraging' the nervous from entering his show. Unlike literary Gothic framing narrators, Méténier and the OTR horror host bore a greater impression on the audience than the narrative. However, Gray argues the radio audience as impossible to reconcile with its theatrical counterpart, in which the actions and reactions of audience members will be affected by those strangers around them (Gray: 2003,

251-252). Accepting that ‘audience’ consists of those sharing the experience of reception, then whilst theatre audience represents a physically united collective, OTR audience comprises of a necessarily projected presence, made up of unconnected groups or individuals ‘tuning’ in from different spaces, most likely unaware of, or unconcerned with, one another’s projected presence. In theatre audience we may struggle to be fearful if those about us laugh, or to laugh if we are alone in doing so; likewise we may laugh harder if others join us, and the rising of our anticipations will doubtless be affected by the presence of others.

Skal offers a translation of Camillo Antona-Traversi’s description of audience experience at the Grand Guignol which illustrates the reality of this distinction, and allows insight to its ramifications upon the host role:

At the sound of three knocks, all the lights go out abruptly; and during those few moments before the curtain rises, we cannot help but shudder.

The nerves are on edge, stretched to the breaking point. In this atmosphere of sudden darkness, faces become ghostly white blotches, the imposing silence broken at times by the laughter of a nervous woman trying to hide her discomfort. The air is heavy with a tension that weighs heavily on sweaty brows ... The curtain rises, the spectator is ready. (cited in Skal: 1994, 59-60)

Whilst Skal is interested in the wider descriptions’ exploration of the theatre’s physical-space and tension, we can see in this snippet the extent to which Antona-Traversi’s anticipatory experience is moulded by his position within a larger, public audience - the ‘we’ that ‘cannot help but shudder’, seemingly as one. There is a continued awareness, both in the stranger’s nervous laugh and the amassed sweating brows, of other people’s rising tensions - of the

strangers about Antona-Traversi with whom he shares a curious, temporary bond. Yet these strangers remain vague uncertainties, their faces ‘ghostly white blotches’, as though they too represent a part of the horror-theatre’s atmosphere, as essential a component to the spectator’s anticipatory experience as Méténier, who goes unmentioned. If the host is directed toward the audience, and the cultivation of their anticipation through suspense and atmosphere, then the host’s mediation, and thus the audience’s position in relation to both host and inner-drama, is of vital importance to the host’s role. Thus the theatre’s collective, anonymous tension, and the intimacy of strangers is not initially to be found in domestic horror. Such aspects, we shall see, must and can be cultivated - through the horror host.

In addition to audience dislocation, the physical proximity of the theatrical horror-world to the audience is another consideration of the horror host. The assumed threshold between the stage’s horror-world and the audience’s seating section, generally termed the ‘fourth wall’, is very thin, and may even be rendered non-existent; audience members sit only feet away from the drama and able to see, hear and smell the horror. As gatekeeper the host’s role often revolves around the hyper-visual limit of the curtain, the sole divide between the seen/real/audience and the covered/horrific/theatrical. The effect of the visual divide of sensations of physical proximity and of anticipatory mass spectatorship is well-exemplified in Carl Laemmle’s *Frankenstein* (1931). Still, despite representing for Skal ‘the most lasting and influential invention of 1931 ... the modern horror film’, *Frankenstein*’s hosting frame makes no attempt to highlight its cinematic medium. Instead *Frankenstein* utilises its shared visual aspects to anachronistically mimic the less-mediated, more proximate atmosphere of live-theatre (1994, 114). Indeed, as Peter Kramer suggests, this transition reflects a dominant convention to normalise the cultural positioning of the cinematic showcase as a new type of theatre, and we can see a subversive humour to the

following 'introduction' (1996, 14). The camera 'opens' on a stage, with a theatrical curtain backdrop, from behind which emerges a man in evening dress. The man looks about him, his gaze sweeping high and distant around the implied theatre, suggesting that a large crowd is present, and that we, the viewer, are among such a number. This impression of spectating whilst snug within an anonymous crowd is strengthened by both the camera's positioning (unmoving alongside the man's movements and within the implied centre of the stalls), and by the man's absolute overlook of our gaze in his sweeping visual address. He clears his throat and speaks:

How do you do? Mister Carl Laemmle feels it would be a little unkind to present this picture without just a word of friendly warning. I think it will shock you. It may thrill you. It might even horrify you. So if any of you feel that you do not care to subject your nerves to such a strain, now is your chance to ... well [chuckling], we warned you.

(*Frankenstein*, 1931)

Besides the obvious anticipatory build-up that the speech intends to induce through its 'warnings', there is a sense here of the announcer being very much a part of the nearby theatrical/horror world, being sent *out from behind* the curtain to warn the outsiders of what awaits once the curtain is lifted. Indeed, Van Sloan *is* a part of the upcoming horror theatre's world: he plays Dr. Walden. Yet Van Sloan retains a sense of liminality as his evening dress and manner align him as a 'front of house' extra-diegetic figure, more closely accordant with the audience's reality. Van Sloan's opening frame offers further insight into the nature of theatrical and cinematic horror hosting: we see a figure who cultivates uncertainty and anticipatory tension in a distinctly formal and very public manner, and in whom a large portion of energy is invested through his role as gatekeeper. Van Sloan builds anticipation for whatever is behind that curtain. This is the difference between the theatrical horror host and the radio horror host: the first must

make believable the notion of a shrouded horror world, situated within the strange, unfamiliar world of the theatre, to an audience gathered and settled in the nervy safety of numbers. The latter must make believable the existence and accessibility of a horror world that may permeate the safe boundaries of the familiar home-space, to an audience of small or sole number and intimate relation. The theatrical host does not need to build a sense of strange, uncertain space - the theatre with its ever-altering worlds, faces and times (and especially, as Skal observes, the small, dark and ornate Grand Guignol) *is* such a space. The OTR horror host, in great contrast, must operate as a horror gatekeeper within the confines of the domestic, choosing whether to imaginatively relocate, or dramatically infiltrate, their audience's situation.

Verma notes the trend of audience 'relocation' that developed within early OTR programming (2012, 29–30), explaining that many dramatic OTR shows sought to emulate the sensation of theatre-attendance as audience. Verma reports that within many early OTR opening sequences there emerged 'the feeling of going somewhere ... characters greeted us with warm phrases like 'Good evening' and 'Shall we get into the taxi, mustn't be late,' ... the radio play had begun to evolve from an expressive activity driven by narration to one driven by scene' (2012, 29-30). Exemplifying this tendency, Verma cites two anthology shows, the comedy-drama *First Nighter* (1930-1953) and the horror-drama *Inner Sanctum Mysteries* (1941-1952). However, even these two ostensibly similar examples evidence that OTR horror established a distinct form of audience situation within its media, seeking not to imitate the entrance or audience of a theatre but rather to imaginatively relocate a collective audience within a shared domestic. *First Nighter* proposed to take listeners to the public sphere of a Broadway playhouse, simulating a taxi journey to the theatre before aurally situating listeners among the chatter and excitement of a crowd. Such acts recreated the sense of domestic abandonment and glamour of a

night *out* at the theatre. In contrast, during the opening frames of *Inner Sanctum* Raymond opened his creaking door, asked us to ‘come right on in,’ and ‘offered us a chair on the other side of an imaginary room’ (*Inner Sanctum*, ‘Death is a Joker’; Verma, *ibid*). Despite his apparent role as MC to the creepy ‘Mystery Playhouse’, Raymond generally afforded listeners the sensation not of ‘going out’ to somewhere, but of coming *in* from somewhere. Whilst the OTR horror host replicated Méténier’s actions of audience relocation and reconstruction, the functional sympathy is complicated in Raymond’s efforts to draw his listeners away from the more public exteriority of the Mystery Playhouse Theatre and down into his, often oddly domestic, ‘Inner Sanctum’, seating them at the ‘fireside’ of his ‘little house of a thousand horrors’ (*Inner Sanctum Mysteries*, ‘Dead Man’s Eyes’).

This action of bringing the audience in from the public sphere to the home and hearth of the host is evident throughout the American OTR horror genre, in the eponymous Hermit of *The Hermit’s Cave*, *The Strange Doctor Weird*’s also titular Doctor Weird (1944–1945), The Keeper of the Book in *The Sealed Book* (1945), the Wizard of *The Black Castle* (1942–1944), and tracing back to the original audio horror host, *The Witch’s Tale*’s Old Nancy who was incarnated in 1931. In contrast, the host frames of coeval mystery and crime shows The Mysterious Traveller (1943–1952) and The Whistler (1942–1955) were located not only in the public domain, but engendered an ephemeral sense of motion in their respective settings of a train and the street, as the listener purportedly travelled alongside their host. Likewise, Orson Welles’ crime-inspired series *The Black Museum* (1952) featured an ambulatory host style, wherein the host feigned to walk alongside the listener, through the ‘museum’. Perhaps these differences reflect the more action-driven thrills of the main dramas whilst Horror and Gothic narratives are more suited to the suspense established through atmosphere and setting.

This affiliation with the home could initially be regarded as typical of the wider medium's efforts to assimilate with the assumed placement of its listener. By the mid-1930s, both American and European radio broadcasting had adopted a domestic sensibility, in what Maggie Andrews explains as an attempt to assuage social anxieties over 'broadcasting's capacity to enable public worlds to enter the private domain of the home, to threaten the idealized status of the domestic space as a safe retreat from the world' (Andrews: 2012, 7). Exploring the construction of radio's domestic image and audience, Andrews explains that 'the domesticity of the listener was celebrated in numerous articles ... and there was a growing expectation that the ideal broadcaster ... needed 'to approach the microphone with the idea of sitting down in the best arm chair and talking interestingly' (ibid, 11). Irrespective of programme content, the radio's domestication was predominantly achieved in the alteration of address as 'the prevailing atmosphere of public meetings was gradually replaced by the consciously studied informality befitting familiar setting' (Lacey: 1996, 193). Address was altered to match the listener's assumed setting, as speakers' tones shifted from 'intimidating to intimate', attempting to 'emulate the language of domestic interior within the public or near-public sphere' (Sparkes cited in ibid, 11).

This is perhaps most famously exemplified in President Roosevelt's broadcast series, 'Fireside Chats', wherein Hand and Traynor note that in location and demeanour, 'he is speaking like a neighbour, a friend in the corner of the room' (2011, 11). Such a style not only embraced radio's potential for intimacy, as shall be discussed, but also offered sharp contrast to, and relief from, the contemporaneous style of news reporting. In radio's early days of broadcast, news segments took the form of a recital of the daily news press. In Roosevelt's speech style then, we may see the shifts in understanding of both audience and medium, with radio developing an

identity which extends beyond the simple allowance of mass-broadcast speech to a unique set of conventions and aesthetics. Here we can see that rather than seeking to transport the listener, the domesticated voice of the radio commonly sought to be regarded as a visitor to the host's domestic, or, as one listener explained, like a 'kindly neighbour who has just dropped in for a words and a few casual remarks at the close' (cited in Andrews: 2012, 13 *sic*). Indeed, Roosevelt was never implicated to be at his own fireside, the shows were recorded at a vast office desk in The White House, and the name 'Fireside Chats' was derived from Roosevelt's informal manner and the intimacy of his address. Far from the grandeur of The White House, Roosevelt was effected to be joining his listeners at their own hearths. Such assumption and mediation of the listener's domestic space was articulated by Basil Maine's assertion that, 'because radio is enjoyed in the house and by families gathered around the fire, they must be addressed and entertained as if the broadcaster were one of their company' (cited in Andrews: 2012, 12).

Roosevelt's fireside chats did not construct a specific mediatory domestic for both listener and speaker to consciously inhabit, but rather sought to make a smooth transition between the president's public address and the listener's (assumed) private setting. The audiences of domestically-situated speakers such as Roosevelt were not imaginatively transported, nor intended to be. Noting that even those without a radio often listened at a friend or neighbour's house, Bruce Lenthall notes that 'in general, modes of listening in the 1930's brought the outside world into familiar surroundings', and so listeners were addressed as though situated in their homes, and often as though the speaker had shared knowledge of their environment – they were told to dim their lights, turn up their wireless, draw close to their fire (2007, 59). The permeation of listeners' domestic space by the public medium of radio remained evident, but was made more palatable by the speaker's adoption of his audience's assumed social

and physical atmosphere. Thus such domesticities as in the ‘Fireside Chats’ existed as descriptively undefined spaces, which could largely be received as either the speaker’s temporary residence within, or non-disruptive affiliation with, the listener’s assumed space. Within OTR hosted horror, the (assumed) domestic of the audience is more frequently displaced, as the listener rather than the speaker is imaginatively relocated to the explicitly articulated and constructed domestic of the host. If Roosevelt was seen (or heard) to be entering the listener’s home through the radio medium, in hosted OTR horror, the audience more often assumed the role of guest. Thus the OTR horror-host role commonly occupies a space between the 1920s mode of imaginatively removing the listener from their environs, and the 1930s mode of meeting the listener at home, embodying a unique incarnation of the domestic host.

While, of course, this argument does not encompass *every* host of such a widespread and varied genre, it *does* identify a common, dominant theme found in the vast majority, and developed within the prominent, influential and long-running OTR horror shows of *The Witch’s Tale*, *Inner Sanctum Mysteries*, and *The Hermit’s Cave*. Exception lies in Arch Obler’s *Lights Out* (1934–1947), and Wyllis Cooper’s *Quiet Please* (1947–1949), the latter of which is often considered as a ‘sequel’ to the former. (While *Lights Out* was begun by Wyllis Cooper, the show passed onto Obler, who is largely credited with its most iconic and experimental episodes.) The opening frames of both shows display original and marked difference to their forerunners and contemporaries, emerging as the exceptions that prove the rule. Both shows employ sparse framing, featuring no host ‘character’ or situation. Instead, *Quiet Please* offers the narrating voice of Earnest Chapel, and *Lights Out* uses the identified voice of the writer as host; both are situated in the radio station, offering warning to the listener of the upcoming show. Whilst Chapel altered his introduction weekly, developing the theme/s of the upcoming story and

‘answering’ implied audience questions in a conversational, intimate manner, *Quiet Please* always began in the same way:

Quiet please, quiet please. [César Franck’s *Symphony in D Minor*] The American Broadcasting Company presents *Quiet Please*, written and directed by Wyllis Cooper and which features Earnest Chapel. *Quiet Please* for tonight is called ... ('Valentine')

Chapel’s cultivated tones and classically-styled musical accompaniment signal an aesthetic departure from most mainstream OTR horror which the understated introductory section maintains. (Although ‘The Mercury Theatre on Air’, who frequently produced horror or Gothic content, did employ Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto No. 1 as a minor theme-tune, such classical cache was otherwise rare within the genre.) Similarly, *Lights Out* also featured an uncharacteristically nuanced, realistic opening formula:

Lights. Out. Everybody. [clock chimes] It. Is. Later. Than. You. Think. [pause] This is Arch Oboler bringing you another of our stories of the unusual. And once again we caution you. These *Lights Out* stories are not for the timid soul, so we tell you calmly and very sincerely, if you frighten easily, turn off your radio now. ('Cat Wife')

Whilst *Quiet Please* develops its opening frames in Chapel’s preliminary speeches, both shows’ standard openings explicitly acknowledge the radio medium in their address of the fireside listener, highlighting the radio as a mediation of terror into the home and so seeking to intrude upon the listener’s domestic in a dramatically less accordant manner than Roosevelt. In Cooper’s address especially, the radio becomes a tangible element of horror within the listener’s home. Through addressing the listener at home and developing their host-frames around a Gothic

intrusion upon the listener's domestic situation, these two shows also displayed firm domestic affiliation.

Despite predominant genre expectations of Gothic and Horror domesticities as disrupted or threatening spaces, most often the home of the horror host developed to be a relatively welcoming, secure and familiar environment. Indeed, Hand observes that in their permanence as characters, the host offered listeners a 'guarantee of security', absent from the inner dramas themselves (2006, 25). This is not to suggest that elements of the Gothic and horror were not heavily present in OTR hosting scenes; they were integral to the host's aesthetic. But such elements were often combined with those of the 'true', homely, stable and welcoming domestic to create a space promoting pleasurable anticipation for the upcoming story, rather than to cultivate abject horror or fear. Old Nancy's 'little house of eerie shadows', formed the antechamber to the dramas of *The Witch's Tale* from May 1931 until the show ceased broadcast in 1944, and became as familiar to listeners as Nancy herself. Early Announcer introductions to Nancy's setting featured, by radio standards, lengthy and descriptive exposition:

Announcer: Now up the familiar weed-grown path we travel which leads to the weather-beaten door of old Nancy and her black cat, Satan. Again we enter the little house of eery shadows - again we gather about the huge stone fireplace there and prepare for another story of ghostly mystery. (*Music swells...wind whistles*) ('Hangman's Roost')

In this passage the listener is guided through an exterior of encroaching shadows and weeds and introduced to an enlarged space of centralised light and warmth - the 'huge stone fireplace', where the listener will find Nancy, and be invited to 'douse that candle', 'draw up t' th' fire' and 'sit and gaze inter th' embers' ('The Image'; 'Mrs Hawker's Will'). All elements of threat and un-homeliness - the weed-strewn path (though even this is 'familiar'), the shadows, the howling

wind - are placed externally to Nancy's hearth, which lies sheltered beyond the weather-beaten door. Roger Silverstone discusses the binary composition of the domestic space as reliant upon the 'Otherness' of the outside world, as 'the domestic defines itself through its opposition to that which exists exterior of it' (cited in Andrews: 2012, 6). In this respect Nancy's house is constructed as an unlikely, and somewhat suspect, anchor of safety between both the inhospitable, windswept exterior of her home, and the threatening world of the horror drama beyond.

As with Nancy, threatening spaces surrounded later host locations, often articulated both through narration and sound-effects of lightning, wind, rain and animal howling, and highlighting the relative relief of the host's home. The Hermit's sheltered cave was surrounded by the howls of both the wind and the Hermit's half-wild dogs; Doctor Weird greeted his 'visitors' at his castle door, following sound effects of heavy wind and knocking, with solicitous greetings and invitations to come on in from the surrounding cemetery and to settle their nerves and themselves by his fireplace. Raymond, as we have seen, guided his guests away from the public domain of the Mystery Playhouse and into his playfully ghoulish home where we were to 'come in, make [our]selves comfortable' and 'huddle by the fire' (*Inner Sanctum Mysteries*, 'Death has Claws'; 'Death is an Artist'). The creak of Raymond's door added a more liminal element of menace to his home. Stephen King, remembering the disappointing effect of the visualised creaking door in the show's TV adaptation, notes the effective level of discomfort that radio's creaks and squeals brought the listener: 'Nothing could have looked as horrible as that door *sounded*.' (King: 2010, 116)

Still, Raymond's 'campy', 'tongue in rotting cheek' patter added a soothing element of self-parody to the door's foreboding (McCracken: 2011, 1227). Raymond's droll puns and

conceits suggested, between himself and listener, a shared awareness and expectation of Gothic and Horror conventions that made even his strange home familiar. Hand observes the import of humour in the wider OTR host role, stating, ‘the cackles of Old Nancy and the Hermit reveal that they had a sense of humor long before Raymond came on the scene’ (2006, 120). The hosts frequently greeted their guests with joking jibes, morbid puns and a laughter which hinted that the listener’s assumed trepidation was as much a source of amusement as any hammy wisecrack that might be thrown their way. The hosts’ homes were not designed to prompt horrified screams but nervous, self-aware laughter before the true fright, a sensation more akin to the first jolt of a fairground ghost train; an acknowledgement that as listeners we are putting ourselves forward, willingly, to be scared by whatever comes next.

The familiarity of both the Gothic and burgeoning Horror genres was further alluded to in the hosts’ personas, as hosts frequently aligned themselves with well-known characters and roles of literature and cinema. The castle residence, educated demeanour and scientist occupation of Doctor Weird bore close resemblance to Universal’s 1931 characterisation of Mary Shelley’s Dr Frankenstein. That Dr Weird’s castle was surrounded by corpses added a further element of familiarity, reminiscent of Frankenstein’s charnel house quarry. Raymond’s overly solicitous hosting nature, evening dress (as depicted in teaser poster and advertisements), and subterranean home bordered on parody of Universal’s *Dracula* (1931). In both examples, one has the sense of having visited these hosts’ homes before. Hand notes that unlike her male counterparts, ‘The Grandmother of Horror’ Nancy seems unique in her era:

A first listening to the few extant broadcasts of *The Witch’s Tale* can be a surprise, as Old Nancy’s voice is not like the other witches of the 1930’s, being neither the rich aristocratic tones of the evil Queen (Lucille La Verne) in *Snow White and the Seven*

Dwarves (Walt Disney, 1937), nor the malicious screech of the Wicked Witch of the West (Margaret Hamilton) in *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939) (2006, 71)

But this is not to say that Nancy did not fulfil an expectation, simply that she fulfilled an expectation older than her era. When the listener travelled to Nancy's cottage they travelled back in time to 'Ancient Salem', for Nancy was that most familiar of American witches, the New England crone ('La Mannequinne'). Nancy's familiarity grew as, throughout the show's development, she became increasingly aligned with a more domestic female role. Evolving from the announcer's descriptions of an 'old, old woman' believed to be 'allied with the powers of Darkness' Nancy became an almost satirical grandmother figure with 'wisitin' hours', telling 'leettle bedtime sturies'; 'allus thinkin' o' people's happiness an' comfort', and suggesting that she and Satan 'edvertize red flannel underwear t'keep folks warm' throughout her spine tingling 'yarns' ('From Dawn to Sunset'; 'Mrs Hawker's Will'; 'La Mannequinne'). Siegel invokes both this familial, grandmotherly quality of Nancy, and her bearing on the friendliness of future horror hosts, in his supposition that, 'We suspect our friend the Crypt Master grew up at Old Nancy's knees' (Cole and Siegel: 1995, 6). Hand further defines Nancy as 'the grandmother of all horror hosts', and notes that whilst 'Nancy may have been one of the greatest 1930's witches in American performance media ... she is not a melodramatic villain. Old Nancy is unquestionably the listener's friend' (2006, 69; 72). Although later diminished introduction times for Nancy's home were, in part, due to the demands of advertising within the show's break and introduction, it is also permissible that by later episodes such a necessary sacrifice could be volunteered - after so many 'visits', Nancy's cottage was a 'familiar' enough space to need no further introduction for listeners.

The domestically-situated horror host's directions to settle oneself by their fire and to prepare for the drama not only situate the host and listener within the host's alternate domestic, but also explore the wider assumptions of broadcasting's 'listener at home'. That the OTR horror host is most often found by their fireside, and encourages their audience to take a seat there too, forms an intriguing sense of domestic displacement, in which the audience's assumed extra-diegetic situation and the wireless medium are replaced. We have seen above that the OTR audience was most often imagined and depicted in relation to three objects: the armchair, the fireside and the wireless. In the horror host's domestic we can see a clear displacement of the listener's armchair and fireside with those of the host, and of the wireless itself as a means of aural communication, with the host's voice and assumed role of storyteller. So rather than armchair; fireplace; wireless, we have armchair; fireplace; host. Such an arrangement suggests an anachronistic displacement of audio-technology in favour of the domestic story-teller. The vast majority of OTR horror-drama hosts identified as storytellers. If, in the storytelling tradition, repetition is to be expected then we may understand the test of a tale to be in its telling. Likewise, while narrative repetition and formulae were prevalent throughout OTR horror's anthology shows, each host offered a particular mode of 'storytelling'; a unique surrounding aesthetic which made the familiar tales distinct and if not new, then reinvigorated with a new voice.

The Black Chapel's Hooded Figure embodied this role quite literally, performing both the opening host sequence and narrating a full story. *The Witch's Tale* makes clear storytelling associations in its title, and it is noted above that Old Nancy referred to the inner-narratives of her show as 'bedtime stories'. Moreover, Nancy often self-consciously noted the listener/visitor's reason for arrival as evidencing not their desire to see her, but to hear one of her stories ('From

Dawn to Sunset'). Introducing *Inner Sanctum Mysteries*, Peter Lorre asked his listener: 'are you unwilling to sit through the telling of a strange and horrible story?' Imaginatively supplying the listener's response as being negative, Lorre continued:

You're not? Then, my friends, keep right on listening... the fellow who you're about to meet ...he loves a good ghoulish joke, oh and he loves to tell one too, he's about to start one now, so follow me please to the Inner Sanctum, and your host Raymond. ('Death of a Joker')

The Hermit introduced his dramas in a similar story-telling vein, though he followed a stricter formula than Raymond and Lorre, alternating only the story's name and often a brief description with almost ritualistic, mantra-esque incantation:

Hermit: (dogs howling, wind) Ghost stories, weird stories, and murders too (laughter), the hermit knows of them all ... have you heard the story of 'The Professor's Elixir'? Eh? Then listen, while the Hermit tells you the story ... (laughter, howling) (*The Hermit's Cave*, 'The Professor's Elixir')

Doctor Weird, on 'noting' his newly-arrived guests' apprehensive state, offered a consistent, weekly remedy: 'Perhaps a story might calm your nerves a little...' (*The Strange Doctor Weird*, 'Stand In for Death'). In a more liminal motion than his counterparts, Doctor Weird did narrate the dramas' opening contexts before fading out to the drama, and so implemented his stated role as storyteller. This technique was sporadically adopted by Raymond who also, on occasion, starred in his own tales, bringing a unique, pleasing uncertainty to the demarcations of host-realm and horror world.

In other instances, the host's role of storyteller was enforced by the presence of books which the host purportedly read tales from, as in *The Devil's Scrapbook* (1936) and *The Sealed Book* (1945). However, rather than suggesting the authored permanence associated with mass-published literature, these books had the air of being either the assembled creation of pre-existent stories known by the host, as in the scrapbook, or an assembly of ancient, mystical and self-authored tales, as in the sealed book. This sense of instability has direct links to folklore and oral narrative, in which stories are regarded as 'authorless' cultural artefacts; the impermanent 'common cultural property' of both tellers and receivers, which are created anew by each teller (Degh: 1994, 2). Impermanence is integral to the OTR medium: even by the 1940s, when technological advances in pre-recording enabled many shows to abandon full live-performance, many horror shows chose to retain elements of, if not full, live-recording and few shows were archived - indeed no OTR horror series survive in their entirety. The OTR horror story was an ephemeral thing, existent for contemporary listeners only for as long as it was being aired and imagined, a property which was emphasised by *The Hermit's Cave* actors' self-titling as 'The Mummers'. Hand reminds us that that 'in the history of popular theatre, 'Mummers' were amateur actors who specialised in the performance of folk-plays, which is apt given the formulaic feel ... to many of *The Hermit's Cave* plays' (2006, 117). Yet we must not forget that, despite their very real presence within the inner drama, the 'Mummers' were not identified to the audience, nor did they address them or share their reality: the Hermit alone claimed a realism outside of the drama, which he described as a story, and proclaimed himself as the 'owner' and conduit of. Hand proposes that the OTR horror host offered an 'original stamp' on 'otherwise formulaic' narratives; certainly, many OTR horror shows offered their own telling of similar stories, many of which were familiar to listeners either as folk legends, such as various

lycanthropic tales, or as variants of literary works, such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) or Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). I believe that we can understand this 'stamp' as an instatement of host as proposed storyteller, displacing the actors as performers and claiming their voices within the host's own. Through the medium's natural impermanence, host references to their dramas as 'yarns', 'tales', and 'stories', and through their displacement of the wireless as oral transmitter, the horror hosts seem consciously to revel in their 'traditional' storyteller's act of taking common and folklore style tales and 'telling' them as their own.

Such a return to oral narrative is suggestive of a gathered and intimate audience. Whilst radio broadcasters spoke of the connectivity that radio afforded lone listeners (Andrews 2012, 19), given the public uncertainty of radio's domestic intrusion, few broadcasts sought to identify or highlight the contradictory nature of radio media as both highly public and shared in reception, and reclusively private in imaginative realisation. Lance Sieveking queried 'How many listeners, if any, are subconsciously aware of simultaneously sharing with thousands of millions of other people the thing to which they are listening?' (cited in Andrews: 2012, 19). The uncanny nature of this listening arrangement *is* invoked within domestically-situated horror host frames as the inferred presence of other listeners within the host's chamber acts to evoke the invisible mass audience. Listeners were reminded in OTR horror that in turning on the radio, they entered alignment with other unknown, simultaneous listeners, all 'present' as guests within the host's home. The dualistic act of gathering of the mass listening public into an imaginatively realised and domestically-situated group appears consciously developed in the home of Old Nancy. When Old Nancy first began to address her audience, it was through the medium of her inter-diegetic visitors Tom and Dick:

Announcer: And now let us make our way to that eerie, windswept corner of historic Salem, where stands the ghostly little home of old Nancy and her black cat Satan ...

[where] we shall hear another story of forbidding mystery.

Nancy: He he he...(CAT *meows*.) Yes'r, Satan - yew and me is havin' anuther buthday ... He he...'spose in echange fer th' nice presint these here young good-fer-nuthins brung us, we'll haf t' tell em anuther ov our cheerful leetle stories.

Dick: If you'd really like to, Nancy.

Tom: But you know we don't bring you birthday presents just to get something in return... ('The Image' in Cole and Siegel: 1998, 15)

Despite the announcer's collective inferences of travel, on 'arrival' to the cottage, no greeting is made to the listener (or announcer), and they remain seemingly invisible to Nancy and placed outside of the spoken interaction, thus creating a self-conscious role of 'eavesdropping' radio listener rather than a narratively acknowledged, 'present', guest (a role fulfilled instead by Tom and Dick). Without any acknowledgement or aural prompt with which to imaginatively place themselves actively within the scene, the listener is further excluded. Likewise, Tom and Dick's 'nice presint' remains unidentified, and ambiguous to the listener's imagination. However, the choice of visitor's names - Tom and Dick - does suggest a third, unannounced guest, 'Harry', who is arguably supplied in the listener's unacknowledged, listening presence.

As the show developed, Tom and Dick disappeared, and Nancy began to address her listeners directly and to identify them as a group of gathered guests:

Nancy: He he he... (Cat meows) Hunner an eight yeer ole, I be t'day ... Much bleegeed fer th' burthday presint ye brung us. These here chocluts with th' soft insides iz fine.

Have ‘nuther, Satan? (Cat meows) ... Well, douse that candle, yew young know nuthin’s!
Whut ye keepin’ us waitin’ fer when we’re gunna tell a story? (‘Snake House’ in Cole
and Siegel 1998, 47)

Nancy’s birthday gift is now identified, and inferred to be the gift of the listener, who is in turn listening to their own projected presence as Nancy’s guest. The listener’s reception on arrival now correlates with that which Verma defines as the ‘fictional second-person plural’ (2012, 52). This usage, Verma asserts, ‘insists on a fantasy of collocation; we are at once listeners and quasi-characters, listening to a projection of our own presence’ (ibid). The listener is present in the scene as a projected presence rather than as a silent ‘spectator’. In accepting the ‘fantasy of collocation’, the listener is not only auditing a projection of their own presence, but also that of their fellow, anonymous yet closely gathered listeners, the other ‘young know nuthin’s’.

From this early development of *The Witch’s Tale*, we can recognize the growth of collective, conversely-intimate audience-construction in the OTR homes of Raymond, the Hermit and Doctor Weird, all of whom referred to their listeners as a collected group of ‘friends’. In particular, Raymond’s introductions resulted in the formation of an explicitly media-conscious collective intimacy. Through Raymond’s weekly invitations to ‘Come right on in through the squeaking door,’ and to settle themselves among the others gathered, the individual listener was imaginatively reformed as one of an anonymous yet intimate and seemingly domestically placed group – the ‘Friends of the Inner Sanctum’. As with Nancy, when Raymond welcomed his friends through the creaking door, he was not addressing an assumed collective audience at home, as Roosevelt sought to, but instead speaking inter-fictionally, to those projected presences waiting at his doorway. Likewise, through Raymond’s pluralised address, individual listeners both projected a ‘quasi-fictional’ self and aligned that self within a group which was portrayed as

‘all old friends here’, as though their weekly ‘attendance’ had forged a familiarity ('Terror by Night').

The individual listener was never addressed or acknowledged by Raymond, who spoke only to his ‘Friends’, a small collective whom he integrated among his other, often deceased, guests, asking listeners to ‘pay no mind’ to the odd ghost or corpse seated beside them ('Silent Hands'; 'Death of a Joker'). However, Raymond forged a deeper and more imaginatively interactive sense of collective audience, often ‘pointing out’ and ‘introducing’ other members of the group to the listener, not only emphasising the listener’s sense of transportation, but encouraging a playfully discomfiting sense of integration between the fictive ghostly collective and the projected, silent collective of listeners:

Raymond: Well, I’m glad you came tonight, because we have a very special guest of horror with us. I’d like you to meet the late Jonny Gravestone ... Jonny’s the tall fellow in the white sheet wearing a blue ribbon. ('Black Seagull')

Raymond: ... Make yourselves comfortable, that is as comfortable as you can among this very strange man that we’re about to be introduced to ... but don’t be alarmed, there are plenty of others here just as frightened as you...' ('Death has Claws')

Raymond: Good evening, Friends of the Inner Sanctum ... We have an expert on murder here tonight, he has a rather strange idea. Something about everybody being a potential murderer. Perhaps he’s right. Perhaps one of us here right in this room is capable of

committing a murder. Take a good look at your neighbour, maybe he's the one. Or [giggle], maybe it's me! [laugh] ('Study for Murder')

In these addresses we are assured that Raymond does not speak to listeners as they physically exist, alone or in small groups at home, but as their projected selves, joining the 'group' established by concurrent listening to the show. Raymond's identification of the coeval presence of other silent, guests, both ghostly and living, is an effective articulation of the newly arisen concept of simultaneous mass audience and its consequential cultural anxieties. In the highlighted uncertainty and fluidity of Raymond's ghostly guests, we are most reminded that to participate in the collectivism of OTR horror listening requires the realisation of the public and mass within the private realm, both in terms of the home and the mind. Similarly invisible, silent, yet ever-present, the 'company' of other radio listeners is expressed well as a collective of uncertain and unknowable spirits.

The OTR horror host is largely defined through its association with domestic space, either that of the listener/s or the host's own un/homely environs. In the more frequent OTR host's imaginative displacement of the listener's physical environs and company in favour of the host's, OTR horror is understood as a media which often does not seek to meet its listener at home, but rather acts to bring the listener to an alternate home, peopled with alternate company. Indeed, even in those cases of domestic disruption, wherein the host 'infiltrated' the listener's domestic and instructed them to turn out their lights, or draw their curtains, the listener's home was utilised as the gateway to horror: the home space was intentionally altered and pervaded, and the mundane domestic was made threatening and liminal by the encouragement of shadows and darkness. OTR horror hosting does not intend to assimilate with the listener's domestic, as other contemporary programmes so often did, but to offer one of its own, rendering the listener's true

location and company an irrelevance. The lone listener of OTR horror, or the listener placed outside of the domestic sphere – even a modern listener of retro/revival horror-podcasts, perhaps ‘tuning in’ from an iPod during their commute - is invited to join the host in their own domestic location, to take a seat by the fire with ‘friends’ and to prepare for the thrill of a horror story.

ii) Horror hosting in the podcast era

The domestic horror host has survived to meet the digital age, and acts of audience construction and relocation remain at the heart of the audio-horror host's functionality. This is not to suggest that Podcast horror affects blind ignorance of contemporary modes of listening, often it seeks to engage with and acknowledge new audio culture before enabling, through the host, acts of imaginative re-location and grouping reminiscent of the OTR era. This section shall explore the ways in which Podcast horror hosts evidence both nostalgia for, and innovation of, OTR hosting frames and the domestic, collective listening cultures which they cultivated, before exploring a secondary consideration of podcast horror hosting: technological regression. Many of the podcast horror anthologies discussed below evidence host frames which seek not only to address and suggest domestic location and collective reception in their audience, but also act to imaginatively replace podcast technologies with OTR. By exploring these aspects, this chapter seeks to show firstly that the OTR host is actively and purposefully evoked in podcast horror anthologies, before querying the degree to which such recollection and reconstruction of OTR horror hosting affects dominant readings of iPod culture as defined by mobility and privacy.

An example of the podcast horror host acting to (re)locate isolated, mobile listeners within a domestic and collective framework is found in Larry Santoro's long-running horror anthology podcast *Tales to Terrify* (2012-). Santoro's hosting is highly reminiscent of the OTR horror era, and - as the show homepage highlights - is fondly affiliated with older horror forms in Jason Sanford's description of him as 'the Vincent Price of podcasts!' From the offset, Santoro effects deliberate imaginative re-location of his (presumed) mobile and individuated listenership within a shared domestic. Introducing the podcast's first episode, Santoro offers a wry

acknowledgement of his listener's likely isolated listening method and public location, before offering an earnest appeal for the imaginative creation of a temporally co-present, collective listening group:

Santoro: Welcome, welcome children of the night, welcome to Friday the 13th. Well it may not be night, it may not be Friday the 13th where you are. It's probably daytime, you're probably sitting in your office, boss unawares. But let's pretend, that's the heart of storytelling anyway isn't it? This is *Tales to Terrify*. Things to terrify you are things of the night, so let's just turn of the lights for a bit, let's close the drapes, let's lock the doors, and there we have it, all of us children of the night. ('Episode 1')

Santoro's opening lines enforce the same transformation of mass audience to intimate grouping that so marked the OTR host role, yet in a manner which appropriates and utilizes podcast form and new listening methods. Santoro's isolation of a daytime worker, surreptitiously seeking escape (a metaphorical if not actual representation of the desire to 'plug in' to another, fictive, sound world) prefigures his offer of such reprieve.

However this reprieve is not identified within the fictive horror works that Santoro's hosting surrounds, but rather in the transportation from that isolated, publically-located stance to a space which is shared and domestic. Ironically, new audio-medias' cultivation of listener separation from their physical surroundings here becomes a tool by which to enhance and allow such an alternative position. We noted in Section One Bull's exploration of the extent to which, during music-listening, aural exclusion from one's environment can result in a sense of physical dislocation, turning the world 'outside' of the iPod into an estranged visual experience rather than a consciously inhabited environment. Thus listeners are described as inhabiting auditory bubbles (2007, 3). Rather than encouraging a distanced, meditative contemplation of the world

outside of the podcast, Santoro aims to highlight the disparity of the aural and visualised worlds, and to draw the listener further toward the world ‘inside’ the podcast. Through acknowledging the possibility of privatised, public listening, Santoro uses his listener’s (presumed) aural-isolation within their ‘sound bubble’ to create an imaginative time-space within the isolated soundscape to rival that of the listener’s physical reality – the evening of Friday the 13th. Should the listener concede to suspend disbelief, a necessary part of the horror genre’s aesthetic consumption, and follow Santoro’s instructive description then the results will be rewarding. It may be Wednesday afternoon at the office outside of the podcast, but ‘inside’ it is Friday the 13th and night-time. In this collaborative construction of the imagination, Santoro allows a sensation of temporal unification among his (potential) audience of lone iPod listeners as they become a ‘children of the [shared] night’.

The act of temporal unification is maintained throughout Santoro’s hosting run (from the show’s beginning until his death in 2014), and is continued in the hosting of his successors; indeed most shows open with the host’s reinstatement of the time as midnight, Friday. Yet in the above example an impression of listener-transportation and collective-identification is not achieved solely through aural isolation from one’s surroundings and inferred temporal unification. Santoro’s requests that listeners turn out their lights, close their drapes and lock their door enforces a starkly domestic sensibility to his listener’s position yet one which again utilises and exemplifies the lone, ‘anti-social’ podcast listening position. Given Santoro’s description of his imagined audience as publicly-situated and temporally fragmented, his requests are likely not given in earnest. Rather, Santoro is asking listeners to further suspend their disbelief, and cultivate a sense of dislocation from their physical surroundings, through the collective imaginative habitation, and darkening, enclosing and barring of an individuated domestic space,

a space which strongly recalls the privacy and solitude of the mind to which the podcast speaks. To Santoro, the actualities of podcast listening are irrelevant: it is the obfuscation of the exterior and enabled retreat to an interior, private space which earphones and personal files allow, which empowers the podcast to take us anywhere. If, Santoro suggests, each listener may imaginatively situate themselves within a darkened domestic interior, at midnight on Friday the 13th, then the transformation is achieved as we are ‘all of us, children of the night’.

Still, the intimacy with which Santoro speaks to each listener, and the division which his requested individuated domestic manifestations enforces between each listener offer a starkly podcast-style of collectivity: each listener is connected through their consciously fragmented and personal projection and imaginative (or actual) inhabitation of an isolated domestic. This strangely divided collectivity diminishes somewhat, as hereafter the show quickly establishes a very specific, richly detailed and emphatically immersive domestic location which all listeners must share together. Whilst undoubtedly strange and consciously Gothic in its aesthetic this location is also highly comforting and homely, acting as a refuge of sorts from the unwanted space beyond the podcast:

Santoro: Good evening children of the night. Settled? Wind, breathing out there, small beasties prowling, hear their pad-falls in the snow, fire, crackling. Curl up. [gentle, spooky music] (*Tales to Terrify*, ‘Episode 3’)

As Santoro welcomes listeners into his home, and alternately invites them to have a drink, take a lap-rug, or ‘curl up’ by the fire there is generated an unmistakable sensation of coming home. This sensation is heightened by the aspects which Santoro identifies as outside of his home. In the example above, the ‘small beasties prowling’ and the ‘wind breathing’ outside Santoro’s door in one sense recollect *The Hermit’s Cave*, where dogs howled and wind screamed about the cave,

or the ‘wind-beaten’ garden path leading to Old Nancy’s cottage, or the storm-ridden graveyard surrounding The Strange Dr Weird’s castle. Audio horror hosts have been welcoming listeners in from unhomely exteriors for a long time. Yet while the storms and animals surrounding Santoro’s predecessors’ homes served to heighten the host space’s uncertainty, Santoro’s descriptions of the world outside seem to form a part of his oddly comforting domestic. The noises he describes are soft, the ‘beasties’ small: the dark world beyond his home seems almost soothing in its emptiness and quietude. There is a cumulative effect here, a hushing and calming of the outside world which heightens the podcast listener’s sensation of retiring from the pressures of the external world which they are commonly seen to navigate and deflect.

We could conceptualise podcasts themselves as forms of mobilised domesticity, allowing the listener to personalise and privatise public and transient spaces. Through horror host frames such as Santoro’s, this domesticity becomes more literalized, as the listener is able to tune out the physical world around them and imaginatively sink into a fireside armchair with a good drink and a good host, and prepare for a story. If, as Jan Duyvendak asserts, leaving one’s home is increasingly common in the digital era, and results in sensations of rootlessness, homesickness and nostalgic domestic yearning, then we may understand podcasts such to offer a sense of comfort; an old-timey bubble of coziness by which to deflect the ‘cold’ environs of the city (2011, 7). Santoro’s host frame (and those like it), becomes a mobile domestic, into which listeners may duck away from the isolated and mobile public listening stance and while away an hour at the fireside, allowing new understanding of the seemingly isolated, mobilised listening culture of new audio media.

A very different use of the domestic host frame is effected in the dramatic horror anthology podcast *19 Nocturne Boulevard*. Herein the implication of transience and shift both

recalls and subverts OTR host frames to create a space reflective of mobile podcast cultures, and unstable podcast form. Within OTR horror we have already witnessed a skewing of early radio's trend towards audience relocation, wherein hosts more commonly emphasise the act of welcoming listeners in from somewhere, to a space which is most often a crucially domestic, Uncanny variation of the listener's presumed domestic spacing. In *19 Nocturne Boulevard*, however, we see a blending of these two approaches enacted through a three-tiered opening sequence. This establishes firstly through the use of urban journey, secondly through domestic arrival, and thirdly through domestic exposition.

19 Nocturne Boulevard forges an almost unheimlich homage to the relocatory taxi-journey frames of the comedy-drama anthology *First Nighter* exemplified by Verma, and discussed above (ibid). In its opening frames *First Nighter* simulates a taxi journey to a Broadway theatre before aurally situating listeners among the chatter and excitement of a crowd. However, whereas *First Nighter*'s 'journey' is a brief, friendly and direct affair, leading the listener to a comforting place within an excited and happy theatre audience, *19 Nocturne Boulevard* offers a rather more disruptive and disorienting excursion:

[Carnival music, jaunty yet foreboding, plays throughout and beneath all dialogue scenes]

Voice 1: [honking, skidding and engine car noises throughout the scene] 19 Nocturne Boulevard, 19 Nocturne Boulevard, when you hit Howard, hang a right, Howard meets Phillip at a weird kinda angle, then ya cross James and Poe, you can't miss Nocturne – it's just past the automat. ('Scream Queen')

The journey to '19 Nocturne Boulevard' both recalls and subverts the gentler *First Nighter* 'transient' experience, paralleling an urban exterior and travelling experience more aligned with

contemporaneous notions of the mobilised pod listener's environment. The frantic cab noises intersecting the dialogue build a space that is chaotic, de-familiarised, and in which the listener is disempowered; carried along as a passenger in an unknown urbanity which darkly mirrors the 'exhausting' and undesirable urban experience with which new listening cultures are so emphatically aligned. There is an effect of horror-substitution for the 'real', as the streets' strange angles and references to 'classic' American horror writers (H. P. Lovecraft, Henry James, and Edgar Allan Poe) impress an archaic, Gothic undertone to the hectic, modernised urban space. Here then the podcast listener's presumed mobility becomes enmeshed within the podcast interior: more than an effective establishing device, *19 Nocturne Boulevard*'s opening seems primed to play upon and exacerbate the modern audio experience.

On arrival at the 'address' for horror, the listener's greeting and welcome across the domestic threshold once more upturns OTR horror host conventions to emphasise and Gothicise the lone podcast listening experience:

Voice 2: 19 Nocturne Boulevard, your address for suspenseful stories of the speculative, strange and supernatural.

Voice 3: ... [SFX door knock] Yeeees? This is 19 Nocturne Boulevard. Won't you step inside? [footsteps and door closing] Did you have any trouble finding it? What do you mean what kind of a place is it? Why, it's a hotel lobby, today. Can't you tell? ('Scream Queen')

While the host acts largely to identify the space as domestic, and to complete the listener's sense of re-location from an urban mobility to a located and interior domesticity, through interaction with the scene's sound-effects her welcome also contributes to a more specific sense of space

and listener identity. Though the host's greeting is ambivalent of listener collectivity or isolation, the footsteps which follow the listener's 'entry' to her house create an unsettling sense of listener individualisation and one-on-one intimacy with the host. The footsteps are indicative not of a crowd of 'friends' entering the hosts abode, as we might imagine in OTR host frames, but rather of two people entering a sparsely-furnished and cavernous hallway. The footsteps' wide echoes both impress a sense of grandiose largesse to the house, and also reinforce the sensation of being a lone visitor, suddenly enclosed in great intimacy with an untrustworthy speaker. Herein the podcast listener/speaker relationship is unsettlingly foregrounded through the domestic horror host frame, as the individual-to-individual intimacy that the form allows, and the listener's self-performed isolation from the greater public sphere becomes an act of horror in itself.

Once 'within' the house, the listener is placed within a domestic space which, unlike Santoro's cumulatively familiar and stable environs, represents an isolating and ever-shifting domestic shell: finding each week that the house is only a casing for each inner-drama's different opening setting (in the above example, 'a hotel lobby'). On one hand, this technique mirrors the host-frame's function as both atmospheric condition and dramatic introduction, with the house standing as little more than an outer-skin for the dramatic horror world. On the other hand, this technique serves to distinguish the podcast horror host frame from its OTR predecessor, offering a setting which is again highly self-reflexive of podcast media and culture. The horror host domestics of OTR, like Santoro's, were stable locations which either remained unchanged in their weekly description, or became further defined and cemented with each passing week's exposition. Section One notes the extent to which repetition and stability quickly became indicative of wider OTR in general, as a means to substitute frequently altering broadcast schedules, and radio's essential ephemerality of auditory form, with a more tangible sense of

familiarity and reliability. The podcast form is different: it is at one highly tangible, being 'owned' and stored within the listener's listening device, and to an extent visible through its thumbnail operational images, or website. Yet it is also, within this tangibility, as fleeting and shifting as radio ever was: the essence of impermanence, each podcast episode is automatically uploaded to its subscriber's listening device on its release, replacing that which came before it (sometimes at a physical level as one episode is automatically deleted to make space for another). Thus we find the audio-host frame again reflective of its form, as the external stability of '19 Nocturne Boulevard' gives way to a chronically fluctuating interior.

The anachronistic longing gestured toward in *Tales to Terrify* and *19 Nocturne Boulevard* emerges as a prevalent thematic undercurrent in Glass Eye Pix's anthology series *Tales from Beyond the Pale* (2010-). While alternating slightly each episode, the show's host sequence maintains a basic framework which is both nostalgic in its delivery, yet contemporary in its address of mobile listening:

Greetings audiophiles, I'm glad you decided to join me on this little journey. I hope you'll take a deep breath now, a deep breath, and just relax and listen with me. Because wherever you think you are, maybe settled in your favourite chair [SFX: leather chair tipping and creaking], maybe driving a car [SFX: skidding, metallic screech], or at the gym, or on a train [SFX: whistle-horn]. Maybe you thought you were tidying up the house [dry, wooden broom sweeping noise] or working all alone on that special little project late at night [quick-moving hand-saw noises], wherever you thought you were, well, look again listener [MUSIC relaxes to a more ponderous 'clunking' sound atop spooky string instrumental], for you have crossed over, you are no longer where you thought you were, you are now... [MUSIC returns to

heavier, staccato organ/piano music] beyond the pale. [MUSIC swells to meet a punctuated and halting, abrupt end] ('The Man on the Ledge')

Once again we have an immediate grouping of the disparate listeners, all united in their decision to listen and to cross the threshold of the host's realm. Of course, through podcast technology, we are able to listen whenever we like, yet as we join and listen with him, host Fessenden's greeting offers that same insinuation of shared time and space as Santoro and *19 Nocturne Boulevard*, and of Raymond et al's before them.

Rather than accompanying sound effects of transport, Fessenden's announcement that we shall be travelling alongside him (and our fellow listeners) seems actually to instigate the beginning of this journey – an aspect which, given the manner in which Fessenden then transports us, seems to highlight the imaginative and co-constructed nature of this journey. Fessenden lists the places that we may 'think we are', all places that we associate with the modern, mobile auditory culture that Bull outlines. However, throughout these suggestions are accompanied by the sounds of a horrific and, wherever possible, outdated world. Whilst the favourite chair tips, the car crashes, and hobbies are made sinister through one auditory gesture, the commuter-train is transfigured as a steam engine, and the Hoover is replaced with an old-fashioned wooden broom. Such details may seem insignificant, but in an auditory drama, where we locate and orientate ourselves solely through our soundscape, they matter deeply. Rather like Cumming's earlier discussed remake introduction, the opening frame sound-effects here work alongside Fessenden's voice to ease our transition to the horror realm, offering a dated and unfriendly parallel to our own world. As the final sound effect fades, we are told that our journey is complete – we have 'crossed over' to the podcast's world of 'beyond the pale'. Aptly, the phrase 'beyond the pale', whilst holding contemporary meanings of beyond the socially

acceptable, originates from the archaic use of paling (or 'impaling') fences to mark strong-holdings and settlements (see etymonline.com). To be beyond the pale was to be, literally, beyond the borders of home. In engaging with the imaginative prompts and narrative provided, the listener abandons their physical surroundings in favour of their aural environment.

That this horror realm is dated as older than our own is further suggested in Fessenden's following welcome to his horror realm:

Welcome listeners to the very first episode of *Tales from Beyond the Pale*. My name is Larry Fessenden and I and my associate, Glen McQuaid, have issued a little invitation to see if we might solicit some submissions for this little audio programme, and I must say we did get the occasional package from some rather odd ducks. Today's tale comes from a mister Joe Maggio, whose recent foodie horror film, *Bitter Feast*, has been turning stomachs over at the local cinema. Fittingly, Joe's tale arrived to me this morning stored in a portable ice box ... ('The Man on the Ledge')

Fessenden's 'Welcome listeners' carries a nostalgic connotation of Raymond and his compatriots: creepy in its own right but layered in its familiarity. Again we receive that sense of travelling into an Uncanny place – both contemporary and past, intimate and estranged, unfamiliar and familiar. Fessenden maintains the sensation through his slightly archaic, formalised language: 'I and my associate'; 'issued a little invitation'; 'rather odd ducks'. Likewise Fessenden avoids direct reference to the podcast medium, terming his podcast in more temporally and technologically ambiguous terms as an 'audio programme'. Furthermore, in explaining his reception of 'the occasional package', and the current tale's arrival in an icebox, Fessenden overrides technological processes of email and file sharing and returns his setting to a more psychically rooted era, and in his mention of the tale's postal arrival that morning, we gain a sense of live-

speech and shared temporality. This image of an older broadcast era is enhanced by Fessenden's assertion that Joe Maggio's horror film 'has been turning stomachs over at the local cinema', as we are given a sense of pleasingly subverted small-town intimacy and community. Fessenden's speech transports us not just in place, as the OTR frames of Raymond et al did, but in time. We are offered the sense of listening not to a horror podcast but to an Old Time broadcast from the warped underside of small town America.

Case Study Part Two

Reading Radio's Legacy in *Welcome to Night Vale's* Cecil

In *Welcome to Night Vale's* Cecil we find the threads of traditional radio hosting and podcast form woven together to create a work in which the host does not simply frame the horror experience, but in fact embodies and almost solely orchestrates it. Cecil's character and narrative frequently acts to explore and problematize both the programme's radio 'heritage', and its podcast present. Whilst retaining the horror hosts un/friendly demeanour, Cecil operates rather differently from the anthology horror host discussed above, and instead embodies the more integrated, directive voice of community radio. With a post-modern self-awareness Cecil develops his host status from framing-voice to a voice which constructs narrative entirely, and in which his retained position as a distanced, invisible 'radio' speaker is paramount.

For the show's early episodes, Cecil is the listener's only link to the town and its happenings. Initially, all other speakers are paraphrased by Cecil and their silence within the show variously explained by faulty telephone or recording equipment, their desire to remain anonymous, or their appearance at the radio station coinciding with an advert or sponsor plug. That Cecil narrates these adverts himself only serves to undermine his rationale for the show's absence of any other voice but his. In early episodes listeners may question whether Night Vale even 'exists' or whether Cecil is simply a madman, recording and 'broadcasting' his thoughts to whoever may hear them. This possibility is recognized by Cecil as he explains:

I have also never bothered to actually check whether this mic is attached to any sort of recording or broadcasting device.

And it *is* possible that I am alone in an empty universe, speaking to no one, unaware that the world is held aloft merely by my delusions and my smooth, sonorous voice.

More on this story as it develops, I say, possibly only to myself. ('The Shape in Grove Park')

Uncertainty of reception is a prevalent Gothic feature, with narrator's frequently 'speaking' or writing to the abyss, and whilst playful in its articulation, Cecil's musings imbue his 'broadcasts' with a highly generic and effective sense of foreboding and instability which ties the listener ever-closer to him. Whoever else may or may not hear Cecil, it is clear that we do, and if his microphone is indeed unconnected, then that he has reached us makes for all the more intimate an arrangement. Eventually more speakers do appear and it becomes clear that wherever he is, Cecil is not alone. Still Cecil remains as the show's leading voice and the source through whom all other voices, opinions and insights are filtered.

In his role as 'radio' host Cecil appropriates radio's live and intimate qualities to reposition his podcast listenership as a traditionally domestic, collective and temporally co-present audience. In essence podcasts are isolated audio forms which may be repeated, paused and replayed as the listener desires and which are downloaded and individually 'owned' rather than broadcast to all listeners. As such podcasts audiences are generally associated with mobile, fragmented and isolated listening habits; people listen to privatized, pre-recorded materials on the go, through headphones, according to their individual schedule and desires. The live, local radio form that *Welcome to Night Vale* claims to inhabit affords Cecil the ability to share moments of time and fictive space with his listener. By adopting radio's guise Cecil feigns to speak 'right now' to his listeners. A sense of shared listenership is enforced as Cecil continually

addresses his audience collectively, as ‘dear listeners’ and ‘people of Night Vale’. As Cecil chats away to his beloved town the podcast listener’s actual isolation from Night Vale and one another lessens: ‘actual’ differences in time and space are negated in the shared imaginary time and space of Cecil’s broadcast. However, whenever and wherever listeners tune in from, they are tuning into the same reality. Thus in the show’s fictive liveness and localness an imaginative collective is formed, comprised both of fellow isolated podcasters and the ever-weirder Night Vale inhabitants that Cecil brings to their imaginations.

The intimacy and collectively which ‘local radio’ affords Cecil’s broadcast is often unsettling. Radio has long been noted for its personal address. Richard Hand and Mary Traynor note that as ‘that most intimate and subtly present of technologies [radio] speaks into our ears with disarming ‘reality’, like the voices we overhear in everyday life, or the voice of a friend at the end of a telephone’ (2011, 13). Likewise, whilst Sconce notes mass radio’s ‘unsettling phenomenon of distant yet instantaneous communication [...] made for messages and audiences that were at once vast and communal yet diffuse, isolated, and atomized’ the community radio station somewhat subverts this, addressing listeners as part of a familiar collective to which they already, daily, ‘belong’ (2000, 62). Indeed ‘for radio’s early [localised] decades, isolation was the condition that broadcasting promised to alleviate, not create’ (Hilmes: 1997, 14). In his ‘community host’ guise, Cecil consistently appropriates and subverts local radio’s familiar qualities to forge a radio presence which is oddly discomforting in its intimacy. Alongside addressing listeners as fellow townspeople, Cecil draws his audience further into a fictitious stance of shared locale and understanding by referencing locals like ‘John Peters, you know, the farmer?’, and ‘Old Woman Josie, out near the car lot’, as though all listeners shared his familiarity with these characters and the spaces they inhabit (‘Glow Cloud’; ‘Pilot’). *Welcome to*

Night Vale rapidly becomes just a little *too* cosy as listeners are enveloped into a faintly nostalgic, small-town America, where everybody - and especially Cecil - knows everybody's name and business.

Throughout the series Cecil's cheerful, gossipy knowledge of his townspeople and their affairs becomes increasingly intrusive and even threatening. Cecil frequently voices his dislike of certain townspeople, occasionally inciting his listeners to take action against them. When 'two hawk eyed listeners' report that Cecil's love-interest Carlos has suffered a bad haircut at the hands of Night Vale resident Telly the Barber, the trusted radio voice's potential to influence and corrupt becomes apparent:

Reports from two intrepid sources are that it was Telly the Barber ... Telly the Barber seems to be the one who betrayed our community.

Telly the Barber.

It is Telly the Barber at the corner of Southwest 5th Street and Old Musk Road, with the red and white spinning pole and the sign that says 'Telly's'.

Telly is about 5'9' with a small moustache and a thick pot belly. He talks with an accent and *sneers*. Telly the Barber cut Carlos' beautiful hair. According to reports.

Telly. ('Station Management')

Whilst the frivolity of Telly's 'betrayal' (alongside Cecil's portrayal of his own interests as those of the community) is initially humorous Cecil's vocal intonation distorts this, making horrific Cecil's position as an amplified town gossip. As Cecil emphasizes Telly's name his voice

becomes embittered and angry. The implications behind his locating Telly so distinctly for his listenership suggest a darkness to Cecil and the Night Vale residents that ‘radio’ broadcast brings to fruition.

In a later episode this suggestion appears verified as Cecil reports that Telly, ‘the deceitful barber with the shrivelled soul’, has been seen wandering the town’s ‘Sand Wastes’, ‘howling at the sky, and holding up Carlos’ shorn locks as though begging God to reverse the crime he has done’ (‘Pyramid’). Cecil continues with a note of disdain: ‘[r]eports indicate that his skin was blistering, that his eyes were bleary, and that he was recently seen trying to give a *cactus* a haircut, whispering and cooing into what he seemed to think was its ear’ (‘Pyramid’). That Telly’s suffering is a direct result of his upsetting Cecil is strongly implied as Cecil concludes: ‘[l]isteners, I am not one to stand aside harshly and say that a man deserves the punishment that comes to him, but I also am not sorry to see Telly in this state, given his crime’ (‘Pyramid’). Though the exact cause of Telly’s madness and physical condition remains undisclosed listeners are left to piece together the blank space between Cecil’s disclosure of Telly’s ‘crime’ and location, and his subsequent ‘punishment’.

As the series progresses, Cecil’s displeasure with fellow locals seems too-often to result in their physical harm. One resident, Steve Carlsberg (later revealed as Cecil’s brother in law), particularly suffers from Cecil’s penchant for on-air slander and is often scapegoated as a threat to the Night Vale community. Eventually following Cecil’s ‘leak’ of Steve’s identity as an anonymous objector to council building plans, Steve meets with an odd and disturbing punishment:

Apparently, the Sheriff's Secret Police *agree* with me about old Steve Carlsberg, dear listeners. We just received a report from a reliable witness that two days ago, Steve was whisked into the back of a windowless van, only to reappear earlier this morning wearing thick head bandages and eating Styrofoam shaped like an ice cream cone. ('The Drawbridge')

Cecil's command over the neighbourhood becomes increasingly overt as he regularly encourages action to be taken against residents and occasional 'outsiders' that materialize. Steve again evidences this trait as Cecil, after implying Steve to be the source of more town strife suggests '[m]aybe a group of *good* citizens should go have a '*chat*' with Steve and find out what he's been saying, *and to whom.*' ('The Man in the Tan Jacket') Cecil's power to publicize the hidden lives of his townspeople distorts the homely nature of the community radio show, rendering Cecil's programme as over-familiar. *Welcome to Night Vale* becomes something halfway between a talk show and a vigilante surveillance system in which to be known by your neighbours is, ultimately, to be in danger of them.

This over-intimacy develops as Cecil is implied to be able to see into places and situations in which he is not physically present. Cecil frequently disrupts his broadcast with apparently telepathic reports on town residents, delivering information including their phone-numbers, locations and activities. These 'reports' sometimes venture within the subject's mental and emotional lives, an aspect which Cecil seems to extend to his podcast listenership. Often Cecil seems to speak directly to the individual listener, asking them to imagine or contemplate things, then verifying or 'correcting' those thoughts, saying: '[t]hink of a number. Yes! That's the one! That's the one that describes an infinity of disparate truths about our disparate universe',

or, '[i]magine a duck. But just the eyes. No, larger than that. Really large duck eyes.' ('The Woman from Italy'; 'Visitor')

The ease with which Cecil 'finds' his listeners' thoughts and locations reflects well radio's Uncanny ability to span vast spaces and enter, un-seeable, homes and private spaces, instantaneously enacting a relationship between physically disconnected people. David Hendy observes that, initially, '[a]s all these disembodied voices were whizzing about, invisibly, in all directions - over the horizon and across oceans, through solid buildings and into living rooms - all at the speed of light', radio's arrival disrupted both time and space (2014, 283). Indeed the medium soon attracted the attention of spiritualists, who believed that somewhere in the static of this ethereal communication form, the voices of the dead may be found. Furthermore, Jeffrey Sconce notes that '[a]s a popular fantasy of disembodiment, wireless suggested that one's consciousness might someday be free to circle the earth in a form of electric omniscience, the radio set only hinting of powers yet to be' (2000, 63). Cecil's psychic 'slips', from the other-worldly Night Vale to our own dimension, infer an unsettling fruition of this fantasy. As Cecil moves through the airwaves, into the minds and hearts of his 'local' and not-so-local listeners, promising, 'stay tuned next for the sound of your own thoughts, broadcast live on the radio for all to hear', radio's strange ability to enter spaces unseen from any place, and the accordant threat of the private being made public, looms large ('Visitor').

Hobbyists and hopefuls still listen to the static, searching for evidence of radio's ability to slip through any plane of existence, and *Welcome to Night Vale*'s creators have credited this subculture alongside the phenomenon of 'numbers stations' as inspiring their show (*The Late Show*, 2015). 'Numbers stations' first emerged in the Cold War era. They were unlisted short-

wave frequencies whose broadcasts, after '[s]tarting with a weird melody or the sound of several beeps [...] might be followed by the unnerving sound of a strange woman's voice counting in German or the creepy voice of a child reciting letters in English.' (Sorrell-Dejerine, 2014) Ham radio enthusiasts believed that these broadcasts carried Morse code messages to spies. The numbers stations still broadcast, giving credence to radio's eerie reputation and suggesting almost an autonomy, or discordance from 'real' time, in their broadcast. When Cecil finds old recordings of himself as a radio station intern a stark accordance with this radio folk lore emerges as he describes: '[t]he [station] windows looking out onto empty recording studios that haven't been used in decades, but that still broadcast live shows every night!' ('Cassette') In *Welcome to Night Vale* radio is everything we ever suspected and more and as listeners we can never be quite certain where the voices it transmits come from, or just how far they can reach.

As our understanding of the town expands with each show *Welcome to Night Vale* delves yet deeper into radio's darker politicised potential. As the numbers stations suggest, radio's unique intimacy and vast, instantaneous reach once afforded the medium enormous influence. Throughout history radio's position as a trusted domesticated voice has provided 'manna from heaven for propagandists who wanted to mould an entire country to their way of thinking' (Hendy: 2014, 284). Joseph Goebbels famously extolled radio's potential as a propaganda machine, arguing it to be 'by nature authoritarian [...] automatically offer[ing] itself to the Total State' (cited in *ibid*, 285). Goebbels installed loudspeakers across Nazi Germany and for the country's inhabitants 'listening to the radio was something of a national duty' (*ibid*, 285). This darker aspect of radio is recalled and cultivated within *Welcome to Night Vale* as amid his gossipy chatter Cecil broadcasts strange noises and chants suggestive of subliminal messaging, alongside explicit government orders and threats. *Welcome to Night Vale* is a town where

government despotism is conducted openly and senselessly. Night Vale's children are regularly taken (and sometimes returned), days of the week are changed, cancelled and erased from memory, and 'correct' voting is ensured by the random kidnap and torture of citizens. Whatever the government atrocity, Cecil acts to 'remind' citizens of their duty to comply.

Cecil often starkly connects radio communication with military propaganda, forging a dark parody of radio's unhappy histories. In 'The Man with the Tan Jacket', Cecil uses his broadcast to rally listeners to war:

Ladies and gentlemen, if you care for your community, your town, *your Night Vale* like I do, you will arm yourselves. You will rally your neighbours to militia. You will point fingers at those who do not wish to fight and have them rounded up into pens. This is no time for the weak. We are at a presumptive war with a projected enemy whom we cannot yet see, or even be certain of, but who are *probably* bloodthirsty giants.

Cecil's rhetoric lends bleak humour to the manipulative emotivism of propaganda, and especially propaganda in a medium which by nature renders its audience sightless and solely dependent upon the speaker's words for information. Cecil concludes this speech with familiar wartime slogans saying '[a]nd remember, Night Vale is at war. Your careless talk costs lives ... Stay by your radios, listeners. We will report further as events warrant' ('The Man with the Tan Jacket'). Although 'Careless Talk Costs Lives' was a British, poster-lead campaign it notably pictured soldiers from all allied nations and influenced the American 'Careless Words' campaign. Cecil further recalls the allied forces' slogan 'you never know who's listening' ('The Librarian', 2014). Of course, in Night Vale we know for certain that Cecil is always listening. In these revived and re-arranged slogans of American war-time, and their recollection of radio voices'

former cultural influence, Cecil and Night Vale come a little closer to home than perhaps desired.

Within the above examples we find the podcast host domestic both reviving and reinventing OTR host frames, not in a simplistic gesture of nostalgia or homage to the radio form which arguably prefigures and 'births' narrative podcasting, but rather in a self-expressive and reflexive act of artistic appropriation. The horror podcast host is seen to utilise conventions of audience (re)location, domesticity and collectivisation to address issues specific to new audio media and culture. Herein we may understand the horror podcast host as indicative of new audio media anxiety, and suggesting uncertainty surrounding new audio medias' apportioned attributes of mobility, isolation and urban escapism.

Yet it has also been shown that horror podcast hosting frames are frequently concerned with obscuring the podcast medium, which is frequently presented as though it were either fully or partially replaced by OTR technologies. This nostalgia within podcast hosting frames is interesting then, as it works not only to adopt an OTR aesthetic in terms of address, but also infers a further rejection of contemporary technologies. This effects an added level of audience construction and location, implicating temporal and cultural relocation, alongside domestic and collective implications. Having explored the extent to which horror podcasts command an alternate, older, or traditional media and audience identities than those with which new audio media is commonly aligned, we shall now turn to examine audience communities themselves, and the means by which they assert very different listening-cultures to those willfully-isolated and individualistic 'bubbles' which new-audio culture seemingly engenders.

Section Three - From Imagination to Enactment: Digital Community and Collaboration in Horror Podcast Audience Cultures

If, through aspects of delivery, presentation and form, horror podcasting frequently cultivates far more connective, often traditional or traditionally-informed concepts of broadcast and technology than new audio media has generally been associated with, then we may be equally enlightened by the audience cultures surrounding such unexpectedly collective and nostalgic works. Here it shall be argued that the audience cultures which surround horror podcasting likewise challenge conceptions of new audio media (and podcasting in particular) as being inherently and intentionally isolating, private and individualistic. Indeed, through examining the audience cultures surrounding the horror podcast genre, it is possible to see a very different picture emerging, one which posits horror podcast listening as highly social, connective, collaborative and community-based. After a brief discussion of the extent to which horror podcasting audience cultures may be distinguished from their traditional radio counterparts, and the manner in which audience collectivity economically and creatively underpins many horror podcasts, this chapter offers three examples by which to challenge dominant understandings of new audio media cultures as anti-social and fragmentary. Through exploration of the audience cultures surrounding *We're Alive*, *Pacific Northwest Stories* and a final case study of *Welcome to Night Vale*, it is posited that, in fact, we may see new audio media cultures as not only disruptive of dominant understandings of hermetic new audio listening cultures, but perhaps rather more connective and social than those of traditional radio to which they are so frequently compared. In podcast audience cultures, it is suggested, we may see listening communities reaching beyond the imagined and toward the enacted.

What does it mean to listen alone? Why is the podcast listener so often understood to be any more isolated than their earlier radio counterparts? To what extent does the fact that the podcast listener may not be downloading, streaming and ‘plugging in’ at the same time as others mean that they are not part of an actively collective audience? Fragmented and solitary listening has always underpinned audio cultures, and it is a long-held truth among radio scholarship that radio community is, by and large, a predominantly imagined construct. In the first instance, radio depended upon the creation of private listening spaces in order to become an active and successful commodity. Acknowledging the fact that ‘people often listened together to recorded sounds and, later, to radio shows’, Sterne rejoins that ‘even these collective modes of listening already assumed a pre-existing ‘privatised’ acoustic space that could then be brought back to a collective realm’ (2003, 155). Thus, Sterne argues, ‘the construction of acoustic space as a private space is in fact a precondition for the commodification of sound. This is because commodity exchange presupposes private property. Acoustic space had to be ‘ownable’ before its contents could be bought and sold’ (ibid, 155). From the earliest moments of commodified radio culture then - from the mid-nineteenth century through to the 1920s - we find in ‘an emergent crest of the middle class ... a group of people learning to believe in connections between consumption and individuation ... The space of the auditory field became a form of private property’ (ibid, 160).

Sterne examples phonograph parlors, stethoscopes, listening tubes (‘an alternative to horns on early phonographs’) and phone booths as examples of early means of delineating acoustic space as private property. Sterne further argues the extent to which people have long entered into private acoustic spaces as a means to experience sound collectively: in the now-predominant Western ‘social contract’ of collectively listening to theatre, radio and later cinema

in if not silence then at least quiet, and in the shared reception of the same materials through separate means, Sterne suggests that listening privately does not necessarily mean listening alone. Likewise, in their dominant studies of ‘traditional’ and Golden Era radio cultures, both Susan Douglas and Michelle Hilmes are noted to ‘draw heavily on the concept of imagined community’ (Chignell: 2009, 81). Imagined community, a concept popularised in Benedict Anderson’s discussion of the press media, expounds the notion that ‘despite the often huge social, ethnic, linguistic and geographical divisions within a nation, the experience of reading the same newspaper every day was profoundly unifying ... Even though reading the paper was often a silent and private act it had the effect of building an imagined national community’ (ibid, 82). Thus, if radio aspired to create a sense of likeness, of connectivity and shared cultural identity within its listeners, then this rested implicitly not only upon the broadcasters’ cultivations of shared listening schedules, collective address and familiarity that we have seen in Sections 1 and 2, but also upon the listeners’ willful suspension of their physical and social distinction from one another.

It may occur to the reader that what underpins such solitary togetherness is liveness, and that is precisely what the podcast medium can not offer. Early Golden Era listeners, Douglas explains were considered as having ‘an imaginative sense of participation in a common way. He knows that others are listening *with* him and feels a community of interest with people outside his home’ (2004, 133, my emphasis). If the imagined communities of radio past, and the shared privacies of cinematic and theatrical audience allow togetherness, it is through the fact that their acts of individuated listening are occurring simultaneously, to material which is shared in its moment of reception. The podcast listener, we could argue, may never be assured of such togetherness. They listen on their own private time-frame - perhaps months or even years apart

from one another. Regardless of any contrivances of their various hosts and soundscapes to assure of live broadcast, these remain contrivances: listeners *do not* share in the moment of reception and if this is the key to an imagined community then the podcast listener cannot be said to inhabit such. Despite imagined midnights, collective welcomes and wireless crackles, they each remain as isolated listeners rather than gathered audiences.

However, this perspective overlooks a number of important points. Firstly, podcasts do, as we have seen, frequently maintain regular release schedules. Listeners can expect, say, episodes of *Welcome to Night Vale* or *The Black Tapes* to be released at the same time-slot, on the same week day, each time. Many listeners may, as is discussed below, choose to listen to a podcast on the immediate moment of its release. Thus, while the podcast is not being ‘aired’ and received simultaneously, there is still a rough broadcast ‘event’ or moment which is little different from the roughness of when a day’s newspaper may actually be picked up and consumed by its various readers. Secondly, podcast listeners are not isolated from one another in the totality that music-centric studies of new audio cultures may suggest. The podcast is not an isolated media. On the contrary, it is, as evidenced above, multi-platformed, digitally fluid and variously integrated among websites, apps, etc. It exists in the moment of Jenkins’ earlier noted term ‘convergence culture’, and so does its listener. Just as the podcast may extend beyond audio MP3 confines to become also the webpage, the forum, the blog, the graphic novel - then so too may its listener extend to become also the podcast blogger or vlogger; the podcast forum member; the podcast Facebook, Twitter or Instagram follower; the podcast comment-thread contributor; the podcast fan-cast host or listener (2008). To comprehend podcast listening culture as to extend no further than the insertion of earbuds and the pressing of play is a fallacy. We may no more regard the podcast listener as disenfranchised from acts of audio-community than we

may regard the *Stranger Things* (2016-) or *Orange is the New Black* (2013-) viewer as existing in a vacuum solely by rote of their chosen shows being streamed through Netflix. In the digital era, listeners do not only imagine community which spans geographical and temporal distance, but also enact and create it.

Indeed, while in traditional radio studies, actual rather than imagined audience interactivity is most commonly found between listener and speaker, through call-ins, letter-writing, etc; in podcasting, listeners may and do interact with one another on a 'real' rather than imagined level. In traditional radio, relationship and co-presence is generally found between listener and speaker: 'it is the most personal and intimate 'mass medium': an unrivalled companion and one of the most interesting, reliable and useful of friends' (Shingler and Wieringa 1998, 110). Martin Shingler and Cindy Wieringa highlight the extent to which radio's sociability centres on the listener/speaker relationship, positing 'a strong suspicion that for most of us talking back to the radio is part of our everyday experience', and arguing that 'radio listening' is 'a phrase which admits no part of the pleasure of a mass medium that is consumed largely by a multitude of solitary listeners in need of companionship and a chat' (ibid 111-112). Accepting this is not to deny the actuality of inter-audience discussion and chat. However, these are most often localised events - after the fact 'watercooler' chats, or in-the-moment discussion with those present: in their ephemerality and apparent secondariness to the listener-speaker/s relationship, and the notions of imagined audience, have received much less prominence in understandings of traditional radio audience culture. In podcasting there comes a change. Alongside similar cultivations of listener/speaker relationship, and imagined audience, we find active inter-audience relationship and community, which are both encouraged and facilitated by podcast creators, and yet remain ultimately listener-led and created.

On a very practical level, for many podcasts, the collectivity of listeners is an essential means of production and economic support. With most podcasts finding new audience through word-of-mouth (or, in the digital world, word-of-keyboard) and fellow podcast endorsement, listening communities form the backbone of the industry's growth. If the people that enjoy horror podcasts don't talk to each other, then the podcasts available to listen to will dwindle, and a large number of podcast forums and discussion pages feature permanent or 'stickied' suggested listening documents. Furthermore, monetary support is increasingly gleaned from listeners, with Patreon and Crowdfunding projects being used throughout the field as a means to allow podcasts' continued development and sustainability. For many podcasts, listener donations are the only means of economic viability: through crowd-funding sites such as Patreon.com and Kickstarter.com listeners are able to become patrons of the arts, offering one-off donations or setting up regular standing orders by which to support the shows they wish to continue. Often these donations are further incentivised by 'reward' in the form of newsletters, 'members-only' updates and information, or bonus episodes. In this sense, listeners have great control over what they listen to - if a podcast does not meet their expectations, they may withdraw support, and may discuss such withdrawal as a group in online discussion, and likewise voice their opinions and desires to the podcast creators.

Moreover, in many horror podcasts, listeners provide not only word-of-mouth advertisement and donated financial support, but also the base matter of the podcast itself. If '[t]he campfire story, as with so many other things, seems to have migrated to the internet,' we may argue it to have set up base-camp in the horror podcast genre (*The Navigator*, 2016). *The Drabblecast*, *Tales to Terrify* and *The NoSleep Podcast*, among many others, operate explicitly on the premise of showcasing listener-contributed and/or performed content. In the spirit of

open communication and contribution, *The Drabblecast* aligns itself with and often showcases works from a fan-operated sister podcast, *The Dribblecast*, wherein '[e]veryone is invited to participate, regardless of talent or experience' (thedribblecast.com).

Likewise, *The NoSleep Podcast* originates from a text-based Reddit.com forum, entirely comprised of amateur, 'true-life' personal horror stories - creating, as its website homepage asserts, 'an online version of telling spooky stories around the campfire'. This recollection of the campfire tale spurred Cummings to translate the stories to oral form (pers. comm., October, 2015). While early episodes were sourced from the Reddit forum, as the podcast's popularity grew listeners submitted their own ideas and/or voices to the podcast directly. Upon episodes' upload to these shows' websites, feedback is sought on all aspects of production, allowing listeners and tellers an established mode of immediate and shared, public dialogue. This diverges drastically from hegemonic, revenue-driven and controlled US radio industry norms. Arguing from a 'hypodermic' media perspective, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer argue that what we may now term 'traditional' radio

turns all participants into listeners and authoritatively subjects them to broadcast programmes which are all exactly the same. No rejoinder has been devised, and private broadcasters are denied any freedom. (1997, 122)

Thus, whereas radio horror (albeit certainly influenced by fan response), must adhere to sponsor and broadcaster censorship and artistic vision, these horror podcasts offer (at present) a less restrictive means of oral and acoustic horror production and dissemination in which any story may be told, by any voice. While this censorship safe-haven may be temporary, as podcast networks, host sites and sponsors (which I shall discuss in this thesis' concluding section) may eventually demand more control over the shows they support, it is certainly central to understanding the horror

podcast genre's development.

The notion of collectivity is paramount to these programs, emerging both through the shared, listener-led development of an audio-horror corpus and group discussion of the shows, and also in the aesthetic suggestion of physically co-present group listening. Discussing horror podcast trends, David O'Donoghue suggest an acceptance of the form as inherent to a sense of physical collectivity: 'the intimacy of the podcast medium provides a great environment for people to gather round and tell stories of things that stretch the boundaries of belief' (2016). Jeffrey Sconce argues that the spoken spooky story is necessarily anachronistic and collective, as '[b]y telling a tale, in the traditional manner, the storyteller draws themselves and their listeners out of the modern world of print or media and back into an older way of relating to society' (2000, 37). Listener-led podcasts all engender an aesthetic of sparse acoustic-framing and aesthetic dependence on a lone, storytelling voice reading out the submitted stories, rather than sound-rich acoustic world-building. The reading voice is not necessarily authorial—it could belong to the tale's author, another show fan, or a member of the show's staff, and indeed *Pseudopod* has a policy disallowing authors to read their own works—thus adding a further sense of co-ownership or participation to the horror experience.

Thus we find a unique development of more traditionally collective oral horror modes, which transforms new audio medias' supposedly isolating and anti-social properties into a polyphonic, organically-developing 'campfire' space. In the shared voices, stories and forum-comments of these podcasts, speakers and listeners may engage with one another, if not face-to-face, then mouth-to-ear-to-eye.

Emerging early in podcasting's 'first wave', *We're Alive* offers insight into the origins and blueprints of now increasingly-established podcast community facets, and into the ways in which podcast audience community operates in the face on the medium's potential for temporally fragmented listening. First, I shall discuss the show's early inter-audience culture, which developed while episodes were still being released and relied largely on online fan discussion. The show's website not only allows listeners to stream and download episodes, but also facilitates fan interaction with one-another through its forum, and also signposts its fan-created and led Reddit page. These online 'chat-room' spaces allow fans to discuss characters, plotlines, fan-theories etc. and, in the forum, to engage with each other an instant, 'private', chat or messenger service. Throughout the show's initial run the forum in particular was highly popularised and was harnessed by listeners as a means not only to interact with each other, but to create a collective listening experience. Throughout the series' run, many listeners elected to listen to episodes as a digital group, streaming episodes at the same time (generally on their release dates and times), and using the forum to chat throughout and/or after listening.

Throughout its development, fans worked collectively to share plot theories and fantasies, listening-experiences, and more general chat. Many of the forum's 'threads' or conversations themselves garnering thousands of responses or comments: as of July 2017, 'Episode Discussions' generated over 23,000 responses; 'Theories' numbered 10, 657; and 'Everything Else' (general chat) totaled 19,239. Both the show's multi-platform developments and the extent of fan response evidence the degree to which fan interaction and collective audience were increasingly understood to enhance, if not define, the *We're Alive* listening culture. Listeners' desires to listen collectively, and to experience the show as 'live' was eventually further accommodated and promoted through *We're Alive*'s development of various YouTube projects

which live-streamed new episodes alongside sessions of chat, interview and ‘behind-the-scenes’ discussion with the show’s creators and actors. These broadcasts also allowed listeners to send in questions and comments through Twitter, Facebook and YouTube comments. That these broadcasts were explicitly promoted as allowing collective audience experience, is shown in the *We’re Alive* website promotion of their spinoff mini-series *The Lockdown*’s conclusion:

The Lockdown CONCLUDES!!! Join us for the live video broadcast, streaming finale of *Lockdown* part 6: June 3rd LIVE starting at 6 pm PST on www.werealive.com ... So if you want to experience the finale with the rest of the fans, join in on the finale stream on Friday June 3rd! Have an idea on how it will all end? Join in on the discussion at <http://www.werealive.com/forum/> (Wayland, 2016)

Rather than podcast listening promoting isolated, fragmented listening, it appears that through listeners’ appropriation of podcasting’s digital platforming to create shared, scheduled listening events, podcast creators were led to extend their medium to acknowledge and provide for more ‘traditional’ audience desires.

Audience desire for these shared listening events is not only evidenced in the *We’re Alive* live broadcast’s evolution and viewing numbers, which often enter the thousands, but also in fan comments and forum conversations. The *We’re Alive* Reddit page offers a succinct example of the import of shared, collective listening:

morosco: I've gone through the series a few times, but I'll never forget that feeling of going down the home stretch in the last season. Just incredible stuff. Now listen to Lockdown and join the Patreon so you're a part of everything as it happens going forward. As fun as it is to binge-listen, it's also fun to be a part of the We're Alive community and digest everything collectively when it happens... (2016)

Quoting morosco's observation that '[a]s fun as it is to binge-listen, it's also fun to be a part of the *We're Alive* community and digest everything collectively when it happens', as-wichita-falls adds: '[d]efinitely. I'm not a fan of bingeing anything, I really think it takes away from the experience. Whether it's participating in the community, waiting for what's coming next, etc., it's just better that way.' (2016) Such comments are reflective of the show's broader online fan-base discussions, and though this hardly reflects all *We're Alive* listeners (many may choose not to contribute to online discussion, or join in shared listening), there is certainly evidence in both fan feedback and producer provision of collective online streaming events of a listening culture which resists and overcomes notions of isolated, 'anti-social' and anti-collective consumption, and which instead strains toward more 'traditional', shared and scheduled acts of listening and engagement.

The extent of this claim is broadened in the *We're Alive* creators' use of YouTube to override the potential longevity of podcast medias' inevitable production of incrementally fragmented audience experiences. Arguably, one of the podcast medium's most appealing points is its potential for permanent availability: so long as a website or streaming service is maintained, a show may continue to engage listeners long after its initial publication, at whatever time a listener should choose to press play. As podcasting entered its second wave, renewed interest in podcast listening and production brought many older shows a new 'generation' of listeners. Through digital word-of-mouth and invigorated media interest in the form, fans of newer horror podcasts are repeatedly directed to older shows of similar ilk or quality. However, while *We're Alive* was readily available for archival listening, production of the original show itself ceased in July 2014, and for new listeners the acts of collective, community discussion, anticipation, and shared-listening were unavailable. On accessing the show's previously bustling forum, a new

listener may be forced to wonder, as one of the first ‘generation’ of listeners puts it, if ‘this board [has] become dead?’ (werewolf 2016) For ‘werewolf’, the forum’s decline suggests an invasion of the digital-undead - spambots - come to populate what was once a vital hub of podcast humanity:

like so many zombies. all I see are a bunch of names that may or may not be real. I remember when we're alive was airing and the next couple of days there would be lively discussions about the latest episode. when it was all over. The last minute of the last scene was played, and we remember all the cast and crew that took the final bow. we all seemed to fade away. (ibid)

While werewolf’s concession that ‘a few of us come back now and then to check in to see what might be in the works. Or see if we can find that friend we made that lives across the country or across the world’ serves to highlight the deep connectivity that the podcast forum once enabled and engendered, for a new-generation listener, the forum’s long-abandoned threads and conversations and expired listening-appointments, may implicate a sense of lack to their isolated, on-demand experience of the show. Indeed, if, as many of werewolf’s respondents posit, the forum’s popularity and vivacity was only ever meant to be for a moment in time, and essence of shared temporality and liveness, then for the new generation there is perhaps a sense of having missed the moment, and of entering into something now cold, whose time has passed.

Such possibility seems anticipated and somewhat remedied by *We’re Alive*’s creation of *Apartment 2C*, a YouTube series dedicated to re-airing archived *We’re Alive* episodes, and seemingly geared toward the purposes of not only allowing veteran listeners to re-listen in anticipation of upcoming spin-off series *Goldrush* (2017-), but also to allow new listeners to engage with the show as a live, united audience. The series revolved around notions of

sociability, liveness and community. Alongside the live streaming of the show's archive, *Apartment 2C* featured, like *We're Alive*'s previous YouTube broadcasts, the live streaming of creator and actor Q and A's and interviews, live audience interaction, giveaways and competitions, updates on ongoing project developments and even live drinking-games.

The extent to which *Apartment 2C* was directed towards a new listening generation is expressed in host Tony Rey's opening explanation of the show concept as he states, 'This is a great time to start listening to *We're Alive*. We're really trying to bring *We're Alive* to the YouTube community'. In reaching out to the YouTube community, *Apartment 2C* seeks not only a new collective of listeners, but to offer an unfettered live listening experience, as *We're Alive* creator and *Apartment 2C* co-host K.C. Wayland explains:

... we're gonna be very careful about spoilers. We don't wanna have anyone who's not visited the series before get spoiled or something, so please keep spoilers out of comments if you can, and we'll do the best on our end to make sure that we don't get any questions that are gonna spoil it ... we won't spoil anything. ('It Begins, Part One')

Any potential spoilers were assiduously removed from comment threads, as the show endeavoured to create a faculty for fresh, 'first-time' listeners to enjoy the show's various surprises, and to create their own collective community of fan theories and explorations of the series' 'future'. Rather than working through the show's archived series alone, then, new fans were encouraged to 'tune-in' to *Apartment 2C*'s live weekly streaming sessions, bringing liveness and shared audience to the forefront of a medium too often defined by its fragmented and on-demand aspects.

While *Apartment 2C*'s broadcast eventually suffered enforced hiatus, due to the increasing demands of new project developments, the show's legacy continued through the

creator's use of the studio space to broadcast various archival streamings. The studio set itself was highly immersive, being designed to emulate the space of early *We're Alive* episodes, namely an apartment within an abandoned tower block, and its continued usage for live streaming events enables a continuity both to the halted project, and to the import of *We're Alive*'s archival presence. With the live streaming of archived episodes continuing to bring new fans into the fold (and acquaint old fans with the story's intricate plots and numerous characters) in time for the spin-off series *Goldrush*'s 2017 Autumn release, *We're Alive*'s development of live streaming and collective audience culture seems set to continue.

The initial stages of horror podcast fan interaction, communication and self-maintained community as evidenced in *We're Alive*'s early forum activities have developed as the digital world has become increasingly connected, multi-platformed and interactive. In 2017 the ability to 'share', comment, link, and integrate our digital platforms is an increasingly expected, routine part of digital culture. Likewise, with advances in smartphone and podcast streaming technologies, listening devices are becoming less self-contained in their purpose, and more integrated within multi-functional mobile devices. Simply put, it is now more than ever possible to listen to a podcast and, on the same device, simultaneously Google a name or point mentioned, share your thoughts on what you're hearing, access and peruse the podcast's website, and search other websites. Such connectivity has come to play a crucial role in the inter-audience cultures and communities of horror podcasting, and have reached particularly fruitful development in numerous horror audio-fictions.

Created by the fictional public radio network Pacific North West Stories (PNWS), *The Black Tapes*, and its later 'sister' shows *TANIS* and *Rabbits*, are among a developing sub-genre of horror podcasts which explicitly organize plotline and form around notions of 'true-life'

audio-investigations of various crimes and mysteries. The development of this subgenre, and the extent to which its origins may be traced to Sarah Koenig's 'true-crime docu-drama *Serial*, is discussed further elsewhere (Hancock and McMurtry: 2017). Whilst these shows offer many important considerations regarding the horror genre's contribution to podcasting, and vice versa, herein it is sufficient to explore solely their development and utilisation of collective and highly social audience cultures.

Of particular interest is the extent to which such programmes integrate and cultivate highly communicative, collaborative and collective audience cultures within their fictive worlds, narratives, and forms. The shows all function explicitly as podcasts, which have been set up by various researchers to detail and aid their personal investigations into various mysteries. While topics of investigation vary from paranormal research (*The Black Tapes*), extra-terrestrial communication (*The Message*), cyber-folklore (*TANIS*), and an abandoned research community (*Lime Town*), all are presented as true stories, evolving in real-time with the podcast's release, and in which the listenership is invited and reported to contribute to the investigation. In particular *TANIS* details the investigations of audio-journalist Nic Silver as he attempts to uncover an ancient, ongoing occult legend known only as 'Tanis'. At times suggested as a Philosophers' Stone of sorts, at others a time-warp, or apocalyptic entity, Tanis rapidly consumes Nic's life, and possibly endangers both himself and his listeners. *TANIS* listeners are encouraged to follow and 'solve' the mystery alongside the host, a point emphasised in the show's weekly concluding tagline: 'We'll be back again next week, until then: keep looking' ('Radio Radio'). Listeners are aided throughout, with each episode being accompanied by online visual documentation of the evidence and clues discussed.

Whilst Silver discusses cryptic drawings, historical records and eerie photographs, listeners may peruse the evidence being discussed. In this sense the stories evolve from pure audio form to become almost transmedia narratives, with the podcast website images and MP3 becoming integrated and co-supporting of one another. While audio-fictions such as *TANIS* may be consumed without reference to the various platforms that they reference and signpost, still we may certainly say that, in their efforts to ‘to fully experience the fictional world’, the audience cultures surrounding such podcasts frequently exemplify Jenkins’ definition of transmedia story-readers, electing to

... assume the role of hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across media channels, comparing notes with each other via online discussion groups, and collaborating to ensure that everyone who invests time and effort will come away with a richer entertainment experience. (Jenkins: 2008, 21)

TANIS and its contemporaries further develop their audio-visual narrative by including ‘real’, ‘findable’ materials and stories alongside fictional storylines, forging an audio horror form which is acutely aware of the audience’s ability to fact-check and research that which is presented as true-life, and which makes use of this fact to develop ever-complicating, broadening storylines. Through, say, *The Codex Gigas* or *Elisa Lam*, a young woman whose strange death in a hotel water-tank became digital folklore, *TANIS* allows a Google search to take enthused listeners so far into the realms of history and/or reality, and then pick up from the eventual dead ends. That listeners may Google the artifacts, news stories, characters and histories discussed in the shows underpins narrative tension in such scenes as *The Black Tapes*’ episode ‘*Codex Gigas*’, wherein Reagan investigates ‘The Devil’s Bible’:

Carmichael: You can look [The Devil's Bible] up online.

Reagan: Really?

Carmichael: Yes. It's called *The Codex Gigas*. You should Google it. I'll stay on the line.

Reagan: You don't mind?

Carmichael: Not at all.

Reagan: Okay, great. [extended pause] Oh, wow. There's a huge drawing of the devil in it.

Carmichael: Quite something, yes?

Reagan: Yeah, that's... something.

While, initially, this may seem an over-long segue to Reagan's discovery of a Satanic image, in fact by delaying such discovery the scene allows for, and seemingly acknowledges the likelihood of, the listener Googling alongside Reagan. In doing so, the listener will discover reams of information on the factual *Codex Gigas*, and may examine the book's illustration alongside Reagan's subsequent description of it. Fans have responded to such allowances with ardor, with the show's Reddit page offering hundreds of fan-theories, concept and plot-maps, time-lines, and research profiles. *TANIS* co-producer Terry Miles likewise explains, 'The fans of *TANIS* are super engaged ... I get emails everyday with crazy theories and videos and pictures. There are the wildest theories' (cited in Locker, 2015) Investigation of narrative detail frequently brings forth—for the 'super-engaged' fan—another clue, story, or mythology. Such enabled research allows fans both to burrow deeper into the story, creating a realism of narrative depth and historical root, and also to branch-out from its origins, allowing for 'wild theories' by which the central narrative becomes splintered and multiplicitous.

The complexities of *TANIS* and its fellow ‘docu-drama’ style podcasts are legendary among fans. As podcast blogger David Chang observes:

Tanis is a podcast that demands your full attention. Let your mind wander for just a minute, and you may miss a vital clue. Skip an entire episode, and you could be lost at sea. And yet, with Tanis, your attention is richly rewarded. (2016)

And indeed, within the show’s fanbase, such attention is diligently and enthusiastically supplied. Many listeners report having to re-listen to episodes or entire series repeatedly, in order to glean meaning, and then bring their ideas and suspicions to the Reddit forum for dissemination and development. The intricacies of programmes like *TANIS*, and their integration with ‘real’ histories, mysteries and folklores thus recollect Jenkins’ discussions of *The Matrix* franchise, and the extent to which the works therein encouraged and even necessitated audience cooperation in order to achieve narrative understanding:

Viewers get even more out of the experience if they compare notes and share resources than if they try to go it alone ... The sheer abundance of allusions makes it nearly impossible for any given consumer to master the franchise totally. (2008: 97, 101)

Similarly, in *TANIS* and its contemporaries, the stories’ vast expanse of clues, references, allusions and code make fan cooperation and interaction pivotal to the pursuit of meaning. Herein, the medium enables the message, as fans may re-listen and ‘join’ the story from independent time frames, and contribute to the online ‘hive-mind’, forging an ever-developing relay of researchers, theories and investigations which collide, co-mingle and co-create a canon of commonly agreed ‘truth’. The listener is purposefully co-opted into the mystery, and it becomes a community endeavor, with fans posting theories and insights onto forums and piecing the mystery together. Indeed, *PNWS* increasingly suggest a ‘breaking of the fourth wall’ horror-

type, with the materials which they air proving, in later revelations, perhaps dangerous when heard. Through, say, hearing a song which supposedly kills within a year, all that hear it, the listener becomes uncomfortably integrated within the show: rather than submitting storylines or voice-over, *PNWS*'s listeners contribute themselves as potential victims of the narrative.

Here we find a concrete example of Jenkins' 'convergence media', wherein 'consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content' (2008, 3). If 'convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others', then we may further argue *TANIS* and its contemporaries to complicate 'first wave' concerns regarding new audio-medias' antisocial properties (ibid). In allowing audiences to double-check, study and dissect, such materials, audio-visual podcast narratives coax acts of armchair detective-work and interactivity as listeners not only discuss and argue the various podcasts' mysteries, but, on fan forums like Reddit, work collaboratively to solve them. As these fictions weave together fiction and fact, the podcast's purported cultures of audience isolation and fragmentation wane thin, as through its aspects of multi-platform and integrated-media listening, audience communities and collaborations are not only encouraged, but necessitated.

Case Study Part Three

Our Friendly Desert Town: Teen Traditionalism and Living Podcast Community in

Welcome to Night Vale

The above examples have evidenced the extent to which horror podcasting challenges assumptions of isolated, individualistic and fragmented listening cultures through acts of organised simultaneous listening, post-'broadcast' discussion, and collaborative interpretation. However, my dispute of the ear-bud solipsist finds full endorsement in the audience community surrounding *Welcome to Night Vale*. If new audio-media usage is too-frequently read as a willful self-exclusion from others, then this is particularly evident in readings of youth-cultures (Collins, 2016). Indeed, for Tom de Castella, new audio anti-socialism is inherently generational, as he states: '[s]o ubiquitous is headphone culture today that it has become a sort of cultural shorthand - often for a spoilt, selfish generation who lack civic values.' (2011) *Welcome to Night Vale* challenges such readings, often being used by its young fan-base not as an imaginative retreat to – as Bull opines - a 'private utopia,' but rather to a location, media-form, and identity that are consciously and enthusiastically collective, frequently nostalgic and traditional, and purposefully shared (2007, 161). In these aspects, *Welcome to Night Vale* suggests fresh potential for new audio-media and exposes alternate desires in audio-media users, as with each 'broadcast' fans continue to cultivate old modes of community in new ways.

Regarding youth culture, audio-escapism is seen to reflect desires to disengage from a society which does not seem to accept or welcome the 'new' generation. Exploring the means by which young people use new audio media to disengage with wider social culture, Michael J. Collins recalls Frank Tonkiss' term 'social deafness' (cited in 2016, 304). By allowing users

shielded isolation from the world, 'social deafness ... offers one kind of urban freedom—the lonely liberty of knowing that nobody is listening, no one likely to speak', thus new audio media:

reverse the modern intent of the concert hall or public address system as means of organising a collective 'culture of listening.' Immersed in a private soundscape, engaged in another interactive scene, you do not have to be in the city as a shared perceptual or social space. No one else can really know where you are. (Tonkiss, cited in Collins, 2016)

Welcome to Night Vale offers an alternate perspective on such phenomena, suggesting that within its young fanbase there is desire to escape not from community, but toward it.

It is perhaps unsurprising that younger listeners seek to engage with the smaller, traditional community culture that new audio media supposedly expunge. Discussing the pressures and anonymity that global culture potentializes, Joseph Reagle recalls Kurt Vonnegut's *Bluebeard*:

A moderately gifted person who would've been a community treasure years ago has to give up ... since modern communications has put him or her into daily competition with nothing but the world's champions. (2015, 123)

Indeed, Marshall Berman notes that '[o]ur century has been prolific in constructing fantasies of life in tradition-bound small towns' (cited in Fernback: 1997, 41). In *Welcome to Night Vale*'s small town, individuals are valued and known. *Welcome to Night Vale* community radio identity is, for many young fans, deeply stabilising and comforting. One listener argues, 'Our lives are so random. The world makes so little sense ... And then community radio comes along to give a narrative to the whole business; and, through narrative, the radio gives meaning.' (solar_eclipse_eyes, 2014) For others the 'regression' to small-town radio enables particular

understanding of individual empowerment and community collaboration; discussing an episode wherein the town's community joins forces to protect its traditional values, one fan states: 'I just really love how everyone has a role to play... revolutions don't happen on their own. Solidarity, man. I fucking love it.' (dizzyfeminist comment on solar_eclipse_eyes, 2014) Another listener explains that the show's narrator, Cecil,

embodies that sense of fierce small-town love and pride I see in a lot of my family members. They care about their high school sports teams and whether or not people replace the hubcaps on their cars; they love their towns, flaws and all, and they're proud of them. And that? That's Cecil. (pathopharmacology comment on solar_eclipse_eyes, 2014)

For one listener Cecil, 'sells us the concept of activism and community participation' (Our Shadows Keep Watching Us, 2014). Thus, while we noted in Sections One and Two that much of *Welcome to Night Vale*'s horror comes from being over-intimate, here this aspect shall also be argued to be a source of much pleasure. By appropriating the sounds, structures and contexts of traditional community radio within the highly private, mobilised technologies of new audio media, I propose that *Welcome to Night Vale* allows its young fan base not only escape *from* the unwanted social sphere, but escape *into* a world which is often highly connective, social and emphatically shared. *Welcome to Night Vale* listeners are not plugging into isolated and individualistic worlds, but are entering, and increasingly creating, a new kind of community.

Night Vale is a town where anybody can find community. That this ethos underpins *Welcome to Night Vale*'s identity is highlighted in co-creator Jeffrey Cranor's discussion of the show's second episode, which introduces a terrifying, mysterious Glow Cloud to the town: 'I knew the moment we posted the episode what the Glow Cloud wanted because I knew then what

Night Vale was. The Glow Cloud wanted what any of us wanted: to settle down in a small town that intrigues and comforts us' (Fink and Cranor *Mostly Void, Partially Stars*, 11). The Glow Cloud eventually joins the local PTA, becoming an integrated (albeit still-tyrannical) member of the town's community. In this domestication of the strange, and in its articulation of such domestication through podcasting's 'comforting analogue roots,' *Welcome to Night Vale* achieves definition (Levy: 2006, 1). Indeed, while *Welcome to Night Vale* is commonly, albeit loosely, ascribed 'uncanny' or *unheimlich* tendencies whereby the familiar, homely, or *heimlich* (such as community radio) is made strange, or *Unheimlich*, of equal significance is the extent to which *Welcome to Night Vale* subverts this sensation, making the strange or unsettling familiar and known.

This tendency is well-exemplified in the town's efforts to include 'detached adult male hand' Megan Wallaby, whose studies at Night Vale Elementary School are disrupted by her physicality. Severed hands 'have something peculiarly uncanny about them, especially when ... they prove able to move of themselves in addition' (Freud: 2003, 14). Indeed, doubles, ghosts and automatons are all, for Freud, charged with *unheimlich* potential, and all find home within Night Vale's community. In *Welcome to Night Vale*, however, the severed hand is given voice, name, family, and a community which meets its need for social integration. Wanting to 'help her communicate!' Megan's parents petition Night Vale's PTA for a computer (Fink and Cranor: *The Great Glowing Coils*, 86). Once enabled, Megan types messages of love for her fellow citizens. However the apparently autonomous computer commandeers the town's electricity, and must be unplugged. Cecil emphasizes Megan's isolation, describing her, 'slipping sadly down from the keys of a darkened computer. She scurries a little slower than before. Maybe her knuckles slump as she makes her way home through quiet streets.' (ibid, 93) Both Megan's brief communication,

and her subsequently illuminated loneliness and humanity make the *unheimlich* known and familiar. As Cecil pleads with Night Vale to tolerate the computer, because 'there is a girl who is only a hand, and she needs a computer to help her be part of our community', the strange is not simply made un-strange, but is embraced as a part of the listener's home, Night Vale (ibid, 94).

The inclusion/domestication of non-normative persons within *Welcome to Night Vale*'s social fabric resonates strongly with fans. Discussing the podcast's success, Cecil Baldwin (who voices Cecil) states that '[h]umans love a good story ... especially one in which they can recognise themselves,' and, while the show portrays a diverse, 'representative' human population, *Welcome to Night Vale*'s monsters and 'freaks' hold equal significance with the fanbase (cited in Butcher, 2017). Interviewing *Welcome to Night Vale* fans, Clint Nowicke reports: 'Jenna from North Carolina identifies most with Carlos due to feeling like an outsider who finds a home in a strange environment. Hanna from Finland enjoys stories involving Megan Wallaby ... since they've shared similar feelings of loneliness and isolation.' (2014) Likewise, explaining her life in 'real' society, blogger thequintessentialqueer explicitly compares herself to *Welcome to Night Vale*'s non-human citizens: 'we are made to feel monstrous. As a queer, autistic woman of colour, I have been taught to feel ugly, to feel dangerous, to feel dirty and wrong. In the absence of representation, I was spectral ... I am many headed and dangerous; I am faceless and afraid.' (2016) Through *Welcome to Night Vale*'s diverse human representation, and the town's inclusion and acceptance of its ghosts, many-headed dragons, and faceless old woman, thequintessentialqueer's own 'monstrosity' or *unheimlich* is made, literally, *heimlich*: 'I am so grateful to Night Vale for being my strange, frightening, absurd home.' (ibid)

Repeatedly, *Welcome to Night Vale*'s hominess eclipses that of listeners' reality. Exploring Polish *Welcome to Night Vale* listenerships, Włodarczyk and Tyminska report one

listener 'noted that when he listens to the podcast now, he feels as if he 'was going back home (however sappy that sounds)'" (2015, 4.6). Blogger solar_eclipse_eyes believes *Welcome to Night Vale*'s community creates 'a sense of wish fulfillment, particularly for those who are hidden and unacceptable, and for those who are otherwise lost in the divide.' (2014) thequintessentialqueer presents *Welcome to Night Vale*'s horror as a matter of perspective: 'fans would often describe Welcome to Night Vale as a horror podcast. I could never understand that ... Those who are trans, who are dark-skinned, who are disabled visibly or otherwise...Of course we love Night Vale. Of course [they] saw horror where we saw home.' (2016) One 2017 Reddit thread, asking whether listeners felt 'prepared' by *Welcome to Night Vale* for real-world political events, generated a response deeming Night Vale more desirable than the real world—a sentiment encompassed in one response: 'I don't know about feeling more prepared, but after I binge a bunch of episodes I want to drive through the desert searching. I kind of want to live in Night Vale' (comment on self.nightvale 2017). For many *Welcome to Night Vale* listeners, the town's strangeness constitutes not an unsettling horror environment, but the comforting semblance of a wished-for home.

In domesticating the strange/Othered within a world of oddly traditionalistic, white-picket-fence and apple-pie Americana, *Welcome to Night Vale* offers its listenership '[a] place where the community of a small town and a world tolerant of diversity intersect' (thoughtlessthinkythoughts, 2015). Traditional American community is re-imagined and revived as a space more socially connective, inclusive, and friendly than the reality beyond the earbuds, or as thoughtlessthinkythoughts puts it: 'either way, I'd be living in a world filled with unspeakable horrors. I might as well choose the place that's honest about it. I might as well choose the place that would let me be my weird, quirky self. I might as well choose Night Vale.'

(ibid)

That listeners find escape and hominess within *Welcome to Night Vale*/Night Vale contrasts starkly to the antisocial, individualistic tendencies attributed to new audio-media cultures. Yet such aspects are interrelated with the podcast's privatizing functions, allowing listeners not only 'escape,' but also immersion and intimacy, wherever and whenever they may be. Indeed, while solar_eclipse_eyes argues that *Welcome to Night Vale*'s 'weird town' setting, 'like Gravity Falls, like Eureka, [provides] a picture of a community where weirdness is out in the open and, somehow, normalized', *Welcome to Night Vale*'s appropriation of community radio form enables a deeper facet of 'wish fulfillment' than its televisual counterparts (2014). While televisual 'weird towns' may represent the inclusion and normalization of 'strange' citizens, such communities exist at a necessary remove from the audience. The viewer is an extra-diegetic outsider, literally looking in; they may be 'represented,' but they are not actively included in the town and cannot enter the wished-for community.

Welcome to Night Vale works differently. Audio is inherently more immersive than purely visually based media. It surrounds us, and coerces imaginative and highly personalized engagement, 'making mass media and consciousness seem coextensive' (Verma: 2012, 6). Through this, *Welcome to Night Vale*'s community radio identity offers stabilizing rhythm and locality. Solar_eclipse_eyes explains, 'Our lives are so random. The world makes so little sense ... And then community radio comes along to give a narrative to the whole business; and, through narrative, the radio gives meaning.' (2014) Yet there is hominess and safety to new audio-medias' sound bubble. Discussing the potentials of headphone/earbud culture, Michael Collins observes,

Sound and new technologies of sound distribution like the iPod have a special relationship to the experience of living, contentedly, within one's own, privatised universe. Indeed, of all the senses sound has perhaps the most to offer in terms of a subjective experience of homeliness, especially in an alien or alienating environment.

Unlike the visual world, sound seems to own us and we to exist within it. (2016)

When paired with *Welcome to Night Vale*'s domestic community radio guise, new audio-media potentializes a mobile domestic, in which the listener is not excluded but enveloped.

This sense of integration intensifies through Cecil's address and implication of the listener as a Night Vale citizen. Through feigning liveness and shared locality with his listeners, who are commonly addressed as 'people of Night Vale' and 'dear listeners of Night Vale,' the podcast listener's actual isolation not only from Cecil himself, but also from Night Vale and one another lessens: 'actual' differences in time and space are negated in the shared imaginary time and space of the broadcast. However, whenever and wherever listeners tune in from, they are tuning into the same reality. Moreover, the podcast's invisibility enables Night Vale's physicality to reside and develop within listeners' minds. Alexandra Brown notes that, while Night Vale's architecture is 'central to the narrative structure of the show ... [*Welcome to Night Vale*] avoids detailed descriptions of the town's architecture, with key buildings within Night Vale and its surrounds instead used as a series of recurring landmarks.' (2017) In this sense, Night Vale as a cityscape, and habitation of this space, is not physically geographic but rather emotional or psychological; space is constructed through events and memories—through individual engagement with the unfurling narrative.

Night Vale seems to fluctuate spatially, its boundaries shifting with events and individual interpretation. 'Despite consistent references to Night Vale as a bustling or even quiet little town,

as well as locations 'at the edge' or 'outside of' town, the size and—by extension—limits of Night Vale are deliberately unclear'; thus, 'Night Vale is both a small town and an infinite city—a polemic rendered absolute by the medium of podcast' (ibid). Furthermore, Night Vale often appears to permeate the 'real world': airplanes and trains from 'real' cities 'crash land' there, invisible goods are claimed as the city's largest export, familiar 'real-world' brands and companies exist there in slightly skewed form. Cecil appears telepathic, and able to scry listeners' thoughts. Indeed, the recognition of 'non-corporeal,' silent, yet present and listening citizens suggests the invisible, unspeaking podcast listenership to be a known and accepted part of Night Vale's community (Fink and Cranor, 'The Investigators'). Night Vale expands to encompass every auditor, in every time and space, and invites each 'listener of Night Vale' to identify as a citizen.

Beyond expressing individual desires to 'live' in Night Vale, *Welcome to Night Vale* fans also seek to share, expand, and experience *Welcome to Night Vale*/Night Vale as a community. For many *Welcome to Night Vale* fans, the fact that Night Vale is a *shared* imaginative space, rather than a 'private utopia' is paramount to their engagement with the show. This is demonstrated through collective visual definition of the town-space and inhabitants in the forms of online, collaborative 'Night Vale community' role play and fan-fic, and the self-motivated formation of a collective listenership.

In terms of its popularity and sustained development, *Welcome to Night Vale* has always been affiliated with online community and cyber fandom. Independent podcasting relies on word-of-mouth or fellow-podcast endorsement for advertisement and, in *Welcome to Night Vale*'s history, fans' potency as a collective force is paramount as Cranor sources the show's sudden, immense, popularity to Tumblr: 'Night Vale was everywhere on Tumblr. Fan art. Fan

fiction. Slash fiction. Arguments over canon' (Fink and Cranor *Mostly Void, Partially Stars*, XIV). Alongside exposing fans' role in *Welcome to Night Vale*'s now-global notoriety, Cranor's comments further example the extent to which fans have, from the start, collectively 'claimed' and expanded *Welcome to Night Vale* beyond its podcast nexus.

Tumblr fandom gave *Welcome to Night Vale* a visual identity. Though *Welcome to Night Vale* exerts some visual identity through its logo, specific details concerning character and town appearance are not visually supplied and are seldom suggested within the audio-narrative. Yet, as A observes, 'there is a surprising alignment in visions of what Cecil Baldwin and his love interest, Carlos the scientist, look like.' (2013) Cecil especially has found recognizable form as 'the skinny, blond, bespectacled white guy with purple eye-shaped tattoos on his face and arms, who shows up with a simple Google search for Night Vale or Cecil Gershwin Palmer' (Okay_sure_lets_post, no date available). This image, generally sourced to Tumblr, has spread through the fandom to dominate both fanart and cosplay. Margaret Chwat, a popular *Welcome to Night Vale* fan-art creator, argues fan-collaboration to underpin *Welcome to Night Vale* fan-art's appeal as 'people want to see images from what they can't actually see and build off what others have imagined' (cited in Carlson, 2013). Chwat suggests an almost hive-mind operation in the formation of synchronous imagery as 'things that are weirdly, unconsciously the same' (ibid). Fans repeatedly attribute group sensibility to Cecil's visualization. Responding to Okay_sure_lets_post's Reddit thread, one listener notes, 'the fandom's understanding of him has changed over the years'; another fan observes that, 'the Cecils slowly evolve as new episodes come out and people continue to pass fanart around. Notice how many Cecils of color exist now? Some versions have remained nearly the same as they were in 2013 and have simply taken on a darker skin tone' (comment Okay_sure_lets_post), suggesting that the fandom's changing social

consciousness is both influenced by, and influential of, Cecil's visual identity.

Okay_sure_lets_post responds, 'I actually imagined him with brown hair. But after seeing all these fan art depictions, my imagination has been supplanted by them.' Through fan interaction and collaborative creativity, an invisible man finds form.

The extent to which fan-community defines Cecil both unites and disrupts *Welcome to Night Vale* fandom. Some fans argue headcanon trends to privilege Caucasian race, male gender, and able-bodiedness, and in doing so disrupt open reading of such attributes. Others believe this stance to deny individual creativity or engagement with the show. However, many fans seek to rectify such misalignment within their 'community.' In a popular discussion of the fandom's fragmentation, *Welcome to Night Vale* blogger anightvaleintern posits problematics of representation as arising directly from the fandom's operation as a social grouping, and the responsibilities attendant to shared social environment. Posing the question 'But what my headcanon is has no effect whatsoever on PoC's!' anightvaleintern responds, 'Your individual headcanon has no effect on... anything whatsoever. But in a group, it, once again, proves that people default to white. Which does effect PoC representation in the media and media representation is very important.' (2015) anightvaleintern further argues the issue to 'open a dialogue' and asks fans to 'use this as a rare chance to teach about expanding [racial and gendered] ideas.' (ibid) In such interactions, *Welcome to Night Vale* fandom extends beyond the parameters of shared appreciation/discussion of the program, and toward a meaningful social community, negotiating its own disputes and developing its own social contracts.

Less contentiously, the town's space is frequently defined and shared by online fans. Individual 'outlining' and cooperative development of town maps, visual representation and familiarization of previously invisible buildings and spaces, and even one fan's (very popular)

offer to 'make you a desktop of your hometown as Night Vale or Desert Bluffs,' exhibit the extent to which *Welcome to Night Vale* fandom increasingly, collectively, both identify and identify with the people *and* space of *Welcome to Night Vale* (npatchett, 2015).

Both *Welcome to Night Vale*'s Reddit fanforum, and comments sections of the show's numerous streaming sites, further demonstrate fans building and sharing Night Vale identities and space. *Welcome to Night Vale*'s Reddit homepage signals the extent to which the group's discussion revolves around shared, imaginative Night Vale habitation, through playful alteration of the show's Wikipedia description: "'Welcome to Night Vale is a podcast presented as a radio show for the ~~fictional~~ town of Night Vale, reporting on the strange events that occur within it.' – Wikipedia.'" Within the group, fans' usernames reflect their chosen identity within the town. Group moderators are referred to as members of 'the Sheriff's Secret Police,' teasingly reflecting their status as unseeable and somewhat omnipotent controllers. Other group members align themselves as 'Night Valers' through affixing a *Welcome to Night Vale* identity to their username, including: 'Librarian,' 'Hooded Figure,' 'you know, the farmer,' 'Desert Flower Bowling alley and aRcade fun complex employee,' and 'Eternal Scout.'

Conversation within *Welcome to Night Vale*'s Reddit forum and episode comments threads typically veers between distanced, consciously extra-fictional discussion of the podcast, and lively re-enactment or appropriation of the world which it depicts. While some discussions exclusively approach *Welcome to Night Vale* as fiction, much of *Welcome to Night Vale* fans' collective interaction revolves around the adoption of Night Vale resident identities, and group discussion of 'town' and 'community' issues. Through collective performance of Night Vale habitation, fans create their own *Welcome to Night Vale* storylines, perspectives, and scenarios within the forum threads, which develop through comment response, generating a collaborative

role-play fan fiction. Recently aired episodes often constitute the impetus and context of such 'in-character' discussions, with fans approaching show-events from their adopted Night Vale resident perspective. Thus, report of mega-corporation STREXCORP's infiltration of Night Vale prompt listener plans to 'TAKE DOWN STREX' and then visit Night Vale's Arby's diner together (er Imperious Condensation, 2014).

One such collaborative fan-fic provokes enlightening discussion concerning the difficulty in discerning 'in character' and 'out of character' forum participation. Following a confused role play interaction, circuitZero (Street Cleaner) posits, 'I think this sub will benefit greatly from (out of character: OOC) tags, I was 'in character' there,' (comment on The_New_Doctor, 2016) This prompts discussion of role-play's ubiquity within the forum:

The_New_Doctor (You): I think it would be better for IC [in-character] tags, as I feel most posts and comments are made out of character. OOC tags are useful for roleplaying subs, of which this is not.

quitesavvy (Intern): Except it kind of it (*sic*)

The_New_Doctor (You): No it's not, the listeners here just treat it like it is.

(The_New_Doctor, 2016)

Such interaction demonstrates the extent to which *Welcome to Night Vale*'s Reddit increasingly, organically embodies an almost innately role-play venture.

Ultimately, most online fan discussion comprises of a blend of 'real world' and Night Vale 'resident' stances. Yet even discussion threads that begin by approaching their topic with a consciously extra-fictional stance are frequently derailed to comply with the Night Vale residence fiction, as in podbay.com's 2013 'Street Cleaning Day' comment stream. The first comment reading 'Tom Milsom for the weather! Awesome!' is immediately appropriated into the

Night Vale roleplay as Kayjee17 responds: '[f]orget Tom Milsom and run, run, forget everything and run because it's STREET CLEANING DAY!!!!' (Kayjee17, 2013). The following thread of replies and new comments expand on Kayjee17's premise: that all listeners to *Welcome to Night Vale* are residents of Night Vale, experiencing a shared reality wherein street cleaning brings 'removal' of homes, belongings, and loved ones; reference to the weather's musical content is deemed irrelevant and unintelligible. For many fans, then, the pleasure in online interaction lies not in distanced, 'real world' discussion of *Welcome to Night Vale* as a show, but in shared imaginative habitation of Night Vale as a community space.

These interactions evidence *Welcome to Night Vale*'s audio-culture as rooted not simply in individuated listening, but also in subsequent collective discussion and role play. This again complicates dominant conceptions of new audio-media as isolating and fragmentary. While fans may 'tune-in' individually, from different places and temporalities, their online behaviors represent a more traditional understanding of audience than new audio-culture usually provokes, as fans form collective audience after the individuated listening experience. Thus we may argue, alongside Gray's earlier noted discussion of traditional radio audience, that 'radio' audience is a collective which always, only exists after the broadcast, and is formed in the interactions which follow the necessarily individual listening event. Much as, for Gray, listening is always solitary, and radio 'arguably achieved true collective response when discussed the next day in the workplace, or when the catch-phrases or distinctive voices passed into common currency,' we may deem *Welcome to Night Vale* fans' (perhaps) isolated listening situation as irrelevant. Indeed, this is a conversation which extends locality, and in *Welcome to Night Vale* fans' globally-spread comments and threads we find the self-motivated formation of collective audience which reach far beyond traditional concepts of audience (2006, 232).

Perhaps more than any other podcast, *Welcome to Night Vale* exemplifies this alternate perspective on new audio-media, suggesting that within its young fanbase there is desire to escape not from community, but toward it. Community and collectivism represent key features of fan interaction and engagement with *Welcome to Night Vale*, with fans increasingly embracing and developing the show's fantasy of shared location, listenership and identity. As Nowicke observes, *Welcome to Night Vale* 'is more than just a podcast full of supernatural oddities, it's a community' (2014). Indeed, beyond enabling fictional community, *Welcome to Night Vale* frequently appears to encourage extra-diegetic collectivism as '[Cecil] sells us the concept of activism and community participation' (sigmalibrae, 2014). *Welcome to Night Vale* listeners do not represent 'anti-social beings, those who avoid human interaction,' nor does the podcast exist as a means to 'reverse the modern intent of the concert hall or public address system as means of organising a collective 'culture of listening'' (Pitt: 2006, 161; Tonkiss cited in Collins, 2016). Rather, *Welcome to Night Vale* has, as Butcher puts it, 'created a community.' (2017)

Exploration of the audience cultures surrounding horror podcasting requires that we reassess common understanding of new audio media technologies and cultures as purposefully, desirably separating listeners from one another. In the fact of listener forums, shared listening events, inter-audience collaboration and textual interpretation and imagined and enacted community, a highly social and connective listening culture is revealed. Horror podcasts are frequently, increasingly, tied to rich social worlds largely of the listeners' own making. Part innovation, part nostalgia, horror podcast audience community is arguably more interactive, collective and social than its traditional radio counterpart ever could be, as listeners are able to connect across global and temporal differences; that horror podcast listeners have so repeatedly, actively sought to make such connections further de-stabilises more dominant technologically-

deterministic readings of new audio cultures. However it may look from the outside, the podcast listener does not listen alone.

Section Four: Audience Presence, Collaboration and Community in Horror Podcast Theatre.

If Golden Era radio and its reception is traditionally considered in terms of the domestically situated listener, as a friendly, entertaining and often informative chatterbox speaking from within the hearth's glow, then the notion of 'going to see' a radio show complicates the way that we think of radio as a medium. Whilst seldom discussed in academic histories of radio, live audience attendance was an essential part of Golden Era radio culture. Many shows broadcast live from audience-attended venues, and the sounds of the audience's reactions formed as much of the broadcast soundscape as the voice actors, musicians and Foley artists. Radio's frequent incorporation of studio audiences re-defines the at-home listening experience, while at the same time offering a fresh understanding Golden Era radio culture itself, as a media-form which cultivated not only imagined acts of audience, but actualised ones too. With this in mind, the fact that horror podcasting evidences an established and increasingly popularised trend of live, audience-attended shows demands critical attention, and a further reassessment of new audio listening cultures. The popularity of live podcast events is such as to form a major revenue source, and an importance means of gathering new podcast listeners. To a significant degree, live audience attendance underpins the genre's survival, once more destabilising prevalent notions of new audio culture as being based in fragmentary, 'anti-social' and individualised listening trends, and highlighting the extent to which radio and podcast forms may no longer be understood through their aspects of difference. In the horror podcast form's revival of live, audience-attended audio-drama, podcasting is once more seen to continuously and consciously assert and

interact with its radio lineage, and to cultivate and propagate listening cultures which are based not only in both nostalgia and novelty, but, crucially, in acts of community and collectivism.

In order to address and articulate the importance of podcasting's revival of live audience-attended audio shows, this section will first explore the extent to which live audience attendance alters our conceptions of radio culture and audio audience itself. Following this, it shall evidence and discuss increasing contemporary interest in showcasing and witnessing audio-drama production methods, and the ways in which we may see horror podcasting to explore and evolve these. Finally, this section offers a detailed case study of *Welcome to Night Vale*'s 'The Librarian' (2014) and 'The Investigators' (2015) tours, arguing that within these we may understand the horror podcast showcase as inherently tied to notions of community, collectivism and new shared listening culture.

The emergence of radio's live studio audience is in itself a keen indicator of the medium's journey toward self-understanding and conceptions of imagined audience. In broadcast radio's early experimentations with comedy, for example, the notion of an audibly present studio audience was keenly discouraged. Because broadcasters initially believed that sounds of laughter would distract listeners, all production crews were ordered to remain silent during comedy shows' airtime. However, comedy performers frequently rely on audience reaction during their performances and the practice soon altered, with Eddie Cantor being 'the first to insist that audience members not only be allowed to laugh, but *encouraged* to do so.' (Bell: 2009, 165) Continued fears that this practice risked isolating the listening audience to the studio audience soon dissipated as, '[a]lthough there was some criticism thereafter that occasionally comedians played too much to the studio audience at the expense of the listeners at home, for the most part the radio audience accepted and even came to expect a live audience's

reactions.’ (ibid) Eventually many variety and comedy shows, from *The Jack Benny Show* (1932-1955) to *Amos ‘n’ Andy* (1928-1960), were performed before studio audiences and the practice became part and parcel of the Golden Era listening experience.

Despite broad acceptance of the audible studio audience, we may still see - even in Bell’s delineation of the ‘radio audience’ and the ‘live studio audience’ - that a clear division of radio experience emerges. To see a radio show performed was to change everything about the audience experience. No longer only listened to in domestic or work environs, no longer even solely listened to, radio was now also a visual, physical and highly collective spectacle. Beyond simply taking place in the public sphere of the theatre or recording studio theatre, physically attended-radio meant seeing behind the scenes to some extent - witnessing the reading of lines and missing of cues and in-jokes - and causing audible audience reactions that the ‘at-home’ audience could only guess at the cause of. For at-home listeners of a 1943 USO Command Performance broadcast of *The Jack Benny Show*, for example, the in-house audience laughter surrounding Lana Turner’s introduction is unfathomable. For the in-house audience, laughter is the only appropriate reaction, as - following a barbed remark - Benny checks Turner’s script for ad-libbing, and then, to the gesticulated protestations of Turner, seemingly wanders off script himself. Here we may sympathise with those early nay-sayers to comedy radio’s introduction of studio audience: there can be little doubt of the at-home audience understanding that, in being at home, they are not receiving the ‘full performance’ and are, in short, missing the joke.

Yet to attend the radio show had its own complications. In revealing the tricks of the trade, the radio showcase often shattered many of the powerful illusions which broadcast radio worked so hard to build. Concerning drama, Bell offers a pressing, if socially problematic, example of this in house/at home audience division:

The popular [black] character Beulah, of The Beulah Show, was portrayed by a white man, Marlin Hurt. Part of the studio presentation involved Hurt's standing among other actors with his back to the audience, turning around only to bellow his opening line in faleshto 'colored' dialect, 'Somebody bawl fo Beluah?' Radio listeners could only wonder at the studio audience's astonished reaction. (ibid, 166)

While the 'at-home' listener may be immersed in an imagined scene of the broadcast's story or happenings, the studio audience was to share in the physical actuality of the performance, and frequently that meant to deny the personalised, intimate imaginative experience for which radio was so well-loved.

Still, in the popularity of 'in-house' radio broadcast attendance, we can surmise that such invasion on the private, imagined, radio experience was clearly an acceptable trade-off. To go to see a radio show might mean to deny one's own, personalised, rendering of the show's characters and speakers, but it also meant to enter a highly glamorised world of celebrity and glitz; to see favored celebrities 'in the flesh'; and to experience an insight to radio shows which was otherwise denied. A clear aesthetic for radio show performance soon emerged, blending something of theatre and cinema's glamour with radio's practicality. Indeed, as Hand and Traynor emphasise, in the studio showcase, radio 'was literally theatre ... which had a live studio audience of hundreds, and a live radio audience of millions' (2011, 17-18). Yet if radio was theatre, it was a very unique type. Stars, red-curtains, full orchestras and partial costume soon aligned with visible scripts and technical broadcast paraphernalia to develop a highly distinct visual spectacle of radio's own identity. The broadly domestic trappings of radio were exchanged for a night on the town. Furthermore, to attend a radio show was to become a part of the radio show; to become part of the applause and laughter and gasps and other acoustic elements that

create the radio show itself. The studio audience member no longer engaged with radio as a mediated form, divorced from its source of origin, stripped to only its acoustic elements, and reaching into the domestic spaces of absent listeners through airwaves and speakers. The studio audience member engaged with radio in its pre-mediated form, as it was created moment by moment, and partially by that audience member themselves.

If such an experience is almost irreconcilable with the traditional image of the listener at home, it is still a highly pertinent aspect of radio audience, and the emergence of radio as an inherently dualistic audience experience dominates contemporaneous renderings of the Golden Era. Mel Smith's *Radioland Murders* (1994), both Garrison Keller's *A Prairie Home Companion* and Robert Altman's cinematic adaptation of the programme (2006), and Woody Allen's *Radio Days* (1987) are among many films which take the concept of studio-performed radio broadcast as their theme. Much of these films' humour emerges from the disjuncture between what is seen and heard. Herein, last minute script re-writes, off-stage Foley effects, and the various mistakes and disasters which remain invisible and unknown to the 'at-home' listener now position the film-viewer as an omniscient 'in-crowd', aligning them both with the studio audience and also allowing insight which even they do not possess.

In *Radio Days*, Allen's self-described 'cartoon' of a memoir to 1940s' radio culture, Allen depicts in particularly vivid strokes the pageantry and energy of a live theatrically-spaced and audience-attended radio show. As the film cuts between sights of the narrator's at-home family listening group, and his recollections of attending a radio show as a studio-audience member, the complexities of such concurrent yet divided acts of audience achieve sharp relief. As Aunt Bee wins 50 silver dollars for correctly identifying a fish, we hear Bee's tentative pleasure as the 'at home' radio listener would hear it. Yet we also *see* Bee and the fish, the

gameshow host, the red-curtained and gold edged stage, and the band in their black and white tuxes. Alongside these we see the rows and rows of audience present at the show - defined here not as the 'listeners at home', to whom the host seemingly addresses his remarks, but as spectators, who (like us) need no description of the show's events, being situated right in the glamorous, laughter-filled thick of it. This doubling of worlds is sleekly observed in Allen's film, as 'Ma' notes, 'there are those who drink champagne at nightclubs, and us who listen to them drink champagne on the radio': both worlds are radio worlds, simply one is the creative object and the other the audience.

Throughout, Allen's film toys with OTR's limitations of in/visibility, and in doing so arguably positions the visual radio experience as better suited to the chat, musically-based or game show genres rather than narrative. Narrative radio is after all illusory, with the medium's 'invisibility' acting as a key conduit for the drama, glitz and adventure that Golden Era radio dramas conjured in their listeners' minds. Through Allen's loving camera gaze, we see beyond the visually-conscious, theatrically-performed radio game-show and into grubby sound booths, where chain-smoking voice-actors huddle about their mics, and frantic Foley artists slap together battered sword blades to form, in the listener's mind, a suave and slickly choreographed duel. Yet as Allen's camera takes us 'to see' those narrative radio shows which would ordinarily remain unseen, we may understand the allure of such insights. In seeing the narrator's fondly remembered vigilante radio-hero 'The Masked Avenger', who Roger Ebert notes typifies 'the way the macho heroes of radio adventure serials turned out, in real life, to be short little bald guys' (1987), we are allowed a different sense of spectacle: that such a figure can embody, in his voice, the dramatic, handsome and dynamic Avenger is a wonder in itself. If, for the purpose of narrative immersion, such aspects of radio are suggested as better to remain behind the veil of

broadcast mediation, then we may still see their allure as highly entertaining, unique and exciting visual experience.

Certainly, this seems to be the case in the podcast era. The last decade has evidenced an emergent trend for explicitly Golden Era radio styled stage shows. We have already noted a number of podcast shows, including *The Thrilling Adventure Hour*; *A Prairie Home Companion*; *Icebox Radio Theatre* and *Fireside Mystery Theatre*, which emerge from stage productions to deliver highly stylised OTR-esque variety programmes through podcast and digital radio media. These shows are not isolated phenomena, and we may add to their number - among others - *American Radio Theatre* and *Old Time Radio Theatre*. Likewise, there are a very large number of ‘pure’, non-podcasted, stage shows which seek to recreate the OTR studio show. A hardly exhaustive list of these includes: *Shades Brigade*; *The Fitzrovia Radio Hour*; *The Oldcast Theatre Company*; *The Super Happy Old Time Radio Hour*; *Don’t Close Your Eyes: Live Radio Theatre*; *Firehouse Radio Players*; *Radiotheatre*; *Mountain Music Medicine Show*; *The Mysterious Old Radio Listening Society*; and *Crime City!*.

In their aesthetics and form, these projects are centrally aligned around notions of nostalgia, operating explicitly on the premise of reviving the theatrical or open-studio OTR experience. One of the most popular, and long-sustained, of these productions is *The Thrilling Adventure Hour*, of which show actor or ‘player’ Marc Evan Jackson offers the following description:

It’s a stage production with a small, 6 to 8 person orchestra, and well-dressed performers with scripts in hands, without scenery, without sets, vocally act out various pieces of a radio serial. (2014)

Or, as another of the show's actors, Molly Quinn, puts it, '[i]t's an old time radio show, the kind that your grandparents used to listen to' (2014). This overview of the show's aesthetic and intent is representative of the wider genre of 'radio-style' stage shows: a group of actors, musicians and sometimes Foley artists, dressed in vintage style clothing, acoustically and physically recreate the Golden Era. More than re-mediation, then, these live shows offer a physical sense of re-temporalization; operating almost like contained time-warps to give audiences a chance to enjoy not simply audio, but visual and environmental representations of radio's past.

The importance of the visual is suggested in one review of *The Fitzrovia Radio Hour*, wherein the show's Foley and costume set-up clearly adds much anticipation and mystery:

The 'studio audience' at The Tobacco Factory entered to see a table with a cut-out door and a pink balloon attached; two ladders with planks holding a host of objects including an assortment of pans, bottles, kitchen implements, watering cans and crash helmets; two hat-stands with a variety of hats. (Clark, 2013)

Whilst arguably rooted in the promotion of the audio arts, these shows are highly visual experiences also, with their Foley equipment, old style clothing and microphones forming a highly important part of their aesthetic and meaning.

The chance to *see* OTR in the modern world is evidently desired. Up till its final showing in 2015, *The Thrilling Adventure Hour* routinely sold out their shows, and had to relocate to larger premises to accommodate their growing number of fans, and that such a large number of similarly 'retro' style shows exist, and have found broad appeal, certainly presents further opposition to notions of radio cultures being usurped or buried in the contemporary era. Rather, like the podcast OTR re-makes and online archives, these studio showcase revivals imply that, in

the wake of new audio culture, there emerges a synonymous cultural fascination with audio's past.

However, within these shows the horror genre is scarcely remembered. While *The Thrilling Adventure Hour* offers within its various regular skits a serialised paranormal investigator show, this is highly tongue-in-cheek and not intended to disturb or terrify audiences. For the most part, the 'straight' horror genre is all but absent from OTR stage re-creations, with generic focus almost entirely remaining on comedy. This is somewhat true to history. On the whole, Golden Era horror radio was not associated with live audience attendance and theatrical performance; its invisibility was seldom broken beyond promotional posters and photographs. There were, however, several instances of 'thriller' or 'mystery' dramas being performed before a studio audience, as in *Lux Radio Theatre*. However, these were often abridged recreations of popular films, such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946). The programmes' general short length likely made studio showcasing unsuitable, and perhaps the illusion of macabre *would* be too irrevocably shattered if audiences saw the sound artists and their wooden boards, sandpits and assorted fruit that created the dramas' footsteps, blood spatter, and broken bones (though, as we shall see, the ingenuity of the horror genre's sound effects is certainly worth watching). Yet this does not deny the potential of the showcased horror broadcast altogether. In the one noted record of an OTR studio showcase, we find imaginative, effective usage of the studio showcase, in which the darkness and personalised experience that horror radio was so aligned with is maintained and evolved. While there seems to have been little studio showcasing within the genre overall, Richard Hand draws our attention to a Chicago Tribune report from February 9th 1935, discussing a studio performance of Wyllis Cooper's *Lights Out*:

Fifty members of Evanston's Lights Out club got more than they bargained for the other midnight when they came to NBC studios to view Bill Cooper's macabre 'Lights Out' broadcast. This week's episode concerned a honeymooning couple lost in the Roman catacombs. Studio lights are doused during the broadcast, only two narrow beams playing on the actors themselves. The studio sound experts gave Evanstonians a nice case of jitters. (cited in Hand: 2006, 152)

In the 'dousing' of lights besides two narrow beams which reveal only the actors, a somewhat dreamy, imaginative space is effected. Herein the mysteries and verisimilitude of the sound effects are maintained and sound itself privileged over the visual. Furthermore, through the midnight setting, the small audience size, the seemingly maintained invisibility of the 'sound experts', and (through the darkened auditorium) the near-invisibility of the other co-present listeners, an effectively unsettling use of the shared receptive experience seems to emerge. Cooper's showcase seemingly appropriates and Gothicizes the studio showcase tradition and brings something of the magic of broadcast radio experience to the studio, as the audience sits in a cozied uncertainty, listening in intimate darkness with strangers. In this lone recorded instance of OTR horror 'theatre' there is the sense of a missed opportunity, of suggested potential, to the audio-horror showcase which - in the podcast era - is finally being met.

We're Alive, Welcome to Night Vale, Fireside Mystery Theatre, Earbud Theatre, Tales from Beyond the Pale, and Tales to Terrify are among the growing number of horror podcasts offering live performance tours to listeners. In doing so these shows not only revive and innovate the act of communal, public listening, but also - for the first time - foreground 'broadcast' dramatic audio-horror within this tradition. Moreover, in horror podcasting's revival of audio-showcasing, we find a rather different art form and audio-culture emerging from that witnessed

in OTR revival shows such as *The Thrilling Adventure Hour*, and which recollects Obler's experimental Gothic showcase form. Despite their many different approaches, within the field of horror podcast showcasing we find a definite, unique, audio-art emerging. This, it shall be argued, is not so much focused on a theatrically-performed and visually-oriented 'return' to the Golden Era, but is an art-form which instead hinges upon innovation of such an antiquated audio-form, to offer a true appropriation of Golden Era radio's showcase tradition in the podcast age. These podcast shows explore and showcase the 'behind the scenes' of the podcast as a worthy, intriguing media form in its own right; privilege listening as a valid collective act in itself; and explore the collectivity of the uniquely united, otherwise physically fragmented, podcast audience. Herein we find audio horror being effectively staged for live, co-present and communal audiences of listeners, in ways which Obler perhaps only dreamed of. In short, the horror podcast showcase brings notions of shared, cultivated, imaginative listening experience directly into the podcast era.

The trend for live horror podcast performance shows little sign of abating, and its popularity seems only to increase. *Welcome to Night Vale* sold out across their 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 British, US and Australian tours, and as the concept spreads, more and more horror podcasts are inviting their audiences to leave their earbuds behind and come *see* an audio-fiction show. However, live showcasing has existed almost as long as the genre itself, and from the offset established very different aesthetics to OTR. If not the first horror podcast to take to live showcasing, then *We're Alive* is certainly among the forerunners of the form, beginning their shows in 2011, and many of the aesthetic conventions which its early showcase events established are still prevalent throughout the wider genre. Rather than working to provide a

cohesive, visual spectacle of OTR reminiscence, *We're Alive* offers a very stripped-down and contemporary approach to setting and costume. While *We're Alive* 'brand' iconography and merchandise are displayed behind the actors, no set is used to convey the spaces or themes of the podcast. The actors appear generally un-costumed. In some of the early tours, a number of the cast wore army uniforms in sympathy with their portrayed characters. However, this costuming was not routinely adopted, and throughout the tours the majority of the cast simply wear casual clothing unaligned with their character. In this guise, actors stand in a line before mics, with their scripts in hand, and perform to the accompaniment of pre-recorded sound effects and music, and whilst their faces and bodies of course demonstrate emotion as they act, a full visually-representative performance of their spoken roles is never offered.

Thus, a *We're Alive* show may be visually aligned with what Christopher Balme defines as 'dramatic theatre': 'forms of theatre that employ exclusively or predominantly the spoken word' (2008, 4). Balme applies this term to a wide range of theatrical forms including stand-up comedy, satirical revues and improvisational theatre, and we may conclude that, beyond OTR, horror podcast theatre is not entirely without aesthetic precedent. However, in its use of pre-recorded sound and music, *We're Alive* offers an intriguing mix of the digital and the traditional. Rather than offering the novelty and 'behind-the-scenes' insight of traditional Foley work, *We're Alive* showcases a behind-the-scenes insight to their artform of podcasting itself, and the digital sound effect methods employed therein. While this may seem rather less exciting to watch than the ingenuity and energy of live Foley work, the cohesion of digital and live performance make for an engaging audio event. As the actors' vocal performances weave with the rapid, audibly immersive and often alarming sounds of gunfire, zombies and spatial signifiers, the audience is able to comprehend the skill and technique demanded to perform such complex acoustic

choreography. In the highly traditional environs of a collected studio audience, horror podcasting begins to develop a new form of audio horror spectacle.

The importance of collective, shared audience and co-presence to *We're Alive*'s studio tours is paramount. For many audience members of the podcast's first tours, attendance appears largely based in the desire to connect with the show's actors and creators, and with one another. The initial live shows did not offer new material, but instead re-created early episodes of the podcast and offered 'Q and A' sessions afterward. The popularity and continued development of these shows intimates the extent to which, rather than desiring purely narrative continuation and development, fans wished to engage with the show socially, outside of the conventional podcast-listening method, and to be able to communicate directly with the podcast creators and cast. Likewise, while the show's performance style and aesthetic potentialities a disruption of the imagined experience, this is evidently an enjoyable part of the show's social aspects. In one early scene, the emotion and drama maintained through the podcast's invisibility is upturned as protagonist Michael describes meeting Lieutenant Angel, 'a tall, blonde spoiled kid who just got out of officer school' (*We're Alive*, 'In the Flesh'). As Angel's dark-haired, cheerfully dishevelled, and distinctly non-military looking voice-actor Shane Salk rises to take the microphone, the audience erupts into laughter, presumably at the mis-match between audio and visual. If, in audience responses to the disjuncture between actors and their characters there is a recollection of Allen's somewhat uninspiring Masked Avenger, then it is a happy confrontation between the individualised, imagined image of *We're Alive*, and the shared, objective 'reality' of the performance.

Audience catcalls and laughter are prevalent throughout the show, and in both the co-present visibility of the actors and fellow listeners there emerges a clear camaraderie which

reforms the podcast experience to something entirely new. Audience members are asked to countdown to the shows' beginnings and are included in 'in-jokes' throughout the shows' introductions and 'Q and A' sessions. This sensibility continues throughout the performance, and likewise reconstructs the podcast's previously, highly effectively, somber narrative meaning and energy to something which is now shared and familiar. When Nate Geez, playing Saul, delivers the first mention of the word 'zombies', a scene which in its acoustic rendering and personalised podcast listening is clearly intended to chill and shock, is now met with audience cheers, whistles and laughter, to which Nate and the other actors respond with smiles and quickly-stifled laughter. As the fragmented podcast listeners of *We're Alive* meet as a united audience, their familiarity with the show becomes familiarity with one another and the actors and producers themselves. Rather than creating a multitude of disconnected, isolated listeners, *We're Alive* appears to have created a highly social, gleefully collective in-crowd.

In *The NoSleep Podcast's* live tours - *NoSleep Live* - we find a similarly contemporary, pared-down visual aesthetic maintained, with minimal narratively representative-set, actors wearing smart/casual clothing, and again standing with their scripts. However, in *NoSleep Live*, lighting and darkness are employed to cultivate a highly dreamlike, imaginative atmosphere, with the theatre's darkened atmosphere being infused with soft purple and blue ambient lighting over the actors. This aesthetic recalls Cooper's Golden Era *Lights Out!* showcase, and suggests an encouragement of truly attentive, immersive listening experience. Furthermore, unlike the majority of *We're Alive's* tours, *NoSleep Live* always presents an original drama, negating the potential for collective familiarity and less-intensive, socially playful listening in favour of a more closely-attended and auditorily-focused event. Indeed, although show host and producer Cummings explains that *NoSleep Live* is 'not really trying to emulate the podcast', but rather

emulating ‘that kind of Old Time Radio drama format’, here he is speaking more to the live show’s acoustically immersive and complex use of multiple voice actors and sound effects, rather than a consciously nostalgic endeavor.

The effectiveness of this immersion, and the extent to which audience members relished the opportunity to engage in a public listening event, or audio-spectacle, is evident in online responses and reviews:

What I loved about the show was that you could close your eyes and it just felt like listening to an actual episode of the podcast. Everything was so beautifully done, from the voice acting to the music and even the sound effects. Such a wonderful experience!

It didn't take long for me to stop seeing the performers standing on stage talking into microphones, and start seeing the scenes they were portraying. There is something about audio drama. It engages the whole brain, instead of just the sight and sound centers.

(u/NocturnalPatrolAlpha, 2016)

However, whilst clearly allowing for a shared experience of individualised imaginative engagement with sound, *NoSleep Live* also cultivates a more explicitly connective understanding of co-presence and collectivity within its listeners, with each live narrative set-up operating through a form of ‘meta-audience’. Within the show’s ‘radio drama’ form, the audience are explicitly aligned as a collective presence, being imaginatively integrated into the plot and shared space as 500 shipmates on a haunted ship. In this role, the listeners are drawn further into the narrative, and sense of shared experience, by being questioned by the actors on their belief in ghosts, or experience of sea-travel, and also by asked to write down any odd phenomena they witness on the evening’s ‘journey’ in notebooks they’ve been given. While these aspects are

spaced at the drama's beginning and end, thus allowing for the experience of shutting one's eyes and investing fully in the imagined scene, in framing the drama this way *NoSleep Live* ensures that the imagined spaces and scenes to which the listener travels are emphatically shared, and consciously populated with their fellow listeners. Such 'togetherness' of the lone imaginative experience is compounded in the *NoSleep Live* 'special tradition' of taking a selfie with their audience at each show's conclusion.

If, in its performed event, *NoSleep Live* offers a less informal and vocally social experience than *We're Alive*, this is not to discount their provision of post-show 'meet and greets', or to suggest that the audience cultures surrounding the show do not build their own sense of community. In the run-up to the tour's events, numerous fans connected with one another online to share hotel and restaurant recommendations, arrange meet-ups, and suggest pre or post-show drinks (Jason L, 2017; BabiesHavingRabies, 2017). Indeed, for one attendee, live show socialising brought about highly meaningful inter-listener relationship:

Thanks for putting on this show! It was great to see you people in the flesh and to see so many other listeners. What's crazy is that I've been happily dating someone I've met since that night. (comment on David C., 2017)

The social groupings and sense of community previously evidenced in horror podcasting's online forums and chat-spaces are thus physically actualised, and again we may see the extent to which horror podcasting continuously reveals a highly social listening culture.

The notion of experiencing individualised, imaginative listening in a collective social arrangement is now prevalent throughout the horror podcast studio show form. In particular, the idea of an 'eyes-shut' audience experience is directly addressed in *Tales from Beyond the Pale*'s theatrical shows. As with the other podcast tours discussed, *Tales from Beyond the Pale* employs

a sparse, contemporary visual design. The actors again perform their roles stood at their mics, wearing what would appear to be their own, casual dress. The sole gesture to more conventional expectations of 'horror' stage aesthetic is, as with *NoSleep Live*, suitably 'ghoulish' or atmospheric lighting and display of the show's iconography. *Tales from Beyond the Pale*, however, does offer visual entertainment and integration of sound effect and voice-acting in the guise of live Foley sound effects, being produced on stage alongside the actors. Likewise, the show utilises a highly immersive, atmospheric setting. Performed live at The Stanley Film Festival, at the Stanley Hotel in Colorado, 'The Tales We Tell' is a duo of plays inspired by the hotel itself, a setting made famous by its previous influencing of Stephen King's *The Shining*, and the various ghost and murder stories associated with it.

However, in the show's introduction, the audience is encouraged to consider the alternate effects of eyes-open or shut engagement with the audio plays. The plays are introduced and hosted by *Tales from Beyond the Pale* co-creator Larry Fessenden, who begins his welcome to the heavy, weighted beat of a 'metronome'. Having explained the significance of the Stanley hotel's influence on the upcoming plays, Fessenden invites his audience (both those sat before him and those 'at home') to, 'sit back and relax as we pull back the curtain on our process, and share a few tricks of the trade'. All of this gives the visual sense of the spectator being caught somewhere between attending a theatrical performance and watching a 'behind the scenes' documentary, and to highlight the offer of making visible the 'process', Fessenden's speech is completed by the Foley production of a brief sequence suggesting a shooting arrow, shattering glass and a cuckoo clock's hoot. Fessenden then continues, '[b]ut remember, if it's too painful to see the illusion shattered, you can always just close your eyes, and listen.' In this acknowledgement of the visual Foley spectacle's potential undermining of the acoustic fiction

that it creates, Fessenden offers two means by which to enjoy the production: as a visual ‘behind the scenes’ entertainment in which the acoustic podcast method is unveiled, or as a live sound experience by which the ‘illusion’ of narrative horror podcasting may remain intact. Yet in Fessenden’s suggested remedy of closing one’s eyes is also suggested a concurrent level of threat as Fessenden holds and deepens his voice to menacing effect and the metronome continues its unsettling pace. To close one’s eyes in the auditorium, surrounded by strangers, and to abandon oneself to Fessenden’s peculiar brand of horror is a disquieting prospect indeed.

If the combination of a live, collective listening event with a momentary lapse in visual awareness is a thrilling prospect for some, then the potentials of collective listening events staged in absolute darkness, and with the addition of headphones, hold clear generic appeal. Since the popularisation of portable MP3 listening technologies, audio artists from across the globe have been engaged in fruitful experimentation with the collectively isolated listening experience, and this is nowhere more evident than in the horror genre. In 2015, BBC4 released binaural (3D sound) audio-adaptations of *The Ring* and *The Stone Tape*, (which appeared alongside the stereo radio broadcasts as podcast functions). The BBC encouraged listeners to use headphones to enable a ‘full sensory experience’ of the drama’s sound circling and moving about the listener, yet also staged a communal, ‘immersive’ listening experience of *The Stone Tape*. Herein a small group of strangers donned headphones and listened to the play within a dark cellar (a space reminiscent of the story’s setting). To listen to binaural one must be acoustically-isolated, yet to do so among fellow isolated listeners allows for an added element of unease, and listeners reported feeling vulnerable not only to what they *were* able to hear, but also to what was happening ‘outside’ the headphones, and thus acoustically masked. Similarly, Glen Neath and David Rosenberg’s immersive theatre piece *Seance*, showcased at the 2017 Edinburgh Fringe

Festival, toys with the notion of collective isolated listening. The show placed listening groups of twelve people around a table, within a completely dark shipping container. Each listener was given noise-cancelling headphones which played conduit to a binaural soundscape, wherein suggestions of nearby movement and atmospheric changes were enhanced by occasional pats on the shoulder from unseen actors' hands, or shakes of the table. As the show progressed then, the physically-located listening group became increasingly divorced from each-other, as surrounding listeners became imaginatively intertwined with that of the binaural recording, and each participant was led to wonder whether they alone were experiencing instructions to remain seated while others appeared to be moving about them in the dark. In such experimentation, we see both the artistic opportunities that MP3 recording and transmission allows, and the import which the collective listening situation may play in this.

Case Study Part Four

'the one night we could take off the costume and be ourselves ... Citizens of Night Vale'

Welcome to Night Vale' live showcases offer a starkly self-aware example of horror podcasting's new audio horror-form and allow great insight into horror podcasting's theatrical properties. This final section shall first explore the extent to which *Welcome to Night Vale* showcases preserve the podcasts ordinarily invisible properties by developing an acoustically and imaginatively-oriented horror aesthetic within the theatrical space, before discussing the ways in which this aesthetic affects the 'in-house' audience and their sense of community. Having established the show's use of its theatrical visibility we shall address aspects of sound and mediation, discussing the ways in which two *Welcome to Night Vale* live shows toy with the conventions of radio, podcast and theatrical mediation to create a horror form dependent upon audiences' awareness of the show's duplicate mediation and listenership. For those listeners than cannot or will not attend a live performance, recordings of *Welcome to Night Vale* live shows are always made available as a podcast. The show thus always represents two forms of media with two distinct audiences - one being co-present with the show's actors and one-another (and audible through the show's recording), the second being absent, temporally isolated and silent. In the examples offered, these two audiences are not simply by-products of the shows' new theatrical form, but are the very facets which inform their structure, narrative and performance. Subversion of dominant, anti-social notions of new audio-culture culminates in *Welcome to Night Vale*'s live, theatrical shows. Herein emerges an extremely social, connective, and collaborative audio-culture borne of previously disparate podcast listeners' desire to commune, not only imaginatively and via online forum, but physically.

In keeping with the wider genre-form, *Welcome to Night Vale*'s live visual aesthetic cultivates and encourages an imaginative and acoustically-based audience experience. Atmospheric lighting forms much of the show's visual ambience, giving an eerie purple or blue glow to the somewhat empty stage. No distinct paraphernalia of 'set' or setting, backdrops or props infer the place of Night Vale or Cecil's radio station booth, and as with the show's contemporaries there is instead a collection of microphones in stands. Once more we may ascertain that, in the dreamy lighting and consciously bare stage there is an inference that the audience's imagination is being encouraged; that the show seeks to retain an aspect of the dark and fluid interiority of the listening mind.

In terms of stage-action a minimalistic aesthetic also, again, prevails. Some characters alluded to in the narrative, whose actions are described and discussed by Cecil as though happening in the 'now' of the performance, are not present on the stage and can reside bodily only within the audience's imagination. Whilst emotion is, once more, portrayed through the face and body of those actors that are present, characters do not physically portray the things that they speak of doing. Similarly, all inferred blood, gore and monstrosity remain the premise of each audience member's imagination. Costume is likewise seemingly unrelated to the show's fictive content. Actors' clothing does not (for the most part) represent their portrayed characters. Cecil Baldwin (who plays 'Cecil') generally wears a smart/casual suit-jacket and jeans, or a dark toned three-piece suit. Though fictional-Cecil is never acoustically-visualised for listeners, his clothing is described, and is generally unconventional by centric Western (indeed any) standards, as in when he describes wearing his 'best tunic and furry pants' for a date ('First Date', 2013). This style of clothing does not seem to be represented in Baldwin's conservative attire. Likewise, whilst Dylan Marron (who plays Cecil's inter-fictional boyfriend 'Carlos the Scientist'),

typically wears breaches, a bow or neck-tie, and eye-glasses for his performance, seemingly in sympathy with his cerebral character, his ‘costume’ neglects a lab coat - the only apparel ever apportioned to Carlos in the podcast. Voice actors pertaining to be respectively monstrous, a faceless old woman, and a vigilante school child are not dressed to reflect these roles and instead wear smart/casual clothing. Thus *Welcome to Night Vale*, alongside its fellow podcast tours, presents a horror theatre in which actors never seek to visually represent either the actions or characters that their voices portray.

However, in contrast to the show’s actors, audience members frequently appear in costume with hosts of Cecils, Carloses, Glow Clouds, Hooded Figures and more representing individual interpretations of favoured characters. *Welcome to Night Vale* live shows are increasingly typified by audience cosplay, and in being so represent a highly visual, physically manifested realisation of the town’s previously imagined or online community. Whilst these costumes are home-made and idiosyncratic, certain visual themes prevail suggesting that in their fans’ collective minds the characters of *Welcome to Night Vale*’s have developed distinct visual form. Whilst Cecil Baldwin is bald, fictional-Cecil is often portrayed by his fans as either blond, or with black hair streaked white; a third eye, unmentioned in the show but likely representative of Cecil’s telepathy, commonly adorns his forehead. In fan costumes tendril-like tattoos often snake their way up Cecil’s forearms. In terms of Cecil’s clothing fan costume tends toward a three-piece suit, or a waist-coat and open collar and here we may wonder, who developed this trend first, *Welcome to Night Vale* or its fans? These costumes are a realisation of the extent to which by eschewing visual theatrical definition, *Welcome to Night Vale* remains idiosyncratic to each listener. Through *Welcome to Night Vale*’s continued ‘invisibility’ theatrical audiences may

still imaginatively contribute much of the performance's people, place and action, bringing their own definitions of Cecil et al with them.

Fan costume further affects 'spectators' through encouraging their interaction as a collaborative unified audience. One blogger describes her experience of a live show saying '[s]o many fans dressed up; there was an awesome Glow Cloud that when she walked past everyone intoned 'All Hail the Glow Cloud'; so many Carlos' and Cecils' and the awesome audience participation during the show was so, so good' (Kialtho, 2014). The connectivity that costume affords is notable. When dressed as *Welcome to Night Vale* characters fans are no longer strangers to one another, they become known and accessible through their costumes' inferred identity, and may relate to one another on this level. Self-expression, performance, and identification as a Night Vale resident are paramount to much of *Welcome to Night Vale*'s surrounding fan culture, suggesting a key component to the show's wide success beyond the show itself. Through *Welcome to Night Vale*'s retention of the audio medium's 'invisibility' theatrical attendees gain the opportunity to engage with a community perhaps more welcoming than their everyday environment, however eerie the setting.

At another show, another fan's disappointment on attending an uncharacteristically low-costumed show illuminates the extent to which live shows represent a rare means for fans to physically embody the collective township of *Welcome to Night Vale*:

My only complaint was there were just not many cosplayers. Those who did, were great though. Of course, in a way, weren't we all cosplaying? As regular people? Or, was that the one night we could take off the costume and be ourselves.... Citizens of Night Vale.
(Townsend, 2015)

The connectivity which costume affords the podcast's previously disconnected, fragmented listenership has been noted. Yet the extent to which *Welcome to Night Vale*'s live shows are themselves focused on cultivating fan community, and temporary embodiment of the otherwise imagined/online *Welcome to Night Vale* community, remains undiscussed.

Welcome to Night Vale live shows operate around acknowledging and cultivating collective audience identity and interaction, both as *Welcome to Night Vale*'s 'residents', and as a 'real world' community. During live shows, Cecil's 'broadcast' generally reports that Night Vale residents have gathered in a large auditorium space. Rationale behind this town gathering varies, but always serves a common purpose: allowing the in-house audience to identify themselves as Cecil's intended listeners, the residents of Night Vale. We shall explore the development and sustained importance of community within two examples of *Welcome to Night Vale* live shows, the first, 'The Librarian', offering an early example of the form, and the second, 'The Investigators', a more contemporary evolution.

It has been noted that in their audible presence on the podcast's recording of 'The Librarian', the theatrical audience's contribution extends beyond imaginative collaboration. The applause, shouts and other sounds of the in-house audience are audible to the podcast listener and form part of the show to which they listen. This acoustically-present live audience may result in the 'at-home' podcast listener feeling even further severed from the show's origin. If everything about podcasting technology is supposedly geared towards allowing listeners as individuated an experience as possible, then the cheers and claps of the 'in-show' audience may be consciously isolating. Such acoustic aspects may reinforce the podcast listener's experience of listening to something second-hand and only partially accessible through acoustic, non-live means. Regardless of the extent to which the podcast listener is sensitive to these possibilities, or

whether they appreciate in-show audience noise as allowing the illusion of joining a live shared show, the point remains that ‘The Librarian’ must always have two audiences, neither of which may be present at the same time. Through explicit recourse to both ‘radio’ and podcast medium properties, both of these audiences are recognised and integrated within the show’s greater narrative (which itself plays out like a ‘regular broadcast’). The theatre audience’s presence and noise, and the podcast listener’s distance and silence are both explicitly explored, and the difference and remove between these two audience/listener types is acknowledged and drawn into Cecil’s horror narrative.

The show’s dualistic audience and their horror potential are first exemplified when Cecil reports that one of the town’s blood-thirsty librarians has not only broken loose of the library, but has entered the auditorium from which Cecil now speaks, yet affects absence from:

Listeners. The worst has just happened. We are getting reports that a librarian has entered a theatre. Thankfully, you are not one of those doomed souls, who risked their lives for something as [laughing harshly] useless as live theatre! [Manic laughter] (‘The Librarian’)

As Cecil announces this plot development, he both distances himself from the theatre location, and dis-acknowledges the ‘in-house’ spectators as his audience, confirming that he has been speaking all along to his radio listeners, more extra-fictionally associated with the podcast listenership. With this move he separates the listeners from the spectators, reaffirming the former’s position as external, ‘at home’ followers of his current situation, whilst shifting the latter to an explicit position of unhappy participation in the situation, as ‘doomed’ victims of the librarian’s wrath whose fate will play out across the ‘airwaves’.

This division is further addressed, and complicated, as Cecil asks his ‘listeners’ to imagine themselves as theatre-audience members:

Let us all, as an exercise in empathy, imagine what it would be like to be one of those unfortunates, in their last, oblivious moments [menacing music begins]. Imagine you are in a theatre. Imagine, rows of seats. Imagine, a stage. Imagine, amplification, and a person seated a row behind you consistently whispering to their friend. Picture this: picture yourself as you would *never* be, in a crowd of listening strangers. (‘The Librarian’)

Here Cecil enacts a partial-merging of the two listenerships. Cecil encourages the theatre audience to self-consciously engage in acts of imagination, thus allowing them to resume their usual status of ‘listener’. Yet the theatre goers still simultaneously share the thrill of being an ‘unfortunate’; their doomed status made conversely special and exclusive as the play’s narrative object and focus. Cecil also allows the ‘at home’ podcast listener a sense of involvement in imagining themselves to be in the audience, obliging this stance by providing visual details of that situation for them. Yet Cecil simultaneously cultivates a thrill of exclusion in the podcast listener’s positioning as they are allowed to listen-in on the unhappy situation of those foolish enough to risk their lives for the ‘useless’ (and, in the likely presence of whispering others, potentially irksome) spectacle of live theatre. Cecil highlights the complexity of his audience’s situation by acknowledging that, ordinarily, his audience would *all* be distanced and potentially isolated podcast listeners who would ‘never’ engage with the show among a physically-present crowd of listening strangers, yet who do comprise of that crowd every time that they listen to the show. In Cecil’s eloquent direction the everyday position of the podcast listener is made clear, as a collection of individuals to whom Cecil is both always, and never, exclusively speaking.

Welcome to Night Vale's exploration of spliced listenership continues as the librarian 'roams' the theatre. With the podcast listener primed to imagine themselves sharing the space of the auditorium, Cecil begins to heighten the narrative's tension now applicable to all audience types:

Now, imagine the librarian *in the theatre*, not yet spotted in the dark of the house.

Imagine it slithering, silently, beneath the theatre seats. What if, hypothetical theatre-goer, it were under the seat that you were in, right now? Don't look [audience laughter], don't look! If it saw you, what would it decide to do to you? Okay there is safety in numbers. Everyone at once, now, look! There is nothing there! You are safe in your imagined theatre seat. Or maybe the librarian anticipated your movement and slipped out of view just as you looked - that *is* a possibility too. ('The Librarian')

Invisibility is key to this scene as neither audience type will ever be able to see the fictive librarian and will only enjoy the uneasy tension of its 'presence' through imaginative engagement with Cecil's words. As the librarian's 'dry, scaled hand' roams the theatre, and 'one, by one, by one, people are disappearing from their theatre seats without a sound, just a flash of red, and a dark stain', Cecil maintains the illusion of the librarian's reality for both audience types through invisibility, explaining that 'your brain adjusts for this, by remembering those seats as always having been empty and moist' ('The Librarian'). Regardless of where the audience is located the nexus of the show's comedic horror-effect lies in audience acts of unseeing listenership, and the imaginative focus that comes from engaging with Cecil's words as a purely auditory fiction.

When the scene culminates Cecil demonstrates why the theatre-goers would do what they would *never* do and abandon their independent and autonomous podcast listener status to join a

crowd of listening strangers. At this point the in-house audience is directed to contribute not only to the atmospheric acoustic of the live show but also to the narrative as Cecil explains: ‘And then, then, the screams start - first the left side of the theatre [audience screams], and then the right side of the theatre [audience screams], and the entire theatre is screaming [entire audience screams]’ (‘The Librarian’). Cecil then develops the audience’s participation, directing the front-row audience to stand, gesticulate and scream in unison:

And one person in the front row stands up, and they’re tearing at their hair, and they’re howling [audience screams meet droning wail of the band], but wait, wait! The entire front row stands up! And the entire front row is clutching at their chest, and they are screaming louder than the entire theatre combined! [the screams rise in volume] (‘The Librarian’)

Cecil’s power in directing this scene, and the inclusion and allowance of such extroverted audience participation, is a successful venture and a strong indication as to why so many podcast listeners would become theatre-goers: in doing so they become Cecil’s co-creators and performers.

Despite the potential of such audience-based scenes to exclude the podcast listenership, this prominent positioning of the in-house audience does somewhat benefit the absent audience’s horror experience. However happily contributed within the theatre the audience screams procured create effective, unsettling sound effects which heighten the believability of listening-in to the theatre-audience’s massacre. As those unfortunates entombed within auditorium walls meet the horrors of the librarian, Cecil abruptly concludes the scene stating ‘[a]nd then, there is silence, utter silence [the band cease and here, in the podcast release, a cut is made to give complete immediate silence]. And the front row sits down’ (‘The Librarian’). The following in-

house audience's giggles and cheers show the delight of being transformed through bodily co-presence from a discrete, temporally and physically distanced podcast listener, to a viscerally present and artistically-collaborating audience. Yet their contribution *has* further developed the position of the visually and physically-excluded podcast listener, as one whose distance from a situation enables them an alternate understanding of the soundscape and allows them to enjoy *Welcome to Night Vale*'s disturbing world in satisfyingly vivid terms. Without an in-house audience to deliver this mass of screams the scene would lack the believability and impact that so empowers it. Through Cecil's manipulation the two audiences are interactive with one another, each feeding from the other's respective presence as an audience to their performance, and a performer for their audience.

During 'The Investigators', *Welcome to Night Vale*'s exploration of community and audience collaboration develops further. audiences are imaginatively situated alongside canonical town residents as Cecil's narrative places such figures among the gathering. Beyond presenting the audience as the collective embodiment of *Welcome to Night Vale*'s community, live shows maneuver fans toward personal interaction through call and response sets. In 'The Investigators', having explained that a murderer is loose, and that Night Vale's residents have assembled in the Rec centre, Cecil describes the townspeople's actions. This guides the audience through a series of not simply performative acts, but sustained interpersonal engagements. These interactions begin with establishing and maintaining eye-contact with a fellow 'townsperson', and develop towards speaking with that person, co-enacting Cecil's humorously complicated physical direction, and eventually 'solving' the murder mystery together.

Specifically, Cecil orchestrates engagement between strangers, explaining, 'they looked past those people that they came with, or people who they might already know' ('The

Investigators'). This point is reiterated as, pre-empting the likely desire to 'buddy-up' with a friend, Cecil interrupts the audience's initial actions, saying: 'No no no no. They sought out the eyes of a complete stranger.' Disengagement with role-play sections is further admonished, and afforded rectification, as Cecil later explains that

those people who just refused to look around them, and so now found themselves without a partner ... took this opportunity to jump on board, and so they found somebody else that was similarly reluctant to participate. ('The Investigators')

As the directed roleplay continues, its narrative moves the audience pairs through initial stages of their characters' distrust, grudging cooperation, and eventual collaborative success as 'ex-strangers ... friends', mirroring and highlighting the stages by which these 'actors' have become acquainted.

As 'The Investigators' concludes, the role-play spell is gently broken; 'the evening turns to night. And soon, all of the citizens of Night Vale will disperse back to their homes'. *Welcome to Night Vale's* briefly embodied community is splintered; transformed back to strangers, with different towns to return to, and only imagined and online acts of citizenship to bind them. Yet Cecil urges his audience to retain its sentiment of community, out in the 'real world':

... for this one evening, we all came together. And what are human beings but a coming together? What are we for, except to lean into those around us, to balance against those around us. A delicate but provocative sculpture ...

Look, harm can come from anywhere, or anyone. Whether it is a stranger, or a friend. But still, we reach out the hand. Still, we allow our eyes to meet. Still, we hope for the best,

and we try to be the best in return because if not, then what else? If not, then nothing. A human life, it's just this. It's a moment of eye contact in a crowd. (ibid)

For *Welcome to Night Vale*, podcast community is not a gimmick, or even a supporting facet of a wider thematic and narrative structure; it is increasingly the hallmark and overriding message of their shows.

Collectivity defines the live *Welcome to Night Vale* experience; the shows enable previously dispersed podcast listeners both to listen together, *and* to create and enact a true listening community. 'The Librarian' reveals itself to be very much a play based in the joy of collaboration, personal connectivity and, strangely enough, friendship. Community Manager of the podcast *Our Fair City*, Lauren Felts, demonstrates this point as she offers a review of 'The Librarian' from the perspective of 'someone who hasn't heard the podcast' (2014). Having observed that, despite the show's clear reference to 'audience in-jokes' and series tropes, that she 'never felt left out', Felts explains,

Welcome to Night Vale's treatment of its audience was its strongest component.

Throughout the evening, Cecil lead audience participation gags. He encouraged crowd members to make eye contact with strangers, say things to them, and gesture. It felt cheesy- particularly when I couldn't find a partner of my own. I sat through most of these sections, wondering what their point was. Turns out, making new friends was pivotal to the show's message. (ibid)

The inter-audience speech and eye-contact to which Felts refers is located in Cecil's request that, on apparently surviving the librarian's attack, all 'remaining' audience members turn to one another, congratulate one another on being alive, and say, 'MY NAME IS...' etc. This deliberate

construction of audience interaction with not just the play, but each other, develops for Felts, a strong message around notions of contemporary isolation and social anxiety. Observing that '[m]any of *Night Vale*'s fans ... are young' Felts continues,

The world is tough- particularly for young people. For many, it's an act of bravery simply to venture out in public, to a show. Cecil - still cleverly speaking in-world - applauded his audience for this bravery. He reminded us all that being alive can hurt. Friends can betray, lovers can leave, random murderers can randomly murder. The important thing is that we still meet, trust, and love each other. We have to keep trying- because if not, 'nothing.' (ibid)

Felts suggests that there is a deeper reason behind why Cecil's audience would, ordinarily, 'never' venture out to share a show with others, a reason that resonates with contemporaneous dialogues concerning social exclusion and discomfort which seem to reflect so many young American life-experiences, and which are central to social anxieties concerning non-communal technologies such as iPods, podcasts and earbuds. 'The Librarian', then, uses its theatrical form to bring podcast listeners together, and to form a community beyond the fictive *Night Vale*. Indeed, for Felts, *Night Vale*'s emphasis on community correlates perfectly with its position as a fictive community radio show, as she explains,

'Stay tuned, next, for tomorrow,' Cecil said, 'by any means necessary.'

He was asking us to listen to his show, yes- but also to keep fighting for another day. I shed a few tears. I stood up, clapping. 'Good night, *Night Vale*,' cooed Cecil, and I truly felt like I lived in his weird, beloved town. Neither my age nor my previous assumptions mattered.

I was, indeed, welcomed to Night Vale. (ibid)

When the *Welcome to Night Vale* podcast becomes a *Welcome to Night Vale* theatre experience, it seems, acts of audience engagement with one another (even through the mediations of auditorium to podcast), are not by-products of the show, but the entire point.

This ethos has come to embody the live *Welcome to Night Vale* ‘experience’, and to underpin critical reception of the shows. In a bid to understand the allure of live *Welcome to Night Vale* shows, Nowicke travelled 2, 512 miles to attend shows in Atlantis, Louisville and Indianapoli. His concluding thoughts:

I quickly realized that the fans make attending a live show special. Each venue was vastly different from the next ... But that feeling of unity followed each show, the same feeling you get when attending rock concerts or fan-fests ... (2014)

It is the collective spirit which underpins the live *Welcome to Night Vale* experience. In bringing horror podcasts to the stage, the podcast genre increasingly evidences a new audio listening culture which is not simply enabling physically co-present community, but in which such endeavors are a defining feature. As online reviewer Ciaran notes:

The Night Vale live shows are really a community event; you may not know anybody, but you’re all here for the same reason. You all share the same energy in the same space. And really, isn’t that truly what community is all about? (2015)

In its varied actions of audience engagement and connectivity, horror podcasting evidences very different traits to those previously imagined and outlined in new audio theory, breaking down the

social barriers so often associated with new listening cultures, and developing listening and audience behaviours more ordinarily outlined as the remit of traditional, yet antiquated, and dying, OTR cultures.

Conclusion: Considering the Past and Future of Horror Podcasting

If, at face value, the podcast appears to be the individualist's answer to traditional radio, exploration of the horror podcast genre's first decade has told another story. Certainly, from the texts, conventions and audience cultures explored within this study, it seems that the listening cultures and indeed cultural properties of new audio-media have been misunderstood, or judged too early, and from only one perspective. In their own explorations of the history of the idea of new media, Pingree and Gitelman assert that,

[t]here is a moment, before the material means and the conceptual modes of new media have become fixed, when such media are not yet accepted as natural, when their own meanings are in flux. At such a moment, we might say that new media briefly acknowledge they are themselves defined within a perceptual and semiotic economy that they then help to transform. (2003, xii)

It is the initial stages of this 'moment', played out within the first ten years of podcasting history, that I believe we have witnessed within this study - or, at least, as they are evidenced within the horror genre. In its initial decade, horror podcasting has negotiated its relationship to radio technologies and cultures, and to social anxieties and desires tied to that media identity; it has developed its own, distinct identity which is informed by the podcast's unique technological and cultural facets, yet which rigorously asserts connectivity to, and a modernised revival of, traditional radio cultures and practices.

Pingree and Gitelman assert firstly that newly emergent media, ‘pass through a phase of identity crisis, a crisis precipitated at least by the uncertain status of the given medium in relation to established, known media and their functions.’ (ibid, xii) Furthermore, they argue,

No medium new or old exists as a static form. Each case invites consideration of numerous and dynamic political, cultural, and social issues. We might say that, inasmuch as ‘media’ are media of communication, the emergences of new medium is always the occasion for the shaping of a new community or set of communities, a new equilibrium. (ibid, xv)

Pingree and Gitelman’s proposed, inevitable ‘identity’ crisis may be witnessed in the first ten years of horror podcasting - as the form initially turns to radio for definition and convention. However, the relationship between ‘traditional’ radio and podcasting extends beyond a temporary, developmental stage of emulation, which exceeds copycatting or nostalgic cultural backtracking, and which itself in part represents new audio medias’ new community. In horror podcasting’s revival of OTR and early commercial radio tropes, cultures and communities, nostalgic recreation emerges alongside highly contemporary innovation. The digital communities and tweaked anachronisms of horror podcasting evidence perhaps not so much a simple desire for cultural return as an active cultural evolution. Perhaps, in the connective, collective, democratic and inherently social audio-culture witnessed within the horror podcasting genre, we are not seeing a fleeting teething stage of an infant audio media still weaning from radio’s definition, but rather a developing, strengthening feature of new audio-medias’ new audio-culture.

Certainly, as horror podcasting progresses through its second decade, those aspects of collectivity and interactivity which characterise its early history remain, as does a preoccupation

with the podcast form's radio and media 'prehistory'. Re-mediation in particular thrives. By 2017 *The NoSleep Podcast* has released four Old Time Radio Specials, and the concept remains highly popular with fans; *Archive 81* has released 'The Golden Age', a series set as a Golden Era radio drama recording; *Welcome to Night Vale*'s podcast network 'Night Vale Presents' have released *Alice isn't Dead* (2016-), which explores the form of both CB radio and commercial radio broadcast; *Within the Wires* (2016-), which adopts the form of audio 'therapy' cassette tapes; and *The Orbiting Human Circus of the Air* (2017-), which presents as a Golden Era broadcast. *The Wrong Station* (2017-) and *King Falls AM* (2015-) have both risen in popularity as radio-styled podcasts.

These programmes give credence to Dominik Schrey's claim that we are living in a 'golden age of nostalgia' for dead media (2014, 27). Yet this continued preoccupation is perhaps nowhere more evident, or interesting, than in those fictions which have followed the release of WBEZ Chicago and *This American Life*'s spinoff success *Serial* (2014). We have already seen the extent to which shows such as *The Black Tapes* and *Rabbits* develop *Serial*'s model to incorporate and evolve collective those listening cultures which proved so popular in 'true crime' listening. Such 'second wave' podcast horrors continue to probe the relationship between radio and podcasting, albeit with more focus upon contemporary public radio, and also evidence a fascination with and techno-nostalgia for analogue media such as vinyl, VHS and cassette tapes (see Hancock and McMurtry, 2018). New audio media has not jettisoned older, 'outmoded' audio-media forms, or relegated them to irrelevant and inferior antiquity; in horror podcasting we see quite the reverse as the podcast repeatedly, almost compulsively, mines its own history and brings its finds to the surface. If '[m]edia can serve as a means of virtually accessing the past, and are thus an important resource for cultural memory', then this must be viewed as more than

an effective embodiment of such Gothic tropes as loss, decay and return (Schrey: 2014, 29). Indeed, if '[l]istening to a record involves experiencing the feeling of an idealised connection with the past' (Sapio: 2014, 45), there is a sense that, in the 'transparent' podcast's conduit of older media technologies' sounds, such things as OTR's crackles, or the clunks and squeals of paused and rewound audio cassette are not only being archived, but are being heard, felt, and their eras emotionally and imaginatively re-connected with for the first time in decades, or - for younger listeners - ever. In the horror podcast, sound's media history is finally being told and heard.

Live theatrical podcast tours continue to rise in popularity, and (alongside both Patreon/crowd-funding and increasingly popularised formal sponsorship method) to financially support the horror podcasting industry. Fans remain vital to horror podcasting's sustainability not only as sponsors and patrons, but in their word of mouth communication and advertisement of the shows and in their receptivity to advertiser questionnaires. *Welcome to Night Vale* now ends each episode introduction with a reminder from creator Joseph Fink to his listener: 'Hey, I love you'. Interactivity between podcast creators and audiences has thus far largely survived the genre's development from entirely amateur to a semi-professional industry: live AMA (Ask Me Anything) sessions on sites such as Youtube and Reddit are becoming increasingly common means of creator/listener connectivity. Likewise, Reddit, tumblr, Facebook, and online comments threads maintain the vivid and often close-knit communities which developed in the genre's first decade. Indeed, as horror podcasting develops in popularity and notoriety, such communities seem primed to expand. If horror podcasting is growing, then alongside it comes an increased sense of the importance of community, collectivity and warped-traditionalism that the genre has always held.

By 2017, there is reason to believe that the domestic and collective listening cultures evidenced within horror podcasting's establishment extend to broader podcast culture. At the 2017 Next Radio Conference in London, Edison Research's Megan Lazovick detailed the company's findings on speech-based media listening location. The study found that an equal number of 'speech' listeners cited 'home' and 'car' as their main places of listening, yet the majority of *time* spent listening was now focused in the home: around 54% of listening time was cited as being domestic. Only 2% was cited as being in 'other locations' than 'at home', 'in the car' (33%) or 'at work' (11%) - that the image chosen to depict such 'other locations' was that of a listener using public transport seems particularly pertinent (Lazovick, 2017). Moreover, podcast listening is frequently found to be shared. In a study conducted by Edison Research and NPR into smart-speaker listening, those digital campfires and electronic hearths cooperatively imagined in the host scenes of horror podcasting find tangible, 'real-world' equivalents (ibid). Lazovick explains that, through digital and smart speakers, our understanding of contemporary listening culture is explicitly challenged as, 'for the first time in years, we're seeing people gather around the radio, almost like it's the 1930s. Families are sitting down together, listening, or couples are listening together.' (ibid) In such research the 2017 audio-media listener is suggested to be a far cry from the publicly-spaced, mobile, solitary, ear-plugged solipsist which early new audio-media studies almost exclusively depicts. Of course, for the horror podcast listener, such revelation is likely old-hat. Perhaps it is now time to explore further into the listening cultures of broader podcasting. Furthermore, given that podcast listening is increasingly popularised by younger generations, and that many of Edison Research's participants cited podcasts as having replaced music-listening, there is all-the-more reason to continue to query and explore the nature of new audio culture and media.

New audio media may enable listeners to break from wider collective listening streams of radio, to a more personalised listening experience, but we have seen in horror podcasting that this does not mean leaving behind ‘traditional’ notions of collective or even domestic listening. Rather, new audio media enables listeners to enter, cultivate and maintain more closely-knit, communicative and elective audio communities than traditional radio was ever able to allow. Furthermore, just as horror podcasting has led the way in many conventions and experimentations of early fiction podcasting, it now pioneers many evolutions of the forms secondary stage. In 2017, the narrative docudrama *Lore* (which tells ‘true-life’ horror tales in a dramatic, quasi-fictional style) was adapted to and released as an Amazon television series, becoming the first podcast to make the jump into TV. Horror plainly dominates this next step in new audio fiction’s development, with *TANIS*, *Limetown*, and *The Bright Sessions* and *The No Sleep Podcast* all currently being adapted for television.

This may raise concerns (or at least eyebrows) regarding the potential cyclicity of audio drama once again moving towards (and being consumed within) visual entertainment. Is this simply a repeat of Golden Era radio’s demise? Such an end to podcast horror’s brief heyday would certainly seem both poetic and perhaps inevitable, given the extent to which it has both wittingly and unconsciously traced OTR’s trajectory. However, I see a number of reasons to query such qualms. Firstly, as we have seen throughout this thesis, podcasting holds a very special set of features which make it desirous as an audio form: it is mobilised in ways which television isn’t: it would be difficult to watch whilst jogging, or surreptitiously whilst working, whilst this is entirely possible whilst listening. Secondly, the audio format itself is conducive to new and refreshed understandings of horror, which for the time being remain attractive in themselves as a ‘relief’ from televised horror. Whilst Golden Era radio was superseded in part

because of the novelty of television, here we have an alternate dynamic at play, wherein podcasting represents the novelty. I believe that for the time being, podcast horror (and entertainment in general) will remain desired precisely for its somewhat counter-cultural aspects. Thirdly, for creators podcasting remains a cheap and autonomous manner in which to create and release their art, and if this now has the added attraction of being a potential calling card to television producers, then this may be all the better. Whilst we may see television as overtaking and harvesting podcast horror, we may also see it as providing added impetus for new creators to continue to add to the steady output of podcast fictions. Finally, the very notoriety which such televised releases will bring to the podcast field is not to be overlooked: just as book-sales inevitable rise for texts which are successfully adapted as films or television series, it seems likely that popular podcast-to-television adaptations will ignite new interest in the source podcasts themselves. Ultimately, I believe that podcast horror's burgeoning relationship with television only serves to further emphasise the genre's popularity and importance. For a medium which relies almost solely upon word-of-mouth and community interaction for publicity, this development clarifies the extent to which such listening communities, and the level to which they communicate with one another, has been sorely overlooked and under-estimated. This is new audio culture, yes, but perhaps not as we expected to find it. In new audio media, it seems, we have not found the death of collective, shared - or even domestic - listening, and socially connective audio-cultures, but the re-birth.

How then can we understand this in relation to the wider fields of sound, audio-culture, and new media studies? We may say simply that in horror podcasting we find an irrefutable indication of a need to move away from totalising conceptions of new media as indicatively 'forward' thinking, individualistic, privatised and discrete from more communal and social past

counterparts. We can argue that it is necessary for media study to become more attune to the value of online ethnography, and the value of such artifacts as comments, likes and the assorted ephemera of youth-based sites such as Tumblr – and in doing so to place equal emphasis on the individual content of such communications as much as their broader structures and implications. We may say that, in considering ‘new’ media we must not only seek to avoid (as Pingree and Gitelman among others have already made clear) over-deterministic assumptions on their very newness, but also to avoid techno-centric and externalised readings of their meanings. Perhaps above all, we must remain scholars – that is to say, we must be willing to allow our assumptions (and perhaps months of research and writings) to be driven off-course by our findings; we must query the validity of each moral panic as it arises (however anachronistic such terminology may seem, and however much more exciting ‘newness’ and ‘evolution’ may seem in contrast to ‘return’ and ‘repetition’); and finally we must remain as curious and awestruck by humankind’s interaction with, and shaping of, its technologies, arts and society as we were when we first began to notice such things as significant objects of study.

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