Routledge Studies in New Media and Cyberculture

PODCASTING AS AN INTIMATE MEDIUM

Alyn Euritt

ROUTLEDGE

Podcasting as an Intimate Medium

This book delves into the notion of intimacy as a defining feature of podcasting, examining the concept of intimacy itself and how the public sphere explores the relationships created and maintained through podcasts.

The book situates textual analysis of specific American podcasts within podcast criticism, monetization, and production advice. Through analysis of these sources' self-descriptions, the text builds a podcasting-specific framework for intimacy and uses that framework to interpret how podcasting imagines the connections it forms within communities. Instead of intimacy being inherent, the book argues that podcasting constructs intimacy and uses it to define the quality of its own mediation.

This book will be of interest to scholars and students of New and Digital Media, Media Studies, Communication Studies, Journalism, Literature, Cultural Studies, and American Studies.

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Introduction

Intimate is an evocative word. When listeners call podcasts intimate—or podcasting calls itself intimate—they are trying to describe something through this evocation. Intimacy communicates feeling so effectively because it has described relationships for quite a long time, in a myriad of complementary and conflicting ways. In studying affect, Sarah Ahmed similarly tracks what feelings do, how they "circulate between bodies," "how they 'stick' as well as move" (4). As the word intimacy circulates through culture, the relationships it describes stick to it, build its meaning, add to how the word affects those who communicate through it. If *intimacy* is a feeling, *intimate* describes how relationships feel. In order to understand intimacy, then, I look to how podcasting uses intimacy to describe itself as a medium: What relationships does it draw on? What are these relationships like? Instead of imposing my own definition of intimacy onto these descriptions, I ask what implicit definitions of intimacy exist within podcasting's use of the term. I find that podcasting defines intimacy as a relation that is close in time and/or space. But what makes a relationship—especially a mediated one—close? The answer to that question is never set or immutable, but in constant cultural negotiation. Intimacy is therefore both a word and a feeling that can be created and communicated—I can create intimacy by telling someone I want to be close to them or by acting as though we are already close. Podcasts are not intimate because of some innate properties of sound or technology. They are intimate because they draw on how culture constructs intimacy to communicate the feeling of closeness. In that sense, podcasts create, or do, intimacy and as they do intimacy, they further negotiate that cultural code. Intimacy is not evocative because this creation is new, clearly defined, or specific to podcasting. Intimacy is evocative because it is contradictory, continually in flux, and very old.

Richard Berry's "Podcasting: Considering the evolution of the medium and its association with the word 'radio'" claims that podcasting's "hyper-intimacy" is key to its medial specificity and draws on an area of scholarship greatly influenced by Marshall McLuhan's well-known statement that "the medium is the message" (7). Media like newspapers, television,

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and radio, in other words, are not separate from the content of what people communicate, but are very much integral to the formation of information. Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* similarly focuses on how the process of reproduction itself changes that which it reproduces (25). Following Benjamin, the meaning of a painting, for example, changes as newspapers and printers make and proliferate copies of the work. The media (painting, art print, and black and white picture in a newspaper) adds and subtracts information from the original artwork and changes the contexts of reception so severely that the meaning of that artwork also changes. This change in meaning is not completely reliant on the physical characteristics of reproduction, but also includes cultural ones: a visit to an art gallery carries with it a different set of cultural values than leafing through an old newspaper on the train does. These values, in turn, affect the way mediation creates meaning. Mediation, in other words, creates meaning as it represents and transforms objects. This model of understanding mediation relies on the idea that an original, or a referent, exists to be represented. Although I draw on work in Media Studies that deals with this concept of mediation, my own emphasis is on mediation as the relationship between production (podcaster), reception (listeners), receivers (listeners among each other), and a wide range of other material and human elements more than it is in the connection between, say, the photograph of an orange and the orange itself. Mediation, for me, is about the relational connections among participants in a network. In this respect, my approach to mediation aligns with Jonathan Sterne's in *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*: mediation is a process of change created by interconnected networks and the "institutional and technical protocols" that "frame the definitions of communication" (3). When Berry claims that part of podcasting's medial specificity is its intimacy, he is using a definition of intimacy as a close relationship to describe the relational connections that podcasting mediation forms.

Berry is not alone. Much of the early scholarship on podcasting has revolved around such intimacy: from the physical closeness of earbuds (Madsen) to the importance of listening routines (Weldon), both academic and popular discussions have considered podcasting in terms of its ability to connect people through its intimate closeness. This book places textual analysis of specific podcasts alongside criticism, reviews, how-to articles, and scholarship to learn from how podcasting uses intimacy as a self-description to negotiate its own mediation. I understand podcasting as a network that consists of these various texts as well as the people and technologies that interact with those texts. When participants call podcasts intimate, they are describing the relationships within that network. Spotify, for example, does so on its website for potential advertisers: "Audio is by nature an especially intimate form of communication," it claims, "and podcasts take that intimacy even further than other types of audio." By studying intimacy in podcasting, then, I am asking the question "How do podcasts

mediate?" and answering that question by examining how podcasting's network defines intimacy and uses that definition to describe its mediation. Podcasting's self-descriptions as intimate, I argue, draw on historical constructs of intimacy to negotiate podcasting's mediality in terms of physical and temporal closeness. At the same time, they participate in a larger ongoing cultural negotiation about what it means to be intimate. This book then finds relevance in its contribution to answering the major research questions within the overlapping disciplines of Culture Studies, Media Studies, and American Studies: How do cultural constructs work? What does mediation do? How does (national) community form? The book's contribution here is threefold. Firstly, it destabilizes the assumption in podcasting research (and much of Sound Studies) that intimacy is a natural, inherent part of audio communication by showing how podcasting interacts with and contributes to the cultural construction of intimacy. This is not to say that audio does nothing, simply that the use of intimacy to describe what it does is a cultural interpretation. Secondly, it provides a framework through which to study podcasting as a distinct medium that does not rely entirely on its technologies. Thirdly, it contributes to a body of research that refigures how digital media influence the imagining of both niche and national communities.

Methodology

In order to learn about how podcasting mediates, I begin by understanding podcasting as a network. This understanding is based on an Actor Network Theory (ANT) approach to media analysis that Ara Wilson succinctly explains (in relation to infrastructure) as drawing "on unfolding studies of technology, science, and objects… understood as the study of ways that heterogeneous components form a network, which itself produces its object" (265). Podcasting then includes a multitude of components—not just the audio of podcasts themselves—that interact with each other. Taken together, these components become the "object" of podcasting itself. This network is deeply interconnected with a variety of mediating networks, including radio, television, social networking systems, and even intimacy. In concentrating on podcasting, I am not arguing that podcasting is medially specific in the way McLuhan conceives of it: I do not think that sound, for example, has natural, inherent qualities that determine medial interactions through podcasting. I also do not think that podcasting is entirely separate from radio, although the scholarly emphasis on this relationship has not always been beneficial in understanding the breadth and variety of podcasting's medial entanglements. I am quite simply arguing that podcasting exists, and is working within culture in interesting ways, and that there is value in drawing a line around podcasting as a self-described network, to learn more about what it is doing. ANT, then, provides a rough outline through which I meld a variety of interdisciplinary approaches to culture and media

in order to describe the formation of cultural protocols within podcasting's network. This research focus works within the tradition of German *Kulturwissenschaft* in its emphasis on description, situates firmly within Culture and Media Studies, and draws on work in Communication and Literature, especially in its concern with feminist and queer traditions of scholarship as well as its engagement with phenomenology.

Podcasting's network includes production practices, reception, the content of specific podcasts, technologies, and a variety of other actors—including academic research—that interact and form the medium. I begin this section by defining podcasting as a network along these lines. Because this network includes contributions that use other forms of media—podcast reviews in magazines, for example—I will then move to how podcasting mediality works within transmedia networks. When I speak of podcasting as a medium, to put it succinctly, I am using "medium" as a shorthand for podcasting's network, or podcasting as a mediating object. When this object defines itself, it builds the cultural protocols that contribute to podcasting's medial distinctiveness (if not specificity). The use of intimacy to describe these interactions, I argue, creates a cultural framework through which those involved in the network can interpret their experiences within the medium and, by extension, communicate the feeling of intimacy.

In order to theorize intimacy, I am drawing in part on work on liveness, or the study of media called "live" in culture (like a live radio broadcast or live theater performance). Liveness is a similar negotiation of relationships within mediated networks because it describes the connection between actors within time and space, but also because it is a feeling that can be communicated through media (Scannell). A recording of a live soccer match, Scannell observes, can feel live even after the event happened because it reproduces the communicative qualities of the original broadcast (155). But while liveness and intimacy are similar in many ways, and podcasting sometimes uses intimacy to talk about qualities other media think of as live, podcasting defines intimacy through interpersonal closeness and tends to reserve liveness for events that involve physical co-presence in a theater or streaming online.[1] The words also have very different histories and therefore carry with them different connotations—different relationships stick to them as they travel through culture and gain meaning. Finally, I turn specifically to how I approach intimacy in this project and the benefits and limits to that approach in terms of analyzing podcasting's power relations. Overall, I argue that podcasting negotiates intimacy as a cultural code to interpret its own mediality.

The case studies here all fall broadly into American podcasting and my analysis of national communities considers the American nation. Podcasting itself is, however, international, and it is not always easy to distinguish American podcasting from industries in other countries, especially Canada and Britain. Many of the conversations surrounding intimacy that are present in American podcasting are also present internationally,

although it is probable that different cultures associate intimacy with different things. I see my work on American podcasting as a step into a larger conversation about how podcasting works in different cultural contexts, not as a blanket statement about all of podcasting. By denaturalizing intimacy, however, these cultural similarities and differences come more sharply into focus.

Defining Podcasting

Since the word podcasting entered the English language in 2004, it has undergone a remarkable transformation (Hammersley). At its inception, producers and New Media scholars alike treated podcasting as an offshoot of blogging—proof of the interactive and democratic powers of the internet. In his 2006 article, "Will the iPod kill the radio star? Profiling Podcasting as Radio," Richard Berry takes a similar line, although he classifies podcasting's accessibility as a new iteration of radio that fulfils Bertolt Brecht's vision of radio as a democratic, two-way medium (147). Berry's 2006 work is complemented by other research claiming the democratic capabilities of podcasting and has provided a basis for much of the work done in the first decade of podcasting research (Madsen, Sterne et al.). Much of this work examines podcasting along the lines of radio, sometimes focusing on how podcasts could be one of many ways radio was being digitized for the information age (Gazi and Bonini, Bonini and Monclús, Cordeiro). This interconnectedness between radio and podcasting has contributed to the difficulty in defining both, but it has also led to insight in how they work and the variety of factors that go into making a medium.

On one level, what podcasting is may seem clear and without need of explanation. *Ear Hustle* is a podcast because it is produced to be one and distributed as an audio-only file through an RSS feed. "Podcasting" is a collective noun for all of these podcasts and the industry that surrounds them. This is probably the most basic, strictest definition of podcasting, but it is not the only one and, in studying culture, it can cut out a huge number of listeners. According to *The Canadian Podcast Listener 2019*, 47% of self-identifying regular podcast listeners tune in on YouTube, a platform that is audiovisual, completely unconnected with RSS-feed distribution, and imposes content restrictions and monetizing structures decidedly different from those that have so far dominated the podcast industry (Signal Hill Insights and Ulster Media). This statistic, alongside the trend toward paywalled podcasts on platforms like Spotify and Audible, has tested the limits of what began, with Ben Hammersley, as "liberating" for listeners and producers alike. These trends are a reminder of the interconnectedness of media technologies and cultures, their malleability, and the difficulty of defining the margins of any medium, much less an emerging one.

Radio Studies has faced similar difficulties. In *Radio in the Digital Age*, Andrew Dubber points out that "The phenomenon that we call radio

changes from place to place in different legislative and cultural contexts, as well as over time" and "even at a specific given point in time…, radio existed in different forms, in different places, to serve different needs, and for different political, social, economic and cultural reasons" (16–17). This multiplicity leads Dubber to do what a lot of media scholars do and caution against both "a technologically deterministic narrative that posits strong cause and effect between different developmental eras" and a "discontinuity theory of media development [which] usually favors a narrative that highlights a particular agency" (16). Dubber tries to "solve this dilemma" for radio and, by extension podcasting (which, in *Radio in the Digital Age*, he sees as part of radio) by proposing "that radio does not actually have any essential characteristics—not even that it favors audio over visual communication" (17). Dubber instead suggests that "there are categories of characteristics that we can use to speak about radio across all of those different milieux, and that these categorical frames remain useful despite the changes that may occur in any aspect of radio" (17).

These categories, which he calls "discursive frames," work toward defining radio along the lines of transmission, text, subtext, audience, station, political economy, production technologies, professional practice, and promotional culture (18–19). Dubber draws on McLuhan's concept of the "techne" to combine these categories through "fold[ing] … the three core concepts of tools, techniques and art into one indivisible concept" (21). In other words, radio for Dubber is not just the text of radio programs, nor is it the medium's transmission technologies, nor any other single category. Instead, Dubber asserts that, "radio has no fixed, essential characteristics, but its characteristics can always be discussed in terms of the analytical framework that the categories provide" (20). Dubber's combination of these different aspects of radio is an attempt to solve a common problem in Media Studies: how to define a medium in a way that includes all of its technologies, content, audience, professional practices, and other varied aspects. In any medium, all of these things work together, and any definition needs to both include the variety of medial attributes involved and wiggle room for those attributes to change and develop over time and in different communities. Purely technical definitions, like defining the podcast through the RSS feed or the television through the box, are not malleable enough to keep up with those changes. Where Dubber unites these different aspects of radio using the techne, I bring them together with ANT.

Dubber's frameworks are helpful, but they do not necessarily mean that everything discussed along these lines is undeniably radio. *Radio in the Digital Age* came out in 2013, only nine years after Hammersley named podcasting ("Audible Revolution"). Since then, the medium has changed and developed its industries, content, and technologies: in short, how it communicates. These developments make it increasingly important to look beyond defining podcasting as part of radio and ask how the medium defines itself.

This need is compounded by the admittedly porous cultural separation between the two forms. Even though early podcasting borrowed language from radio to describe itself (networks like Radiotopia, for example), most online services differentiate between radio and podcasting. iTunes has kept the two separate, introducing podcasting capabilities in 2004 and a radio section in 2011 (Morris and Patterson 223). The introduction of the Apple Podcasts app in 2012 magnifies this division, separating podcasts from radio, which it situates under Apple Music.[2] Spotify has also separated the two. The company did not launch its podcasting section until 2015, even though it has offered a streaming radio service since 2012 (Ek, Perez). Other popular sources for podcasts, like Stitcher and Luminary, define themselves entirely as podcasting companies without reference to radio. There is even podcast crossover into terrestrial radio, with traditional radio stations playing content they label as podcasts. iHeart Radio's all-podcast radio stations are a rather extreme example of this trend in their promise to play only podcasts on air (Cridland "iHeartRadio Launches"). Even specific programs that are available as both podcasts and on the radio distinguish between the two, inviting listeners to download their podcast or tune in, and do not say that the podcast itself is radio. In one sense, podcasting is not radio because cultural discussions of media currently use the words differently to refer to different things.

Amanda Lotz's *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* takes a similar approach when analyzing changes in the television industry. She argues that even though "the U.S. television industry may be being redefined, the experience of television viewing may be being redefined, but our intuitive sense of this thing we call television remains intact—at least for now" (21). In other words, television might be defined differently than it used to be, but it is still television because society broadly still thinks of it as television. Along those lines, podcasting is not radio because it is not called radio. Regardless of similarities, historical associations, and significant intermedial ties, popular discussions of podcasting have led to a break between the two.

Andrew Bottomley, writing on podcasting as a remediation of radio, recognizes these discussions when he comments that "podcasting, in particular, routinely gets referred to as a new 'medium' and championed as a disruptive technology that is especially 'intimate' and 'authentic' and so on. These discourses typically divorce the contemporary media from the past, treating them as though they are purely a product of new technologies and recently developed modern sentiments" (3). Even though Bottomley positions his research as a scholarly argument against these popular interpretations of media, he is correct in his assertion that the discourse framing podcasting as separate—and especially intimate—has a distancing effect. Instead of fighting these cultural self-descriptions, my aim is to understand them and the cultural work they do in creating podcasting's unique mediality.

Part of that work is establishing podcasting as its own medial network. That podcasting exists as a distinct network does not mean that it has no

connections to radio, just that it is a sufficiently complicated cultural system to deserve detailed research in its own terms. Berry writes in "Podcasting: Considering the evolution of the medium and its association with the word 'radio'" that "label[ing] podcasting as radio is not conductive to innovation and may actually distract us from attempts to fully theorize and investigate the form of podcasting on its own terms as it becomes more ingrained in our lives" (9). Instead, he proposes that there is important work to be done in "offering a framework to consider what podcasting is (or might be) as a distinct form" (10). By thinking about what podcasting is, and how it defines itself, it is possible to learn about how it works as a medium and better describe its connections to other media, including radio. By examining intimacy, I use one of podcasting's own descriptions of distinction (its intimacy) to build such a framework.

I am therefore defining podcasting very broadly as a medium that includes a variety of technical, cultural, and material elements that work in sync with each other to form a network widely considered to be podcasting. This very large definition is useful to me in its inclusiveness. It is not important to this project to say what podcasting should be, what podcasts are good, or how to make a quality show. As a researcher in Culture Studies, my job is instead to learn about and describe how podcasts work within culture and limiting my definition to specific kinds of content I find exemplary of the values of podcasting would undermine that goal.

Transmedia Distinction

Defining podcasting as a distinct medium does not mean that it does not connect to other media. Quite the contrary, my broad definition will by necessity overlap podcasting and other media as, say, a podcast host interviews a guest over Skype or a critic publishes a review to *The AV Club*. As much as there are technical and practical aspects of podcasting that mark it as distinct, podcasting is not separate from the rest of the world, including radio, blogging, and social media. Understanding the relationship between these different media and how they work together will enhance our understanding of how podcasting works.

An example of this overlap occurs in Chapter 2, where I study the podcast *Hello from the Magic Tavern*. If I look only at the podcast's content, that content is not limited to an audio file on an RSS feed, but spans into Twitter accounts for its characters, live performances, *Yelp!* restaurant reviews, an online store, and more. This expansion of *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s story across multiple platforms, or media, speaks to its transmedia storytelling within what Henry Jenkins calls "convergence culture" (*Convergence Culture* 2). "By convergence," he explains, "I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want"

(*Convergence Culture* 2–3). How *Hello from the Magic Tavern* and other podcasts work within convergence culture is important to how they work as podcasts.

In one sense, it is impossible to separate podcasting from its intermedial context. Fredrich A. Kittler goes so far as to say that "the general digitization of channels and information erases the differences among individual media" (*Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* 1) while Richard Grusin leaves room for medial distinctiveness, writing in *Premediation* that "media should not be studied in isolation, but placed in relation to their patterns and flows of interaction" (5). As podcast listeners slide easily between listening to a podcast, engaging in its social media, and checking out its online shop, they are engaging in a transmedia flow based on content developed specifically for that podcast. When I study podcasting as a medium, I am studying it as highly intermedial one that remediates other media and works within a transmedia environment. My broad definition means that I simply include these medial interactions under the umbrella of podcasting.

Media convergence does not mean that there is no difference between podcasting and, say, Twitter. As information, or a story, travels from one media to another, it changes. Understanding these changes, and how they work, was the reason Marshall McLuhan wrote *The Medium is the Message* and formed the base of Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility." When taken into the context of media theory, Bruno Latour's translation can also be read to comment on the same process. *How* we experience something and *what* we experience are inseparable: as much as podcasting is broad, its status as podcasting does *do* something.

Podcasting as a Medium

That the same story feels different when told in person versus on a podcast is not an inherent part of podcasting's technologies, but an ongoing process that involves people and things working together to create and define this difference. "Whether for the technologies of the early twentieth century or those of today," Richard Grusin writes in *Premediation*, "it is important to remember that each interaction, each step in the process, involves what Latour calls a translation from one affective formation to another. These movements, both human and technical, do not function as passive or neutral intermediaries, but work actively to translate or mediate action into another affective form or networked assemblage" (103). Along these lines, the steps, or connections, within podcasting's network change the affectivity of interactions and, by extension, the interactions themselves.

Podcasting includes audio files, technological practices, and production practices, but it is not limited to them. It also encompasses how people talk about podcasting, about what shows are good and what shows are not, not to mention how creators talk *on* podcasts and gear content to specifically

fit the medium. That listening to a podcast *feels* different from watching a movie or playing a video game depends on all of these interactions and how they affect those involved. In discussing podcasting as a medium, this section will examine how podcasts do that, how they *translate*—to use Latour's term—and how that translation connects to feelings, or affects.

All of the aspects of podcasting included in Dubber's discursive frames can be seen along the lines of Latour's "On Technical Mediation—Philosophy, Sociology, Genealogy." Podcasting is like a box with all these different things in it: there are iPhones in there, Spotify, some *Hello from the Magic Tavern* fans. These are all, in ANT terms, technological and human actants and they are all in there together, talking to each other, interacting. Those interactions, in turn, make podcasts mediate the way they do. In order to understand how podcasting mediates, it is therefore necessary to open the box and take a look at the interactions inside. Latour comments that mediation can be "difficult to measure" because "the action that we are trying to measure is subject to 'blackboxing,' a process that makes the joint production of actors and artefacts entirely opaque" (36). They are opaque, for Latour, because the actants that make up, in this case, podcasting integrate into a "single whole" (36). In order to understand how podcasting mediates, researchers must

> open the black boxes, examine the assemblies inside. Each of the parts inside the black box is a black box full of parts. If any part were to break, how many humans would immediately materialize around each? How far back in time, away in space, should we retrace our steps to follow all those silent entities that contribute peacefully to your reading this article at your desk? (37)

These actants inside the podcasting box are themselves their own boxes, containing more boxes, and so on. Production practices, technologies, critics, all of these are boxes within podcasting that work together to create the medium.

Together, these boxes translate, or mediate, information. This mediation occurs when podcasting changes the information it distributes. It includes, of course, many human actants, but is not limited to them. When *The NPR Politics Podcast*, for example, prepares the news for distribution, the hosts (working within the system of podcasting) prepare news items so that they can be easily understood through mobile listening and headphones take their files and convert them into the vibrations that play in the ear. These changes in information itself is the process of mediation. Latour uses "*translation* [sic] to mean displacement, drift, invention, mediation, the creation of a link that did not exist before and that to some degree modifies two elements or agents" (32). As an actant, then, podcasting mediates information—modifies it—using human and nonhuman parts.[3] In learning more about the object (podcasting), I aim to learn more about how it mediates.

This mediation includes a translation in and through affect. That both objects and people can make people feel things is a valuable part of Latour's analysis: it feels different—both emotionally and physically—to step on a Lego than to step on a pillow. The physicality of the objects plays a part in why they feel so different. Grusin links this change to affect (by which I mean emotions/feelings, both conscious and unconscious) and uses Latour to argue that mediation happens not "by neutrally reproducing meaning or information but by actively transforming conceptual and affective states" (6). When a podcast does a live show, for example, it feels different from listening to the same script on earbuds and that difference is the result of affective translation, or how mediation influences how people feel.

This process of mediation as translation includes, but is not limited to, the cultural practices that surround (and interact with) material technologies. Lisa Gitelman calls these practices protocols. "If media include what I am calling protocols," she explains, "they include a vast clutter of normative rules and default considerations, which gather and adhere like a nebulous array around a technological nucleus. Protocols express a huge variety of social, economic, and material relationships" (*Always Already New* 7). These protocols shape medial interactions and they "are far from static. Although they possess extraordinary inertia, norms and standards can and do change, because they are expressive of changeable social, economic, and material relationships" (8). These protocols, from a systems-theoretical perspective, can also be seen as codes for mediation that define the parameters for interpretation and interaction within a cultural system (Luhmann loc. 187).

Like Latour's blackboxing, Gitelman comments that these protocols can become invisible over time and "the success of all media depends at some level on inattention or 'blindness' to the media technologies themselves (and all of their supporting protocols) in favor of attention to the phenomena, 'the content,' that they represent for users' edification or enjoyment" (6). This invisibility does not mean that norms and protocols do not exist, however: "As much as people may converse through a telephone and forget the telephone itself, the context of telephoning makes all kinds of difference to the things they say and the way they say them" (Gitelman 7). Before that happens, though, these protocols need to be negotiated by participants in the medium.

On one hand, Gitelman seems to position herself against Actor Network Theory (ANT)'s conception of things as actants. Remember, for Latour, earbuds can influence the information on the news just like the anchors can and podcasting itself has a certain amount of agency in the creation of podcasts. Gitelman argues against the "tendency to treat media as the self-acting agents of their own history… that seems to make media into intentional agents, as if media purposefully refashion each other and 'do cultural work'" (9). While networks are not people and do not have purpose or intention, they do things in the world and learning more about how these networks configure themselves can lead to a better understanding of

how they do those things. Frank Kelleter argues against critiques similar to Gitelman's while researching seriality as a network in "Five Ways of Looking at Popular Seriality:"

> Couldn't it be argued that I am personifying series (perhaps seriality itself), ascribing agency to something that is really the result of deliberate human actions? It all depends on what we mean by agency and how we want to account for the presence of nonhuman and transhuman (institutional) factors in serial storytelling. Based on the points discussed so far, we can describe popular series as self-observing systems, in the sense that they are never just the "product" of intentional choices and decisions, even as they require and involve intentional agents (most notably, people) for whom they provide real possibilities of deciding, choosing, using, objecting, and so on. In shaping the self-understanding of their human contributors, series themselves attain agential status. As praxeological networks, they experiment with formal identities and think about their own formal possibilities. And they do not do so instead of human beings but with and through dispersed participants, employing human practitioners […] for purposes of self-reproduction. Series are not intentional subjects but entities of distributed intention. (24–25)

It would be just as fallacious to say that the system of podcasting, then, has no effect on how podcasts are produced as it would be that the producer of a single podcast is in complete and total control of every aspect of the story she tells. As human intention is distributed through a network, it effects the range of possibilities for podcast production and reception, and as technologies work within that network, they limit or expand upon those options.

Gitelman herself points to studies of individuals actors as ones that are flawed in their focus on inventors (10) and her incorporation of technologies (or materials) into her definition of media aligns her methodology with ANT. If materials and technologies can influence how a medium works, they have what ANT considers to be a certain amount of agency. Because technology exists through the work of humans, this agency can in large part be attributed to human agency being distributed through a network. In the grand scheme of things, this agency is quite different from the kinds of agency Gitelman attributes to inventors, but it is nonetheless the ability to do things. Once she grants this ability to any object, Gitelman is, in ANT terms, granting it to a medium as well.

These distinctions in Gitelman's use of agency are important because, overall, her work shows how media cultures fit into ANT networks. Gitelman's explanation of how a medium becomes invisible also tracks with Latour's blackboxing. When scientists look through the telescope, she explains, they do not think of the "battles already won over whether and how it does the job. The instrument and all of its supporting protocols (norms about how

and where one uses it, but also standards like units of measure) have become self-evident as the result of social processes that attend both laboratory practice and scientific publication" (5). These processes are blackboxed, in Latour's terms, insofar as they go unnoticed until something within them stops working. Gitelman also comments on this process, arguing that "media technologies work this way too," and that "inventing, promoting, and using the first telephones involved lots of self-conscious attention to telephony. But today, people converse through the phone without giving it a moment's thought" (5). Cultural negotiation, then, works within the process of creating and blackboxing media. "Comparing and contrasting new media," by which she means media when they are new and not those created with the internet, "thus stand to offer a view of negotiability in itself—a view, that is, of the contested relations of force that determine the pathways by which new media may eventually become old hat" (Gitelman 6). In learning about how cultural protocols formed around new media, Gitelman learns about how those media work within culture.

With this in mind, it is not so much that podcasting has been entirely blackboxed within American culture as it is that podcasting is currently undergoing a process of negotiation over what its protocols are. This negotiation is important because it plays a defining role in podcasting's medial translation. When media talk about how they mediate, they are also constructing the protocols for their mediation. As podcasting talks about itself, it forms cultural protocols and marks them as its own. Discussions that mark podcasting as a distinct medium, then, may be overlooking the history of their medial development, but they also create protocols for cultural interaction with podcasting as a distinct medium.

What ANT lacks in studying this formation is the interplay of agency and power that is central to much of Cultural Studies work done in a Marxist tradition. While these analyses are quite useful, it is difficult to fit them into this broad study of podcasting. Power within podcasting as a whole does not fit neatly into a top-down model and is more accurately described as distributed throughout a system. Speaking of seriality, Kelleter writes that "The challenge, therefore, is to understand popular seriality not as the deceptive formalism of capitalist entertainment, or as the emancipative consequence of everyday uses, or as the articulation of elemental sensualities, but as something that emerges from situated historical actors and agencies with particular modes of describing and performing themselves" ("Five Ways of Looking at Popular Seriality" 11). In the case of podcasting intimacy, some of these modes of describing can be said to be constricting and some emancipative, but to say that all of podcasting is either one of these things misrepresents the medium.

There are also limits to ANT as a general theory of media. Nick Couldry comments on these limits in "Actor network theory and media: do they connect and on what terms?," the first of which is that "ANT's initial insights into a dimension of social order (spatiality of networks, power asymmetries)

are not developed for a network's longer-term consequences for social space and its implications for power. This suggests a third limitation on ANT's usefulness for a general theory of media, which concerns interpretation: its lack of interest in the possibility that networks and their products go on being reinterpreted long after they have been established" (102). "These limits are, however, not fatal," Couldry counters, "provided that we step aside from its grandiose claims to be a total and radically rethought account of social action, ANT can be an important part of the panoply of media theory" (99). What ANT's emphasis on network distribution provides in terms of describing the intricacies of networked connections can therefore be limiting when it comes to delineating and reinterpreting power hierarchies within media. In using ANT to study podcasting, I am, following Couldry, trying to reap the benefits of its focus on networks in learning about how this emerging medium forms connections and defines itself. This focus should not be interpreted as a grand theory that will explain how all of podcasting works forever and I am in no way trying to say it is the best way to understand every kind of mediation or every kind of culture.

In sum, I think of podcasting as an object, or a box. There is something culture refers to as podcasting and that thing is sufficiently interesting to be studied in its own right. That podcasting exists does not mean it is not connected to other networks, or other things. When I call podcasting a medium, I am using the word "medium" as a shorthand for this object, not as a declaration of its independence from radio or any other medial network.

Liveness

At its base, liveness is the study of media that is called "live:" a live television broadcast or a live concert, for example. Both intimacy and liveness describe the process of mediation, then, in relation to co-presence. These descriptions have their own histories with their own ongoing negotiations of meaning, but both describe interaction in terms of spatial, temporal, and relational closeness. In *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, Philip Auslander presents a table illustrating different uses of the word "live," ranging from "'classic liveness,'" or the "physical co-presence of performers and audience, temporal simultaneity of production and reception; experience in the moment" associated with "theater, concerts, dance, sports, etc." to a "website" that "goes live," a category that includes "interactive media" and "chatterbots" (61). These uses of "live" convey what it means to be *with* someone: in the same room, at the same time, or within the same interaction. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that podcasting's manifold discussions of intimacy are interconnected with liveness: both deal with what it means to be connected to others, to be close to one another. These understandings of live connections, according to Auslander, can "be understood as historical and contingent rather than determined by immutable differences" (8).

The negotiations that form media also form liveness as a protocol for medial interaction. Even though Auslander emphasizes historically contingent over "ontologically given or technologically determined" meanings of liveness, he does not entirely detach himself from the influence of nonhuman actants. "It was the development of recording technologies that made it possible to perceive existing representations as 'live,'" he explains, "prior to the advent of those technologies (e.g., sound recording and motion pictures), there was no such thing as 'live' performance, for that category has meaning only in relation to an opposing possibility" (56). Basically, live came to have meaning because it described an absence of "mediatization," or the invisibility of medial translation.

According to Auslander, the vocabulary for liveness emerged when radio practices blurred the line between recorded and non-recorded media. The "first citation of the word 'live,'" he points out, "comes from the *BBC Yearbook* for 1934 and iterates the complaint 'that recorded material was too liberally used' on the radio" (59). Because radio made it impossible for listeners to look at a performance and determine if it was recorded or not (like they could with a gramophone), Auslander argues that "the need to make that identification arose as an affective response specifically to radio, a communications technology that put the clear opposition of the live and the recorded into a state of crisis" (59). Liveness, then, emerged within the medium of radio to describe the blackboxing of mediating across space, but the need to culturally negotiate and define protocols for the mediation across time made possible through recording.

That liveness began as a negotiation of cultural protocols seems to contradict Nick Couldry's "Actor network theory and media: do they connect and on what terms?," which describes this interconnection between liveness and blackboxing: "The special status given to live media can therefore be understood in actor network terms as the time when media's status as mediation is most effectively black-boxed because of the direct link to events as they happen. Liveness is, in effect, a network value, and it is a value whose applicability across media is increasing (to the internet, for example)" (105). While liveness is a network value—it describes translation—I disagree with Couldry that it describes blackboxing. That media are talked about as live shows that their processes are not entirely blackboxed. Instead, talking about liveness negotiates the cultural protocols of mediation.

That the radio public was talking about liveness reveals how little it actually was blackboxed. While liveness does describe a network, it is not one that is completely blackboxed but one undergoing continual cultural negotiation. This process of negotiation forms protocols that help define the translational affects of a medium. As Auslander points out, "the liveness of the experience of listening to or watching the recording is primarily affective: live recordings allow the listener a sense of participating in a specific performance and a vicarious relationship to the audience for that performance not accessible through studio productions" (60). Talking about these

experiences and how they feel creates expectations and frameworks through which producers and listeners alike interpret and define their experiences.

That liveness can describe connections among members of an audience does not mean that it can *only* describe these connections. Couldry explains that "we are entering a period in which there is likely to be a dynamic interplay between different modes of liveness and the differently organized networks for which they stand" ("Actor network theory and media" 105). These categories include "online liveness," or the "social copresence on a variety of scales from very small groups in chatrooms to huge international audiences for breaking news on major websites, all made possible by the internet as an underlying infrastructure" and "group liveness… for example, the liveness of a mobile group of friends who are in continuous contact via their mobile phones through calls and texting" (Couldry "Actor network theory and media" 105–106). These new forms of liveness describe the affective immediacy of different kinds of network connections, both of which use similar technologies, but both of which connect people in different ways, "both in some sense characterized by liveness" (Couldry "Actor network theory and media" 106). Liveness, then, is the self-description of a translational affect that both forms and interprets mediation.

As becomes clear throughout this work, liveness contributes to podcasting's codes for intimacy. Not only does this happen by incorporating aspects of traditional liveness into podcasting's network—live tapings and shows being the most obvious examples of this—it means examining how the new forms of liveness Couldry defines contribute to how podcasting affectually connects people as well as how podcasting negotiates what it means to be live.

Intimacy

Podcasting's discourse on intimacy, although deeply connected to liveness, is much more pronounced. Based on my research into podcasting's self-descriptions, I define intimacy as a cultural code for communicating a feeling of relational closeness in time and/or space.[4] While I developed this definition through my readings of podcasting sources, it is very much in line with Wilson's observation that in scholarship, intimacy "commonly provides a synonym for a concept of proximate, close relations: local, microlevel, private, embodied, involving the psyche" (249). She also draws on Constable's explanation that intimate relationships are, or seem to be, "physically and/or emotionally close, personal, sexually intimate, private, caring or loving" (50). While these definitions seem to expand beyond the one I have found in podcasting, they do not do so entirely: podcasting uses emotional closeness and concepts like care and love, but it interprets them in terms of time and space. Podcasting, in other words, negotiates the emotional connections intimacy forms not as separate from the physicality and temporality of its mediation, but as very much part of it. If networks describe themselves,

podcasting describes itself by talking, in large part, about its intimacy.[5] These descriptions draw on historical negotiations of emotional, physical, and interactive closeness to negotiate podcasting's affective translation.

Academic research into podcasting intimacy can be divided into four parts: the performance of intimacy by podcasting hosts (McHugh, Spinelli and Dann), the relationship between podcasting devices and listeners (Bull, Madsen, Llinares et al., Spinelli and Dann), the interactions between podcasters and listeners (Cordeiro, Yeates), and the aesthetics of the human voice (Madsen, Spinelli and Dann). In a field over which relatively little has been written, the concept of intimacy shines as a defining feature of podcasting. These academic descriptions function alongside popular medial negotiations of podcasting's intimacy. I am arguing that this overall discussion describes podcasting's translation, or how it mediates, much like liveness does.[6] Intimacy makes a powerful descriptor not because it is new or specific to podcasting, but because it is very old and draws on long negotiated, and sometimes contradictory, interactions.

Luhmann writes that, in using his theory of media of communication, "love will not be treated here as a feeling (or at least only secondarily so), but rather in terms of its constituting a symbolic code which shows how to communicate effectively in situations where this would otherwise appear improbable. The code thus encourages one to have the appropriate feelings" (loc. 180–187). Intimacy evokes a code. It is a word that stands in for a set of interactions and feelings that can be difficult to communicate. At the same time, it "encourages" the listener to have this feeling. When a podcast host whispers, she uses podcasting's cultural protocols to communicate intimacy and encourages her listener to "have the appropriate feelings" by feeling intimate themselves (187). Intimacy as a word both stands for and creates this complicated cultural code that communicates (evokes) feeling. In using intimacy as a cultural code to create protocols for its own mediation, podcasting then encourages those involved in the medium to feel intimate and to interpret their relationships with the medium along the lines of intimacy.

Podcasting's intimacy is therefore a way of processing, describing, and forming how the medium feels by providing a frame through which to understand its translational affects. To do so, intimacy establishes part of the cultural protocols that form podcasting's medial distinctiveness. Podcasting translates in a specific way because it trains its listeners and producers to have specific expectations and interactions with the medium and to qualify those interactions in terms of their intimacy. While it can be tempting to separate podcasting's self-description from its mediality, these two things are inseparable because, in describing itself, podcasting is negotiating cultural protocols that govern the very act of mediation. In learning more about podcasting's self-description, I am trying to learn about how it mediates.

By using intimacy in these descriptions, podcasting is tapping into a term with its own set of cultural expectations. These expectations have formed

through a long history of interpersonal relationships that have themselves undergone significant cultural negotiation and change. Despite their various methodologies, much of the work on intimacy has tracked these changes, be it Niklas Lunmann's discussion of intimacy's codification through novels in eighteenth century France or Anthony Gidden's sociological work with teenagers in *The Transformation of Intimacy* or Lauren Berlant's analysis of intimacy in women's culture in *The Female Complaint*. These vastly different works all share the basic premise that intimacy is not an inherent, timeless attribute but a quality built, negotiated, and structured among people. In using the language of intimacy to describe itself, podcasting is not only drawing on these descriptions, it is participating in a further negotiation of what intimacy is.

In reading intimacy as something not innate, but negotiated within a culture, these works make intimacy, in one way or another, public. As much as intimacy feels personal, it is always part of these public conversations. This relationship has led scholars to focus on the ways in which intimacy has been used to negotiate power. Jason Loviglio argues in *Radio's Intimate Public* that intimacy in radio is a conversation about the dichotomy between the public and private and is not so much a symptom of the failure of those categories as much as it establishes them (XVI). Berlant similarly tracks the ways domestic intimacy is not a separate refuge from the public, but very much constructed through public conversations and used to reinforce heteronormative power structures in twentieth century U.S. media (*Cruel Optimism*, *The Female Complaint*). To study intimacy is to study power. Even though my scholarship does not fit easily into a tradition of Marxist analysis, in learning about intimacy, I am also studying the ways in which actants negotiate power within podcasting's medial network.

These negotiations have been especially poignant insofar as they concern race, empire, and colonialism. Peter Coviello's *Intimacy in America*, Ann Laura Stoler's collection *Haunted by Empire*, Emma Rothschild's *The Inner Life of Empire*, and many more studies analyze intimacy's entanglement with structures of racism and empire. These works show how intimacy can be used to assert power onto the lives of racialized people by governing the closeness of their relationships. Queer Studies has also tackled intimacy, sexuality, and the interconnectedness of public and private relationships. Tim Dean's *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*, Martha Vicinus' *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928*, and *Male-Male Intimacy in Early America: Beyond Romantic Friendships* by William Benemann are three among many authors who explore how queer intimacies have developed alongside dominant discourses of closeness at different points in American history. These studies are a reminder that, while mediated intimacy may seem like an oxymoron, public intimacy certainly is not. Intimacy, in the words of Wilson, is "a field of power" (251). By negotiating intimacy, communities are defining which behaviors are acceptable and which are not, and that negotiation creates cultural power imbalances

that can be incredibly damaging to the lived lives and most private-feeling relationships between individual people.

When podcasting draws on traditions of intimacy to consider its own mediality, it is also drawing on the power relations attached to them. To study intimacy is a step toward understanding the underlying power relations that determine how the public is made private, how cultural power inserts itself into people's lives, and what types of privateness are deemed acceptable for public consumption, but it is not the final step. The power distribution between producers and consumers, not to mention the ways podcasting coopts and transforms historical modes of intimacy, are incredibly complicated. I strongly suspect that nobody knows enough about podcasting to accurately, honestly, and thoroughly critique the power relations of the entire medium, especially at such an early stage of the podcasting's development. But that does not mean that those power relations do not exist, that podcasting is neutral, or that its intimacy is an unproblematically *good* quality. Intimacy is not an innocuous descriptor borne from the overwhelming distinctiveness of podcasting's closeness. Instead, it is a culturally precedented conversation that draws on, reproduces, and repurposes established discourses in order to define the parameters of podcasting mediation.

I define intimacy, then, as a cultural construct that describes communication in terms of physical and temporal closeness. Podcasting draws on and incorporates this construct in a myriad of different ways. Sometimes being close through a podcast means a voice is whispering, like the person is sitting right next to the listener—close in space. Sometimes it means a lively conversation that makes it sound like the listener is listening to people talk as it happens—close in time. Together, these definitions of intimacy through time and space describe mediated interactions among people.

At its base, this entire book aims to define intimacy within the context of American podcasting. I study American podcasting because I am interested in what podcast intimacy can tell me about American culture, not because I see American podcasting as somehow exemplary of all international podcasts. That said, there are similar descriptions of podcast intimacy in other countries and denaturalizing intimacy in one cultural context, by extension, denaturalizes it in others as well.

Even in limiting my work to American podcasting, my aim is still quite broad. This means that, in order to be useful, my analysis needs to be somewhat broad and I will lose some of the complexities of specific subgroups of podcasts. This breadth makes a precise and thorough critique of the power relations involved next to impossible: some actors within podcasting's network repurpose—or queer—intimacy in ways that disrupt established hierarchies, others reinforce those hierarchies, and most do both. My hope is that the impetus of my work—to challenge the inherency of intimacy in podcasting and make steps toward providing a critical language for interpreting that intimacy—will open the field to a more thorough critique of these power relations and how they change across a much wider swath of sources

and from a greater variety of critical and personal approaches than any one scholar could ever possibly provide. The book's breadth is in service of that goal and is one of the places I find its relevance within scholarship. ANT gives me a structure through which to examine the minutiae of how podcasting forms and communicates intimacy; it provides me with an attention to the detail of this creation. This detail has drawbacks when interpreting hegemonic forms of cultural power. I use ANT as a tool to help me understand the construction of intimacy, however, not as an all-encompassing, infallible cultural truth. My challenge to hegemony lies not in the minutiae of my cultural analysis, but in my own position *within* podcasting's network. In dismantling the naturalization of intimacy within podcasting research and clearly delineating its creation, my goal is to undermine the forms of cultural power that determine who can be close to whom, and how.

Roadmap

Overall, I argue that podcasting uses intimacy to describe how it translates, how it affects the stories that pass through it. As it does so, podcasting defines the affective quality of its own mediation as physically and temporally close. This closeness extends to how podcasting builds its network through constructing different kinds of communities, including the fans of specific podcasts and the American nation. In defining its translation, its very mediality, through intimacy, podcasting is also transforming intimacy by pushing and pulling on its historical definitions and using them to describe the feeling of closeness among members of the very communities it works to build. This use of intimacy not only helps define podcasting, it contributes to how intimacy describes relationships among imagined communities of different shapes and sizes.

This work tracks how American podcasting creates these connections. Each chapter follows the techniques podcasts use to connect listeners and the ways in which podcasting describes itself, and those techniques, as intimate. This chapterization is not a categorization of different kinds of podcasts, but a story about mediation, intimacy, and community. As podcasting describes itself through intimacy, its descriptions, narratives, and sounds work to affectively bond members of its communities. Intimacy in podcasting is about these bonds: how they move, how they describe what it means to be close together.

The first chapter considers the ways in which podcasting defines intimacy as being close in space—how podcast technologies, sounds, and voices touch the listener. Media do not work completely outside the bodies of those who interact with them, but provoke physical reactions within them. Drawing on Richard Grusin and Linda Williams, I examine the affectivity—the physicality of emotions—of the alternate reality narrative fiction podcast *Within the Wires*. *Within the Wires* creates intimacy through its sound design, tightly scripted storytelling, and emphasis on the body of an

individualized listener. Instead of being incidental, the podcast continually uses this intimacy to reflect on the affectivity of podcast mediation, both within the show itself and the fan community. These reflections are not limited to this one podcast, however. As critics and advice articles describe podcasting through the intimacy of its physical presence, they extend the physicality of podcasting's affective touch to the medium's ability to connect members of a community. Intimacy here is not an inherent part of podcast's physicality, then, but a specific learned strategy for communicating with podcasts. Analysis of *Within the Wires* and texts surrounding podcasting's physicality use intimacy to create a cultural code with which those who interact with the medium can interpret their own complicated attempts at communication.

The second chapter, "Chatcast Liveness: Community and the Temporality of Conversation On-Demand," uses the podcast *The Flop House* to focus on intimacy's relationship with time. Chatty podcasts, it argues, create a form of affective liveness that podcasting describes as conversationally intimate. These conversations link to podcasting's parasociability—or the intimacy of "conversational give and take"—because it makes it sound like the listener and hosts are together, in the same time. Podcasting's self-descriptions of intimacy often amplify the importance of this conversationality and link it to intimate friendship. By presenting podcasting as an accessible, niche medium, how-to articles often tell their audience they can participate in the conversation and advise creators to make their podcast sound like they could be made by nonprofessionals. Podcasting also draws on historical notions of the home, or domestic space, as being especially intimate when they focus on recording podcasts at home and the home as a space for friendly conversation. Alongside repetition and recognition through the use of comedy callbacks, the podcast under study in this chapter's conversational liveness makes the show sound like it is with the listener, close in a shared time. Where scholarship has described these temporalities as live (Couldry, Scannell), podcasting describes them as intimate.

The next chapter takes this connection between intimacy and liveness a step further. Not only do conversational temporalities make some podcasts feel like they exist at the same time as the listener, the chapter argues, podcasts can present themselves as continually with the listener throughout their lives. I begin by looking at how podcasting's self-descriptions link intimacy to podcasting's ability to integrate into all aspects of one's daily life. By being on-demand and mobile, these descriptions present intimacy as always being there, available to the listener when needed. I then turn to an analysis of the improvised fantasy interview podcast *Hello from the Magic Tavern*, which fuses the temporalities of conversational liveness with podcasting's physical presence to create an ever-present secondary world called Foon. Monetizing paratexts and fan interactions extend this mythical world into physical space, making it—and the community it imagines—intimate in its accessible ever-presence and continual availability for interaction.[7]

These forms of intimacy take on new meaning when, instead of fantasy and alternate reality universes, the podcast follows the unfolding politics of a nation. The final chapter, "Imagining an Affective American Nation," examines how the temporality, presence, and interactions in podcasting's intimate imagined communities function in political commentary podcasts. Using *NPR Politics Podcast* and *Yo! Is this Racist?!*, it argues that podcasts present the American nation as both an imagined community (Anderson) with ties to a physical space, connected in shared forward-marching time, and as a live, participatory nation always present in its accessibility. The intimacy of these connections and the affective quality of this participation complicates the role of imagining a nation through intimate participation. At the same time that these podcasts form intimate national communities around their podcast, they construct a nation that includes those who oppose the politics of the podcast and a larger national context in which these opposing forces exist. In constructing the podcast's national community as intimate, or close, the podcast also situates that intimacy within a larger, not so close, nation.

This work then has the difficult task of defining a medially distinct framework for understanding intimacy and simultaneously using that framework to learn about podcasting. As a result, the first two chapters deal most heavily with specific analysis of podcasting's use of intimacy in its self-descriptions, the first focusing largely on space and the second on time. The final two chapters move more firmly into the ways in which space and time work together to create community, although there is significant overlap here. The divisions between these sections should not be read as a categorization of different kinds of podcasts or an ontology of intimacy—"physically close" ones versus "reciprocal" ones, for example, and the categories for intimacy I have proposed are an artificial production on my part to make it easier to discuss intimacy's closeness. They are in no way exhaustive and the division of intimacy can, in some cases, make its affect more difficult to understand—and not less. This is because podcasting does not have a single, simple, timeless definition of intimacy. Like many emotions and relationships, intimacy can be confusing and contradictory. Podcasting cannot draw on a single, universally understood definition of what it feels like to be close because no such definition exists. Podcasting rather participates in the continual construction of what it means to be intimate by discussing its mediation in terms of closeness in time and space. This discussion, in turn, negotiates what it means to communicate through podcasts.

Notes

1 Copresence, defined by Hugh Chignell, is the "idea that radio listening is a sociable activity and that listening simulates being with presenters and other listeners" (74). My usage builds off his to include more of the relationships within podcasting's network.

2 Labelling radio as music and podcasting as different (in that it is mostly talk) fits into Susan Douglas' work in *Listening In* on American radio's slow shift to predominately music formats, with the exception of news, sports, and right-wing and religious broadcasts.
3 That mediation does not always occur linearly: it is not as if a news story exists, and then it is modified. In the process of creating the story, the writers already have its technologies and audience in mind. In many cases, politicians or political actants (for example) do things specifically in order to be mediated. Those actions are then working within the network.
4 When I say that podcasts *do* intimacy, I mean that they create this feeling. The distinction between *doing* intimacy and *being* intimate is that *being* intimacy implies that intimacy is innate where *doing* intimacy is creating intimacy and contributing to its cultural construction.
5 Latour writes that "techniques modify the matter of our expression, not only its form" and that "the notion of … translation, should be modified not only … to absorb a shift in the definition of goals and functions, but also a change in the very matter of expression" ("On Technical Mediation" 38). Translation and language are therefore interconnected, with the words that describe networks and the networks themselves forming each other.
6 My research into podcasting's network includes academic research as primary sources. I do this because I do not see research as separate and disconnected from podcasting's self-descriptions. All research reacts to and contributes to the time in which it is written. Part of what makes academic research valuable is that it is a form of cultural self-reflection, a meaning-making endeavor that is not (and should not be) completely separate from popular concerns, but in conversation with them. When I use research as primary sources, it is because I very much respect that research and find it valuable in this conversation, not because I see my own work as somehow more empirical or in any way above that of others.
7 I use 'paratext' in this context to refer to elements of *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s transmedia storytelling not contained within the podcast. This is a simplified approach to paratexts. For more on paratextuality, see Genette.

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1 Touching Podcasts

Recognition, Eroticism, and the Haptics of Sound

Being intimate can mean being physically close to another person—linked to them in space. The bonds formed through the presence of bodies together can feel personal, familial, even erotic. Through the closeness of touch, relationships form. Seen through the lens of Actor Network Theory, touch is itself a form of mediation: it connects actants to one another and translates meaning between them. That these connections feel primal does not make them so. As Benedict Anderson says of nations, "To understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy" (*Imagined Communities* 4). When podcasting describes its intimacy—and by extension, its mediation—through the language of touch, it defines the quality of its mediation in terms of connection, community, and closeness.

Within the Wires centralizes the process of creating intimacy within its storytelling. It is a narrative fiction podcast from the Night Vale Presents network written by Jeffrey Cranor and Janina Matthewson and with music by Mary Epworth. Jeffrey Cranor is a co-founder of Night Vale Presents, a position which he, answering a fan question at the London Podcast Festival, said provides him with the opportunity to "greenlight [his] own stuff," including *Within the Wires* ("Night Vale Presents: Within the Wires"). Where the podcast *Welcome to Night Vale* largely sticks to the idiom of a small-town radio station, *Within the Wires* explores the storytelling possibilities of a variety of aural media in building its fictional universe. The first season is told through relaxation tapes, the second with museum audio guides, the third through dictations to a secretary, the fourth with tape recorded letters, and an extra paywalled series through blackbox recordings. Over the course of the four main seasons, listeners learn more about their world and the relationships among a few of those who inhabit it. For the purposes of this study, I will focus on the first season, in which relaxation tapes slowly reveal that the imagined listener is captive in some kind of research facility. As the season progresses, the relationship between the narrator, Helen, and listener character, Oleta, becomes closer and more complicated. *Within the Wires* builds this relationship, and the storyworld in general, through

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the use of textual repetition. As it does so, the podcast creates an imagined community using textual repetition to elicit communal recognition—in providing shared memories through which listeners can recognize themselves, and others, as listeners to the podcast.

This recognition acquires a physically affective form in which its modes of interaction are described as intimate through their physical proximity, co-presence, and touch. As podcasting works affectively within the bodies of its listeners, it, in the words of Richard Grusin, "imitates the affective attunement between human beings and each other, as well as the more large-scale relation between humans and technologies at the current historical moment" (*Premediation* 105). That affectivity forms and moves through *Within the Wires*' listening community and contributes to the "affective life" of podcasting (Grusin *Premediation* 121). When podcasting speaks of its intimacy in terms of physical closeness and touch, it provides a frame through which to interpret this bodily affectivity. In the case of *Within the Wires*, that frame extends beyond the experience of the individual listener and into its community.

This chapter begins by looking at how the discussions within and surrounding podcasting turn to haptics to describe mediation and how they consider these haptics to be intimate. I then examine *Within the Wires* as a form of creative reflection on similar issues, exploring how it uses queer eroticism to create a form of physical closeness it relates to intimacy. The next section examines the link between touch and time, using Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* to dissect how the podcast creates recognition before moving to how the inattentive spatial presence of recognition creates a form of engagement not entirely reliant on dutiful attention. The chapter then moves to how touch, recognition, and engaged presence work within podcasting monetization.[1] Framing *Within the Wires*' monetization within advice blogs for beginning podcasters, it shows how making money works within podcasting's discussion of intimacy. Money does not necessarily cheapen podcasting's intimacy here so much as podcasting uses intimacy as a concept to negotiate what kinds of monetization are acceptable. The final section, "Intimacy curdles into invasiveness," focuses on how *Within the Wires* plays with the breakdown of intimate recognition.

Within the Wires serves as a good case study in learning about the dynamics of recognition because of its self-reflection, but not necessarily because it is more intimate than any other podcast or is doing something no other podcasts do.[2] As I show in Chapter 2, comedic callbacks are also a form of repetition that can work in similar ways and there are forms of friendship-based intimacy that can be just as powerful as *Within the Wires*' romantic overtones. While each podcast has its specific mixture of ways in which it defines itself as intimate, what relationships and historical constructs it draws from, and what spatial and temporal aspects of closeness it emphasizes, these individual forms of intimacy are, together, a negotiation of the closeness of podcasting mediation that is continually being reshaped and redefined.

Physically Close

Podcasting's definition of intimacy as a form of physical closeness is large, developed, and fits within a tradition of scholarship that describes media interactions in terms of their intimate haptics. To hear a podcast, listeners touch their phones or computers, and the technologies respond. In "'Haptically Mediated' Radio Listening and its Commodification: The Remediation of Radio through Digital Mobile Devices," Angeliki Gazi and Tiziano Bonini place smartphone haptics into the materiality of radio history. "Listening to radio has always been a haptic act," they argue, "amateur radio making and listening in the 1920s was a highly material activity, which depended on touch" (110). For them, radio and podcasting are haptic because of the physicality of the machines we use to listen.

That media can be understood through touch is given: haptics form the basis of human senses (Grusin 91). Light bounces off objects and physically moves the eye, causing sight. Sound waves physically move parts of the ear, causing some to hear. Taste and smell can similarly be attributed to the physicality of reactions within bodies. When people communicate by touching each other, touch mediates their connection. Different kinds of touch mean different things, in different situations, depending on the cultures and relationships involved. In the analysis of mediation, intimacy describes some of these connections. These descriptions contribute to building the cultural protocols around mediation—they are a way in which people interpret their interactions within a culture—by defining intimacy as physically close.

"The way in which a photograph is handled," Margaret Olin writes in *Touching Photographs*, contributes to "how intimately one can engage with it" (loc. 57). "Touch puts people in contact with photographs;" she says, "but as photographs pass from hand to hand they establish and maintain relationships between people-or try to" (loc. 61). By touching the same photograph, Olin reasons, members of a family touch each other through generations as they pass photographs on from generation to generation. The physicality of touch mediates the connections among their community. When Olin describes that mediation as intimate, she contributes to cultural construction of intimacy as a code through which to interpret medial interactions.

Michael Bull similarly uses the language of physical feeling when defining relations between the iPod listener and her environment. "iPod culture embodies a dialectical relationship between the desire for an ever-present intimate of personal connectivity and the impoverishment of the social and geographical environment within which it occurs," he explains, "this dynamic is expressed theoretically in the present work through the concepts of 'warm' and 'chilly'–'warm' representing the proximate, the inclusive; 'chilly' the distant and exclusive" (9–10). As with Olin, there is a slippage here between the physicality of media and the relationships they create, a slippage common in both scholarly and popular descriptions of intimacy that draw on the language of physical proximity and presence. The physical

warmth of being close to another person's body slips with the emotional feeling of inclusiveness, distance with exclusion. Touch and warmth imply an interpersonal connection, a physicality of closeness that defines how these authors evoke intimacy and use it to interpret—and contribute to the production of meaning and cultural protocols for—the mediality they study.[3]

That these physical relationships are, for these authors, close speaks to the power of their affective bonds. In defining affect, Richard Grusin draws on cognitive computing and the relationship between the human and the game controller. Arguing against "work in media studies [that] has minimized or elided the non-visual senses" (*Premediation* 101), Grusin uses analysis of touch to argue that "humans are affective as well as cognitive cyborgs … we are engaged in a complex and overlapping network of heterogeneous feedback loops not only with other people but increasingly with our media as well" (97). The affective physicality of this touch mediates social relationships. "Rather than social interactions occurring with other people located within our physical space," Grusin argues, "such interactions occur with and by means of media technologies within our physical space, sometimes even (in the case of wearable devices) within our bodily space" (Grusin *Premediation* 91). Drawing on Mark Hansen's work on the haptics of visual embodiment in film, Grusin argues that, "insofar as seeing the world is touching it with one's eyes, or hearing the world is touching it with one's ears, so smelling it is touching it with one's nose, or tasting it is touching it with one's tongue. Strictly speaking, all of our senses are haptic" (Grusin *Premediation* 101). Mediated affect can be physical, and *intimacy* is here a cultural code present in both popular and scholarly descriptions for interpreting that physicality.

Descriptions of podcasting's intimacy often interpret this physicality along the lines of the kinds of social relationships it works to build. These descriptions tend to elide the haptics of media reception in general and focus on a construct of podcasting, or audio's, exceptionality. In *Sound Streams*, Andrew Bottomley quotes psychologist Anne Fernald's interview on *Radiolab*, in which she says that "We're used to thinking of sounds as being about something—speech is always about something. But it feels to me more like touch. Sound is kind of touch at a distance" (174). "The quotation hints at the exceptionally affective power of sound," Bottomley reflects, "specifically, Fernald is referring to speech between mothers and their infant children. Over the past decade, her statement has become a mantra of sorts for radio producers and fans seeking to demonstrate the 'intimacy' of radio, podcasting in particular" (174). Podcasting's sound, here, stems from the intimate sonority of infant and mother, and forms podcasting's exceptionally intimate mediality as connected to the social relationships between infants and their mothers. Although Bottomley attributes that exceptionality to sound in general, the producers he studies do not: a repeated "mantra" of sound as touch permeates podcasting discourse and interprets its mediation along the well-worn lines of familial intimacy (174).[4]

Popular descriptions of podcasting similarly draw on the language of touch to explain podcasting's intimacy as exceptional. Jonah Weiner explores the haptics of sound as a physicality specific to podcasts in his article "What makes podcasts so addictive and pleasurable?" for *Slate*: "In the case of podcasts, the air literally thrums, our eardrums vibrate, and the cliché of the 'human touch' is physicalized." Like Grusin, Weiner describes how sound touches his body. Unlike Grusin, this touch is not a general quality of all senses so much as the specific intimacy of the podcast. In using intimacy to describe the physicality of mediation, Weiner qualifies and interprets podcasting's affective translation.

Radio scholar Virginia Madsen similarly explores how sound enters the body, writing that, in podcasts, "the acoustic voice is poured into the ears without disruptions from the exterior world, enveloping the listener with the intimate expression of its character—its grain—before the content of its message is even considered" (45).[5] This description's intimacy describes the physicality of closeness: that which is intimate "pours into the ears," enters the body, expresses "its character," the physical texture of its "grain" (45). Madsen uses intimacy to describe the haptic touch of sound mediation as well as podcasting's affectivity. This affective physicality moves in this passage from the technological earbuds into the texture of podcasting's voices. In describing this touch as intimate, Madsen qualifies podcast mediation in her scholarship much as Weiner does in his journalistic criticism.

The technical capacity for headphones to make it sound like voices are physically located inside the listener's head, which sound designers sometimes see as an obstacle more than a benefit (Dockwray and Collins), transforms in podcasting criticism into meditations on the physical characteristics of podcast intimacy. Glen Weldon writes in "It's All in Your Head: The One Way Intimacy of Podcast Listening:" "Perhaps most crucially, earbuds transmit their voices inside your head—they roost there [sic], rubbing shoulders with your own thoughts." For Weldon, the earbuds' placement in the ear does not completely define the podcast's haptics: the voice they carry also enters the head and physically touches "your own thoughts." In doing so, the voice provides the description's most evocative haptic experience, not the earbuds or even the physicality of sound—a voice may move the body that hears it, but one's own thoughts? Weldon uses the language of physical closeness to describe the intimacy of his not explicitly physical media experience.

He is not alone. It is not uncommon to describe podcasting listening in terms of a voice inside one's head, regardless of earbud use. Noelle Acheson in "Whisper in my ear: the intimacy of podcasts" writes that "when you read, it's your voice in your head. And the written word, while very stimulating, does not have the same level of immediacy as the spoken word. It's not nearly as intimate." Intimacy, here, can be linked to the spoken word in general and does not necessarily rely on any particular medium. That said, she compares podcasting to the written word, whose aurality derives from

"your voice in your head." Acheson not only claims that podcasting is more intimate than reading because the host's thoughts mingle with her own, but also comments the temporal "immediacy" of her experience and associates it with oral/aural culture ("Whisper in my ear").

Later in his article for Slate, Weiner writes that podcasts are "driven by voices. Recognizing this, we talk about the form's special sense of intimacy and even its erotics: the dulcet phonemes of Jad Abumrad, issuing into us from earbuds snugly nestled into our heads" ("What Makes Podcasts"). Weiner here echoes Hilmes' scholarship in describing the physical sensation of earbuds. He also draws on the importance of the host's voice in this sensation; Jad Abumrad's "dulcet phonemes" seem to "nestle into our heads" almost as much as the earbuds do ("What Makes Podcasts"). The voice surfaces here as the almost inseparable combination of man and technology, an assemblage. It is the amalgamation of culture, man, and machine that makes podcasts mediate as they do and Weiner has chosen to describe that amalgamation as "intimate" ("What Makes Podcasts"). These descriptions of podcasting's intimacy build a cultural protocol through which to interpret and regulate interactions within podcasting's network. These sources, and many others, contribute to building that code by using intimacy to understand the physical affectivity of podcasting's translation.

"She is Breathing Out into You": *Within the Wires*' Queer Eroticism

As much as intimacy can be negotiated in think pieces and reviews, podcasts can themselves discuss what it means to be connected, or intimate, and their own physical closeness. "In fact, so dominant is the idea of atmosphere in many podcasts," Patrick Gill writes in "Listening to the Literary: On the Novelistic Poetics of the Podcast," "that it is hardly surprising that many of the most successful shows produced in this medium belong to genres or sub-genres specifically associated with the triggering of an emotional response in the intended audience" (9). The triggering of these emotional responses aligns with Grusin's use of affect: podcasts communicate in a way that causes listeners to feel something. In triggering feelings consistently associated with intimacy, and sometimes even specifically stating that those feelings are intimate, podcasts use intimacy to contribute to the negotiation of the medium's mediality. In this vein, *Within the Wires* constructs intimacy through the exploration of an emotionally close relationship alongside the physical closeness of its sound. The podcast plays with the boundary between eroticism and horror by building a close relationship between listener and narrator along the lines of Horton and Wohl's concept of "extreme para-sociability." The relationship, for Horton and Wohl, bonds listener and host by mimicking the conversational style of a romantic partner. At the same time, *Within the Wires* does not put any particular emphasis on the

fact that its main two characters are women. "Rendering queer as normal thus has the effect of queering our own world," Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock writes of *Within the Wires*' sister podcast in his introduction to *Critical Approaches to Welcome to Night Vale*, "nowhere is *Night Vale*'s critique of the real world more apparent than in its representation of an alternate world that seems Utopian to many because of its open acceptance of diversity" (Weinstock 20). As *Within the Wires* uses the romantic relationship between two women to negotiate podcast mediality, it also asserts that queer relationships are normal and that podcasting's intimacy is not entirely based on heterosexuality.

Within the Wires uses the relationship between these women (Helen, the narrator, and Oleta, the listener) to connect physical to emotional closeness. The following example demonstrates how the podcast's text does so:

> You are holding hands with this girl. You are looking into her eyes, which are so different to yours. You are looking at her face, which is so different to yours, and you are seeing yourself iterated twice in two blue pools. This girl knows you. This girl sees you, properly, completely. Maybe she still sees you today, right now. You are breathing together. She is breathing out into you, and into herself that which you are breathing out. (Cranor and Matthewson "Season 1, Cassette #4: Sadness, Lungs")

"You" are physically close to the girl. "You" hold hands, look into her eyes, and share her breath. Much like the voice, this breath breaks down the binary between two bodies as it traverses between them. There is also an emotional closeness here: she sees you; you tell her you will never forget her. This is someone "you" know very well.

In understanding *Within the Wires'* intimacy, it is important to note that these moments, not the story, carry the podcast's affective weight and point to what Horton and Wohl call "extreme para-sociability." In their insightful, but dated, 1956 article "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance," parasocial interaction is "intimacy at a distance" and it becomes "extreme" when, "evidently on the presumption that the maximum of loneliness is the lack of a sexual partner, these programs tend to be addressed to one sex or the other, and to endow the persona with an erotic suggestiveness." As an example, Horton and Wohl use the radio program *The Lonesome Gal*, explaining

> The outline of the program was simplicity itself … She was exactly as represented, apparently a lonesome girl, but without a name or a history. Her entire performance consisted of an unbroken monologue unembarrassed by plot, climax, or denouement… The Lonesome Gal simply spoke in a throaty, unctuous voice whose suggestive sexiness belied the seeming modesty of her words.

> From the first, the Lonesome Gal took a strongly intimate line, almost as if she were addressing a lover in the utter privacy of some hidden rendezvous:
>
> 'Darling, you look so tired, and a little put out about something this evening …. You are worried, I feel it Lover, you need rest … rest and someone who understands you. Come, lie down on the couch, relax, I want to stroke your hair gently … I am with you now, always with you. You are never alone, you must never forget that you mean everything to me, that I live only for you, your Lonesome Gal.'

The similarities between *The Lonesome Gal* and season one of *Within the Wires* are manifold: low feminine voices, suggested eroticism, an unbroken monologue, a voice without name or history (at the beginning, at least). *Within the Wires* use of autogenic exercises means that they are also similar in how they directly address the listener: they tell her what to do (lay down, relax) and that she will never be alone. They also both allude to physical proximity, even touch. Both women "stroke your hair," both are "with you" (Horton and Wohl).

The narrator's "low, unctuous tones" (Horton and Wohl), along the lines of the physicality of the senses, touch the listener as the narrator/listener character relationship becomes increasingly romantic throughout *Within the Wires'* first season. As the narrator helps the listener character remember their forgotten relationship, the podcast plays on the slippage between parasocial romantic relationships and other ones in, as I will go into more later, sometimes uncomfortable ways.

Linda Williams locates similar emotional responses within the body. Speaking of pornography, horror, and melodrama, she writes that "what may especially mark these body genres as low is the perception that the body of the spectator is caught up in an almost involuntary mimicry of the emotion or sensation of the body on the screen along with the fact that the body displayed is female" (4). The podcast's slippage between the listener and Oleta, amplified by their use of the second person, turns Williams' mimicry into a different kind of embodiment: the listener embodies Oleta as she listens to the podcast. Reflecting on the process of writing the first episode, Cranor writes that "As Janina and I continued to play with the language, we took static lines like 'Is the breathing heavy or light? Listen.' and punched up the imagery to give the listener something specific to try to feel in their bodies, as opposed to just listening" ("Backer Update #7: Intimacy"). This line reveals the slippage between Oleta and the podcast's listener: the podcast tells both what to do.

In response to the article, one listener comments on Oleta's body and his own:

> The thing about season one I always found interesting is the weird things we are asked to do with our bodies (Well, Oleta is). Imagining your lungs are moist yellow cake or explaining body balance to a security

> nurse seem almost like jokes, but then I wondered if maybe people in this universe have different symbolic relationships with their bodies and this was normal. Or if my relationship with my body was weird. (Bruno Borgna)

Oleta's lungs become the listener's lungs. When Oleta is touched, the listener is touched. "The bodies of women figured on the screen have functioned traditionally as the primary *embodiments* of pleasure, fear, and pain," Williams writes, this embodiment is aurally marked "by recourse not to the coded articulations of the language but to inarticulate cries of pleasure in porn, screams of fear in horror, sobs of anguish in melodrama" (4). As much as *Within the Wires* uses sound to represent elements in its environment—a technique that does not entirely fit with the relaxation tape trope—it does not play Oleta's voice. Instead, the shudders, cries, screams, and sobs are embodied by the listener. "The listener is a character in your story," Cranor explains, advising his readers on "a few best practices I've found for achieving this kind of speaker/listener intimacy" ("Backer Update #7: Intimacy"). "In Within the Wires Season 1, the listener is literally one of the two lead characters, but that's an extreme example" (Backer Update #7: Intimacy). Horton and Wohl's extreme parasociability is here the extreme intimacy of a podcast for which the listener is a main character. Intimacy is closeness; extreme intimacy is embodiment.

Time, Touch, and Roland Barthes' Recognition

According to Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, recognition is the simultaneous experience of multiple moments of time. In a picture of his mother as a little girl, Barthes reads "at the same time *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror and anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. What pricks me is the discovery of this equivalence" (96). The instant in time the picture represents does not stand on its own. Instead, it is deeply steeped in multiple moments of time that Barthes describes as the conflation of two time references: when the photo was taken (the *this has been*) and the moment he recognizes it (the *this will be*). The photo's *this will be* comes from his memory of his mother; the future of the girl in the photo, but Barthes' past. Although the picture exists in these moments, and pricks Barthes with the recognition of these times, it does not tell a story that connects them. Instead, Barthes experiences them simultaneously, outside of a developing narrative. For Barthes, it is this simultaneity that pricks him with recognition.

This lack of narrative connection becomes increasingly important when taken out of photography and into media that can only be understood progressively through time. Barthes compares the pricks of recognition, or the *punctum*, he experiences in photography to a haiku, an art form that, like photography, focuses on describing a single moment: "The notation of a

haiku, too, is undevelopable: everything is given, without provoking the desire for or even the possibility of rhetorical expansion. In both cases we might (we must) speak of an *intense immobility* [sic]: linked to a detail" (49). Here Barthes speaks of the immobility of recognition: not only do readers experience this recognition as immobile, he argues, they have no real desire to connect it to a narrative through "rhetorical expansion" (49). Although Barthes claims that the punctum is particularly suited to photography because the viewer can experience the entire work in a single moment, his example here illustrates the limitations of that point of view (49). Readers consume haikus progressively through time just as listeners consume sound through time. The haiku remains immobile not because readers experience it in its entirety in an instant, but because the moment of recognition is itself instantaneous. Barthes' use of a haiku to illustrate his point on recognition reveals that his intense immobility is not exclusive to photography and can exist in media with different relationships to time.

While intense immobility in sound does not have to relate to language, Barthes' example of a haiku invites such comparisons. Weinstock comments on the haiku-like writing style of *Welcome to Night Vale* in a different context. Focusing on the first line in the podcast's first episode, he asks his readers to

> Consider again the lights above the Arby's passage and note the sequence of short, declarative phrases built around the repetition of keywords: lights, Arby's, we, above. There is a poetry here in the long vowel sounds, the sibilance of "lights seen in the sky above the Arby's," the haiku-like precision, the concise narrative beginning and ending with "above the Arby's." (9)

This precision is linguistic, temporal, and centered around repetition. For Weinstock, these repetitions include the sounds of language, but they also extend to the repetition of specific scenes and elements within the podcast's serialization. As repetitions with contextual variations, these references expand the storyworld without pushing the narrative forward, much in line with Kelleter and Loock's observation that, for many digital-age viewers, "seriality apparently is understood … more in terms of an expansive storyworld than in terms of linear narrative progression" (138). The weight of these intensely immobile moments comes from their instantaneous affectivity more than the linear progression of the story.

In "Backer Update #7: Intimacy," Cranor links these kinds of affective connections to intimacy, or love, and prioritizes them over the development of a storyline: "Obviously, write a good story, but my experience with podcasts is that I love you, the speaker, way more than I love your story." For Cranor, an intimate podcast relies on a loving relationship, not on a linearly unfolding narrative. *Within the Wires* builds that relationship through its use of intensely immobile repetition.

Within the Wires reflects on the temporality of recognition in "Season 1, Cassette #6: for Oleta," when the narrator talks about seeing someone she once knew in a park: "The memories of you did not return to me; suddenly they had never left at all, although they had not been there the moment before. I saw you, outside on an autumn day, and there you were. In my mind, iterated many times." In this example, the narrator's memories of the listener character come back all at once, each instance on top of the other. The memories come back "suddenly" because "they had never left at all," "there you were, in my mind, iterated many times" (Cranor and Matthewson "Season 1, Cassette #6"). This instantaneous experience of past and present moments causes the narrator to recognize the other character. Like Barthes' haiku, its temporality is intensely immobile and decidedly non-narrative. It describes a single moment of time undevelopable through narrative expansion: there is no unfolding story about how the narrator met the character, or what their lives have been like since. Everything exists in that single moment. The listener, in turn, can recognize the phrase "iterated many times" because she heard it before in previous episodes. Just like the narrator experiences recognition when she sees the other character, the listener experiences recognition of the phrase (Cranor and Matthewson "Season 1, Cassette #6").

Aural recognition in podcasting is not limited to two experiences of time, but is capable of eliciting multiple moments simultaneously and with the same reference. This multiplicity in podcasting can be specifically related to its aurality (the sound of a familiar voice), but is also intertwined with the medium's production and distribution practices. In distributing repetition throughout its network, podcasting creates shared memories among those who interact with it.

In *Family Frames*, Marianne Hirsch uses Barthes' definition and the "anti-narrative wound of the *punctum*" to explore how family photo albums solidify bonds within families (54, 5):

> I 'recognize' my great-grandmother because I am told that she is an ancestor, not because she is otherwise in any way similar or identifiable to me. It is the context of the album that creates the relationship, not necessarily any preexistent sign. And when I look at her picture, I feel as though she also recognizes me. We share a familial visual field in which we see even as we are seen. (54)

The context of a family album and familial relationships, for Hirsch, gives the viewer the ability to recognize these pictures as belonging to her community and to allow the pictures to recognize her as a member of that community. In this way, photo albums solidify bonds between members of a social group. *Within the Wires'* dynamic of repetition and recognition extends into the show's paratexts and similarly uses recognition to solidify bonds between members of a listening community by creating a shared memory, a shared history among those who listen to the podcast.

The use of repetition and relative lack of narrative expansion relates to *Within the Wires*' use of bodily affect. Writing on genre, Williams places melodrama, horror, and pornography "under the extended rubric of melodrama, considered as a filmic mode of stylistic and/or emotional excess that stands in contrast to more 'dominant' modes of realistic, goal-oriented narrative" (3). These "body genres," or extended melodrama, are "marked by 'lapses' in realism, by 'excesses' of spectacle and displays of primal, even infantile emotions, and by narratives that seem circular and repetitive" (3). Repetition, then, can focus on forging "primal," "excessive," and bodily emotional connection over more goal-oriented storytelling. *Within the Wires* links this focus on the excess of eroticism to the creation of a world in which same sex relationships are the norm.

Hirsch and Valerie Smith emphasize the role of different forms of memory in creating recognition, extending her work on families to different kinds of communities. When reading Lori Novak's self-portrait at Ellis Island, for example, she argues that the photo "shows memory to be both public and private, both individual (it is a self-portrait) and cultural (the self is shaped by, and thus conveys or represents, its group history and identity)" (2). Hirsch and Smith implicitly links these memories to the temporalities of Barthes' recognition, stating that the "present is thus composed of numerous layered temporalities that come together in Novak's projection" (2). Moments of recognition, then, do not need to work within an unfolding narrative about how a family or group has grown and evolved over the years. Instead, they can rely on a connection achieved during the intense immobility of non-narrative recognition.

In creating a shared past, this textual repetition works as a form of "collective memory, or the shared knowledge held by a select group of past experience" (Kelleter 46). In creating memory without a story that connects the dots between points, *Within the Wires* queers its relationship to memory. Drawing on Elizabeth Freeman's concept of temporal drag, Theresa L. Geller and Anna Marie Banker argue that *American Horror Story*'s "televisual temporal drag offers a dialectical pressure on the present by refusing to simply reproduce 'a chain of events over time'" (40). Along similar lines, *Within the Wires*' focus on specific moments of shared history over a linear narrative queers time by refusing "history as linear narrative" (Geller and Banker 40). Creating community through a nonlinear shared history links *Within the Wires*' bodily affect to "a desire for a different kind of past, for a history that is not straight" (Dinshaw et al. 185). When *Within the Wires* uses textual repetition to create recognition, it queers time by creating a shared past out of nonlinear narrativity.

Jason Mittell's *Complex TV* also relates temporalities similar to those of Barthes' recognition to seriality, stating that "the act of remembering is quite pleasurable, rewarding a viewer's knowledge base while provoking the flood of recognition stemming from the activation of such memories. Such pleasures are hard to imagine working in non-serialized formats" (Mittell

191). While non-serial formats can prompt recognition, serial storytelling is well-suited for creating recognition because creators can repeat information from previous episodes. These moments, be they the reflective ones of *Within the Wires* or the ubiquitous comedic callback, carry with them the ability to build fan communities around recognition.

Within the Wires creates such moments of recognition within its storyworld by repeating specific words and elements. In this selection from "Season 1, Cassette #1: Stress, Shoulders," for example, the narrator repeats the imagery and phrase "iterated many times:"

> Close your eyes.
>
> You are in a forest. The forest is large, and you are small. The forest is immense, and you are tiny. You are in midair, and you see several things at once. To be more specific, you see the same thing, iterated many times.
>
> You are an insect, with complex eyes and simple desires. You are erratic and frenetic. What little wind winds its way through leaves lifts and twists you to new directions.
>
> You are naked. You are alone. You are fine. You feel fine.
>
> You cannot see your own nakedness, for you cannot move your head to look down. Never look down!
>
> You see every sight iterated many times, but you do not see yourself. You are uncertain if it will rain. You are uncertain how you are floating, or flying.
>
> You see a child. She is iterated many times. (Cranor and Matthewson "Season 1, Cassette #1")

The repetition of the phrase "iterated many times" creates recognition with this passage (Cranor and Matthewson "Season 1, Cassette #1"). The different contexts of the phrase stack on top of each other, adding meanings and memories to later repetitions. The callback also occurs in later episodes, adding a serial component to the podcast's repetitions that further underlines the show's regularity for fan consumption.

This dynamic of repetition and recognition also extends into the *Within the Wires*' online fan community. One Reddit user posts: "the repeated 'iterated many times' was a way to have 'iterated many times' iterated many times" ("Discussion: Relaxation Cassette #1"). Readers familiar with the episode will recognize the reference, recognize the writer as a fan, and feel recognizable themselves. When the podcast repeats the phrase in the next episode, the listener may remember the joke along with other repetitions, solidifying the relationship between the fan community and the text. Like the "complex eyes" of *Within the Wires*' damselfly, the listener recognizes herself, and her fellow fans, "all at once, iterated many times" (Cranor and Matthewson "Season 1, Cassette #1").

Community building through recognition extends into *Within the Wires*' use of fan-created paratexts. As Dannielle Hancock argues about *Welcome to Night Vale*, "*WTNV* fans build and experience community through imagined and performed 'Night Vale' residence and community radio listenership, collective visual construction and definition of *WTNV*'s invisible spaces and inhabitants, and communication and collectivism enacted both as 'cyber' and physically co-present audiences" (36). These repetitions further define *Within the Wires* characters and connect listeners through their collective creation of characters.

Through repetition, *Within the Wires* reflects on the temporalities of creating memories and building its own fan community. These processes codify the relationship between fans, fan and art, and contribute to how podcasting constructs how it mediates. In concentrating on nonlinear connections through time, *Within the Wires* queers its communal connections. Building a story out of the emotional excess of women through repetition, the podcast foregrounds both its sensuality and the power of its worldbuilding. "Worlds," Wolf explains, "unlike stories, need not rely on narrative structures, though stories are always dependent on the worlds in which they take place" (17). The very repetition that forges emotional bonds also builds a storyworld in which those bonds are possible.

Attention, Engagement, and Presence

Within podcasting research, the medium is often heralded as distinct from radio because listeners presumably pay closer attention. Bottomley repeats ideas from the podcast industry when he writes that, for podcasts, "listeners have presumably sought out the program and they will consume the story linearly from beginning to end. That is, listeners will not be randomly tuning in to the middle of the story, as is common with broadcast radio" (Bottomely 213). Listeners pay attention, the story goes, because they seek out the content they want. Their attention connects to their detailed listening, from beginning to end. These connections relate to contemporary discussions of media engagement. These discussions, writes Elizabeth Evans in *Understanding Engagement in Transmedia Culture*, "emerged within screen industry discourse in the early 2000s" in its current form, "as a mode of being, as meaning a kind of experience with screen texts" as opposed to the use of "'engaging,' as an evaluative term in reviews" (2). Much like intimacy, engagement is, for Evans, an ambiguous, descriptive term that means different things in different contexts and to describe different kinds of experiences. Within these ambiguous meanings, however, are meanings that associate engagement with attention, participatory production, and affective bond (1–10). When podcasting sources describe the medium as conducive to this detailed attention, they are working within popular and scholarly understandings of engagement to place the medium. At the same time, they build on a description of intimacy as one of attentive care while

side-stepping the potentialities for distracted engagement and presence within podcast reception.

Margaret Olin's 2012 book *Touching Photographs* "investigates how photographs participate in and create relationships and communities, and… ways in which communities gather around photographs" (205). Olin explains basking as a mode of viewing photography that prioritizes connection over examination. Seeing a photograph and analyzing its many parts is, according to Olin, a concept of viewing photography developed in the Victorian era. Some photographs are better suited to being seen in their generalities than their specificities, though, and these photos can be experienced through basking. Basking prioritizes connection over examination: "We bask in an image to obtain what we need from it" she states, "much as we bask in the sun or under a sunlamp, to obtain the benefits of light. Only a certain kind of image can keep this therapeutic connection open" (loc. 2008). There is more than one way to pay attention, then, and feeling the affective presence of media does not rely on close, undivided reception.

Passive, emotional forms of reception like the one Olin describes through basking are, in Western cultures, often denigrated in favor of examination and production. Kate Lacey's *Listening Publics* challenges the association of passive media consumption with femininity and the willingness to discount "distracted women's listening" as a degraded attribute of "the 'soap opera'" (loc. 3023). Lacey discusses the discourse around distracted listening as taking shape when radios moved into the home, where their daytime listeners were mostly women who tuned in while doing housework. The "dominant discourse about domestic listening through radio's 'golden age,'" Lacey explains, "was precisely about learning how to listen in a concentrated and purposeful fashion" (loc. 2981). This purposeful listening can be compared with Olin's attentive viewing, during which one takes the time to pay attention to a photograph and appreciate all of its details. In both cases, the consumer is expected to studiously engage with the material.[6] The need for an audience, assumed to be female, to learn how to listen purposefully emerged with programs like the soap opera, whose use of repetition makes them particularly well-suited to distracted listening.

A similar degradation of female-coded reception exists within fan culture. *Fake Geek Girls* takes aim at the ways in which fandom, despite academic interest in female-dominated textual communities, tends to focus on "androcentric conceptions of fan culture and identity" despite "growing industrial and fan-cultural efforts to marginalize female fans over roughly the past decade (2006–2017)" (Scott 4). The valorization of the fanboy over the fangirl, for Suzanne Scott, is encouraged by a media industry that "has cultivated a structured secondariness for female fans and their preferred modes of engagement, which in turn is used to rationalize fangirls' dismissal and harassment by a small, if voracious, segment of fans" (5). Gender and reception are therefore intertwined and tying concepts of attention and engagement should be sensitive to a variety of listening practices.

Where Fernald evokes mother and child to describe the intimacy of sound in her interview on *Radiolab*, the predecessors Jenkins writes about in "*Star Trek* Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching," use a similar lens to pathologize fans:

> the fan is trapped within a repetition compulsion similar to that which an infant experiences through the *fort/da* game. A return to such 'banal' texts could not possibly be warranted by their intellectual content but can only be motivated by a return to 'the lost breast' by the need for reassurance provided by the passive reexperience of familiar pleasures. (86)

Intimacy, especially when it concerns women, is here—as it is for Horton and Wohl—a degraded mental illness, a malformation, a social distortion. When Jenkins argues against this pathologization in his early work, he argues that these fan experiences are valid because they are not a return, but are productive. There is also nothing wrong with returning, as there is nothing wrong with comfort or the femininity of "the lost breast" or the "passive reexperience of familiar pleasures" (86). The language here shows how media reception and intimacy—mother nursing baby—are interconnected and how that connection precedes podcasting, even if it is, for some of these scholars, a problem.

Secondary listening, or listening while doing something else, should not be used by scholars as a value judgment on the quality of the listener or the podcast. Lacey's historical research shows how embedded such assessments of quality are in sexism while Olin has proven their relationship to specific Victorian aesthetics. Distracted listening can be a powerful way of mediating community and making its presence felt.

The types of images suited to Olin's "therapeutic connection" are generic ones with "less to look at" (loc. 2008). Tourist pictures, for example, are suited to basking in part because they do not "aim at being unique, but rather generic-because only a generic, that is, recognizable, photograph can help the tourist feel authentically a part of the event" (loc. 2008). This feeling of authenticity is not inherent in the images, however. It comes from feeling the presence of the images by viewing them distractedly. These images work, says Olin, "not because they are authentic, but because they are generic, and created an environment for basking" (loc. 2020–2026). These generic elements then encourage a kind of engagement not tied to detailed attention.

The use of repetition in many podcasts, including *Within the Wires*, does not make them less powerful so much as it rewards distracted listening and increases the podcast's presence. For *Within the Wires*, this increased presence is that of its fictional storyworld, and this presence is not the singular effect of aural immersion, but works within a variety of media. Marie-Laure Ryan speaks of presence in literature, which "has time and again demonstrated its ability to promote a haunting sense of the presence of a spatial setting and a clear vision of its topography. […] These mental geographies

become home to the reader, and they may for some of us steal the show from the narrative action," which she relates to a text's "emotional immersion" (121). Listening distractedly, repetition, and the recognition it creates are then linked to a stronger sense of presence of *Within the Wires*' storyworld. The emotional immersion of this presence is, along the lines of Grusin and Williams, a physical, bodily one.

In using emotionally charged repetition to build a secondary world, *Within the Wires* manages to create memories and return to those memories within the first episode of its first season. "Our desire to return to an imaginary homeland may satisfy our desires to hear a familiar story retold," Jenkins' observes that, for *The Wizard of Oz*, "to return to a familiar place, and to reengage the memories we associate with it." (Jenkins "All Over the Map" 237). Engagement here is not limited to close, detailed attention. Engagement can also mean affective connection and spending time in *Within the Wires*' world. The same repetition that builds the podcast's community builds its secondary world and makes that world comfortable and familiar. It also invites practices of distracted listening, practices that are historically linked to female modes of reception and that build the affective, emotional connections with the podcast that increase the presence of the storyworld. Engagement here is not the product of detailed, undivided attention, but an affective connection within an aural presence. Attention here is not taking something apart and analyzing it, it is the calming "touch" of infant and mother (Bottomley 174) playing a "*fort/da*" game (Jenkins "*Star Trek* Rerun" 86), being together at a distance, possibly while doing other things.

Monetizing Intimate Repetition

Within the Wires monetizes its free-to-listen podcast in part by selling paratexts. These paratexts include extra content behind a paywall, posters, live performances, and, to some extent, T-shirts. Within the show's aesthetics of repetition, these products offer listeners more time to spend with and enjoy the storyworld without dealing with the pitfalls of content that focuses on a story with a single forward-moving plot. It is an example of how the storyworld "progresses more in the sense that it spreads than it unfolds" within *Within the Wires'* seriality (Kelleter "From Recursive Progression" 101). Instead of focusing on unfolding, repetition-based paratexts give fans the chance to experience recognition that is not absolutely necessary, but is nevertheless enjoyable and invites listeners to integrate the show into different parts of their lives.

On the podcast's online store, a poster called "Child and the Damselfly Art Print," for example, depicts a scene in the podcast's first season as if it were a print from a character in the second season's museum exhibit (Hayworth 2020). The poster is a repetition of key themes in the text that allows listeners to experience recognition within their physical environment and

ties the two seasons together. On one hand, the poster can be seen as encouraging forensic fandom. It reveals that the oft-repeated fly is a "damselfly," a gender clue that could inspire interpretations on the human character the fly represents. It also canonizes the race of the girl, presumably Oleta, by borrowing on fan representations from the character.[7] The audience does not need this knowledge to experience the text, though, and the show's poetic aesthetics are not entirely driven by a solvable mystery with a concluding payoff.

This type of storytelling does not easily fit Mittell's categorizations of "what is" and "what if" paratexts because it emphasizes character relationships over a strong unfolding plot (314). According to Mittel, "'What Is' transmedia seeks to extend the fiction canonically … explaining the universe with coordinated precision and hopefully expanding viewers' understanding and appreciation of the storyworld. This narrative model encourages forensic fandom with the promise of eventual revelations once all the pieces are put together" (314). *Within the Wires* paratexts do extend the storyworld, but they do not provide revelations to figure out a mystery about how the world works. Mittell's "What Is" texts also decentralize a show's characters. "The majority of *Lost's* transmedia extensions," Mittell explains, "prioritize storyworld expansion and exploration instead of building on the program's emotional arcs and character relationships" (306). The "Child and Damselfly" poster does both of these things: it expands the storyworld and builds on the emotional repetition of the child and the damselfly, which is itself an important character relationship. It also adds a relationship between the subjects of the painting and the painter Claudia Atieno, who is a character from the podcast's second season. By centering itself so fully on the characters, the poster does not entirely fit into a "What Is" paratext.

The poster also does not fall easily into Mittell's "What If?" paratext, which "poses hypothetical possibilities rather than canonical certainties, inviting viewers to imagine alternative stories and approaches to storytelling that are distinctly not to be treated as potential canon" (315). There is nothing explicitly hypothetical about the poster at all. At the same time, though, its similarities to "What If?" paratexts lie in its character exploration. In so doing, it falls under the umbrella of centripetal transmedia, which, according to Mittell, create "extensions that coordinate character identities and constant tone with the series points to a strength […] by downplaying plot, the extensions work by allowing viewers to spend time with the characters without encouraging the forensic attention to story as with most canonic extensions" (312). By providing more time with characters without specifically feeding into forensic fandom, the poster is similar to "What If?" paratexts, but is not hypothetical (Mittel 312).

The problem with using either of these forms is that they both rely on a strongly forward-moving plot where *Within the Wires* relies on character-centered repetition. The pleasure from *Within the Wires*' paratexts stems from the affective experience of recognition they provide more

than their insight into narrative development. The prick of recognition the poster provokes is yet another repetition of a poignant moment in the text. The podcast's nonlinear storytelling and focus on character relationships over plot makes it easy to incorporate such paratexts into its storytelling. This seamless incorporation is important to *Within the Wires* in part because it earns money directly from its paratexts, unlike the television that Mittell studies. Speaking to the importance of these paratexts within Night Vale Presents storytelling, creator Jeffery Cranor reportedly attributes the "success [of *Welcome to Night Vale*] to fan enthusiasm on the social networking website Tumblr" (Weinstock 3). The centrality of paratexts to podcast popularity and financial feasibility encourages modes of storytelling open to paratextual expansion.

Instead of the narrative-driven extensions Mittell studies, merchandise like this poster encourages listener-fans to extend the storyworld into their lived environments. In this sense, they work to "recapture an emotional moment" in the show as Lancaster's *Babylon 5* fans do when participating in show-themed role-play (*Interacting with Babylon 5*). The podcast's distracted, inattentive presence here takes a physical form: the podcast becomes physically present in an imagined space that merges with the listener's physical environment. In *Within the Wires*, the emotional moment is not just recaptured, but built upon, adding layers of past experience to the recognition elicited by the consistent repetition within the podcast.[8]

Live performances offer another site for repetition and recognition. During a show at the 2018 London Podcast Festival, writer Jeffery Cranor introduced the podcast thusly: "Just like, hands in the dark, who has never listened to *Within the Wires* before? Whoah, hey all. That's amazing. [With surprise, nervous laughter] Well, welcome to it. [Nervous Laughter]" (Cranor, Epworth, and Matthewson). Even though only a handful of hands went up, Cranor's uneasy response demonstrates two things: the performance was meant as a repetition of elements of the show for an audience who had heard them before and, secondly, it served as a site of recognition where fans could recognize others in their intimate fan community and feel recognized as fans themselves.

During the performance, listeners followed the show's relaxation tape inspired breathing exercises alongside each other and responded to prompts in unison.

MATTHEWSON: Say aloud the following: my shoulders are stone
AUDIENCE: [hesitant at first] My shoulders are stone
MATTHEWSON: My shoulders are sod
AUDIENCE: [not hesitant] My shoulders are sod
MATTHEWSON: Hold your shoulders up beside your ears, tense and angry [almost the entire audience does this] Lower your shoulders [almost the entire audience does this] Let them slip back down like beads of water on the side of a chilled glass. Let your right shoulder fall away.

> Say aloud: My right shoulder slides down my ribs to my waist. It is free now, but separate from my body it is meaningless [laughter begins] it is just a shoulder out of context lying upon the ground, my shoulder is useless and alone. Say all of that aloud [light laughter, music stops for a moment of silence, group laughter, some people start trying to say it but not in chorus, light laughter] Good. [Almost breaks character, a more joyful tone, and group laughter] Now say aloud: my left shoulder is in its place, it does not miss my right shoulder because it did not know my right shoulder had ever existed and now it is separate and alone lying upon the ground and it is not missed in the way a brother or sister is not missed because after age ten there are no brothers or sisters and before age 10 nothing can be remembered. Say all of that aloud. [Light giggle] Great [no pause at all, laughter]. (Cranor, Epworth, and Matthewson)

Not only is this part of the performance a repetition from the show's first episode, which most of the audience had already heard, it is a repetition that recasts their reactions as part of an intimate listening community. The choral response to relaxation tape prompts sonically binds the voices of audience members together, performing an intimate closeness among fans. Hancock speaks to similar strategies in *Welcome to Night Vale* live shows, during which the presenters "maneuver fans toward personal interaction through call and response sets" in order to "embody community" (Hancock 44–45). In the case of *Within the Wires*, that embodiment is the literal in-sync movement of the audience members' physical bodies as they breathe together, "hold" their shoulders up, and "slide" their shoulders down (Cranor, Epworth, and Matthewson). The podcast then toys with the intimate closeness of these repetitions by asking the audience to repeat texts so long it is impossible for them to respond. In setting up moments of recognition, then taking them away, *Within the Wires* is playing with the power of repetition to form bonds between people in its live audience just as it does in its podcast.

Importantly, both of these examples are monetizing paratexts. It is possible to listen to the podcast and understand it without these texts; these texts are not valuable because they provide additional, necessary information. Listeners do spend money on them, though, so they are adding value. The valuable experience these paratexts provide is one of unequivocal physical presence and recognition among members of an intimate fan-based community. The relationship between money, creative soundwork, and community building here is not contradictory. Writing on authenticity and branding in American culture, Sarah Banet-Weiser could be talking about podcasts when she writes that "brands are meant to invoke the experience associated with a company or product […] When that story is successful, it surpasses simple identification with just a tangible product; it becomes a story that is familiar, intimate, personal, a story with a unique history" (4). Like the

advertising Banet-Weiser studies, *Within the Wires* creates a unique and intimate history. "In the contemporary US," she writes, "building a brand is about building an affective, authentic *relationship* with a consumer, one based—just like a relationship between two people—on the accumulation of memories, emotions, personal narratives, and expectations" (Banet-Weiser 8). *Within the Wires'* podcast's narrative focuses on building that relationship by creating memories, embedding them with emotions, and touching their listeners. Posters and live shows are two examples of these, but T-shirts and social media also give listeners the opportunity to be recognized by others. Even if they are not recognized, the feeling that they could be is a key part of participation in the podcast's community.

Love and Patronage

One of the ways *Within the Wires*, and many other podcasts, monetize is through some kind of listener donation. Podcast co-creator Janina Matthewson's ko-fi webpage is an example of one of these kinds of donation and its link to intimacy is clear: the listener can buy Matthewson a coffee as she would a friend ("Buy Janina Matthewson a Coffee"). The most well-known model for new media patronage is, however, the patreon.com website. On Patreon, content creators can make a page, offer memberships, and/or accept one-time payments. They can also offer bonus content to those who give at various levels. The idea is that the majority of the creator's content is free, but those who choose can give money and, possibly, get rewarded for doing so. "When *The Economist* writes that 'Edmund Burke described patronage as 'the tribute that opulence pays to genius.' Today it is the spare change millennials pay to podcasters,' it points to the importance of engendering a feeling of personal responsibility, of stakeholdership, even, individual listeners," Gill writes, these forms of monetization mean that "podcasters cannot afford to make listeners feel part of a crowd in which others can take up the slack: every listener needs to be made to feel involved, engaged, and partly responsible for the podcast's wellbeing" (Gill 164). In discussing patronage, podcasting draws on the language of intimacy to describe the financial relationship between listener and podcaster as a form of close and fair (parasocial) interaction. Podcast advice articles position Patreon as an intimate way to engage an audience. *Within the Wires*, in turn, incorporates the language of intimacy in asking people to contribute to their Patreon while providing extra in-world content as well as content like live question and answer sessions that collapse the distance between podcaster and host.

The Patreon for *Within the Wires* provides further opportunities for recognition and expands on the parasocial relationship between podcast listeners and creators. In addition to articles about making the podcast, there are regular live chats with the creators in which listeners can interact with the hosts, ad-free episodes, a Patreon-exclusive season, and a variety

of other content. This additional content builds on *Within the Wires*' intimacy through its repetition, interaction, liveness (which will be discussed in further depth in Chapters 2 and 3), and the operational aesthetic.[9] In their video asking listeners to become patrons, Cranor uses the language of intimacy, this time that of love and reciprocity. After listing the extra content available to subscribed members, Cranor refers to the relationship between the listeners and podcasters and repeatedly uses the word "love" (Within the Wires). "Mary, Janina, and I love making the show and we love making it for you and we loved all of the actors that contributed […] but all of this takes, of course, time and money so we need your support to help this continue, so just give it a thought" and ends with a recognizable repetition from the podcast: "don't begin to breathe" (Within the Wires). The relationship between podcast, creators, and listeners is one of love. Giving through Patreon is a way of speaking to the podcaster and telling them that you support that love.

This technique of encouraging donation is standard within podcasting and the discourse surrounding the medium explicity links it to intimacy. In her advice articles, Sarah Mikutel encourages fellow podcasters to monetize with Patreon. "You may have heard podcasters tell listeners that they can financially support their show by donating via a platform called Patreon," she says,

> Making money this way works best after you've already been providing great content to your audience for a few months. You've built up that know, like, and trust factor with them. […] When it comes to listener support like this, some people create bonus content for patrons or offer access to themselves via Q&As… Other podcasters just express their gratitude for financial contributions. ("The 5 Best Ways")

The interaction here is clear: after building trust with an audience, that audience can "support" the show by "donating" (Mikutel "The 5 Best Ways").

Once the podcaster has spent time with the audience and built a trust relationship, they can ask for money and in return for their "support," listeners can become patrons and receive "access" to podcasters "via Q&As" (Mikutel "The 5 Best Ways"). This access extends the conversational tone of many podcasts into its monetization: listeners who give money can literally ask questions and hosts answer them, a lot of the time through live feeds.

In a blog post for aspiring podcasters, Listen Notes encourages its readers to use a patronage model. "If your listeners fall in love with the content you provide, they will be willing to fund your vision in order to help it succeed," they write (Listen Notes). Where *Within the Wires* focuses on how much the show's creators love the podcast, this advice focuses on the audience's love for the show. In both cases, the evocative intimacy of "love" describes the interactions that make up podcasting patronage.

"Intimacy Curdles into Invasiveness": Disgust and the Affect of Bad Intimacy

Within the Wires, often classified in popular reviews as "horror" and "creepy" (Romano, Grant), finds horror in its intimacy. In a Q&A session during the London Podcast Festival, Jeffery Cranor explains his inspiration for the podcast as the uncomfortable intimacy of certain kinds of audio:

> I ordered a whole bunch of really old relaxation cassettes and autogenic exercise cassettes on eBay, um, and they're really, really upsetting to listen to. Like, I don't know, just think about somebody you kind of, like think about a co-worker you kind of know and just see if you can sit and stare them directly in the eyes quietly for like thirty straight seconds, like it's that level of discomfort, like, the type of like intimacy these tapes want to have with you. (Cranor, Epworth, and Matthewson "Night Vale Presents: Within the Wires")

Instead of intimacy and discomfort being opposites, Cranor explores here the discomfort of an intimacy that lacks deep personal connection.

Within the podcast, this discomfort occurs, in part, when the narrator demands that the listener recognize something she is incapable of recognizing. In continuing the previous excerpt from "Season 1, Cassette #4: Sadness, Lungs," the comforting intimacy of sharing breaths transitions into something more terrifying:

> You are breathing together. She is breathing out into you, and into herself that which you are breathing out. You are telling her you will never forget her. You are not imagining how you could ever forget her. She is not imagining how you could ever forget her! Did you forget her? What have you done with your life? (Cranor and Matthewson "Season 1, Cassette #4")

In this selection, it sounds like the narrator is the girl and she is upset "you" do not recognize her. The breakdown of the system of recognition occurs between the past and present. The listener cannot recognize the girl because she cannot experience her past memories of the girl. The podcast gives the listener what should be the *present* in a moment of recognition, but does not supply enough of a *past* to create the recognition. The horror comes from the failure of this moment. Later in the episode, this breakdown of recognition transforms the intimacy of sharing breaths into the creepiness of sharing breaths with someone who you do not know, but who knows you, who you cannot see, but who sees you. Without recognition, intimacy is scary.

These moments come across as particularly unexpected because *Within the Wires* often gives its audience past moments for recognition. Even though the contours of horror are continually changing, Kendall R. Phillips notes

in *Projected Fears* that this kind of "violation of an audience's expectations contributes to their experience of terror" (5). When speaking of influential horror films, Phillips writes that "these films connected to existing cultural drifts and directions in such peculiarly poignant ways as to be recognized as somehow 'true'" (5). As *Within the Wires* continues, the truth in its script slowly reveals itself. In the final episode of the first season, Hester tells Oleta she has escaped the facility she had been confined to and has fled to a seaside cottage. The episode, like the rest of the show, reflects on its mediality: the relaxation tape format highlights the centrality of the podcast's aurality while Hester explains how she is covering up Oleta, the listener's, escape by destroying all recorded traces of the event:

> Once I have cleaned all the footage of all the rooms and corridors I have been in, once I have replaced certain key tapes with generic footage, old footage that could come from any day, any normal day when nothing really happened, and once I have destroyed every cassette I have created, and once I have made sure that any details about me the Institute has on file are…inaccurate, then I will be able to leave. (Cranor and Matthewson "Season 1, Cassette #10")

These recordings as well as the narrator's ability to manipulate them and, by extension, manipulate what appears to be the truth of the situation, serve as a reminder of the fallibility of media and puts into question the narrator's trustworthiness. The listener's entire experience of the text and its associated storyworld to this point had been told through this unreliable narrator. Even Oleta's understanding of the situation is formed through the narrator's attempts to reconstruct her memory. Oleta needs to decide whether to stay in the cottage and trust the narrator, Hester, or to leave into an unknown world. Anticipating this need, Hester says:

> I like to envision how you spend your days, because it stops me from picturing what I am afraid of – that you are not there at all. That you have taken your freedom and used it to go elsewhere, somewhere other than this cottage by a sea, so far away from where you lived, from where you have ever been. That you have decided you cannot trust me, and do not want to know me properly again. That you have decided to find your own way, where I cannot follow.
>
> I envision myself understanding why you would do this. (Cranor and Matthewson "Season 1, Cassette #10")

The podcast thus confronts the listener with the unreliability of its own intimacy by leaving its ending ambiguous. This ambiguity in and of itself queers time in that it puts the "promise of reproductive futurism" into question (Geller and Banker 38), or, in Kelleter's analysis of seriality and capitalism,

"Panic happens in such self-sustaining systems when a promise of future fails" (Kelleter "Trust and Sprawl" 50). Not only does *Within the Wires* queer time by using repetition to create a nonlinear experience of the past, the podcast queers the possibility of the future by destabilizing the inevitability of the future.

The season's direct address further leads to a slippage between the listener and the character of the listener. Both must decide here whether or not to trust the narrator. It is unclear if their relationship was really close or if the narrator manipulated Oleta's memories the same way she manipulated the past when covering up the escape. "We feel manipulated by these texts," Williams says of body genres, "an impression that the very colloquialisms of 'tear jerker' and 'fear jerker' express—and to which we could add pornography's even cruder sense as texts to which some people might be inclined to 'jerk off'" (5). In framing its horror around the failure of recognition, *Within the Wires* creates discomfort from the same intimacy it works to create. The uncomfortable lack of trust does not make the podcast less intimate; it is just a reminder that intimacy can be forced and "upsetting" (Cranor, Epworth, and Matthewson "Night Vale Presents: Within the Wires").

There is a line to be drawn between this kind of uncomfortable intimacy and disgust. "When my seven-year-old son and I go to the movies," Williams says, "we often select from among categories of films that promise to be sensational, to give our bodies an actual physical jolt. He calls these movies 'gross'" (2). In this story, what is, for Williams, an intimate moment is, for her son, disgusting. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed speaks of the connection between intimacy and disgust. "The object becomes disgusting in a way that allows the subject to recoil," she explains, "only after an intimate contact that is felt on the surface of the skin" (88). Intimacy, for Ahmed, is touch and disgust is recoiling from that touch.

Within the Wires similarly incorporates the physicality of sound to elicit a bodily affective response. Alongside intimate language and "low, unctuous" voice (Horton and Wohl), the podcast's sound design works at times to penetrate the listener's head. In "Cassette 9: Loss, Hands," for example, Oleta undergoes medical tests and the podcast's music becomes overpowering and, for listeners using headphones (which the podcast's first episode tells them to do), inserts itself within the head. These sonic insertions mirror the narrative's body horror: Oleta is injected with sedatives and is the subject of various surgeries, including when a tracking device is implanted within her abdomen. Weiner hones in on the negative side of intimacy, "In a podcast, the moment we lose faith in our guide, it becomes increasingly excruciating to keep listening—intimacy curdles into invasiveness." The intimacy podcasting describes through its physical closeness is here an unwanted and untrusted physical invasiveness, but it is still intimacy.

As invasive as *Within the Wires'* intrusions seem, they do not turn into disgust. When they invade the listener's head, the intrusions are not disgusting because they are so embedded within the body that there is no

option of recoil. Instead, they present a different kind of intimacy: a kind of unfamiliar, unwanted closeness that more commonly resembles sexual assault than the oozy blood of Williams' horror movies. Another podcast written for a primarily female audience, *The Heart*, works similarly within nonfiction storytelling. In the season "No," a woman describes her assault. As she recounts the incident, a low, piercing sound slowly and violently bores into the listener's head (Prest et al.). This kind of sound design, used both in *The Heart* and *Within the Wires*, uses the physicality of reception to communicate a heavy dose of emotion. Like many things in *Within the Wires*, the podcast's reflection on the connection between listening, emotion, and physicality reflect on the role of mediation. Podcasts can enter the body, they can create memories, but they are not always trustworthy.

Conclusion

Philips observes that "an influential horror film does not necessarily create a certain pattern of anxiety or fear within a culture. Instead, elements within the film resonate—connect in some sympathetic manner—to trends within broader culture" (6). In centering its storytelling on forms of mediated intimacy, *Within the Wires* creates, critiques, and plays with broader cultural concern over the role of media in connecting members of society. At the same time, it uses its own storytelling techniques to build parasocial and fan-based intimate communities around its podcast. These techniques include its use of repetition to create moments of recognition that occur within each episode of the podcast and extend through the show's serialization and paratexts. This recognition does not rely on the narrative unfolding of specific plotlines, but on the repetition of key words, phrases, and sounds. The poignancy of these repetitions is key to the podcast's aesthetics and by centering them within the text, *Within the Wires* creates an intimate fan community based on listening and recognition. One of the ways in which the podcast makes money, selling paratexts, earns revenue by creating different contexts for repetition that listeners can incorporate into different aspects of their lives. Live events, T-shirts, and other merchandise invite listeners to feel recognizable as a member of the show's listening community. These forms of monetization work within the podcast's aesthetics: the show presents them as intimate, close, and recognizable.

Within the Wires' use of voice and parasociability further codes this recognition in terms intimacy. At the same time, the podcast uses horror to highlight the strength of the bonds it has formed by questioning how much their mediation makes them untrustworthy or potentially manipulative. In doing so, *Within the Wires* speaks to both the power of podcasting to build communities and to larger cultural anxiety about what it means to be intimate and the extent to which media in general, and podcasting specifically, create intimacy.

The repetitions that are here embedded within an ethereal story take other forms in other podcasts. In comedy, for example, the callback can forge similar relationships. "Ironically, the publicness of social media also provides privacy in new ways," boyd writes, "in-jokes are only meaningful to those who are in the know, whether they are shared in a group or online" (boyd 76). As intimacy negotiates the boundaries of private and public, it also forms new listening communities.

These communities participate in both the negotiation of intimacy and use intimacy to interpret and define their experience with podcasting. Intimacy as physical closeness runs through their descriptions as well as podcasting content and *Within the Wires* is no exception. Touch is a potent framework for interaction and community as much as it can literally describe the movement involved in listening and literal closeness of podcast technologies. All the while, though, these metaphors and descriptions all define how podcasting mediates. In defining podcasting as intimate because it is there, close to the listener, this discourse makes podcasting there, intimate, close.

Notes

1 Monetization here is the process by which a podcast makes money.
2 Podcasts express intimacy in a lot of different ways. Sarah Murray's "Coming-of-Age in a Coming-of-Age: The Collective Individualism of Podcasting's Intimate Soundwork," Ania Mauruschat's "Poetics of Intimacy: Podcasting's Power to Affect," Lukasz Swiatek's "The Podcast as an Intimate Bridging Medium" and Wanning Sun and Wei Lei's "In Search of Intimacy in China: The Emergence of Advice Media for the Privatized Self" examine different kinds of podcast intimacy using different kinds of podcasts.
3 I am using Olin and Bull here as primary sources: they are examples of how scholarship participates in cultural negotiations of mediality through intimacy.
4 Anne Karpf's "The sound of home? Some thoughts on how the radio voice anchors, contains and sometimes pierces" (2013) is a scholarly example of work that links the mediated voice, in this case radio, to both haptics and maternity. When using psychoanalytic theory to interpret the radio voice's maternal relationship to the listener, Karpf states that sound "surrounds and envelops us not only in the womb: in some real sense you can feel held in the warm embrace of someone's voice" in radio (63). Sound here relates to the physical touch of a mother carrying an infant and the three dimensional spatiality that touch implies.
5 Richard Berry's extensive work, *Podcasting: New Aural Cultures*, and *Podcasting: The Audio Media Revolution* also speak about the physical intimacy of earbud listening.
6 The studious engagement with media can also be compared to Barthes' *studium*, which he explains as related to the intentional "functions" of photography "to inform, to represent, to surprise, to cause, to signify, to provoke desire" (*Camera Lucida* 28).
7 Weinstock comments on a similar trend in *Welcome to Night Vale*, in which Cranor gave up voicing the character of Carlos and hired Dylan Morran, a man with a racial and sexual identity in line with the character, in order to make the character more identifiable to children who shared those identities (19).

8 Interestingly, these paratexts are aimed at niche audiences and often use non-auditory senses, like visuality, to connect with the listener. These aspects distinguish the podcasts I study from Andrew Crisell's analysis of British radio, which argues that radio's solely auditory composition and its status as a mass medium limit its potential for audience feedback and the effectiveness of linguistic codes (*Understanding Radio* 4–5).

9 The "operational aesthetic," coined by Jason Mittell in "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television," is put to particularly persuasive work in Ilka Brasch's *Film Serials and the American Cinema 1910–1940*. Brasch uses the phrase to refer to the enjoyment derived from understanding or wonderment caused by the technical process of making cultural works (43).

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2 Chatcast Liveness

Temporalities of Parasocial Reciprocity

The blending of intimacy and liveness exists in physical proximity and continues into descriptions of what it means to be together in time. Part of this blending relates to the context of audio content specifically: sound as a form of communication must be understood through time—there is no timeless snapshot of a sound. This temporality has complicated audio's cultural association with life and death. Those who participate in cultural critique and interpretation of media have taken sound's movement and linked it to the forward-moving motion of life. For these people, the live movement of sound (recorded or not) contrasts the stillness of death, a stillness that can be captured in an unmoving photograph. Within these interpretations, sound's movement could even provide a limited promise of life after death. Kittler writes of the Morse alphabet's "tapping specters of spiritistic seances" in 1837, "sending their messages from the realm of the dead" (12). In the 1920s, radio, "like telepathy, interplanetary communication, and talking to the dead […] seemed to be heralding a new relationship between space, sound and human experience" (Loviglio xix). Acousmatic sound—sound heard without seeing the source—could be used to talk to the dead. "Guglielmo Marconi, one of the inventors of radio technology at the turn of the twentieth century," Bottomley writes, "late in his life reportedly came to believe that sound never dies. All sound waves continue to radiate eternally, he theorized, they just became too quiet for human ears to detect—and so he envisioned something akin to a super radio that would allow him to hear every sound ever made" (94). The voice of one no longer alive could move through time with the living, challenging the boundaries between life and death for a society in which those boundaries already felt all too porous. These associations show how these cultures linked sound to life and how that link extends beyond the classification of "live" versus "recorded" broadcasts. Sound's life here relates to its continuous existence, its unending movement through time.

Like Marconi, Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* also links sound to life. "For me the noise of Time is not sad," [sic] he says, speaking of the analogue camera's shuffles and clicks when taking pictures—"the living sound of the wood" (15). For Barthes, this living sound contrasts photography's death. At

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the moment the picture is taken, Barthes "experience[s] a micro-version of death," becoming "Death in person," "an object" (14). According to Philip Auslander, descriptions of medial life are a product of recording technologies. Without recording, after all, there would be no need to differentiate between a live performance and a recorded one (Auslander 7). This form of life, the live broadcast, "carried over from broadcasting to podcasting—the chattiness and direct address a primary source of podcasting's perceived 'intimacy'" (Bottomley 16). That media can be live, or intimate, is the result of these descriptions, these attempts to find meaning that simultaneously create meaning.

Many podcasts, including *The Flop House*, use chat to create a sense of liveness that podcasting describes as intimate. *The Flop House* is a comedy movie review podcast that has existed in one form or another since 2008. It has a very regular release schedule and, for those unfamiliar with podcasts, the sheer amount of time listeners can spend with *The Flop House* is astounding. At the time of writing, it has been running for almost 11 years and includes over 227 episodes. In 2018, the show came out biweekly with episodes ranging from an hour and 19 minutes (McCoy et al. "Ep. #264") to 2 hours and 16 minutes (McCoy et al. "Ep. #263"). The podcast has a couple of standard segments, including an ad break, movie recommendations, and a listener letters section, but mostly consists of the hosts recapping a bad movie and chatting with each other.

The Flop House invites fans to imagine themselves as participants in their conversation by using unscripted friendly banter and giving listeners opportunities to interact with the podcast and its hosts. The letters from listeners segment, in which fans can submit emails to the show and hear their emails read out loud, is an example of this kind of interaction. These letters give the listener an opportunity to recognize themselves and others as fans of the podcast, or feel that they could send a letter in and be recognized if they chose to. *The Flop House*'s paratexts also provide opportunities for recognition among fans. Paratexts like T-shirts, YouTube videos, and live shows provide narrative repetitions based on comedic callback structures that provoke recognition. This recognition works alongside callbacks within the show's text to bind fans to each other and forms the basis of *The Flop House*'s fan-based intimate community.

The Flop House also makes money from ads, most of which take the form of personal recommendations along the lines of Horton and Wohl's parasociability. These ads often work with the show's use of narrative tangents, embedding the ad within the content of the podcast and making it difficult to skip. When Apple Podcasts began allowing dynamic ad insertion in 2018, the show started including pre-recorded ads as well, but host Dan McCoy generally apologizes for reading copy, implying that this format does not fit the show.

In building this community through the temporalities of friendly chat, *The Flop House* contributes to how podcasting uses intimacy to reflect on

its own mediality. This chapter begins by looking at how these discussions draw on well-established forms of intimacy related to the home and the idea that private space can spur particularly close conversations. I then turn to the concepts of friendly parasociability and liveness to consider the temporalities of these conversations, how they work to include the listener, and how *The Flop House*'s reviews qualify them as intimate. The next section, "Seriality, Conversation, and Monetization," describes how these conversational temporalities move from one episode to the next and include financial interactions the podcast codes as conversationally intimate. Even though *The Flop House*'s codification of intimacy is based more on friendly conversation and *Within the Wires'* on touch and eroticism, the two podcasts share similar approaches to monetization and community formation. This chapter's final two sections focus on community formation, the codification of intimacy as a host speaking directly to the listener, and negotiations of intimate reciprocity in podcasting fundraising. The ways in which the forms of intimacy that present themselves in *The Flop House* compare and contrast those in *Within the Wires*, and how they build off of established forms of intimacy, demonstrate the extent to which intimacy is multifaceted and sometimes contradictory. That podcasting's discussions of intimacy overlap with popular understandings of live media further complicates the understanding of intimacy as an innate part of podcasting: in describing qualities usually associated with live media as intimate, podcasting in general—and discussions around *The Flop House* in particular—creates and reworks intimacy in using it to describe the quality of podcasting's mediation in terms of close connection.

Making Podcasts at Home and the Intimacy of Domesticity

Negotiations that link intimacy to domesticity are plentiful in Western history (Luhmann, Gill, Welter). As the word intimacy moves through culture, these associations stick to it and, in turn, stick to how intimacy describes podcasting, even (or maybe especially) as the medium further develops the term. As media enters the home, it invites the public into domestic spaces, thereby challenging the public/private binary. The intimacy of media, then, is not a complete appropriation of the private, but a liminal space in which cultures negotiate the very concepts of public and private (Loviglio). In using domesticity to negotiate its own mediality, then, podcasting is creating community within these liminal spaces.

"The reading public was constituted as a dispersed and privatized public in the age of print," Lacey observes, arguing that Anderson's "mass ceremony" of newspaper reading, carried out every day "in silent privacy, the lair of the skill," entailed the "re-sounding of the public sphere through new media technologies further entrenched the privatized modern public, characteristically encountering public life within domestic space" (loc. 2661). The development of sound technologies, including the phonograph, brought

a new area of experience to these publics and further complicated their relationship to the home. Even though reading publics had long operated within domestic space, listening became associated with feminine passivity. "And yet, while it is indeed possible to read the domesticated audience as a mass audience tamed and disciplined," Lacey argues, "the privatization of the listening public had obvious affinities with the privatized reading public which was understood not as passive, but as actively engaged in critical reason and the development of public opinion" (loc. 2701). Domesticity, for Lacey, did not limit listening's participatory power, as sound technologies as early as the phonograph developed communities around domestic listening environments.

Be that as it may, the tension between these public and private sounds led to concern about what content was let into the domestic space. Because early sound technologies in general, and radio specifically, worked without a visual element, listeners could not use visual cues to classify voices according to race, gender, or class. Cultural anxiety formed around these voices for fear that they challenge prevailing social structures. "Radio responded [to these concerns] by obsessively rehearsing these distinctions," Michelle Hilmes explains of 1930s radio in "Radio and the Imagined Community," "endlessly circulating and performing structured representations of ethnicity, race, gender, and other concentrated sites of social and cultural norms—all through language, dialect, and carefully selected aural context" (359). Susan Douglas further speaks of the backlash against African American musicians on the radio in the 1920s in terms of domestic listening: "the fact that radio brought such music into 'respectable' people's homes also intensified traditionalists' reactions against jazz, with their calls to censor or at least tame it," which networks eventually did (84). These reactions present listening at home as a problem because it let a dangerous public into private, domestic space. By curbing radio's subversive potential, these programs made audio safe for the home.

Discussions of intimacy within podcasting tend to side-step this historicity, however. In an interview for BBC News, television, radio, and podcast producer Olly Mann comments that "what distinguishes radio from TV is the intimacy. What distinguishes a podcast from radio is that it's intimacy plus, because you've chosen it and it's literally in your ears" (Goodrich). This statement speaks to podcasting's definition of intimacy as physically close: where radio was close because it was in the home, podcasting is here close because it is physically in the listener's ears. Mann conjures Bull when he points to podcasting's mobility in this increased intimacy: "People tend to listen on headphones in their personal bubble" (Goodrich). The close physicality of the earbuds is here extended to the physical imagery of a bubble that surrounds the listener as she moves through space. Personal space here is not necessarily the family home, but this mobile bubble.

Perhaps in line with this mobility, its discussion of domesticity is more thoroughly linked to the place of recording than the place of reception. In

how-to articles, writers advise hosts on how to change their lived environments to create the best sound. In her blog post "How to record high-quality audio at home," podcaster Rachael Corbett writes:

> I built a (very unattractive) voice-over booth out of a cardboard box, some mattress underlay and just about every towel I could find in my house… [sic] I've since moved to a new place that's much more audio friendly. It has curtains, carpet and softer furnishings so my microphone doesn't need the industrial strength protection it did before. These days I can get away with using three large couch cushions that I arrange around my microphone – two on the sides in a triangle and one on top. This gives me an enclosed space that absorbs the sound so you'd never know I was recording in my bedroom.

In recounting this experience, Corbett not only encourages budding podcasters to record at home, she links good audio to materials from the home, like "mattress underlay," "towels," "soft furnishings," and "couch cushions." These references not only link podcasting to private space, they also make it seem more accessible to those with no training in audio production. At the same time, this blending of environments poses a problem, as the home needs to be modified for recording.

As listeners move through space surrounding by their audio "bubbles" (Bull *Sound Moves*), they bring the domesticity of the recording environment with them. Sometimes that environment is linked with the actual, physical recording space of the podcaster's home, and sometimes it is an effect of the storytelling itself. Hancock quotes the blogger thequintessentialqueer as referring to the entire secondary world of Night Vale as home: "I am so grateful to Night Vale for being my strange, frightening, absurd home," she says (37). Later in the article, Hancock connects this home to the podcast's mobility. "When paired with *WTNV*'s domestic community radio guise," she says, "new audio media potentializes a mobile domestic, one in which the listeners are not excluded but enveloped" (39). These descriptions present the warmth of podcast intimacy as linked to a mobile domesticity that physically surrounds the listener.

While much of the advice on how to get "good sound" is written by trained sound designers who tend to favor professional qualities, many podcasts position their intimacy as a function of their home recording and use their "bad" audio as a sign of their intimate domesticity. In an interview for Dann and Spinelli's podcast *For Your Ears Only*, *My Dad Wrote a Porno* host Jamie Morton explains that recording in kitchens adds to the show's intimacy.

> We record it the same way that we did it at the beginning actually, we all have a microphone each, it's very lo-fi, it's in one of our kitchens each week, we like to cook for each other and then have a couple of glasses

> of wine and start recording, and we just have a microphone each and we record it through GarageBand on our computers. We just really enjoy it being a bit of a kitchen table project, really, and that it is genuinely three friends chatting around the kitchen table about something that is quite intimate. (qtd. in Spinelli and Dann *Podcasting*)

As Anne Korfmacher and I argue in "Die Intimität und Zeitlichkeit der Podcast-Kommentarform am Beispiel von *My Dad Wrote a Porno*," by recording in the kitchen with readily available equipment, *My Dad Wrote a Porno* incorporates an approachable, do-it-yourself aesthetic into its sound design. This aesthetic relates to negotiations of both authenticity and domesticity: the sounds of the kitchen are quite different from those of a sound studio, but recording in a kitchen allows the hosts to present the show as authentically intimate. Morton defines this intimacy through domestic space, but as linked to his friends and not his family.

While co-host Alice says leaving the home for the studio would "upgrade" the podcast by improving "sound quality," she says that doing so would take away from the show's relaxed, chatty atmosphere, especially with guests:

> I'm not sure what the upgrade would really be other than, I suppose the fact, sound quality, we could do it in a studio but then we would lose some of the atmosphere we get because we're relaxed and we're at home, especially with the footnotes guests, I think that they see it as something completely different than being sort of ferried into another studio. It doesn't—It doesn't feel like, like another work booking. (Spinelli and Dann "Authenticity")

Korfmacher and I argue that this discussion references the aesthetics of professional sound design "by referencing a clear, studio sound" while undermining that aesthetic "by claiming it inhibits hosts and guests from interacting in the relaxed way they would in someone's home. Because people on the podcast are supposed to act like they are comfortable at home, and not professionals, the studio space is not suited to the podcast" (Euritt and Korfmacher). The kitchen, as a domestic space and also a space of labor, provides the environment necessary for the lively, friendly exchange the podcasters value. For them, sounding the domestic is not only about the literal sounds caused by the space, but also by the quality of conversation they spur.[1] These reflections connect their recording conditions to prosumer authenticity and intimacy.

References to the kitchen as a conversational space among friends works within an aural tradition that links both mediated and unmediated sound to this particular domestic space and its work/leisure liminality. In analyzing feedback from a 1946 radio program, Scannell quotes a listener saying that "it seems that she's [the radio host is] sitting in your kitchen and talking to you. The way it would be with a friend … She's spontaneous; her speech isn't

forced. It's natural, makes me feel I'm talking to my neighbor over the wash-line" (Merton qtd. in Scannell 120). These comments not only link lively conversation to domestic space, they connect it to work done in the home and the friendships formed while working: the kitchen and the wash line.

The idea that the kitchen can spur conversation is also a well-established idea in radio. Loviglio talks about Eleonor Roosevelt's radio program being sponsored by the Coffee Bureau, where she discussed politics "'over our coffee cups,' evoking the metaphoric space of the home, even, more precisely, the kitchen, where women gab rather than debate" (Loviglio 29). These spaces played with the balance between public and private work before prosumer culture was at issue.

Podcasts like Mark Maron's *WTF* work with a similar domestic work/leisure divide, but tied to masculine spaces, when they talk about recording podcasts in the garage. Public Radio Exchange's (PRX's) Podcast Garage, a professional nonprofit working with community radio, similarly draws on this liminal domestic space in its name.

Podcasting's discourse of domesticity extends to its reception practices, with researchers and critics both commenting extensively on how listeners consume podcasts at home. Edison Research's yearly report, *The Infinite Dial* tracks listening at home versus other spaces, with statistics for 2019 reporting that 90% of monthly listeners over 12 listen at home (Edison Research and Triton Digital). Many critics use these statistics to argue that listeners who listen at home must be paying undivided attention to a podcast, while others point to domestic listening as a sign that listeners consume podcasts while doing housework.

Reviewers posit that a podcast can be good because it demands close attention, but it can also be good because one does not have to listen intently and can put it on while going about their daily life. Discourses of domestic intimacy relate to both of these constructs: those who listen at home do so because they want to invite public speech into their private space, content creators record at home because it makes their show more personal. If mobile podcast listening is a way of colonizing public space and making it private (Bull *Sound Moves*), podcasts recorded in the host's home are a way of merging the host's private space with the listener's private aural bubble. Discussions of podcasting intimacy therefore use constructs of domesticity to position the medium as private in its reception and production practices. In doing so, they also define domesticity, and intimate domesticity, as a physical space that involves specific sounds and manners of communication, but that is not necessarily reliant on the family. The construct of intimacy relies on private space and the home, but that space becomes a cite for engaging in public speech and larger communities. In contributing to this contrast, podcasting further negotiates intimacy as a quality that both connects and constitutes the public and the private. When sources within podcasting's network link intimacy to the home, they are actively linking mediated closeness to domestic space.

Parasocial Liveness

The Flop House is a movie review podcast in which hosts Elliot Kalan, Dan McCoy, and Stuart Wellington recap and review bad movies. This premise relies heavily on the friendly interactions between the hosts and has a highly episodic nature: each episode reviews a different movie. This episodic premise, though, does not mean that the podcast lacks serial complexity. The show's complexity comes from the interplay between the movie being reviewed each week and the unfolding of personal events in the hosts' lives, similar to Mittell's analysis of the *X-File*'s ongoing mystery and monster of the week ("Narrative Complexity"). These long, unfolding relationships with the podcast's personae anchor the show and provide ongoing fan engagement from episode to episode akin to Horton and Wohl's description of parasocial interaction. Importantly, the show's strict structure and reliable premise create comfortable boundaries for the dynamics of repetition and variation within *The Flop House*'s seriality. The podcast creates intimacy—or closeness in time—through the continuous, serialized liveness of its interactions. That this dynamic is *intimate* is a product of podcasting's self-descriptions. In attributing the podcast's success to the intimacy of its banter, reviews of *The Flop House* contribute to the construction of intimacy as a framework for understanding the temporalities of podcasting's mediation—its liveness and its seriality.

Horton and Wohl's 1956 article "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance" comments on the intimacy of conversation in radio and television. The "simulacrum of conversational give and take" between presenters and listeners, for these sociologists, provides "an illusion of intimacy" (Horton and Wohl). Drawing on the mediated relationship between a talk show host and his audience, Horton and Wohl observe conversational qualities that are also at use in many podcasts. The "'personality program,'" they explain, "in contrast to the drama—is especially designed to provide occasion for good-natured joking and teasing, praising and admiring, gossiping and telling anecdotes, in which the values of friendship and intimacy are stressed" (Horton and Wohl). The light-hearted simulation of a conversation, for Horton and Wohl, can exist when hosts chat with others or when they directly address the audience, "conversing personally and privately." In each case, by talking to an in-studio audience stand-in or one-on-one, the host's chat includes the listener.

A conversation is intimate because it is close in time: in order to be in a conversation, people need to interact to what each other say and correspond through time together. When Reddit user ThatRedheadDude could not record with his co-host anymore, he asked how to make his podcast. It is perhaps no surprise that the top-rated piece of advice given to him was:

> Talk to your audience. Engage with them. If you know what you're talking about, you'll have plenty to say. Take notes beforehand for an

> outline of topics to go over. But mostly just talk like you would if you were having a conversation with your listeners. That's what they want to hear anyway.

Thinking and making content for listeners, and listeners reacting to that content, creates a feedback loop. The forward-moving temporalities of this conversational intimacy can be seen as a type of interactive liveness. In *Television and the Meaning of 'Live': An Enquiry into the Human Situation*, Scannell argues that recorded media can be experienced as live. "'Recorded live' is not an oxymoron," he states, "Audio-visual recording redeems the living moment from death. Whenever I hit the replay button, the living moment comes to life once more" (Scannell 96). The moment of recording is living because it replays an interaction as it unfolds. Scannell links these interactions to Socrates' dialogue, a link that works particularly well when understanding the conversational temporalities of chatcasts.

> Dialogue was Socrates' preferred method for the pursuit of truth which can only emerge, as he argues here, in questioning, interactive talk between people who are present to one another. Only in this kind of discourse can distortions and misunderstandings be untangled in the back and forth of question and answer, a progressive clarification of meaning and understanding. It is precisely this that is redeemed by technologies of *live recording* for both radio and television. Audio (for radio) and audio-visual recording (for television) capture and preserve live speech-act-events as they unfold in the immediate now of their coming to being. (95–96)

Socrates' dialogic emergence of the truth is a conversational exchange that Scannell classifies as live. The affective liveness these exchanges provide comes from the dynamics of their conversation and can be preserved when they are recorded and played later.

The Flop House's use of chatty banter mirrors both the conversational quality Scannell refers to and Horton and Wohl's parasociability. The hosts use their summary of the movie at hand as a loose structure to support a variety of casual, conversational riffs. In the following example, Elliot talks with Stuart about the end of a movie while Dan listens:

ELLIOTT: And then what happens to Kiefer?
STUART: He gets smashed by a rock or something, I think…
ELLIOTT: And then?
STUART: Then he, like, wakes up.
ELLIOTT: The twist ending, the twist ending…
STUART: No, he wakes up and he's walking around.
ELLIOTT: He's walking around and?
STUART: Uh…

DAN: Stuart, did you notice anything strange about the words after he woke up?
STUART: Well, I mean, uh, it looked like everything was backwards but I thought I'd just been drinking a lot.
ELLIOTT: No, everything was backwards cause now he's trapped in the mirrors.
STUART: Wait… what?
ELLIOTT: For some reason!
DAN: Whoaaaa…!
STUART: C'mon
ELLIOTT: Nope, and then cut to credits-
DAN: Stu-
STUART: What?
ELLIOTT: That's it.
STUART: C'mon
ELLIOTT: That's the end of the movie.
DAN: The hell you say!
ELLIOTT: But it's li-
STUART: What?
ELLIOT: It feels li-it feels like a movie that-
STUART: C'mon
ELLIOT: -the script ended-
STUART: C'mon. What are you talking about?
ELLIOTT: That's what, that's how it ends. You watched it us-
STUART: Wait, wait, what?
ELLIOTT: You watched it with us, that's how it ends.
STUART: That's how it ended?
ELLIOTT: Yes.
STUART: C'mon. What are you talking about?
ELLIOTT: Yes, yes, that was the end of the movie-
STUART: What? Wait, that's the end?
ELLIOTT: Yes.
STUART: C'…c'…c'mon, what are you talking about? Wait, he's a ghost now?
ELLIOTT: No, well he's not necessarily a ghost, he's trapped in the mirror world though.
STUART: Wait, but he's like walking around.
ELLIOTT: He's walking around but he's in in a mirror version, you know, he's in the reverse image of the world around him.
STUART: We-c'mon, that doesn't make any sense.
ELLIOTT: No it doesn't, but it's still the end of the movie.
STUART: Wait, what? What, is he a demon?
ELLIOTT: No, he's not a demon, he's just himself.
STUART: C'mon, that doesn't make any sense.

(McCoy et al. "Episode #34")

This quick back and forth between the podcast's hosts presents the men as present together, untangling meaning through their conversational exchange. Stuart is confused about what the ending of the movie means and Elliot explains what happened and that the character is himself within the mirror world. The fast exchange jokingly clarifies meaning and understanding in a way that highlights that the presenters are talking to each other in real time. The liveness of this exchange, following Scannell, is preserved when the podcast is recorded and played later. Even though the listener hears the show on demand, the affect of liveness remains, making it sound like she is listening to the conversation as it happens.

The improvisational feel of the conversation between the hosts adds to its generally friendly group of guys aesthetic. In a review of the show "Pick – Slate 25 Best Podcast Episodes Ever" in *Slate*, linked to on *The Flop House* website, David Haglund and Rebecca Onion both fit *The Flop House* into the bad movie review subgenre and laud its improvised style, asking:

> Why are there so many podcasts dedicated to talking about bad movies? Is it because teenagers who loved Mystery Science Theater 3000 reached adulthood just as podcasting arrived? Whatever the reason, the best of them is *The Flop House*, hosted by two Daily Show writers, Elliott Kalan and Dan McCoy, and fellow comedian Stuart Wellington. The three have a silly, improv-informed approach that suits well the idiocy they have generally just witnessed; many of their best moments come in ridiculous riffs that have nothing to do with the movie under discussion.

Haglund and Onion here link the improvised style to the show's tendency to go on unrelated tangents. These tangents narratively underline the show's spontaneity and key the podcast for distracted listening: by including story lines that the listener does not have to pay close attention to, the podcast makes it easier to listen while doing something else and still be able to follow the show's general outline. If the listener decides she wants to listen more attentively to the tangent, she can always skip back and replay it.

In a *Vulture* podcast listicle, Althea Legaspi cites the show's banter as one of its main draws, commenting that "listening to hosts Dan McCoy and Elliott Kalan, both Daily Show alumni, and Stuart Wellington feels a bit like eavesdropping on three BFFs trying to make each other laugh-fart." *The Daily Beast* extends this friendliness to the podcast's listeners:

> One of the great parts of listening to "The Flop House," though, is that this friendship almost transcends to the viewer. The three men have maintained a remarkably intimate relationship with their listeners. Kalan openly discussed why he left *The Daily Show* on one of the recent episodes and McCoy announced his marriage was ending. (Shire)

These reviews point to an aesthetics of intimacy by judging the podcast on the basis of its liveness and parasociability. The critics recommend *The Flop House* because it sounds like a fun conversation among friends in which the listener is either overhearing or invited to take part.

These conversational elements point to Horton and Wohl's discussion of intimacy at a distance as promoting "the simulacrum of conversational give and take" and they are common within podcasting. This accessibility and friendliness close the distance between listener and host and promote an aesthetics of friendliness based, in part, on the conversational temporalities of liveness. When reviews of the podcast point to these temporalities as intimate, they are drawing on intimacy's association with friendship and temporal closeness to interpret podcasting's medial quality.

Seriality, Conversation, and Monetization

Jason Loviglio's research into Roosevelt's fireside chats combine the setting of the home with the "intimate" and "reciprocal nature" of the chats themselves, noting that "some of [the listener's response] letters were written during the broadcasts of the chats themselves, in a conversational style" (13). The aesthetic give-and-take of a podcast invites listeners to take part in the conversation and participate in the parasocial relationships Horton and Wohl describe. This conversationality has a strong temporal element to it: it is a reciprocity that develops through time. When listeners actually do reach out, as they did to the fireside chats, their responses can help shape the podcast. While Horton and Wohl downplay the extent to which these responses can actually respond within a parasocial relationship, "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance" is an early contribution to a long line of research that suggests otherwise. When these conversations are serialized, this reciprocity is not only possible, but is built into the structure of a program. "Series observe their own effects—they watch their audiences watching them—and react accordingly," Kelleter writes, "They can adapt to their own consequences, to the changes they provoke in their cultural environment (which is another way of saying that there is a feedback loop)" ("Five Ways of Looking" 14). The conversationality and liveness podcasting describes as intimate, then, creates a cultural protocol for understanding and evaluating serialized feedback loops.

Horton and Wohl are quick to distance this parasocial intimacy from what they consider to be the true intimacy of relationships among family and friends. "We call it an illusion because the relationship between the persona and any member of his audience is inevitably one-sided," they say, "and reciprocity between the two can only be suggested" (Horton and Wohl). Because the listener cannot actually speak back to the persona and participate in the conversation, these relationships cannot, for Horton and Wohl, be truly intimate. This argument has several key flaws, especially when taken into Kelleter's understanding of participation in which audience

responses affect how a series unfolds "in a non-populist sense, describing a distribution of authorship among personal, objective, and aesthetic agencies" ("Trust and Sprawl" 55). Participation and conversationality are therefore built into serial programming. The other flaw here, of course, is the assumption that there is a kind of true, pure intimacy that exists outside of the relationships people have with each other.

While she is not directly responding to Horton and Wohl's analysis here, Lacey challenges similar associations between listening publics and lack of reciprocity, especially in light of work that valorizes the reflectivity of publics formed through reading.

> First, lack of reciprocity is a common feature of public life, not least in the constitution of the reading public. It is the re-sounding of the public word through broadcast speech that introduces the specter of a muted public of listeners. Second, the equation of listening with passive reception fails to give credit to the listener to engage in the critical activity of reflection and critique, despite this being assumed for the reader (who, despite this abstraction, may well be the self-same person). Third, it is, perhaps, the "liveness" of radio which gives rise to the unrealizable expectation of reciprocity in the moment and reciprocity in kind. And finally, the focus on the structural conditions of reception overlooks the specificities of the broadcasts which may have a more or less public character. (loc. 2967)

Just because listeners cannot chip into a conversation and be heard in real time, in other words, does not mean that they cannot reciprocate in any way or that they cannot reflect on and critique the content they consume, thus participating through listening.

Grace Gist relates this kind of participation to listening. "On the broadest level," she argues, "engaging with narratives at all is itself a participatory venture, especially when the narrative is viewed as a conversation in which the reader or listener may subsequently enter" (84). This participatory conversational nature reflects on the liveness of many podcasts. "Through feigning liveness and shared locality with his listeners," Hancock writes of *Welcome to Night Vale*, "the podcast listener's actual isolation from Night Vale and one another lessens: 'actual' differences in time and space are now 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" (39, 222). Where in *Welcome to Night Vale*, *Within the Wires*, and, as I will go into greater depth later, *Hello from the Magic Tavern*, that shared world is a fictional, imaginary one, the conversational liveness of a shared world also presents itself in nonfiction chatcasts.

Podcasting's self-descriptions often characterize reciprocity and participation as intimate. In doing so, they create a cultural protocol for understanding these aspects of podcasting mediality that relates to close

interpersonal relationships. These descriptions include the medium's approach to monetization. The connection between intimate reciprocity and money is not surprising, especially since Horton and Wohl consider the commercial aspect of media within their analysis of parasocial reciprocity. In exchange for the host's friendship, they explain, the audience gives back when members "reflect on his [the host's] advice, sympathize with him in his difficulties, forgive his mistakes, buy the products that he recommends, and keep his sponsor informed of the esteem in which he is held" through fan mail (Horton and Wohl). Kelleter and Loock take this a step further in associating seriality with the forward-looking temporalities of capitalism (126). In addition to a listener letters segment, *The Flop House*'s monetization works within parasociability to provide listeners with the opportunity to interact with the show. These interactions unfold serially through time and influence the show's content.

An example of how *The Flop House* incorporates this monetization within its podcast is a T-shirt with the phrase "Wait, What? C'mon!," which the podcast sells at its TopatoCo.com store. The T-shirt repeats a phrase from the show and gives the listener the chance to reciprocate within the podcast's parasocial relationship by giving money to the podcast. Much like *Within the Wires*, this monetization takes the form of repetition, in this case through a comedy callback. These repetitions are not limited to monetization—there is a fan-produced YouTube video illustrating the scene and it is well-documented on the show's wiki—but it is one repetition of many. If serial culture is based on "Iterative modes of cinematic storytelling [that] are propelled by the same project that animates the capitalist production of culture at large: they aim at an endless innovation of reproduction" (Kelleter and Loock 126), this T-shirt repeats a conversational moment within the podcast that elicits an instantaneous affective recognition within the listener (see Chapter 1). Where *Within the Wires* uses eroticism to sound intimate, *The Flop House* uses friendly chat. In both cases, however, buying merchandise is one way listeners can participate in the podcast.

In her article describing podcasting intimacy, Noelle Acheson describes this kind of reciprocity as intimate. "And, of course, there's the merchandise," she writes, "Top podcasts generate such a loyal following that we want something that indicates that we 'belong.' A Nerdist t-shirt, a WTF mug, a Planet Money canvas bag…" Financial reciprocity is here part of the intimacy that, for Acheson, makes podcasting a distinct medium.

Live shows are another way listeners can reciprocate. At live performances, fans give back to the podcast by paying to be both temporally and physically co-present with the show's hosts and fellow listeners. The 2001 NYC Podfest interpreted these temporalities as intimate in its tagline, "the intimate stage." When *The Flop House* performed a live show at the festival, it categorized itself along these lines and circulated images of hosts performing in front of the festival's logo and "intimate" tagline. These images include visual call backs from the show, including one in which the three

hosts hold up T-shirts of the Flop House Housecat, a running joke from the show (The Flop House and Hampton). The repeated joke, its reference to fan interaction, and the live setting all provide points for recognition within the fan community. In selling tickets, the podcast monetizes itself by providing access to this moment and by circulating pictures of the event, it creates points of recognition after the event for fans who were there. NYC Podfest's projection of the "intimate stage" behind the hosts links these interactions specifically to intimacy: being in a room with hosts and fellow listeners, repeating moments from previous episodes, and giving money to the podcast are here all coded as intimate.

The podcast industry often links the liveness of such theater performances with the medium's intimacy. In her article "How to host a live podcast recording to grow your audience," journalist Suchandrika Chakrabarti writes that, during podcast recordings with a live audience and the "meet the host" sessions afterward:

> 'Within a few minutes, it stops being a one-sided friendship because there's an ease to those conversations. It happens because of all those shared things you have around listening to the podcast, sometimes for years. I think that's really special,' [London Podcast Festival programmer Zoë Jeyes] said. Behind the screen, your podcast has been engaging listeners and building up a following, too. Now when they have the opportunity to meet the host, they get to experience how their favourite listens are formed alongside fellow fans.

This writing blends liveness and intimacy: being in an audience together and meeting the podcast host in person are undeniable aspects of live co-presence by any definition. This liveness is not only about the listener and host, of course, but includes the listeners among each other, consuming as an audience. Interestingly, the passage does not present the liveness of theater performances as entirely different from the podcast's normal distribution. Instead, live theater is an extension of what, in the passage, are already existent aspects of podcast mediality. The article expresses this mediality in terms often linked to intimacy: the conversationality is part of a "friendship," albeit a "one-sided" one, and its relationships include moments "shared" over years (Chakrabarti). Here the complex intersection of podcast seriality comes into play: the improvised-sounding conversationality of chat podcasts lends to its friendliness and learning tidbits about the hosts' lives over years of serial production solidifies the show's relationships. In linking these relationships to friendship—a term elsewhere explicitly associated with intimacy—the article contributes to the use of intimacy as a cultural code for interpreting podcast mediality. Live shows, in turn, are not separate from that mediality but an extension of it. The podcast itself, for Jeyes, is a one-sided friendship that, according to Chakrabarti, becomes reciprocal when the listener is in person with hosts

and fans. The live show, in other words, is an extension of the conversational liveness already present within the podcast and in service to the show's friendly intimacy.

As the NYC Podfest projection suggests, the use of intimacy to describe podcasting's parasocial reciprocity is not limited to *The Flop House*, but is common within podcasting's self-descriptions. Acheson connects the friendly liveness of many podcasts specifically to both intimacy and monetization. "It feels personal," she explains, "Our favorite podcasts become our favorite because there's a connection. We enjoy the podcaster's sense of humor, tempo, voice. We become friends, in a non-creepy way. And therein lies the real economic value of podcasts. The monetization of that relationship" (Acheson). In "Whisper in my ear: The intimacy of podcasts," Acheson uses intimacy as a cultural code to describe a very important part of any medium: its finances. As I will show later in this chapter and again in the next, monetizing as parasocial reciprocity can pose difficulties when money seems to get in the way, instead of enhance, the intimacy of a podcast. When discussing the value and ethics of making money in podcasting, however, intimacy is used as a metric by which to judge appropriate monetization. This use does not mean that these forms of monetization are unquestionably intimate, but that intimacy is being used to describe the connections between actants of podcasting's network.

Truth Works Media's advice article "Connecting with Your Podcast Audience" turns to social media to realize podcasting's conversational give and take. "There are dozens of ways to talk to your listeners," the article claims,

> you can engage with them on social media, ask them to submit questions or thoughts to your official, podcast email, or address them directly in your episodes. Giving your listeners a chance to join the conversation helps them feel like they know you and are a participant in your show. That's the kind of feeling that builds the loyal following you're looking for.

One way to include fans in the conversation is having them submit questions to the show. Working around audience submissions is common in radio and draws on constructs of intimacy within that medium.

In a very strongly worded post on *Medium*, user A. O. Line complains that podcaster Jesse Thorn does not respect this conversational reciprocity because he misuses similar submissions on *My Brother, My Brother, and Me*:

> That show is based entirely around fan submissions. If they didn't have fans submitting questions or Yahoos they would have no content, or at least less content. Yahoos you can find, writing advice questions not so much. Without the fans, the content of their show wouldn't be the same, let alone the reach it gets. ("Maximum Fun Isn't That Fun")

A. O. Line is upset because after using fan submissions, Jesse Thorn threatened to sue a listener for selling content based on one of his podcasts. While there could be many reasons for these actions, A. O. Line says they fail to participate in a reciprocal listener–host relationship. He connects this failure to what he sees as the listener's contribution to the show: their submissions to a question and answer segment. These negotiations revolve around intimacy as conversational reciprocity. On one hand, a show can demonstrate their care for listeners by including them in the production. On the other, that inclusion can be seen as basing a show on fan labor. In arguing that Jesse Thorn is taking advantage of fans, A. O. Line is referencing what he sees as the failure of parasocial reciprocity.

In a comment on A. O. Line's article, user James Sevigny argues in favor of *My Brother, My Brother, and Me*'s format by linking it to other media. Getting mad at the podcast for its submission-based format is, for Sevigny, "like being mad at dear abby [sic] for being such a lazy old bag and not asking herself some questions for once" ("As an avid MBMBaM listener"). A. O. Line, in turn, answers that "it makes it feel very weird and exploitative of eager fans ready to get recognition from their podcast pals" ("Hi, thanks for responding"). This exchange shows both a public consciousness about how podcasting builds on other kinds of media and a debate over how the medium changes its relationships with fans. For Sevigny, the submissions are no different than *Dear Abby*'s print articles. For A. O. Line, the podcast's ability to cast its hosts as the listener's "podcast pals" means that it has a greater responsibility to be conscious of exploiting their labor.

The conversational temporalities of podcasting's aesthetics here combine with its negotiation of intimacy: because podcasts sound friendly, A. O. Line holds them to a different standard than *Dear Abby*. In this negotiation, neither A. O. Line or James Sevigny argue whether or not podcasting values an aesthetics based on conversational reciprocity. Instead, they use those shared values to argue about what that reciprocity should consist of. Since this reciprocity is a key dynamic in how podcasting understands its seriality—or how participation works with its network—intimacy here becomes a value judgment that regulates the medium's cultural protocols. In discussing intimate reciprocity, in other words, the people who make up podcasting's network decide what kinds of relationships are an acceptable part of the medial network and which ones are exploitative.

Niche Community and an Audience of One

One of the ways in which podcasting codifies its intimacy is in presenting quality shows as targeted toward a single listener or a finely defined niche audience. Returning briefly to Horton and Wohl, this manner of presentation can be directly linked to "intimacy at a distance" in other forms of media. The television host "faces the spectator, uses the mode of direct address, talks as if he were conversing personally and privately" (Horton

and Wohl). There is also a strong tradition of speaking directly to listeners in radio. Shingler and Wieringa point to BBC radio trainer Elwyn Evans' 1977 *Radio: A Guide to Broadcasting Technique*'s advice that "the audience to be aimed at is *an audience of one* (infinitely repeated)" as how broadcasters can "achieve intimacy and a sense of reciprocity" (115). Like radio, the friendly conversationality of podcasts is here focused on the individual listener, and is inseparable from how podcasting creates community.

When Mikutel advises other producers on how to make a good podcast, she states that "when defining your ideal listener, go beyond the basic demographics of age, gender, occupation" ("Who Is Your Podcast for?"). Instead, Mikutel recommends writing a detailed biography of the listener and gives the following as an example:

> Amy's 36 and teaches English as a second language in Montana. And while she likes her job, it's not her passion. She's feeling stuck in her small town and wants to find a way to live in Italy, where she studied abroad for a semester during college. This is more than a dream for Amy: she's taking action and evaluating ways she can start an online business to work from anywhere. She'll drive an hour to spend an afternoon in a cozy bookstore so she can flip through information on global travel and how to live abroad (and she'll take a sneak peek at the celebrity mags). While she's jogging in the morning, Amy listens to a mix of '80s pop, NPR, and podcasts about travel and world affairs. She loves history and walking tours and wants to learn to salsa. She's not huge into social media, but you'll find her on Instagram, seeking travel inspiration and sharing her passion for wine and Italian cooking. ("Who Is Your Podcast for?")

While a lot of this biography describes Amy's habits and routines, much of it focuses on her aspirations and her internal world. This focus defines Amy beyond a set of characteristics, but as a decision-making person. Because Sarah Mikutel knows Amy as a person well enough, she can predict what content Amy wants to hear on the podcast.

This codification of podcasting intimacy then draws on Luhmann's description of a historical code for love that focuses on futurity. In an intimate relationship, according to this code, "the asymmetry of inner experience and action then entails the possibility of anticipation: one can orientate oneself toward the inner experience of the other person, even if he has not actually conveyed that expectation, has not expressed a wish of any kind and not undertaken to attribute anything to himself" (loc. 449). Like the depictions of relationships Luhmann studies, Mikutel can predict her listener's wishes because she is so oriented toward that person's inner experience. In framing the ideal relationship, and the ideal listener, in these terms, Mikutel draws on codes formed through intimate romantic or love relationships to describe the relationship between podcast, listener, and host. In

telling others to use this code when making podcasts, she uses it as a quality discourse, implying that good podcasts are intimately interactive because creators can take a listener's perspective and predict her actions, even if that listener is an imaginary one. At the same time, this code describes a key part of serial culture: the creator adapting to their perception of the audience.

The ideal listener is, after all, not a single person, but an audience. In her introduction to the article, Mikutel explains, again in bold, that the "ideal listener" is "the person who is all-in on our message and community" ("Who Is Your Podcast for?"). In using the ideal listener as a stand-in for speaking to a community, Mikutel takes the perspective-taking code for intimacy that Luhmann, at least, explores as related to romantic relationships and modifies it to work for the relationship between podcast host and audience.

Not only does this relationship draw on Luhmann's historical codes for love, Truth Works Media explicitly references intimacy when making a similar connection. "If you're starting your own podcast, use this podcaster-listener intimacy to your advantage," they advise, "If your audience likes your content, then you already have things in common. Treat them like friends. Speak to them directly. You'll create that intimate feel that keeps listeners coming back and sharing your show with their friends." By speaking to the audience directly, or one-to-one as Mikutel explains it, Truth Works Media says that the host can "create that intimate feel." This "intimate feel" is, according to Truth Works Media, what listeners value in the podcast because it keeps them "coming back" to further episodes in the serial. Podcast content is not as important as creating this friendly directness since Truth Works Media assumes that listeners like the content if they choose to listen to the show. There is not an expectation here, as there can be within broadcasting, that a show engage a wide range of listeners. The futurity of reciprocity Mikutel speaks to—and which Luhmann connects to the intimacy of romantic relationships—Truth Works Media specifically describes as intimate.

When it tries to sell ad space, Spotify positions these niche audiences as part of podcasting's intimacy and one of the things that makes the content valuable to marketers. "Audio is by nature an especially intimate form of communication, and podcasts take this intimacy even further than other types of audio," the company says, "Unlike other mediums, many podcasts are tailored to niche audiences… As a result, listeners can find their community and bond with hosts who share their humor or a quirky personal interest" ("Podcasts and the Attention Sweet Spot"). Just like Truth Works Media's hosts "already have things in common" with their audiences, Spotify's hosts "bond" with communities because they "share" certain characteristics ("Podcasts and the Attention Sweet Spot"). For Spotify, this relationship is specific to podcasting as a distinct medium.

The vast majority of advice on forming podcast content similarly targets niche communities. In his blog post for business owners thinking about starting a podcast for marketing purposes, Colin Gray also focuses on

the importance of targeting content to a group of listeners' interests: "You know your customers, and you know what interests and/or needs they have that drive them to your business. Explore those interests and needs. A food store can talk about cooking, nutrition, or holiday rituals. Exploring your customers' interests builds intimacy and trust." Much like Mikutel proves she knows her listener by predicting what content she will be interested in, Gray advises that businesses can show they know their customers by reflecting their interests back to them. For Gray, doing so is a way to build intimacy between a business and its clients. Intimacy for Gray, then, is not so much the interaction between individual people, but between members of a community with shared interests. The business can show it is part of that community by using podcasting to communicate their shared interests. The medium's intimacy, then, lies in its ability to provide that connection.

Some strains of podcast sound design encourage listeners to interpret content as coming from their own community by using amateur sound. The medium's self-presentation as accessible to anyone who would like to give it a go works within its code of conversational intimacy by making it sound like listeners themselves can make a podcast and join in on the conversation. "Podcasting doesn't require a degree in broadcasting or any kind of professional training," Daniel J. Lewis assures his readers in a post for *The Audacity to Podcast* entitled "What Makes Podcasting More Intimate than Other Media," "many podcasters tend to be on the same level as their audience. More than authenticity, this makes you relatable as people see how much you are like them." Not only does Lewis work with intimacy as a hyperauthentic ideal, he implies that coming to the medium as an amateur makes the host "relatable" and "like" their audience. This model of intimacy appears within podcasting and negotiates the medium's conversationality in terms of professionalism and access.

Presenting podcasting as an easily accessible medium is, as Bottomley points out, "strongly connected to discourses of produsage, participatory culture, and broader theories about the democratizing effects of the internet," discourses that, in one way or another, assert "that networked digital media like podcasting are opening up the media environment for an increasingly active audience, empowering more diverse cultural production and eroding traditional hierarchies between media producers and listeners" (81–182). These discussions, whether or not they are true, present podcasts as close to their audience within an exchange that develops over time.

Colin Gray echoes Lewis' sentiment when he writes to complete novices (he even includes an explanation of what podcasts are) and tells them that they can hire professionals to produce their podcasts, but "the more that you do it yourself, the more unique and personal your podcast will be." Not only does Gray say that good podcasts are "unique and personal," he specifies that audio from untrained do-it-yourselfers gives the sound and editing those qualities. What for Lewis was a quality of podcast distribution is, for

Gray, a quality of podcast sound. Not hiring professional sound designers is here a conscious aesthetic choice based on an intimate ideal.

Later in the post, Gray moves beyond production and tells his readers to "speak naturally and informally, with a conversational tone. This brings people closer, rather than using 'A Professional Radio voice.' Be yourself." For Gray, a "conversational tone" is the opposite of "A Professional Radio voice." By making the podcast informal and conversational, Gray tells his readers they can make it more intimate, or "[bring] people closer." What began as sound design advice here moves into instruction on how to talk. For these advice-givers, it is important to sound like anyone can make a podcast in order for a podcast to sound like it is coming from within the listener's community.

Sarah Mikutel explicitly links this to intimacy when she writes in her advice column "Who Is Your Podcast for? Defining Your Ideal Listener" that

> I think one factor driving the intimacy of podcasts is that many have a narrowly focused topic and target audience. In that environment, the producers and the consumers share a very specific interest. The conversations that result are thus more meaningful to those participating.

The post "Why People Listen to Podcasts Instead of Consuming Other Digital Media" specifically uses intimacy to highlight podcasting's medial distinctiveness (Mikutel). Where the title points to distinctiveness, the section heading "Because of the 'intimacy of audio,' listeners feel they have a relationship with the podcast host" relates it to intimacy.

Interestingly, Backyard Media explicitly connects the niche audiences developed through podcasting within one's community to intimacy and monetization:

> **The host-listener relationship is the core of podcasting's strength as an advertising channel** [sic]. The IAB podcast advertising study we mentioned earlier also asked listeners about how they feel when podcast hosts recommend products, as well as more generally about podcast advertising. […] **Listeners take concrete actions when they hear ads on podcasts they like** [sic].

Because podcasts are so intimate, Backyard Media argues, listeners engage with their ads. The niche communities that help bind an audience to a specifically positioned podcast make it possible to pitch the show as attractive to advertisers.

DIY sound and a conversational tone are here not so much proof of podcasting's free and level playing field as much as they are being discussed and valued as an aesthetic that encourages certain ways of building and

interacting with podcasting as a medium. The idea that anyone can make a podcast has never been true. But having a podcast that sounds like anyone can make it is an aesthetic ideal these authors, and others, link to the medium's intimacy. Intimacy, then, becomes a way of describing the way information moves within podcasting's network, both in how podcasters imagine their listeners and how listeners respond to the show. These descriptions, in turn, further structure the network. Intimacy here is a construct that both creates network connections and interprets their quality.

Fundraising, or "Giving Back to Your Podcast Pals"

Podcasting uses language associated with public media fundraising to monetize its content. It draws on this language, rendering it specifically intimate by associating fundraising efforts with reciprocity, family, and friends. In so doing, podcasting creates cultural protocols for medial interaction that influence how podcasting mediates.

Some of the networks that use fundraising language come from shows with a clear lineage to public radio, including Radiotopia programs like *99% Invisible*. Radiotopia is a nonprofit podcast network with ties to public media. The podcast *99% Invisible* covers architecture and design and started as a public radio program, then morphed into a podcast.

In its 2015 fundraising campaign, Radiotopia asked listeners to "Donate now to get an exclusive tote bag, one of your favorite Radiotopia T-shirts, or the brand new 99% Invisible challenge coin, which is only available during this drive" (99pi). Talking about donations and including perks like tote bags draws on NPR and PBS's long-standing use of these perks within their own pledge drives and therefore draws on a code of media interaction formed through public broadcasting.

In the same year, *99% Invisible* took these links to public service a step forward by introducing themed challenge coins (Trufelman). When listeners donate, they receive a coin to prove they support the show. In the episode "Coin Check," producer Avery Trufelman explains the history of these coins and their link to military service. The episode's accompanying webpage explains that members of the military give specially designed coins to each other, and to civilians, to "serve as literal tokens of gratitude. They can symbolize everything from a nod of appreciation to a deep personal connection" (Trufelman). Later in the article, Trufelman continues that "however they came about, the coins have always been about identity." This emphasis on "personal connection" draws on the language of intimacy while the military reference likens it to public service (Trufelman). When it aired, this episode followed its history and use of challenge coins by telling listeners that they would receive a *99% Invisible* challenge coin if they donate to the show (Trufelman). In a post about the drive, the show connects giving money to their program and public service: "A challenge coin is given for exceptional service to a cause, and if you become a

monthly donor during the Radiotopia Forever campaign at the $4 level, we will send you your very own 99% Invisible Challenge Coin" (Trufelman). In donating to Radiotopia, then, listeners can give back to the show, serve the public, and in return receive a coin symbolizing "anything from a nod of appreciation to a deep personal connection" (Trufelman). Intimacy is here about personal connection and giving money to the show establishes that connection.

The fundraising article later makes the reciprocal, interaction-based nature of this exchange even more explicit. "After this fundraiser, you will have to earn a challenge coin from one of us in person," it says, linking the coins to physical co-presence, "So the next time you see one of us and say, 'I love the show!,' we'll say two words to you: 'Coin check.' Get yours today" (Trufelman). Not only does this writing present a face-to-face interaction with the host as completely plausible, it posits that if listeners truly "love the show," they need to donate $4 a month and that hosts will check to make sure they do. This framing of a face-to-face encounter codifies listener–host reciprocity as a primarily financial form of intimate reciprocity.

While most podcasts do not officially rely on nonprofit or public radio relationships, a lot of them also draw on the language of support used in public media. Networks with no formal relationship with public radio and which are not registered nonprofits sometimes use similar language. Maximum Fun, the network to which *The Flop House* belongs, has a "donate" page that tells listeners to "support the shows you love… Our shows are made by hand for you, and we appreciate your decision to give back to us" ("Donate"). The page heavily prioritizes "memberships," which listeners can receive by making monthly "donations" ("Donate"). They also have a yearly pledge drive called "MaxFunDrive" and in exchange for a donation, listeners receive similar perks as public radio donors. By calling pledge categories things like "Friend of the Family" and "Diamond Friendship Circle," as well as including face-to-face access with podcast hosts on its highest level of membership—they guarantee tickets to their convention, MaxFunCon—the Maximum Fun network draws on the language and cultural coding of public broadcasting parasociability and links it to podcasting intimacy.

Even though this content draws on codes of support from public broadcasting, the network is private and for profit. In the last question in the "Maximum Fun Memberships" part of their FAQ section, the company answers the question "Is MaximumFun.org a 501(c)(3) nonprofit? Are my contributions tax deductible?" with

> Nope. We are a for-profit company, so your contributions to Maximum Fun are not tax-deductible. Non-profits have lots and lots of reporting, accounting, and other logistical requirements that we don't have the resources to manage. We're really happy as a 'dual bottom line' company - with our goals being to earn money while making the world better with great, responsible content. (*Maximum Fun FAQ*)

This answer is clear, but also implies that the network does not register as a nonprofit because they cannot afford to manage the legal requirements and still frames their work as in the public interest by citing their commitment to "making the world better with great, responsible content" (*Maximum Fun FAQ*). The network frames itself as reciprocal, then, because it gives back to its community.

In a series of posts on *Medium* and Twitter, user A.O. Line criticizes Maximum Fun for codifying its relationship to listeners along the lines of public radio and fan communities. Their article "Maximum Fun STILL Isn't that Fun" includes screenshots of tweets by the network's owner, Jesse Thorn. "I try to talk about this every drive," the first tweet reads, "If you're unemployed or under 18, or you don't live in the developed world, please enjoy what we make for free. If you're not one of those things, though, pay for what you enjoy. You'll feel great every time you listen" (Thorn qtd. in "Maximum Fun STILL Isn't That Fun"). In the next tweet, Thorn specifies that these groups of people can "mooch away," and the third clarifies further: "No, I could add 'at a living wage,' but there's a clarity and character limit. Mostly want to emphasize that it isn't a charity, it's an exchange for services. We don't make people support us, but that doesn't mean we see support as an optional luxury if you listen" (Thorn qtd. in "Maximum Fun STILL Isn't That Fun").

For A. O. Line, the use of "donation" in the network's marketing associates it with charity and is misleading:

> In the last tweet, he mentions that '[Maximum Fun] isn't a charity,' which I find very strange when almost all they their branding and terminology is 'donating' and they aren't even a 501(c)(3). 'Contribution' I can understand, but 'donation?' […] When you use 'donation,' when you actually mean 'contribution,' you're not being clear. Those words have different connotations, and you're not being clear when you use a word whose connotation doesn't fit what you actually mean or are doing. ("Maximum Fun STILL Isn't That Fun")

A. O. Line's criticism reveals cultural unease with Maximum Fun's use of funding vocabulary and practices derived from public broadcasting. "Support" and "donation" are, for them, an inappropriate way to model reciprocity for a private podcast.

These examples show how podcasting draws on fundraising monetization models formed through public radio. These models connect to structures of mediated intimacy formed through radio and build on parasocial reciprocity while emphasizing intimate language (friends and family) and possibilities for face-to-face interaction. In his criticism of these codes being used by a private company, A. O. Line further establishes intimacy as a code for podcast reciprocity by explaining how, in their view, the Maximum Fun network does not abide by that code. Overall, these discourses both show

podcasting's intimate reciprocity as in a radio tradition and how podcasting is reforming those codes to fit its specific mediality.

Conclusion

The Flop House relies on an aesthetics of friendliness to define its intimacy. This friendliness works within comedic structures based on improvisation to create a sense of liveness. The show uses callbacks throughout its texts, paratexts, and monetization to create recognition among members of its community. These traits create an engaged listener based on distracted listening practices, which, in turn, enhance the sense of intimate presence within the show. *The Flop House* is not inherently intimate so much as it, and the discussion surrounding it, creates intimacy by incorporating these techniques and references into the podcast. As much as *The Flop House*'s banter seems specific to the chatcast format, this kind of conversationality exists throughout many podcasts. Writing on the scientific communication podcast *Radiolab*, Bottomley comments on how "the dual-narrator device functions to bring the audience into the story" through a "back-and-forth dialogue" that is "intimate," "akin to a group of friends sharing an amazing story at a bar" (197). The conversational liveness of these podcasts, then, is part of how the medium defines itself as distinct and is inextricably linked to podcasting's discourses of intimacy.

Perspective-taking codes for intimacy are part of reviews for many successful podcasts, regardless of genre. In her review of *Serial* for *The New Yorker*, Rebecca Mead writes "the show's real innovation lay in capturing Koenig's psychological process—her inward struggle about what to believe… The episode ends with a wrenchingly intimate phone call between Koenig and Syed, in which he tells her that he wants her to judge him innocent not because he seems too nice to have murdered Lee but because she's found exculpatory evidence." The intimacy here is not in the podcaster taking the perspective of the listener, but of the listener taking the perspective of the podcast host. The code for intimacy Luhmann discusses as being developed in the eighteenth century, then, works here to interpret and provide a cultural protocol for the interactions within podcasting's network: the listener's relationship with the host, the host's with the subject of the podcast, and the host's understanding of the listener. These interactions differ significantly in friendliness and tone from *The Flop House*'s, and yet they draw on similar historically constructed descriptions. Intimacy here is not limited to a specific kind of friendly banter, or the relationship between listeners and hosts, but describes and influences a multitude of interactions within podcasting's medial network.

Note

1 In his keynote at the *Podcasting Poetics* conference, Richard Berry pointed out that kitchens are generally bad places to record studio-like sound because they have a lot of sharp, smooth surfaces that reflect sound.

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3 "You Can Even Sleep with Them if You Want To"

Participatory Culture, Worldbuilding, and Integrating into Daily Life

As Philip Auslander writes in *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, liveness is best "understood as historical and contingent rather than determined by immutable differences" (8). The cultural contingency of liveness means that as media technologies change, so does what it means to be live. Nick Couldry's "Liveness, 'Reality', and the Mediated Habitus from Television to the Mobile Phone" comments on these changes, retooling liveness for different ways of accessing a variety of online and mobile media. Liveness, when understood in these broad terms, is not about a specific kind of interaction so much as it describes how media connect listeners, hosts, and audiences. Within podcasting, liveness also describes the feeling of being continually connected through media. Commenting on this feeling, danah boyd writes that, with the internet, to be "always-on" is "no longer about being on or off really, it's about living in a world where being networked to people and information wherever and whenever you need is just assumed. I may not be always-on the *Internet* as we think of it colloquially, but I am always connected to the network" (71–72). This continual connectivity extends into the podcast listener's daily life. In describing iPod culture, Bull notices that, for one of the listeners he follows, "the radio is imbued with the intimacy and proximity of the soothing voices of her favorite radio presenters, through which she structures her commute" (*Sound Moves* 97). This use of media within one's daily routines is part of serial culture and one of the things that podcasting discourses describe as intimate when it defines its mediality.

This chapter uses *Hello from the Magic Tavern* (2015–present) as a window into how podcasting intimacy works with liveness to describe the integration of media into the listener's daily life. After examining podcasting's use of intimacy to describe this integration, it uses the previous two chapters' analysis of podcasting's spatial and temporal self-descriptions of intimacy as a framework for understanding how *Hello from the Magic Tavern* builds communities and creates a sense of continual presence.

Hello from the Magic Tavern is a comedy storytelling podcast based on what Kathleen Collins calls CHIPs, or "Comedian Hosted Interview

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Podcasts" (229). "This format," Collins explains, "emphasizes conversation between host and guest replete with intimate, personal subject matter, rather than rote, or the publicity-style interview banter seen and heard in other broadcast venues" (229). Apple formalized this popular format when they announced the introduction of a new "Comedy Interviews" category option in June 2019 (Cridland). In the tradition of parody following the popularization of genres and forms (Hutcheon), *Hello from the Magic Tavern* fictionalizes the format by hosting their CHIP in a Tolkien-inspired secondary world called Foon. Host Arnie Niekamp plays a version of himself, Adal Rifai a talking badger and Matt Young the wizard Usidore the Blue. Each week, the hosts interview a guest playing another being from their fantasy world. These interviews contribute to *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s worldbuilding, as does the show's use of paratexts, and the podcast serves as a kind of found audio broadcast from an ongoing mythical world that exists parallel to the listener's real world, here referred to, in the words of Tolkien, as the primary world.

The relationships between *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s characters are largely friendly and can be linked to the relaxed, casual manner of Horton and Wohl's parasocial late night television personae. The characters often go on tangents and their conversation's improvisational quality, drawing on the podcast's link to the Chicago improvisational theater scene, adds to the podcast's sense of an intimate liveness that extends into its audience.

Much like the continual connection boyd describes, Foon exists in real time and listeners can always access it. *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s claim to liveness draws in part on the existence of this world and its transmedia accessibility and in part on the show's improvisational content. Much like the other podcasts under study, *Hello from the Magic Tavern* does not focus on developing a specific narrative line, but instead dedicates its time to building this world. The first part of the chapter examines the ways in which that integration works within podcasting discourses of intimacy. It then studies *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s use of improvisational comedy, arguing that actors creating a world as it comes to them speaks to the show's liveness. The third section turns to *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s transmedia engagement and how it invites fan participation: listeners can always access and build the storyworld, making it part of their lives. The final section examines how these structures of liveness extend into the podcast's monetization, including how they draw on modes of physical liveness. The chapter's overall argument is that *Hello from the Magic Tavern* incorporates a form of intimate liveness based on improvisation and the creation of an accessible storyworld that exists temporally synchronously to the listener's lived environment and can be integrated into their daily lives. In treating intimacy as a cultural construct, the chapter explores how the podcast both creates intimate forms of communication and contributes to larger cultural negotiations about what it means to be close within a community.

Everyday Listening

Podcasting's definition of intimacy as based on its integration into everyday life has in many ways built off of its use of domesticity. Instead of taking place completely in the home, however, this definition sees intimacy as podcasting's ability to accompany the listener throughout her life and become part of her daily routine.

Susan Douglas speaks of the mobility of this kind of integration as one of the ways radio distinguished itself from television in the 1950s and 1960s. "Radio structured people's days," she says, "waking them up in the morning, punctuating their routines, separating the afternoon from the evening, and putting them to sleep at night. It provided audio markings of time and space, an aural signifier of people's schedules" (Douglas 220). These temporalities intertwined with radio's mobility as car radios encouraged listening in a wide range of places. "In this climate repertoires of listening became even more complex and contradictory," Douglas writes, "modes of listening were increasingly tied not just to what you listened to but to where and how you listened—while falling asleep in your bed, making out on the beach, and especially driving around in the car" (221). When it became mobile, radio became a part of the daily lives of listeners.

Much like intimacy discourses related to mobile audio and private listening in cars and with MP3 players (Bull, Sterne, Loviglio), podcasting describes its power as the ability to integrate into the listener's life as she moves through space. While Bull describes personalized listening in public as "the privatization of public space" (*Sound Moves* 4), podcasting tends to describe it as an intimacy unique to the medium. In her 2018 *New Yorker* article "How Podcasts Became a Seductive and Sometimes Slippery Mode of Storytelling," Mead claims that podcasting's intimacy is a defining feature of the medium and stems from the heightened immersion of the commuter in contrast to the kitchen radio listener:

> Podcasting is a peculiarly intimate medium. Usually transmitted through headphones to a solitary listener, or played over the car stereo during a commute, an audio narrative can be immersive in a way that a radio playing in the background in a kitchen rarely is. Podcasts are designed to take up time, rather than to be checked, scanned, and rushed through: they are for those moments when you can't be scrolling on your phone. For a digital medium, podcasts are unusual in their commitment to a slow build, and to a sensual atmosphere.

Mead defines podcasting intimacy through the "immersion" of the "commuter," distancing it from the domesticity and secondary listening of a "radio playing… in a kitchen." While Mead's description of podcasting's intimacy directly counters forms of distracted domestic intimacy discussed

in previous chapters, it still relies on the medium integrating itself into the listener's daily life: the commute. Mead further relates this integration to podcasting's reception technologies (headphones, car stereo), narrative ("a slow build"), and sound design ("a sensual atmosphere"). These qualities make the medium, according to Mead, intimate in their ability to immerse the attentive listener. As much as Mead attributes this intimacy to the specificity of podcasting, Christine Hämmerling and Miriam Nast notice similar trends in their analysis of serial television and novels: "Reading the booklet on the commuter train is considered a classic mode (and setting) of reception," they write, "the transportability of the booklet format is one of the reasons for its staying power" (255). What is interesting in Mead's comments is not that they are describing a practice that is undeniably specific to podcasting, but that they use these practices to define the medium and establish protocols for interaction within it.

In his article "It's All In Your Head: The One-Way Intimacy Of Podcast Listening," culture critic Glen Weldon draws on the language of a romantic relationship to link podcasting's intimacy to its integration into his life. "I fell in love this week," he proclaims,

> Happens more often than you might think. But the fact that it's happened before, and will happen again, doesn't mean this latest infatuation is any less passionate, abiding, head-over-heels, birds-suddenly-appear, stars-fall-down-from-the-sky resolute. My husband's cool with it. He always is; we have an understanding. Also the object of my love is a podcast. […] It's all I've listened to for a solid week: on the Metro, at the gym, walking the dog, folding socks, loading the dishwasher, realizing I'd just loaded the dishwasher with folded socks, unloading the dishwasher, you get the idea. (Weldon 2018)

In this article, which centers on podcasting intimacy, Weldon describes the relationship between podcast and listener as similar to one between romantic partners in funny, hyperbolic terms. He then describes that love as turning on podcasting's presence in his daily life, including domestic tasks ("folding socks"), commuting ("in the Metro"), and leisure time ("at the gym"). Podcasting is, according to Weldon, a passionate infatuation that accompanies the listener throughout her daily routine much like a love relationship would. His use of hyperbole exaggerates, but does not undercut this message.

How-to articles also reflect the need to create content that listeners can incorporate into their routines. Brian Edmondson's "How to make money podcasting" goes so far as to describe this integration as a benefit specific to podcasting that ensures the medium will not "be supplanted by the likes of YouTube, Netflix, and other specialty video channels." "People cannot watch video while driving, working out at the gym or outdoors (note: if they are, they are not working out!), and a number of other important activities," he continues, "and these are the times that are extremely popular for people

to get in their daily fix of their favorite podcast" (Edmondson). Where Weldon pointed to binge listening as part of his podcasting infatuation, Edmondson frames podcasting's ability to integrate on listening regularly, not necessarily as binging.

This relation between regular listening, incorporated seamlessly into the listener's routine, and intimacy is common within podcasting and does not rely on a specific genre of show. Daniel J. Lewis points to the medium's reception technologies as one of the reasons for this integration in "What makes podcasting more intimate than other media" for *The Audacity Podcast*.

> Because podcasts are consumed primarily via download, most people can take those episodes with them everywhere, thanks to the proliferation of smartphones and other mobile devices. Audio consumption significantly trumps video consumption because we can listen in more places than we can watch or read. Many people will listen while driving, mowing, cooking, cleaning dishes, folding laundry, working at their jobs, and even using the restroom! These are places other conversations are either impossible or unwelcome.

Lewis points to the mobility of podcasting reception technologies as the reason for its integration and calls a podcast a "conversation" that the listener participates in, linking this integration to podcasting's conversational liveness.

Weldon also touches on the friendly, conversational aspect of podcasting and specifically links it to the medium's intimacy. "You listen to them talk to one another in exactly the same way you talk to your friends," he says, "you keep them close throughout your day — you can even sleep with them if you want to, that's your business." These comments relate podcasting's conversationality to the ability to listen to it almost anywhere.

The use of podcasts to go to sleep is widely commented on within podcasting. Some podcasts, like *Sleep With Me*, are even specifically produced to put listeners to sleep and longtime podcast advertisers Quip (a toothbrush company) and Casper (mattresses) speak to podcasting and the routinized ritual of bedtime. This integration into the listener's life is the stuff of seriality. "Often, the ritualized aspect of their reception is also associated with a transition from waking to sleeping," Hämmerling and Nast write, "Perry Rhodan readers frequently read their booklets in bed, while *Tatort* viewers say they like to watch the show before falling asleep or even consider the weekly mystery as an aid to do so" (255). Podcasting seriality, then, is not entirely attributable to its relationship with radio. The ritual of listening at bedtime can also be attributed to the ability to listen on-demand, as *Perry Rhodan* readers read on-demand, even if one does not always go to bed at exactly the same time. Weldon uses intimacy to understand this ritualization and association with sleep, however, and as he does so, he defines, and, by extension, builds protocols for podcasting's mediation.

Acheson firmly links chat to podcasting's intimate integration into the listener's life. "With podcasts," she writes, "you have someone murmuring things in your ear, or you have people chatting and laughing around you. And we tend to listen to podcasts while we are doing other things: driving, cooking, ironing, doing sit-ups… Podcasts accompany us on our daily activities, and that creates an even deeper intimacy." Only by being part of the listener's daily life does podcast chat create "an even deeper intimacy" (Acheson). This "deeper intimacy" is also key to much of podcasting's marketing (Acheson). In the blog post "How does podcasting fit into your marketing strategy," Colin Gray writes that "[listeners] can choose to listen while doing other things (chores, commuting, exercising), but the relationship is companionable. After a while, your podcast can become part of their habit patterns, and so can your business." Gray later links this companion relationship specifically with podcasting's intimacy, explaining that "social media posts, email newsletters, and videos are all good ways to reach customers. Podcasting, however, is more intimate." The importance of integrating content into a specific schedule is perhaps not surprising since serial culture can attract and maintain new audiences as a medium grows. Through serial culture, the parasocial intimacy between host and listener builds.

By consuming podcasts while doing other things—at the gym, during the commute, going to bed—the listener's aesthetic experience combines with their physical movements. Incorporating podcast listening into everyday life, then, provides a physically affective experience that merges the listener's position in the world with their enjoyment of the podcast or relationship with its host. "The persona offers, above all, a continuing relationship," Horton & Wohl explain, "his appearance is a regular and dependable event, to be counted on, planned for, and integrated into the routines of daily life." The ways in which podcasting describes these interactions show how the medium works with a definition of intimacy based on the daily incorporation of media into one's life.

In marketing discourses, the intimacy of serial distribution and reception create listeners who trust and are loyal to the podcasts they consume. On a website encouraging businesses to invest in advertising on its platform, Spotify uses its platform specific *Dissect* as an example:

> *Dissect*'s beloved host Cole Cuchna deconstructs classic albums one song at a time, fostering a loyal community of music geeks and audiophiles along the way. In a perfect partnership, Cole shared why he's so devoted to Sonos' speakers — and why his fans should be, too. ("Podcasts and the Attention Sweet Spot").

Not only does this description draw on Cole Cuchna's host persona, its use of seriality (one song at a time) translates into loyalty within a niche market. Spotify implies that the listeners' loyalty to the podcast will, or at least could, transfer to Sonos' speakers.

In the post "Connecting with Your Podcast Audience," Truth Works Media specifically links seriality to intimacy. "Building intimacy with your audience increases the likelihood that they'll continue listening to your show," they explain, "but it also makes them more likely to buy into ads you promote on your podcast." These discourses of intimacy intertwine with loyalty and draw on podcasting's serialized distribution.

Overall, discourses of integration define intimacy through its side-by-side companionship throughout one's life. This use of intimacy incorporates language from a variety of relationships (friends, family, romantic partners) and does not privilege a single manner of listening. While some critics claim that podcasts are intimate because they completely immerse the listener, others focus on their presence while listeners multitask. The similarity between these two is that the podcast is intimate and part of one's life, continually present and available.

Hello from the Magic Tavern: Improvising a Live Secondary World

Hello from the Magic Tavern's year-round weekly distribution schedule—including holidays—continually reminds the listener of its ongoing availability. "The quick timing of narrative steps in commercial serial storytelling—that is, the speed with which instalments follow each other," writes Kelleter, "enables the ongoing story to respond directly to current events and become part of its recipients' daily realities and routines" ("Five Ways of Looking at Popular Seriality" 13). In addition to the continual presence of serial media, the liveness of *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s improvisational comedy gives the show a sense of conversational interaction. As these qualities extend through the podcast's transmedia presence, they integrate the show into the listener's life and the listener into the show's secondary world.

While many podcasts work in similar ways, *Hello from the Magic Tavern* is particularly suitable for study because its fantasy-based storyworld makes this integration easier to track. What *Hello from the Magic Tavern* establishes through the creation of Foon, *The Flop House* forms by hosts talking about their personal lives and *Serial* creates by the slow uncovery of a mystery (Ora 2018). Where listeners to *Hello from the Magic Tavern* can participate in building Foon, *Serial* listeners can help try to solve a murder and *The Flop House* listeners can visit Stuart's bar or buy Elliot's comic. In each of these cases, the ongoing narrative is not always as important as the details revealed along the way.

This narrative quality tracks with the qualities of worldbuilding. "To paint in somewhat broad strokes," Jenkins writes,

> traditional storytelling often works through exposition, sharing backstory, while world-building more frequently works through description,

> accumulating meaningful details, though of course, in both cases, the situation is more complicated in practice. These details are not plot devices; rather, the plot often exists as a means through which to explore different aspects of a given world. ("All Over the Map" 231)

For *Hello from the Magic Tavern*, the premise of an interview podcast is well-suited to this kind of storytelling. By placing host Arnie Niekamp as an outsider interviewing people from the secondary world, Foon, the podcast spends much of its time creating seemingly unnecessary details.

The very loose storyline that runs through the first season develops slowly, over the course of three years and is only labeled a season in retrospect. The second season's storyline develops over two years. Instead of emphasizing linear unfolding, the majority of the show is about meeting characters from Foon and learning more about how the world works. The podcast does so through the use of live, improvisational comedy that encourages listeners to imagine Foon as in the process of continual development and invites listeners to contribute to that development, taking up authorship of the world.

As already discussed in Chapter 2, podcasts place themselves affectively alongside the listener at the time of listening by using language that references temporal liveness. This liveness is tied to the temporalities of conversation and can contribute to the creation of knowledge. In *Television and the Meaning of 'Live': An Enquiry into the Human Situation*, Scannell uses reporting on the September 11, 2001 World Trade Center attack to contrast the retrospective present of most television news to the forward-moving present of real-time coverage. When reporting the event after it happened, Scannell observes, "the newsroom informs its uninformed audiences of what it knows. There is an asymmetry of knowledge between the producers and tellers of the news and those for whom it is produced and to whom it is told" and for which "the boundaries of the event are apparent… because it has already happened and is now over" (192). This asymmetry and closure contrasts the liveness of the breaking story, during which "the CNN news team knows no more than viewers about what they are looking at on screen" and during which "boundaries of what is happening cannot be foreseen" (Scannell 192). These temporalities contribute to the mediation of a story's affect. In the case of September 11, 2001, "the most terrifying aspect of the unfolding chain of events is that there is no apparent limit to it. It seems to be a spiraling disaster without end" (Scannell 192). The event's liveness comes, in part, through the fact that reporters do not know how it will end. This lack of knowledge, according to Scannell, means that reporters cannot communicate a set narrative, giving the impression that anything can happen. Importantly, this quality of liveness continues after the initial broadcast through the circulation of recordings that capture reporter's reactions and attempts to make sense of events.

The initial broadcast's temporal synchronicity to the event, along the lines of Crisell's *Liveness and Recording in the Media*, becomes an affective

liveness when recordings are played later, disjointed in time but together in feeling. Crisell states that "radio, even when its programs are pre-recorded, is a 'present-tense' medium, offering experiences whose outcome lies in an unknown future" (4). For Crisell, these temporalities are not exclusive to radio. "Like theater, film, and television," he notes, "it seems to be an account of what *is* happening rather than a record of what *has* happened" (4). The live temporalities of radio and theater overlap, then, and are both reproduced in *Hello from the Magic Tavern*.

Grace Gist comments on a similar temporality in *Welcome to Night Vale*: "Because he and the listener are experiencing the studio at the same time, Cecil has no time to act as a filter—either in his description or his reaction—and thus has no time to intellectualize or soften details" (Gist 91). This affective quality can, in Scannell's terms, be attributed to the recording's liveness: "The closest and perhaps most disconcerting degree of separation between Cecil and the listener is when there is no temporal separation at all between events and Cecil's reporting of them; these are the events that happen to Cecil while he's on the air" (Gist 88–89). These events "field greater emotional impact" (Gist 19). The closeness here comes from the distance between reporter and event: a liveness that lends itself to an affective response.

Something similar can be said for *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s use of improvisational comedy to create a sense of liveness within the podcast. In an interview at the Chicago Comic and Entertainment Expo (C2E2), Arnie Niekamp (not in character) comments on a forward-moving present of the show's improvisation that parallels Scannell's. "I think a lot of it, like what makes good improv," he comments, "is you just keep your ears and eyes open for the thing that it needs to be about next" (Paleczcny 27:59). Because the actors have no script, and have said that they do not even have a general plot for the show, they do not know how the episode will end. This means that they lack boundaries for their narrative and almost anything could happen. The podcast's primarily audio format means that it does not have to inform a production team about storytelling decisions in advance. There are no sets or costumes in a typical episode, which means that fantastic and difficult to produce twists can take place without any preplanning.[1]

This lack of necessary preplanning means that unlike the retrospective news coverage Scannell studies and the more tightly scripted *Within the Wires*, there is not necessarily an "asymmetry of knowledge" between *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s actors and the audience. Even though the podcast is mostly prerecorded, the feeling of liveness in listening to actors building a story as it happens remains.

Hello from the Magic Tavern's improvised liveness is the backbone of the show and an example can be found in the following passage with guest Can the Wizard:

ARNIE: Wait, why are there? How many Cans are there in here?
CAN VOICE 1: One

CAN VOICE 2: Two
CAN VOICE 3: Three
CAN VOICE 1: Three Cans!
CAN VOICE 4: Four. There are four Cans.
CAN VOICE 5: What'd I miss? Oh, I'm a fifth Can.
CAN VOICE 1: All right.
USIDORE: I suppose since he lives through time so many times this is why there's so many of them.

The show's host, Arnie, both expresses surprise and laughs at the early appearance of Can the Wizard. These reactions aurally point to his lack of foreknowledge of the situation and the show's live storytelling.[2] The performers quickly escalate and clarify the situation through their conversation. Usidore the Blue explains why so many Can the Wizards can exist after their appearance, trying to make a certain amount of sense of this unexpected situation for the audience. The story, and how its universe works, unfolds seemingly spontaneously as problems arise that pose questions about the storyworld (how are there so many Can the Wizards?) and performers answer those questions (time travel). This conversational worldbuilding contributes to the podcast's portrayal of the "immediate now" of the present (Scannell 94), even when replayed later.

At the same time, this excess detail works to slow the narrative development of the show while building the world of Foon, in this case by commenting on how time works. Wolf writes that these digressions are characteristic of worldbuilding, which "often results in data, exposition, and digressions that provide information about a world, slowing down narrative or even bringing it to a halt temporarily, yet much of the excess detail and descriptive richness can be an important part of the audience's experience" (Wolf 29). As the podcast goes on these descriptive tangents, they contribute to the overall picture of Foon. These tangents work within the liveness of learning about something while drawing on the modes and traditions of improvisational comedy.

The aesthetic accessibility of liveness, shown to be linked to podcasting's model of intimacy (Chapter 2), and this excess of detail invites listeners into this worldbuilding, thereby distributing authorship throughout the podcast's network. Within serial culture, such details provide information that encourages "diegetic overflow as authorized (spin-offs, tie-ins, or more recent types of transmedia storytelling) or unauthorized (letters to the editor, fan fiction, etc.)" creators "proliferate [the series] beyond the bounds of their original media and core texts" (Kelleter "From Recursive Progression to Systemic Self-Observation" 101). Using live improvisation to provide those details doubles down on these narrative possibilities and encourages "unauthorized" overflow.

Building a storyworld through improvisation makes it understandably difficult to maintain continuity and *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s hosts

consistently make fun of their uneven universe, specifically mentioning retconning and errors within its episodes.[3,4] In an interview on the *Improv Nerd Podcast*, the hosts comment on their attitude toward continuity, saying that they stopped rigidly tracking their storyworld early into the podcast's run and that they do not expect the interview guests to be very familiar with Foon (ImprovNerdPodcast). Since these guests play a vital role in building that world, this flexibility clearly prizes the podcast's aesthetic of live improvisation over any kind of clearly plotted worldbuilding or plot development. It also puts those in the podcast on more of a level playing field with listeners: some fans will track the world more closely than others, but so will some guests. A guest with little previous knowledge of the show may have even less knowledge of the storyworld than a faithful listener.

Speaking of the collaborative nature of worldbuilding, Jenkins writes that fans and authors are all "working from some shared understanding of what constitutes Ozness. This shared conceptual model explains the continuity of details across different versions—the reduction of Oz's 'narrative sprawl' into a much smaller number of elements that constitute the canonical story" ("'All Over the Map'" 244). Foon, however, does not take itself seriously. It is a playful world where improvisational retconning is part of the world logic and canon can change. In one episode, for example, it turned out that one of the main characters, Usidore the Blue, was being controlled by a mind-control goldfish locked in a tower for much of the series.

This lack of a clear or expected knowledge of the universe links fans to creators by minimizing their asymmetry of knowledge and enhancing *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s claims to liveness while leaving the world open to diverse claims to authorship. This open-ended authorship is similar to that of Massively Multi-player Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGS)—funnily enough, since many MMORPGs follow the Tolkien-esq model Foon does and both incorporate the playful interactivity of Dungeons and Dragons. Wolf writes of these participatory worlds as

> blurring the distinction between author and audience. The world is still originated by an author, who determines what the world will be like initially and what rules will be followed by the participants and inhabitants within it; so the role of an author is still present, even though it may be filled by a team rather than an individual. A participatory world, however, allows an audience member to participate in the world and its events, and make permanent changes that result in canonical additions to the world. (281)

This similarity between games and podcast storytelling makes a certain amount of sense. After setting up the basic world logic behind Foon as uninterested in continuity, the podcast lets its audience play with and contribute to building the world from there. The conversational liveness of the podcast's improvised interview format, then, extends into its relationship

with its fans, promotes podcasting's accessibility by blurring the line between podcasters and audience—described previously as intimate—and distributes authorship within podcasting's medial network.

The feeling of liveness exists even within scripted podcasts. Writing about *Welcome to Night Vale*, Bottomley observes that "Cecil's words are tightly scripted yet presented in such a way that sounds natural and spontaneous, so has to give the appearance of informality, creating a sense of intimacy between broadcaster and the audience" (186). In calling this kind of liveness intimate, Bottomley contributes to intimacy being used as a discourse to negotiate podcasting mediality. In this case, the medial connections formed through spontaneous speech. The feeling of uncovering a mystery or figuring something out is not limited to clearly improvised podcasts like *Hello from the Magic Tavern*. As Bottomley notes, multiple elements make "*Radiolab* sound like the process of intellectual discovery" (198), and *Serial*'s first season is the progressive story of a woman learning about the murder of a teenage girl. True crime podcasts often follow *Serial*'s lead and the host's journey of discovery is it evolves. *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s distributed authorship is part of its seriality and follows the podcasting aesthetics of intimacy discussed in Chapter 2, as being based on an open-ended, freewheeling conversation among friends. Like friends, fans can contribute to and build Foon on the same level as the show's hosts without fear of authorization conflicts.[5] Podcasting's self-descriptions of intimacy can here be used as a framework for understanding the medium's approach to seriality and authorship as conversationally close.

Hello from the Magic Tavern's use of the comedy interview form further contributes to its closeness by collapsing the distinction between discourse time and narration time. Between episodes, time in Foon passes at the same rate as time in the rest of the world and characters can read their email or post on Twitter, continuing their interactions with fans between episodes. This continual presence enhances the podcast's intimate integration into the listener's life by making Foon constantly available and temporally close to the listener. In the first episode, host Arnie Niekamp presents the podcast itself as a form of found audio from this ongoing storyworld:

> A couple of days ago, I fell through a magical rift behind a Burger King, into a magical land called Foon. Luckily, I happen to have my podcasting equipment with me, and I'm still getting a slight WiFi signal from the Burger King, through the magical portal, so I've decided to host a weekly podcast here in the tavern, the Vermilion Minotaur. And this week I'm joined by a couple of guests, would you guys mind introducing yourselves? (Niekamp et al.)

In this exposition, Arnie sets the show by explaining that it comes from a parallel universe. Any delay necessitated by podcasting distribution, then, is

due to the constraints of the medium, but not the constraints of Foon. Foon continues to exist alongside the listener independent of the podcast's weekly release. The podcast itself serves as a kind of diegetic extension in which "an object from the storyworld gets released in the real world" (Mittell *Complex TV* 298). The storyworld of Foon, much like that of *Within the Wires*, exists outside of the podcast. The podcast is a kind of found audio from those worlds and therefore leaves room for found artifacts from other media.

Because the podcast is itself found audio and is released weekly year-round, its paratexts serve a slightly different purpose than Mittell's do for television. Mittell explains that, for television, "officially produced paratexts," like blogs and merchandise, "can also fill serial gaps," a trend he sees tied specifically to television's parasociability, for which "typical domestic viewing literally invites characters into your home, often for regularly scheduled visits over the course of years" (Mittell *Complex TV* 128). On one hand, breaks between *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s episodes are shorter and require less content to fill them than for the television Mittell studies. On the other, the relatively large amount of content means that listeners spend a lot of time with the podcast. While many listeners consume podcasts at home (Edison Research and Triton Digital), *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s claim to intimacy does not rely on a domestic environment so much as the constant ability to connect with the podcast's storyworld through mobile listening and the availability of paratexts. With websites and social media, the podcast establishes itself as part of the listener's community while its regular release and abundance of paratexts—including fan-created explorations of Foon—emphasize the continual existence of its storyworld and the listener's ability to continually integrate it into their lives.

Live Transmedia Presence

The relatively asymmetrical knowledge between listeners and show creators makes it easy for fans to think of themselves as contributing to Foon's worldbuilding. They can make contributions in a variety of ways, including submitting suggestions to the show and creating paratexts. *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s lax attitude toward continuity and willingness to accept and build off audience suggestions further decentralizes the creators' power over the storyworld, much of which exists outside of the podcast itself. Incorporating transmedia paratexts into Foon's worldbuilding extends the audio-based storytelling into visual representation and existence within physical space.

That members of Foon's fan community negotiate these qualities alongside the show's creators is a hallmark of both worldbuilding and seriality. Kelleter argues that seriality leaves itself open to listener participation: Because of the "overlap" between publication and reception, serials "generate affective bonds" as their audiences "become involved in a narrative's progress" ("Five Ways of Looking at Popular Seriality" 13). Serials therefore extend "the sphere of storytelling onto the sphere of story consumption,"

stimulating "creative activities on the part of their recipients, who, for all practical purposes, operate as agents of narrative continuation" (Kelleter "Five Ways of Looking at Popular Seriality" 13). As a series forms through time, listeners participate in the development of that series, whether or not they actually engage in traditional forms of fan production.

For a series focused on improvisational worldbuilding, like *Hello from the Magic Tavern*, fan participation can mean contributing to the development of a secondary world. Importantly, that participation—be it through the creation of transmedia paratexts or simply listening and imagining the world—generates the "affective bonds" that form a community around the podcast (Kelleter "Five Ways of Looking at Popular Seriality" 13). As fans create and debate Foon's construction, their "evolving, recursive, proliferating, and multi-agential mode of storytelling enables cultures of attachment—imagined communities—that are all the more powerful for being held together by shared communications—shared conflicts and anxieties, too—rather than shared opinions" (Kelleter "Five Ways of Looking at Popular Seriality" 28–29). This community and the world it creates exist beyond the confines of the podcast itself. In its transmedia existence, Foon is continually present, or live, with the listener. This presence is part of what podcasting discussions refer to as intimate: the content becomes ever-available, parallel to the listener and can accompany them throughout their daily lives. When podcasting talks about the medium's everyday intimacy, it is interpreting this serial presence as close and creating a cultural protocol for podcasting's medial interaction.

Hello from the Magic Tavern's letters segment gives fans the opportunity to interact with the podcast along the lines of radio phone-ins and works similarly to audience suggestions in theatrical improvised comedy, helping build the storyworld by giving performers a basis for improvisation.[6] In episode 16, for example, a listener letter introduces a prophesy that an unnamed stranger (presumably Arnie) will defeat the Dark Lord (Niekamp et al.). This letter was influential as the battle against the Dark Lord became increasingly central to the show's storyline and influenced the podcast's narrative development as well as its worlds. Even listeners who do not choose to interact in this way can see these exchanges and feel that they, too, could talk with the characters if they chose to do so. Martin Shingler and Cindy Wieringa note a similar dynamic in radio phone-in reciprocity. "For the majority of the audience listening to phone-ins," they state, "such programs simply represent the possibility or potential of engaging directly in the program: they could participate or engage directly if they wanted to" (114). This possibility speaks to the show's liveness: Couldry's observation that "liveness—or live transmission—guarantees a potential connection" stresses the importance of these potentialities in live communication (3). These temporalities reflect what danah boyd calls the "always-on lifestyle," in which "all channels are accessible, but it doesn't mean I will access them" (76). Not only do the improvised temporalities of the show's conversational

style invite listeners to contribute, so does its on-demand distribution and continual availability.

Hello from the Magic Tavern's use of the comedy interview form contributes to its liveness by presenting time in Foon as moving forward in line with time in the primary world. Between episodes, time in Foon passes at the same rate as time in the rest of the world and characters can read their email or post on Twitter, continuing their interactions with fans between episodes. Because the podcast is itself found audio and is released weekly year-round, its paratexts serve a slightly different role than Mittell's do for television. Mittell explains that, for television,

> Officially produced paratexts can also fill serial gaps, including in-character blogs, commentaries found on podcasts and interviews, and character-based merchandise. Such on-going parasocial relationships are heightened for television, where typical domestic viewing literally invites characters into your home, often for regularly scheduled visits over the course of years. (*Complex TV* 128)

On one hand, breaks between *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s episodes are shorter and require less content to fill them than for the television Mittell studies. On the other, the relatively large amount of content means that listeners spend a lot of time with the podcast. While many listeners consume podcasts at home (Edison Research and Triton Digital), the form's intimacy does not rely on a domestic environment so much as the constant ability to connect with the podcast's storyworld through mobile listening and the availability of paratexts. With websites and social media, *Hello from the Magic Tavern* establishes itself as part of the listener's community while its regular release and abundance of paratexts—including fan-created explorations of Foon—emphasize the continual existence of its storyworld and the listener's ability to continually integrate it into their lives.

Spreading storytelling out among a variety of platforms and media falls under the umbrella of what Henry Jenkins calls transmedia storytelling. In *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Jenkins explains that "transmedia storytelling represents a process where integrated elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience" (Jenkins "Transmedia Storytelling 101"). Each medium, in turn, adds a new element to that story (Jenkins "Transmedia Storytelling 101"). As *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s storytelling spreads into other media, its claims to liveness, and its incorporation of podcasting specifically, evolve. The world of Foon becomes, like other secondary worlds, "a large entity which is experienced through various media windows," but one in which "no one window shows everything, and only an aggregate view combining a variety of these windows can give a complete sense of what the world is like and what has occurred there" (Wolf 2). The podcast is just one of these

windows. Fan art, cosplay, live shows, and a myriad of other media produced by a variety of authors also provide windows into Foon. While some listeners may never engage in these paratexts, "for those who do care, the vicarious experience of a world is strengthened through transnarrative and transmedia references, all of which are unified by the world into an overarching experience" (Wolf 57). By extending Foon, these paratexts enhance its continual presence. Like the digital primary world, it is "always on" (boyd).

While *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s improvisational format leads to inconsistencies in Foon's worldbuilding, these inconsistencies can enhance, rather than detract from fan engagement with the world. "Deliberate gaps, enigmas, and unexplained references help keep a work alive in the imagination of its audience," Wolf states, "because it is precisely in these areas where audience participation, in the form of speculation, is most encouraged" (60). In the case of some gaps, like what characters look like, fan production is built into the podcast format as fans either imagine appearance or negotiate it with other fans. At the same time, the improvisational liveness and comedic nature of *Hello from the Magic Tavern* does not give "the impression that all questions could, in theory, be answered, even though they are not" (Wolf 61). Instead, it invites listeners to enjoy the affective liveness of world creation along with the podcast's hosts. This quality turns fan creation away from the studious (but perhaps not completely serious) completion of inconsistencies into the joking playfulness of chatting with friends.

The friendly chattiness of this worldbuilding includes the show's use of social media to connect with listeners as would a friend. Many of the characters from *Hello from the Magic Tavern* have email addresses and Twitter accounts. These accounts reinforce the idea that characters have internet connections in Foon and play with the permeability between Foon and the social world of the podcast's listeners. Characters can interact with listeners like they do with their friends, sometimes even using the same media.

Usidore the Blue, for example, extends his character into Twitter and builds on his relationship with birds when he retweets @EffinBirds' image of a bird singing with the text 'listen to my opinions' (@usidoretheblue). That Usidore follows @EffinBirds extends his performance beyond the confines of the podcast's audio feed and gives listeners the opportunity to incorporate the character into their online social group. In doing so, *Hello from the Magic Tavern* works with what Nick Couldry calls "group liveness," or the "the liveness of a mobile group of friends who are in continuous contact via their mobile phones through calls and texting" (Couldry "Actor Network Theory and Media: Do They Connect and on What Terms?" 106). Liveness here stems from the continuous ability to access content more than from an audience consuming media synchronously. When taken into the context of podcasting's own self-descriptions, this continual availability is part of what makes podcasting so intimate: it is always there waiting for the listener to integrate it into their lives.

Fan art also has the potential of solidifying bonds between members of an intimate community and gives listeners the ability to expand on the podcast's storyworld. E.R. Gilliam's (@omgwtfois) character sketches build on Foon by providing visuals for some of the show's characters (Usidore the Blue @ usidoretheblue). When Usidore the Blue's character account retweeted the art, he creates a repetition that validates the contribution and shows that fans are recognizable as members of the show's community.

The liveness of this community solidifies itself through these interactions: the world of the podcast can be accessed any time, any place. As Foon expands and allows more authors, it creates "narrative traffic that renders the separating line between producers and fans permeable (fans turning into authors, official authors acting from a self-understanding as fans). From a systemic standpoint, all this activity is best described as a necessary—that is, unavoidable—feature of serial aesthetics" (Kelleter "Five Ways of Looking at Popular Seriality" 19). As fans contribute to the look of characters, they create canon about the world.

Studying these interactions in *Welcome to Night Vale*, Hancock writes that "fans repeatedly attribute group sensibility to Cecil's visualization" and "through fan action and collaborative creativity, an invisible man finds form" (Hancock 41). Foon is not the only live, continually available presence, then. So are the other fans (and podcasters) who help create the world. In retweeting fan art, Usidore the Blue uses his status as an official living author of the world to authenticate the text as "legitimately fitting within the shared world" (Jenkins "'All Over the Map'" 245–246). He is, in other words, incorporating the text into Foon and opening the show's improvisational worldbuilding up to listeners.

Just because podcasts are on demand does not mean their audiences completely lack any kind of synchronicity: even though all members of an audience do not all listen at the same time, a live characteristic Andrew Crisell attributes to broadcast media in *Liveness and Recording in the Media* (7), they exist parallel to each other in *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s timeline. This synchronicity is important in part because of its community-building affordances. Just like Couldry's group liveness can connect members of a social group, Crisell points out that "one quality of broadcast liveness" is "the sense of commonality or community that it creates—a consciousness in each viewer that many other viewers are watching at the same moment" (99). In creating a world that continually exists, *Hello from the Magic Tavern* creates a world in which members of its listening community can imagine themselves living together at the same time—even if they do not all listen to the podcast at the same time.

Hello from the Magic Tavern only rarely—during its theater performances—makes claims to the kind of communal reception Crisell refers to. Instead, it builds community by reinforcing its live, continual presence. Instead of podcast listeners being isolated from each other and unable to

form an audience, this connectivity "complicates dominant conceptions of new audio-media as isolating and fragmentary" because, "while fans may 'tune in' individually, from different places and temporalities, their online behaviors represent a more traditional understanding of audience" (Hancock 43). Hancock argues that fan interactions therefore show that audio culture is "rooted not simply in individuated listening but also in subsequent collective discussion and role-play" (43). The continual presence, or social liveness, of transmedia worlds creates a shared space and temporality for this ongoing communal reception instead of the literal temporalities of a terrestrial radio broadcast.

Alongside Foon, *Hello from the Magic Tavern* has other secondary worlds, including one that looks very much like Earth, but has a few notable differences, not the least of which is a magic portal to Foon. Listeners play with this world by extending it into primary world space through the use of digital mapping tools like *Yelp!* In the following examples from *Yelp!*, fans have posted reviews for the real Burger King in Chicago where secondary world Arnie fell through the magic portal that sent him to Foon. Kerem O. makes a call-back to an oft-repeated joke about spiced potatoes from the podcast: "Big fan of the spiced potatoes. My friend really seems to think they're a little too raw, but I'm pretty sure that's how they're supposed to be prepared. Delicious, regardless." Adam H. is more direct in his references:

> There are always a bunch of handwritten notes on the ground in the drive thru. They appear to be from a pet store owner named Arnie. Also, I'm pretty sure I got a glance of a badger and a tiny horse acting very strangely, but when I looked again, they were gone. Great WiFi though.

These reviews build Foon, in part, by providing information on how the rift works—sometimes he can see through it, objects can pass through the rift through the drive through window, etc. They also toy with Foon's permeability and ever-presence: it is always there, behind a rift, ready for the listener. Online interactions like these posit that Foon is not only temporally synchronous with our own world, but physically parallel as well. Listeners can write reviews of the show's Burger King because it exists within the same time and space as the primary world. These interactions bind listeners/fans in their experience of time, as well as in their ability to participate with each other and the podcast.

Hello from the Magic Tavern's transmedia storytelling then amplifies the liveness of its conversational quality by including listeners in the conversation. This inclusion works with constructs of liveness that focus on the ever-present, forward-looking temporalities of digital communication and their continual possibility for interaction. By incorporating transmedia texts into its worldbuilding and inviting fans to contribute paratexts, *Hello from the Magic Tavern* distributes authorship within its

community and provides alternate windows for experiencing its world. Being on-demand does not inhibit *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s community-building by making it harder for fans to be synchronously present with each other, it enhances synchronicity by making a continuously present world that fans can always interact with.

Monetizing Participatory Liveness

Like many podcasts, including *The Flophouse* and *Within the Wires*, fan texts and merchandise extend the storyworld, or the podcast's atmosphere, beyond the podcast. In many cases, these extensions even look similar or are, like *Within the Wires*' poster, positioned as fan art being sold in order to support the podcast. Much of *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s monetization works within and enhances its claims to building a live, intimate community. Through advertisements and corporate partnerships, online merchandising, and live theater performances, *Hello from the Magic Tavern* makes money in the live extension of its fictional universe. These monetizing paratexts are engrained within the podcast's storytelling and, in some cases, add a physical dimension to the podcast's temporally live secondary world.

Some practitioners find merchandising like this uncomfortable or awkward and not fitting podcasting's aesthetics (Spinelli and Dann *Podcasting*). At the same time, Banet-Weiser argues that branding and commercialization so thoroughly permeate American culture that authenticity is itself a brand that "is not only understood and experienced as the pure, inner self of the individual, it is also a relationship between individuals and commodity culture that is constructed as 'authentic'" (14). As branding works hand in hand with culture, and notions of authenticity themselves become a brand, podcasting discusses related constructs of intimacy to negotiate when it is acceptable to earn money off of fan labor and when it is not. While podcasts in a variety of genres, not just fantasy worldbuilding ones, incorporate and benefit from fan participation, participants in podcasting's network evoke intimacy to both describe and critique this participation.

One of the companies to advertise on the podcast is Squarespace. As part of their campaign, podcast hosts often make websites with their web-building platform. For *Hello from the Magic Tavern*, this website was built within Foon by the character Usidore the Blue and is called "Usidore ROCKS!" In addition to advertising the software, "Usidore ROCKS!" furthers the character outside of the podcast much like his Twitter feed does. It also adds a visual component to the podcast by using fan art and things Usidore likes (namely pictures of birds, rocks, and birds on rocks). These images are all callbacks; listeners know that Usidore likes both birds and rocks from the podcast. The images extend the character by showing he can make a website and adding depth to his likes and dislikes. In this way, the website works as a diegetic extension of the fictional universe, a place to add information about the character (it even mentions some of his

secret names) and a chance for the podcast to make money by advertising Squarespace.

At its base, "Usidore ROCKS!" is an advertisement that helps pay for the content of the show. Unlike Mittell's "What if?" paratexts, which tell a hypothetical story that does not interfere with the text's continuity (*Complex TV* 314), "Usidore ROCKS!"'s separation from the main storyworld would be detrimental to its aim of leading listeners to the website and the advertiser. Even though it is not necessary to go to the website to enjoy the show, podcasting's largely aural format makes it possible to go to the website, look at the rocks, birds, and birds on rocks while listening to the podcast.

Hello from the Magic Tavern's merchandise also builds the ever-present permeability of its imaginary world. T-shirts from fictional businesses are examples of this process and how closely it relates to forming a listening community, even a fan community, around the podcast. Their online store contains a poster of a map of Foon that similarly builds the podcast storyworld (Roth). In one sense, the map works as an orienting paratext. Mittell explains that with these paratexts, "orientation is not necessary to discover the canonical truth of a storyworld but rather is used to create a layer atop the program to help figure out how the pieces fit together or to propose alternative ways of seeing the story that might not be suggested by or contained within the original narrative design" (*Complex TV* 261). By looking at the map, listeners can learn about what Foon looks like and how its various landmarks connect.

At the same time as it provides orientation, the map lovingly parodies the continuity and the detailed understanding of fictional places rampant in science fiction and fantasy fandom. The caption to the picture on topatoco.com reads: "Sometimes it feels like people are just making up places. But they're not. These are real places in the magical land of Foon and now you can see for yourself thanks to this amazing map created by Foonish cartographer Adam Roth" ("Hello from the Magic Tavern"). This joke is about how the use of improvisation makes the show's storyworld somewhat unstable. The next line continues in this vein: "It should be noted that there are many contradicting maps of Foon, so the accuracy of this particular map is, well, dubious. But Arnie took a look and said, 'Looks good to me!' So that's something" ("Hello from the Magic Tavern"). By not claiming accuracy or continuity, the map encourages this kind of play among its fans. In so doing, it binds its own worldbuilding capabilities with the liveness of its improvisational worldbuilding.

Because the landmarks on the map are all readable in its online preview, it is not necessary to spend money on it to enjoy its storytelling possibilities. To buy the map, then, is to invite it into one's space and experience it within one's physical world. The map, then, extends *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s temporal liveness into physical space much in the same way the *Yelp!* Burger King reviews do: Foon continuously exists in an imaginary physical space parallel and sometimes overlapping with the listener's.

Probably the most obvious example of *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s use of liveness in its monetization is through theater performances. The discourse around these performances term them as explicitly live, in the sense that the podcast is performed in front of a physically present audience. These performances build on the same forms of improvisation and audience interaction that the rest of the podcast does: they work with familiar repetition and call-backs, audience suggestions, and specifically addressing the audience by talking about which references they will find funny.

Interestingly, these shows are not only an opportunity for listeners to be with the podcast's hosts, but for them to be with each other. In the 2018 show at the London Podcast Festival, listeners participated in cosplay and hung out together in multiple bar areas offered by the festival venue (Niekamp et al. "Hello from the Magic Taven with Special Guests"). During the performance itself, listeners can hear their laughter alongside that of others and the podcast's structure provides ample opportunity for choral repetition of key lines. Usidore the wizard has multiple names, for example, which he recites at the beginning of each episode and which listeners can chant with him, and each other, during the live show. During these moments, listeners hear their voices at the same time, in the same place as the voices of others, solidifying bonds between members of their listening community.

Hello from the Magic Tavern records these shows, edits them, and includes them in their podcast feed. When they do so, they keep these audience interactions, along with their constructs of liveness based on physical and temporal co-presence, and send them to their many subscribers. Live performance as a way of monetizing the podcast also works to validate its liveness. Along the same lines as the rock concerts Philip Auslander describes, these performances prove that the show is improvised, that a listening community exists for it, and that any listener can, in theory, go there if they choose to. The podcast's most obvious claim to liveness, the live show, serves to validate its other ones: Foon, its characters, and listeners exist together in the same universe and can interact with each other as they interact with others in their social group, both in person and online. *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s monetization works because it expands on one of the main draws of its show: its intimate liveness.

This ability to build on the storyworld works well within the podcast's fandom. For Jenkins, a "central characteristic" of fandom itself is its "ability to transform personal reaction into social interaction, spectator culture into participatory culture" (*Textual Poachers* 88). In leaving the storyworld so open for transformation, *Hello from the Magic Tavern* makes it very open to the kind of participation Jenkins is talking about. In "Serial fiction podcasting and participatory culture: Fan influence and representation in *The Adventure Zone*," Robert Yeats even goes so far as to say that "*The Adventure Zone* [podcast] and similar works signal the beginnings of a powerful new era for the production and distribution of serialized fiction, distinguishing themselves from their mass media predecessors in their manifestly

participatory culture" (3). Yeats comes to this conclusion by studying multiple instances of fans from marginalized groups telling creators of *The Adventure Zone* that their text was problematic and how the show's writers tried to correct their content to be more inclusive but his statement could also apply to the podcast's improvisational content and worldbuilding. While I disagree with the assumption that listeners need to transform a text in order to be fans—I do not believe that this kind of speaking is any more indicative of fandom than reception or listening—opening up a text for listener participation can be an effective way of communicating intimacy within a podcast.

The incorporation of friendliness into monetization can create uneasiness, however. The following posts on Reddit illustrate the ways in which podcasting uses intimacy to negotiate the relationships it forms. During the first season of *Hello from the Magic Tavern*, the podcast had an ad break for Cards Against Humanity during which the hosts riffed on the content of packages listeners sent into the show. The format for the ad fits podcasting's intimate aesthetics: friendly, live banter; distributed worldbuilding; fan interactions; etc. In a post on Reddit, a listener who would prefer to remain anonymous expresses disappointment with how the podcast managed that intimacy:

> Early on in the podcast the crew seemed thrilled to get and open packages on the air, even trying occasionally to incorporate your gifts into the show; you could tell they were really trying to show they appreciate their listeners. Now, however, they haven't opened any packages in many months, barely touch on any emails. ("I'm done listening to Magic Tavern")

For this listener, the packages worked along the lines of parasocial reciprocity: fans gave to the show by sending gifts, the show responded by acknowledging those gifts. Part of that acknowledgment, in the case of *Hello from the Magic Tavern*, meant incorporating the physical objects contained in the packages into the secondary world of Foon and the show's live storytelling.

In his response to the post, show creator Arnie Niekamp—under the name (Earth) Arnie Niekamp to distinguish him from the character on the show—uses the same criteria of intimate interaction to reflect on the appropriateness of the gifts.

> We had wanted to do a thing where listeners could send physical stuff to the world of the show (because we love places where the show can touch the real world and vice versa) and that seemed like a fun thing to add to those ads, especially since Cards helpfully offered us a place we could have that stuff sent to. As the first packages came in we opened them on the show, sight unseen, to get our spontaneous reactions to what we found inside, sometimes to great effect and other times just amounting

> to us opening pre sents [sic] in front of our listener. (Niekamp "This is Arnie")

Niekamp here melds the physical closeness of intimacy—"touch the real world"—with the temporalities of friendly liveness—"spontaneous reactions"—and the interactivity of listener submissions. Opening the gifts worked, for Niekamp, because it fit into the structures of improvisational and physical closeness of the podcast.

The standards both Niekamp and the listener use to judge this part of the program are strikingly similar and both agree that the packages did, in part, serve their purpose. For both participants, the gifts were successful when they incorporated elements of intimacy into the podcast. For Niekamp, the gifts were close in time (spontaneous, improvised) and space (touch). When he says that the gifts were "a poignant reminder that this thing we do means as much to other people as it means to us," Niekamp also comments on how these elements underscored the close relationship between show creators and fans (Niekamp "This is Arnie"). The listener and host present themselves as connected through their reciprocity, a reciprocity podcasting often considers in terms of intimacy.

The conflict between the two does not lie in a disagreement about whether or not the podcast should aim for these kinds of intimacy, but in the execution. The anonymous poster writes that they assembled a package of gifts they "couldn't afford" and "a one page letter explaining each and thanking each of the cast for getting me through really unpleasant times" ("I'm done listening"). They "hoped that the things I picked would be useful in their story," or integrated into the Foon, and "hoped to hear if they liked it or not," but the actors "haven't opened it or any other packages since I sent mine" ("I'm done listening"). The lack of response—acknowledgment and reciprocity—was, for this listener, a breach of their relationship with the podcast. They apologetically explain that they are "heartbroken," that they "forgot that this is a business first," and say they "might return to Magic Tavern if they get their priorities straight again" ("I'm done listening"). The listener describes a very personal attempt for interaction: they tried to express friendship through the gift and were "heartbroken" when that expression was not reciprocated ("I'm done listening"). Part of that reciprocity would be in accepting the gifts into the podcast's storytelling and into the world of Foon. For this listener, the podcast is not making these interactions as high of a priority as they should be.

Niekamp does not outright argue with the listener's expectation for reciprocity. Instead, he uses the same model to express a "feeling of general free-floating guilt" at not being able to respond to everyone who reaches out to the podcast. The gifts were

> both wonderful but also slightly troubling at times in ways that was hard to put our finger on... but I guess in retrospect reading that someone

> spent more money than they could afford to spend sending a package and then felt betrayed that it was never mentioned on the show... that's exactly what that finger was having trouble articulating. (Niekamp "This is Arnie")

Both Niekamp and the anonymous listener, then, express unease at the failure of reciprocity within their interactions. This exchange is not an argument, but evidence of a shared interpretation of podcasting mediation as governed through an ideal of friendly, intimate reciprocity. Niekamp and the listener agree that interaction is important, that it makes the show better, and that hosts have a certain responsibility to include the listener. Although there is debate within podcasting about the extent to which this responsibility exists, Niekamp expresses a certain obligation to his listeners when he says the packages were "slightly troubling" ("This is Arnie"). When Niekamp suggests that the gifts could appear within Foon in subsequent episodes, he extends that reciprocity into the shared authorship of Foon. While podcasting as a network negotiates its mediality through intimacy in large, this exchange serves as a small example about how those larger negotiations affect the relationships between individual people (Arnie Niekamp and the anonymous listener) through the podcast. Both Niekamp and the listener judge their mediated interactions according to a framework that podcasting refers to as "intimate" and how they use that framework influences the content of the podcast (what storytelling elements and details occur in Foon), its audience interactions (the decision to no longer accept packages), monetization (the packages were a promotion for Cards Against Humanity), and listenership (the listener decides not to continue listening to the podcast). These are just some of the many connections that occur within podcasting as a network and they are here being negotiated according to the qualities of their intimacy. It is, in a sense, a snapshot of the much larger, more general conversation happening within podcasting's medial network and demonstrates the extent to which that larger cultural negotiation affects the lived experiences of individual participants.

Conclusion

One of the most striking things about *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s live construction of Foon is not its singularity, but how familiar its techniques are to anyone involved with CHIP podcasts. Their spontaneous, interactive tone, their incorporation of listener interaction and social media, and their monetization methods are all quite similar and all work to position themselves, and their audience, within an ongoing listening community. *Hello from the Magic Tavern* is remarkable only in that the world it builds is in the fantasy genre—a trait that makes its boundaries a bit clearer for study—but its ability to draw on liveness to connect listeners is not unique. True crime podcasts often work in similar ways, to follow a mystery as it

unfolds, lending to the sense that listeners are figuring out what happened alongside hosts (Waldmann "From Storytelling to Story*listening*"). Narrative journalism in general incorporates elements of liveness, focusing on the journalist's perspective as they learn about events (Lindgren, Dowling and Miller). If liveness, following Couldry, describes how media connects people ("Liveness, 'Reality,' and the Mediated Habitus from Television to the Mobile Phone"), podcasting's liveness describes its position within a digital landscape in which immediate connectivity does not mean that an audience listens to content at the same moment, but that they can continually interact with content across a variety of platforms. As podcasting discusses and reflects on these temporalities, however, it does not use the language of liveness, but one of intimacy. Popular discourses of intimacy that emphasize friendly conversation and companionship within the listener's everyday life describe podcasting's mediality. As they do so, they use intimacy to interpret what kinds of mediation are good and which are not and they create a framework through which participants in podcasting's network can interpret their own experiences of the medium. These forms of structural intimacy extend throughout *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s transmedia presence and create a listening community that has an authorial role in creating the podcast's secondary world. The presence of that world, then, is the continual presence of an intimate community in which listeners can participate, interact with, and continuously and extend into the future.

Notes

1 Rebecca Coleman argues that digital media are also mainly concerned with the present moment. "Digital media function in terms of the processual and affective qualities of the present," she explains, "it is a temporality that is always in flux" (Coleman 609). In always keeping an ear to the future, Arnie is pointing to the pre-emergence, or anticipation of what is to come, of the present.
2 Notably, the performer Arnie Niekamp is both playing the character Arnie and the character Can the Wizard. The important thing is that it *sounds* live.
3 Ret-con is short for 'retroactive continuity,' or creating story and world cohesion after a storytelling element has been released, most likely because that element conflicts with other parts of the story and/or world. Although the term is widely used in fandom, academic accounts can be found in Mittell (2015) and Kelleter (2015).
4 David Hendy similarly points to liveness and narrative as in conflict with each other in British radio, mostly due to the prolonged production schedule needed to create a tightly constructed narrative (91).
5 "These constant appropriations, modifications, unofficial continuations, and so on tend to generate *authorization conflicts*" (Kelleter "From Recursive Progression to Systemic Self-Observation" 101).
6 Crisell 1994 points out that, for radio, phone-ins "create the illusion that radio is a two-way medium," an effect that podcasting replicates and builds from (187).

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4 Intimacy in the American National Imaginary

Hello from the Magic Tavern creates a secondary world that overlaps and interacts with the everyday lives of its listeners. Foon exists because it is continually formed and reformed through the collective actions of many, not entirely centralized, authors. These interactions create community and podcasting's self-descriptions codify them as intimate. But not all of podcasting's imagined communities create secondary worlds. As podcasts circulate within the United States and among Americans abroad, they work within culture to create connections among members of an imagined national community.

The NPR Politics Podcast melds a variety of formats, including chat and straightforward news reporting, to form these connections. The podcast, alongside the political commentary show *Yo! Is this Racist?!*, provides an insightful case study into the interrelated temporalities and spatialities in podcasting's contribution to the national imaginary. One of the ways podcasting presents the nation is as a progressively unfolding story. Benedict Anderson argues in *Imagined Communities* that media (he uses newspapers as an example) that comes out at specific times and shows events unfolding week after week makes members of a nation think of other members as experiencing these events at the same time they do (25). These media consumers imagine the connections between them as similar to characters in a novel: characters can change and grow at the same time that other characters change and grow (Anderson 26). As characters move parallel to each other, the story itself moves forward. Anderson applies this concept of parallel forward movement to a nation that moves forward through history while its members read the newspaper. These temporalities of an imagined nation present themselves within podcasting. *The NPR Politics Podcast*, for example, tells its listeners when it records, thereby locating it within the public performance of a historically unfolding nation. The show also relates to current events, keeping listeners informed on where they are in the political calendar and the issues that will affect their future forward movement.

At the beginning of the podcast, listeners send in recorded messages saying some basic information about the show and what they are doing while

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they record. At one point, the listener says "this podcast was recorded at," a reporter jumps in to say what time they recorded the show, then the listener continues with the scripted message. These timestamps make up a small part of the show, but they do the important work of locating it within the nation. On a basic level, they state the time the podcast was recorded in order to fit it in to an unfolding national narrative.

The listener-submitted section of the timestamps does more than just say what time it is, though. While situating the show within a nation imagined through parallel movement, they also present a community imagined through nondeveloping connections between people. A variety of media perform these connections and work on photography by Roland Barthes, Marianne Hirsch, and Margaret Olin have highlighted the image's ability to mediate these connections. Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* explains how viewers recognize others in pictures by experiencing the past and the present (or the anterior future) at the same time (96). When Barthes looks at a family picture, then, he knows who the person is because of his past experiences of that person, he knows that the picture was taken in the past, and he knows that the person has changed since the picture was taken. When he experiences these different points of time simultaneously, the picture "pricks" him with recognition (43).

Marianne Hirsch expands on Barthes' analysis of recognition. She says that family pictures do not only elicit the experience of those moments of time, but also the connections between all of our family members who have passed down pictures throughout the years. Viewers can recognize their ancestors as family, even though they have never met them, because they also recognize all of the other members of our family who have taken care of the photographs (Hirsch 11). This system of connections, according to Hirsch, helps form and stabilize familial bonds.

Neither of these texts describe recognition as being a story that unfolds over time. In both cases, these photos promote feelings of recognition that occur instantaneously. If I recognize a friend on the street, I do not think back to the entire story about how we met and what I think she has done since I last saw her. I just see her and, in an instant, remember her based on past experience. The listener submitted timestamps to the *NPR Politics Podcast* work in a similar way. They are short and do not tell a story. Instead, they are mostly cell phone recordings with a person saying what they are doing at the time of recording. Their short script makes it easy to experience them instantaneously and their use of everyday recording technologies makes them feel familiar. Unlike Anderson's analysis, this part of the timestamp is not an unfolding narrative.

Instead, this temporality relates more closely to Ernst Renan's concept of a nation being defined through both "memories" and a "daily plebiscite" (*Qu'est-ce qu'une nation 10*). The memory here is the listener's experience of the past when she recognizes the timestamps and the "daily plebiscite" is her perception that she can also participate in the constitution of the nation

by sending in her own submission (Renan 10). When she hears a listener call in from Pikes Peak, she recognizes simultaneously the natural monument's past (westward expansion), the listener's location, her current experience of the timestamp, and the intermediary step in which the reporters who run the show select the submission ("Midterm Update: May 8th Primaries Takeaways"). The imagined nation here connects people through this web of national performance and perceived participation and not necessarily through a narrative or historical unfolding. The notion that each member can participate is the way in which the nation perpetuates itself. Like *Hello from the Magic Tavern*'s intimately conversational participatory connections, this community extends itself into the future with the promise of further expansion more than a developing story.

This chapter has six main parts. The first part, "The Nation in Homogenous Empty Time," will discuss in further depth the ways in which the *NPR Politics Podcast* situates itself in relation to Benedict Anderson's concept of time as a developing story in *Imagined Communities*. The second section, "Temporalities of National Recognition," looks at the experience of undevelopable national recognition in the podcast and then continues, in "Aural Basking" to comment on how these temporalities work to create a continually present nation. These relationships to time and space work within scholarship on liveness and, in the case of podcasting's self-descriptions, intimacy. The next two subsections use these conceptual frameworks to analyze how podcasting's national imaginary describes—and forms cultural protocols that contribute to the medium's affective translation for—connections among members of the national community. The following section, "Voice, Place, and Authority," relates how podcasting reflects on these two models for understanding time and space in the national imaginary.

The recognition and repetition-focused, more highly recursive forms of serial progression that podcasting presents creates different kinds of affective bonds than the story-focused ones Anderson describes. As much as industry discussions derived from radio present simultaneous reception as intimate, popular criticism, and fan cultures tend to focus on the intimacy of podcasts that center on chat and repetition-based temporalities over ones with a strong forward-moving plot. The function of podcasting's intimate self-descriptions is therefore not to be underestimated. In discussing intimacy, podcasting is forming its own cultural protocols and these protocols play a role in constructing the national imaginary. When podcasts create national connections, they position their intimate communities in opposition to imagined others. The closeness of podcasting's connections then counters the distance of these imagined others. Because nations are formed through shared debate, and not shared ideals (Anderson, Kelleter "From Recursive Progression to Systemic Self-Observation") these podcasts imagine a single forward-moving nation divided in space and time.

The Nation in Homogeneous Empty Time

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* posits the importance of cultural concepts of time in creating a nation. A crucial part of Anderson's argument is that members of a nation imagine their connection to other members through their simultaneous experience of linear national time. He explains the temporality of this forward movement using the novel. In the first part of the novel, "A quarrels with B" at the same time that "C and D make love" (Anderson 25). Time moves on and later "A telephones C" while "B shops" and "D plays pool" (Anderson 25). Later, in the final time Anderson describes, "D gets drunk in a bar" while "A dines at home with B" and "C has an ominous dream" (25). The novel's events, to put it succinctly, unfold with characters acting separately, but at the same time as others. They can connect as their personal timelines overlap, but they do not have to meet to be included in the same novel. "Note that during this sequence," Anderson explains, "A and D never meet, indeed may not even be aware of each other's existence if C has played her cards right. What then actually links A to D?" (25). The link is that A and D are members of the same "firm and stable reality," in which members of a social group "can even be described as passing each other on the street, without ever becoming acquainted, and still be connected" in time through "acts are performed at the same clocked, calendrical time, but by actors who may be largely unaware of one another" (Anderson 25).

Anderson, then, sees in these novels a cultural understanding of connections between people that forms itself not through a relationship to a deity, but to an understanding of a society in and of itself. This conception of a society has a set temporality of measured forward movement, as characters in a novel move steadily (sometimes simultaneously) toward the end of the book. He relates this concept of society to a nation, stating that

> The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which is also conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history. An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000,000-odd fellow-Americans. He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity. (Anderson 26)

In understanding that these other Americans experience time in the same linear fashion, the individual American can think of herself in relation to them. This imagined connection, then, forms an imagined national community defined in part through linear temporality.

Newspapers highlight their place within this linear temporality by noting their time of publication. Anderson explains that "the date at the top of the

newspaper, the single most important emblem on it, provides the essential connection [between seemingly unconnected stories]—the steady onward clocking of homogeneous, empty time" (33). The homogeneous time constructed through the rhythms of publication, then, is what makes it possible for members of a nation to imagine themselves as such in relation to others in their community.

Many podcasts fit themselves into this linear national narrative in much the same way newspapers do. They use dating and naming practices to direct listeners on when to listen to their podcast and continually refer to the narrative of the American political process through their visuals and references to specific events and places in the electoral calendar and map. These rhythms of circulation present the American nation, and the connections between members of that nation, within homogeneous empty time. What in *Hello from the Magic Tavern* was the continual presence of a secondary world, in political podcasts is the continual presence of a national imagined community. By fitting themselves into a linear national narrative, these podcasts imagine that community as connected through the forward march of time.

The professional announcer saying the date and time the podcast was recorded fits the *NPR Politics Podcast* into a nation imagined linearly through a developing narrative. This part of the stamp works the same way the date at the top of a newspaper works: it says where the podcast is in this unfolding of events. Other podcasts go further by instructing listeners when to best listen based on how the podcasts are situated in the linear circulation of homogeneous empty time in the public sphere. A significant number of news podcasts do so in their titles: *UpFirst*, *The Daily*, and *Today Explained* all remind the listener when the podcast is released, how often it circulates, and when to listen. *UpFirst*, for example, is available early in the morning for listeners in the territorial United States and reminds the listener that they can get up-to-date news at that time.

The *NPR Politics Podcast*, first conceived as a political chat show reflecting on the week's news, does not include a time reference in its name. The titles of early episodes, though, closely relate to time and consist of weekly episodes with the title "Weekly Roundup," then the date—"Weekly Roundup: Friday, November 13"—or "Quick Takes," which focus more on a particular topic—"Quick Take: Bernie Sanders and Socialism." These "Quick Takes" do not reference calendar time, but instead the amount of time it takes to listen to the podcast, and focus on topics that are either generally reflective ("Quick Take: Campaign Apps," "Quick Take: Candidate Books") or reflective takes on recent, although not breaking, news events ("Quick Take: Paris Terror Attacks" released three days after the event).

As the podcast progresses, episode names become more varied. Running up to election day 2016, the podcast came out daily and episodes were named with the date ("Sunday, November 6," "Monday, November 7," "Tuesday, November 8"). This naming was perhaps necessary in underscoring the date

due to podcatchers' inconsistency in displaying a podcast's release date. Apple's iTunes was the leading podcatcher at the time and its desktop program did not show release dates. When the *NPR Politics Podcast* uses the date in its episode names, it highlights the time in which the podcast episode is located in the linear circulation of professionally produced media and makes it possible for listeners to imagine other listeners consuming the podcast parallel to themselves. The podcast's regular release schedule underlines the importance of serial development in an unfolding national discourse.

Interestingly, the episode-naming conventions changed when Donald Trump was elected president. The titles change from "Tuesday, November 8" to the more newspaper headline-like title "Donald Trump Elected President." These headline-style episode titles continued for the next few episodes: "Trump's Victory: The Day After," "Trump, Obama Meet at the White House," "The Election Of Donald Trump." The podcast assumes that the magnitude of the event and the newspaperesq headline are enough to position it within the national narrative and the changing of format underscores its impact. While it can be reasonably argued that the podcast did not need to say the day Donald Trump was elected president because it would be clear to most listeners, the same could be said for election day itself. The title for that episode, however, is that date "Tuesday, November 8" and not the equally readable "Election Day." On one hand, "Donald Trump Elected President," the result of the election, shows a break with the podcast's presentation of the linear progression of time, the election itself does not. On the other, its similarity to a newspaper headline situates the podcast into cultural conventions surrounding that progression.

Before listener-submitted timestamps were introduced to the podcast, the show's journalists situated it within this linear, narrative time themselves. Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, or the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" is useful in understanding the ways in which space and time interact in these introductions to construct a nation (84). For Bakhtin, time and space are "fused carefully into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole" in which "space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history" (84). This fusion of time and space means that, as constructions of national time change, so do constructions of national space. The *NPR Politics Podcast*, as it moves forward through homogeneous empty time and the political calendar, also moves forward through the territorial United States. The interrelatedness of these times and spaces in the podcast's chronotope at this point in the show's development describe a territorial nation tied to the unfolding of the presidential primaries. It presents a single nation present in both time and space.

When the podcast began, the 2016 primary season was well underway and the set introductions that make up the majority of this study were yet to be introduced in the podcast. Instead, like this example from the February 2nd 2016 episode "Quick Take: Iowa Caucus Results," reporters often set

the show by going into great detail on where and when they were in all of its regional specificity.

RON: I'm still here in Iowa. I'm coming to you from Iowa Public Radio right in Des Moines

ELSA: And how's the weather over there?

RON: Ah, we had a little snow overnight and flights are cancelled and uh we may have an extended stay in Des Moines.

ELSA: And as we said, everyone's heading to New Hampshire. Reporter Asma Halid, you're already there!

ASMA: I am, where it's remarkably warm for a February day in New Hampshire. I'm coming to you all from the beautiful Comfort Inn in Manchester, New Hampshire, uh, where I am looking at the campaign as well as the intersection between demographics and politics.

Here, the reporters not only say what part of the country they are in, they go into detail on the weather and hotel rooms. The podcast ties this regional specificity to the political calendar: Ron Elving is in Iowa because of the Iowa caucuses and will be moving to New Hampshire to cover the primary there. Asma Halid is already in New Hampshire for the primaries. Their locations are relevant and important in setting the show because they relate to the time in which the campaign progresses and the political schedule of national politics. Later episodes go into even more detail on each region, with reporters speaking at great length about the kinds of food available and their experiences in each place.[1]

This changing of specific places and times throughout the election season and in relation to events on the primary season calendar define a nation similar to the one Anderson describes: a nation moving forward through time. The references to politics and the detailed descriptions of regional specificity (weather, food, etc.) anchor this movement firmly within the territorial United States, but also describe the nation as a space specifically tied to governmental politics. Reporters visit these spaces for the moment of time they are useful in telling the story of political development, and while the listener can imagine that the space continues to exist when not being reported on, it is no longer an explicit part of the national story. The nation as presented in these early episodes of the *NPR Politics Podcast* is one in which both time and space are defined through their relationship to the political calendar and the national narrative built on that calendar.

The first episode of the podcast gives a start and end point for this time-based narrative:

SPEAKER ONE: We're the team who covers politics here at NPR coming to you because this week officially marks less than 365 days until the presidential election, which means that if you're already tired of trying to keep up with politics, just you wait.

SPEAKER TWO: But that's why we're here. We travel with the candidates, with the president, we cover the events that will shape this election year. You don't have to keep up with politics to know what's going on, just keep up with us. ("Introducing the NPR Politics Podcast")

Even though the show continued after the election year, the use of a start point and an end point, and the sequential development of time along the lines of a national political calendar, further situate the majority of the *NPR Politics Podcast* firmly within the sorts of national imagining distributed through media circulation developed during the Enlightenment, especially in the show's first year (Habermas 68). The podcast has a start and end point, with developments along the way that all work to influence the outcome. Characters, or politicians, grow and change and how they grow and change reflects the outcome of the election, and therefore, the end of the show.

The podcast did not end as planned at the end of the election year, though. It kept going, and shortly after changed the introductions to a more standardized format with a listener submitting a set message and a journalist saying the (measured) time they recorded the podcast. While the journalist's insertion of the day and minute remains connected to the unfolding of events in relation to a political calendar, the listener submissions have a less narratively bound chronotope that binds nationality with the notion of a non-narrative recognition, liveness, and participation instead of an unfolding national narrative and members of a national community experiencing those events parallel to each other.

Temporalities of National Recognition

The repetitious phrasing in the *NPR Politics Podcast*'s episode titles, their accompanied references to American space, and their regular schedule structure national time as linear and progressive. Appadurai calls similar practices a "structuring temporal rhythm" that "can perform a percussive role in organizing large-scale consumption patterns," but points out that these patterns may also "be made up of much more complex orders of repetition and improvisation" (68). Where some aspects of the timestamps structure time in this linear, progressive fashion, then, the podcast's temporality is much more complicated than that. The "repetition and improvisation" Appadurai associates with this complex structuring smacks, in the context of podcasting, of the spatiotemporality the medium interprets through the cultural construct of intimacy. The repetition of elements connects to the constructs of memory and recognition discussed in Chapter 1 and the improvisation relates to those forms discussed in Chapter 2. These constructs imagine connections among members of podcasting's network and they structure those connections, but they do not structure them completely through a linear progression of time. In the case of the *NPR Politics Podcast*'s timestamps, these orders of repetition and improvisation work to

create moments of recognition within the show that evoke the simultaneous experience of past and present. Where Appadurai connects these practices to "feeding the body" and the structural rhythms of "daily food habits" (68), podcasting self-descriptions speak to the physical consumption of time in terms of intimacy: space and time connect as the temporal rhythms of recognition combine, in the case of food, when the food enters the body and, in the case of podcasting, when cultures interpret the medium's intimacy through its close (and even internalized) intimacy (Chapter 1). The timestamps connect listeners to other members of the nation through these complex rhythms of repetition and recognition.

The submissions to the *NPR Politics Podcast* create national connections through recognition. Following Barthes' definition of recognition as the *punctum*, or the conflation of two (or more) moments of time, the timestamps relate the present moment of podcast listening both to past timestamps, specifically national times and places, and moments of the listeners' actual life.[2] In the Thursday, June 14, 2018 timestamp, for example, a sparkly, friendly voice chimes: "Hi, this is Ryan from Newport News, Virginia and I'm doing nothing exciting. Just living ma' life. I have Chipotle, that's kinda nice. This podcast was recorded at […] and things might have changed since then, but probably not in my life, just an ordinary person. Thanks for listening, now here's the show" ("Weekly Roundup: Thursday, June 21"). This clip makes it possible for the listener to see herself in Ryan. The reference to Chipotle is both specific and generic. It paints a picture of Ryan sitting there, recording a quick message over a burrito, enjoying the somewhat pleasure of better-than-average fast-food. At the same time, Chipotle is a national chain, making his reference of it relatable to people outside of his region. A listener, then, can recognize themselves in Ryan by simultaneously experiencing the memory of past Chipotle in her own life, the idea of Ryan recording in the past, the idea of journalists for the podcast listening to and (perhaps) relating to Ryan's message, of other listeners doing the same, and their current experience of the message.

That most of these recordings use cell phones binds their sound quality to the types of communication used among colleagues, family members, and friends. Bottomley notes that cell phone recording "discursively functions as a signifier of intimacy and authenticity" (211). In some podcasts, he explains, "producers also leave in (or even accentuate) phone greetings, call distortion, and other 'mistakes' as a way of simultaneously creating an unedited feeling and reflexively prodding the listener to hear the documentary as a construct or representation" (211). At the same time, these distortions relate to the sound technologies many people use in their everyday lives and therefore connect the stamps to the listeners' interactions with people they know well. As such, these sounds are both hypermediated, in that they are identifiably media, and aesthetically unmediated as a podcast. That Bottomley refers to intimacy here shows the extent to which the word has come to reflect on these qualities of podcast mediation.

These timestamps connect members of a listening nation. While it is certainly true that not every listener will relate to every timestamp and that Ryan's message will certainly not touch everyone, the variety of different stamps make it possible for a wide swath of Americans to identify with at least a few, be they in references to restaurants or staying up all night to take care of a crying baby or going to a concert. These references from daily life make it possible for listeners to recognize themselves in the collection of timestamps that make up the introductions to the *NPR Politics Podcast*. In addition to the simultaneous experiences listed above, the show's set script relates Ryan's message to more traditionally national ones.

US Army Specialist Larry Moore's timestamp is an example of a submission that creates explicitly national connections:

> This is Specialist Larry Moore with Charlie Company 8248 ASP in support of Operation Inherent Resolve located in Southwest Asia. You are listening to the NPR Politics Podcast which was recorded on… Things might have changed by the time you have heard it. Keep up with all of your NPR Politics coverage on the NPR One App, npr.org, and of course, your local NPR station. Now here's the show. Hwa! ("Weekly Roundup: Thursday, May 3")

The listener can clearly recognize Larry is in the military, even if she does not particularly identify with that mode of participation in American nationhood. If the submissions are all taken together, though, Larry Moore's entry works alongside others, like Ryan's, to make their presence specifically national. The entries stand next to each other in a metaphorical family photo album; the viewer need only see a few familiar faces to know that the pictures belong to her family. The *NPR Politics Podcast* mixes representations of these classical examples of "Americanness" with ordinary ones and ones that speak more specifically to a left-of-center politics (non-native English speakers and queer families, for example).

That the stamps use a simple, easy-to-reproduce format makes them recognizable while the different speakers—a new submission each episode—provides variation within this repetition. This use of repetition combines with the recognizability of their speakers. This part of the timestamp, then, does not present members of a nation as connected by imagining their parallel movement through time, but bonded through their shared ability to participate in the construction of the nation. These interactions are not entirely without forward movement—listeners are familiar with the form of the timestamps because they have heard them before—but this movement is more closely aligned with serial "sprawl" (Kelleter "Trust and Sprawl") than an unfolding national story. The connections, in other words, extend out instead of linearly forward. As the number of submissions increases and the community expands, the podcast invites listeners to recognize the stamps and imagine that they, too, are recognizable as a member of the national

community. Similar to how *Hello from the Magic Tavern* creates a fan community through the expansion of its storyworld, the timestamps incorporate a variety of voices to expand on who belongs to the national community.

The *NPR Politics Podcast*'s production practices and content form connections between a multitude of participants and moments in time. National symbols are imbedded within these moments, rendering the experience of recognition within the timestamp a national one and in so doing connecting members of the imagined national community through moments of recognition that podcasting describes along the lines of smaller, more intimate communities.

Aural Basking: Creating a National Presence

The *NPR Politics Podcast* creates a national context surrounding moments of recognition, making it more likely that listeners relate the punctum to the nation. In order to create this context and define it as national, the timestamps use an auditory version of the "therapeutic connection" of Olin's basking in photography: they focus on strong structural/generic elements, multiple entries, and practices of distracted listening.[3] Basking, when adjusted to fit the spatial qualities of sound and mobile listening, creates a sense of national spatial presence tied to the nonlinear dynamics of contextual recognition. National space experienced through aural basking creates both a context through which to experience moments of recognition and the simultaneous experience of multiple spaces within those moments.

The types of images suited to this connection, according to Olin, are generic ones with "less to look at" (loc. 2015). Tourist pictures, for example, are suited to basking in part because they do not "aim at being unique, but rather generic-because only a generic, that is, recognizable, photograph can help the tourist feel authentically a part of the event" (loc. 2010). This feeling of authenticity is not inherent in the images, however. It comes from feeling the presence of the images by viewing them distractedly. These images work, says Olin, "not because they are authentic, but because they are generic, and created an environment for basking" (loc. 2020–2026). In this statement, Olin connects the photographs' generic presentation to the viewing practices used to appreciate them as well as their ability to create a sense of environmental presence.

The timestamp from May 7, 2018 uses descriptive language, national icons, and background sound to evoke national presence:

> This is Valerie from the top of the Manitou incline in front of beautiful Pikes Peak just outside Colorado Springs, Colorado, where today on, May 3d, it is snowing. I have just descended to 8,590ft above sea level by climbing 2,000ft in less than one mile. That is, 2,744 railroad tie steps up the side of the mountain to my happy place. This podcast was recorded at [...] Things may have changed by the time you hear this, so keep up

> with all of the NPR Political coverage at npr.org, the NPR One App, and on your local NPR station. Go KRCC in Colorado Springs! ("Midterm Update: May 8th Primaries Takeaways")

In this entry, Valerie uses sound to create a national aural space. Her voice, both slightly breathless and cuttingly strong, is raised against a gust of wind into her speaker. The rhythmic crunch of either gravel or snow tells the listener that Valerie is still walking and the layering of wind sounds (between mountains, through trees, into the speaker) give the sense of distance and a vast natural landscape. The listener most likely experiences the immersive qualities of this soundscape while physically located in a very different place.

Valerie's details about this space create opportunities for national recognition. The first of these opportunities is in naming Pikes Peak and speaks to images of romantic nationalism and natural monuments. Similarly, the entry's reference to the railroad serves as a symbol for westward expansion and Valerie's description of it as her "happy place" connects it to her as a person. These details define Valerie's aural environment as national. Rather than speak to a developing national history, this aural snapshot is a symbol of national space that reflects "the poverty of their (and our) political languages rather than the hegemony of territorial nationalism" (Appadurai 166). The strong sense of national presence is not tied to a completely territorial experience of national space, but instead promotes the simultaneous experiences of two spaces: the lived one and the mediated nation. These experiences are both spatial and, with the timestamp's use of recognition, temporal. Aural basking creates a sense of presence through distraction because it enables this simultaneity. In not paying complete attention, listeners can feel as if they are in more than one space.

Recognition and Liveness in Imagining the Nation

These connections have a structure that is both similar to and temporally distinct from the one Anderson speaks of in *Imagined Communities*. "The obsolescence of the newspaper on the morrow of its printing," Anderson writes, "creates this extraordinary mass ceremony: the almost precisely simultaneous consumption ('imagining') of the newspaper-as-fiction. We know that particular morning and evening editions will overwhelmingly be consumed between this hour and that, only on this day, not that" (35). Hilmes notes that Anderson's "description of the modern print influenced citizen, the newspaper reader, even more accurately evokes the radio listener," who tunes in at set times and hears the news alongside a community of other listeners ("Radio and the Imagined Community" 351). This synchronous reception parallels the liveness of many forms of mass media (Chrisell) and the connections formed between members of a community who experience it together as an event unfolds.

Anderson contrasts the mass ceremony of newspaper reading to "sugar, the use of which proceeds in an unlocked, continuous flow; it may go bad, but it does not go out of date" (35). The flow of sugar is, for Anderson, quite different from the time-sensitive events of newspaper—and by extension radio—imaginaries, but forward movement presents itself in both cases. In the case of the newspaper, punctual and simultaneous reception inform members of a nation on a developing story. In the case of sugar, the emphasis is not on simultaneous reception but on continuous flow. Taken into the context of Actor Network Theory, this flow presents the nation (or society) as "a movement in need of continuation" (Latour *Reassembling the Social* 37). By participating in podcasting, those involved in the medium's network continue that movement. This flow, however, is not a linearly unfolding narrative so much as a "sprawling" web of connections among participants in a network (Kelleter "Trust and Sprawl: Seriality, Radio, and the First Fireside Chat"). Commentary podcasts that take on an improvisational tone, or that serve as general reflections more than updating their audience on the unfolding of national news headlines, present a nation imagined through the continuous, sugar-like flow of decentralized participation within that network. This flow moves forward through time as connections expand, but it is not a story. They, in other words, "may go bad," but do "not go out of date" (Anderson 35).

Within this flow, members of the nation imagine others not by their parallel consumption of media, but by their ability to participate in the national conversation through media. The repeatability, accessibility, and ease of recognition within the timestamps aesthetically encourage this imaginary. For Nick Couldry, the ability for members of a social group to imagine others as connected and reachable through media—in his case, mobile phones—is a characteristic of group liveness ("Liveness, 'Reality,' and the Mediated Habitus from Television to the Mobile Phone"). The *NPR Politics Podcast* presents this version of a nation modelled through continual participation in the national imaginary. Notably, both forms of movement have been described as live—Anderson and Hilmes' synchronous listening relates to Crisell's work on radio liveness and participation-based forms to Couldry and Scannell's. Liveness as a theoretical concept, then, can describe network connections among members of a nation.

While one does not have to actually submit an entry to a podcast to participate in this liveness, one of the listeners who did so to the *NPR Politics Podcast* was Kylie, an American whose blog, *Off They Went*, concerns her experiences living outside the United States. On March 22, 2017, she describes her relationship to podcasting as one centered on the ways in which the medium helps her feel connected to the American imagined community. "Walt thinks I'm nuts," she says of her partner, "but to help me feel connected to the onslaught of issues facing our country I have subscribed to a steady diet of political podcasts" (Kylie). This connection does not describe a connection to friends and family, as it would in Couldry's description of

group liveness, but instead a connection to the American public sphere. As an American living abroad, this connection takes on a spatial importance.

> Living abroad during this turbulent time in the US is both a blessing and a curse. I'd like to say it's easy to check out and ignore the insanity that's happening in the horrifying circus that is the American government right now, but it really isn't. Whenever I log on to Facebook there it is, smacking me in the face. (Kylie)

Here Kylie expresses the ways in which her media presence (in this case Facebook) is also a national one. Although she can, assumedly, remove herself from the territory of the United States, it is not as easy to remove herself from its online national community. The American nation's self-presentation has a strong media presence that she does not feel she can entirely avoid.

This sense of presence is not necessarily tied to territorial space, but instead to a national community from which it, to her, sometimes feels impossible to escape, regardless of physical location. When Kylie says that "I suppose it's that way with everyone, no matter where you are," she includes everyone participating in this community, both in the United States and abroad, in this feeling of being called upon.

These selections reveal three things about Kylie's media experience to the extent that she presents them within the public sphere. The first is that she uses media in general, and podcasts in particular, to "connect" her to the American national community; the second is that this connection does not rely on territorial space; and the third is that she does not feel she has complete control over when this connection happens. Compared to Couldry's mobile phones, she can either call this community by deciding to listen to on-demand media (the podcast) or it can call her by "smacking her in the face" in her Facebook feed (Kylie). Kylie does not find it "easy to check out" because of the consistent feeling that she can be connected to the American imagined community.

At the same time, that speech can also access the media consumer. Smartphone notifications like those used in podcasting are probably the most obvious example of speech calling individuals, but newspapers with bold headlines stacked on street corners, unexpected posts in a social media feed, and a variety of other traditional and new media can have the same affect.

The perception that one can address the national community whenever, wherever is communicated by discussions surrounding a variety of media. Letters to the editor, radio call-in shows, and man on the street interviews all perform this accessibility to some extent. The cultural self-reflection surrounding new media also invites users to conceive of themselves as political actors addressing a larger community, even if the realities of that community are not always very expansive and are regulated by social and professional practices that monitor and form public speech. This kind of liveness is not about the actual ability to address the nation and be heard, however,

nor is it about actually consuming media constantly. It is, instead, the perception that one could at any time or any place do either of these things and that, maybe, one will be called upon to do so or to listen to others.

Kylie did submit a recording to the *NPR Politics Podcast*, though, and when she did, she decided not only to feel the presence of a live national community, she decided to hear herself represented back and recognize herself as a member of that community through a performance of national participation. When she writes of this process in her blog, Kylie prioritizes this time of recognition over the moment she records her submission. The latter she brushes by quickly in the post, saying that "when they asked for listeners to call in and provide their voices for the podcast time stamp… of course, I sent in my cut. And promptly forgot about it. That was a month ago" (Kylie). Kylie, then, does not consider sending the submission to be noteworthy enough for a blog post and she presents it as an unremarkable part of her media experience.

When her friend recognizes her voice on the timestamp, however, she posts a screen shot. "I woke up today with a WhatsApp from my friend Dylan who lives in New York," she says, noting the time she received the message (Kylie). Mentioning the time of reception in this way shows that this moment is more important to her story, or expressing her state, than the time Dylan sent the message. When she explains who Dylan is, she does not reference time, but instead notes his location: New York. New York here serves as a symbol of American space that is important in its connection to Kylie's friendship with Dylan. Instead of connecting national space to territory and an unfolding political calendar—or "flag waving in the political rituals of the election year" (Appadurai 159)—Kylie associates the city with the more "intimate loyalties" of friendship (Appadurai 160). New York is part of American space, a space she connects to her friendship with Dylan and her (mediated) connection to an intimate national community. The connection between the two friends is formed in part through Kylie's participation in the podcast and the national community the podcast imagines: Dylan hears Kylie on the podcast and gets in touch with her. The friendship between the two links here to their shared connection as listeners to the podcast and members of an American national community. That podcasting often refers to friendship and connections to members of its audience in terms of intimacy qualifies not only those relationships but, in the case of the *NPR Politics Podcast*, national ones as well. Podcasting's self-descriptions refer to intimacy as innate, which here works to naturalize the national communities those podcasts play a role in forming. These are in contrast to Appadurai's presentation of the "flag waving political rituals" that are linked to the podcast's reporting on the 2006 primary season (159). Instead, the naturalization of intimacy in podcasting's self-descriptions serves to qualify its creation of national connections as "primary loyalties," like friends, family, and romantic relationships, "attached to more intimate collectives" (Appadurai 162). When Dylan recognizes Kylie on the podcast,

the podcast is then simultaneously mediating their friendship and their national participation, thereby melding the two.

Explaining this moment of recognition constitutes the majority of Kylie's post. She includes a WhatsApp screenshot in which Dylan writes "Kylie!!!! I just heard you on the NPR politics podcast!!!!!!," the "just" emphasizing his moment of recognition (in his case, recognizing a member of his social group as part of this listening community) (Kylie). Under the post, Kylie includes a link to the episode so her readers can hear her timestamp. In doing so, she expands on the threefold connections in each timestamp (person who records it, show that selects it, listener who recognizes it) by including even more moments of recognition. Not only did Kylie submit the timestamp and have it selected, her friend recognizes her, and when she listens to it again she can think of his moment of recognition as she recognizes herself alongside others who have submitted timestamps. She then invites readers of her blog (presumably her friends and family) to participate in this network of recognition.

This network is experienced instantaneously through podcasting's punctum. It does not create imagined connections among members of a nation through their parallel activities during a narrative of national unfolding, but instead creates connections through moments of recognition and the shared ability to construct and continue the national community. During these moments, time is not a story that unfolds, but instead stacks on top of itself. It is this simultaneous experience of different moments of time, different moments of recognition by others in a community, that strikes the listener.

The inclusion of explicitly national symbols in these moments and an environment of national basking renders the distracted presence of these moments national. In incorporating listener submissions, the podcast provides an opportunity for these moments as part of a performance of participation within a live national imaginary. These moments further perform the national conversation as accessible to all members of the community. This national imaginary is not entirely formed by the punctual, simultaneous reception of large events, but also by the sugar-like flow of a conversation that presents itself as accessible to ordinary Americans, regardless of location. This accessibility provides the promise of a forward-moving nation—because everyone can participate, the national conversation will continue through time.

Voice, Place, and Authority

The listener submissions to the *NPR Politics Podcast* similarly meld these different constructions of time. Where the reporting followed candidates through the nation in accordance with the primary schedule and political calendar, the timestamps present national connection through the intensely immobile punctum and encourage forward movement through participation. Each entry consists of a different listener saying where they are

recording, connecting national space to this instantaneous experience of recognition and presence instead of an ongoing development through space. This lack of unfolding story from one timestamp to the next does not mean a lack of serial development, however. The same generic elements that make the timestamps recognizable also create communities through the serial promise of innovation through repetition (Kelleter "Five Ways"). Instead of a national community based on members imagining each other listening to a story together as it unfolds, this imaginary circles around sprawl and the instantaneous experience of recognition. That podcasting describes these temporal connections as "intimate" (Chapters 1 and 2) reinforces the poignancy of their bonds. Podcasts derive authority through their ability to reflect these temporalities back to their listeners. Kate Lacey writes that, in early audio recording, "representations in sound, so radically new and uncanny, were multiply coded as trustworthy and authoritative and became part of the new 'habitus,' a disposition towards mediated sound as reliably real that allowed public life legitimately to be played out before a listening public" (loc. 1663–1667). Part of forming a habitus—or the cultural protocols—for media connection, then, lie in discussions of authority. These discussions present themselves in the *NPR Politics Podcast*'s use of sound and in their listener reviews.

The listener-submitted timestamps to the show claim authority by emphasizing the podcast's use of recognition and participation. The podcast has the authority to represent the community back to itself, in other words, because it includes the voices of nonprofessional participants in a live imagined community. To promote the perception that anybody can participate in this community, selected entries often incorporate the sounds of a cell phone. Because cell phones are widely available and tend to pick up the noise of the surrounding environment, they not only make the timestamps sound more like a conversation with a friend (and therefore more recognizable), they also increase the sense of presence in the recordings, and therefore add to the inattentive presence associated with basking. What in *Within the Wires* appeared as the sometimes erotic physical intimacy of connection here is the intimacy of connections within a national community.

In Lacey's discussion of early British radio, she notes that the "ability of sound to produce this sense of 'being there' was underscored by the indiscriminancy of the microphone in picking up all sounds in its range" (loc. 1633). Radio audiences, she notes, commented on background noises while hearing their king speak for the first time, noting how the rustle of papers and sneezing of audience members enabled the "sound to produce this sense of 'being there'" (loc. 1634). Picking up background noise here, for Lacey, "translates into a sense of 'real' proximity to the event" (loc. 1634). The broadcasts Lacey studies here are temporally live, but this realness is not so much a function of their temporal liveness, but their relationship to space. By indiscriminately reproducing what listeners perceived as all of the

sounds of the space, these broadcasts created a sense of presence among listeners that amplified its indexical quality.

While it is fair to say that listeners in 1924 Britain had a different concept of what constituted authority in audio than contemporary podcast listeners, the use of background sound in the *NPR Politics Podcast* timestamps has a similar affect, even if the kinds of sounds in the background are quite different. Because most of the timestamps sound like they were recorded using smartphones, they usually are not as high fidelity as the rest of the podcast and pick up noise that is not heard in a sound studio. In the February 16, 2018 episode "Grand Jury Indicts Russians Linked To Interference In 2016 Election," for example, the crackles of trucks driving on ice are clearly audible in the background and on June 14, 2018's "Supreme Court On A Baker Vs. Same-Sex Couple, Trump Exerts Executive Privilege, & Tuesday's Primaries," a wind gusts by what sounds like a phone held in front of two women recording in speaker mode outside an auditorium. In one sense, these noises verify the speakers' claims that they are actually where they say they are.

More importantly, they also verify the unspoken claim that the people calling in are listeners, members of the community, and not professionals. Even though listeners submit recordings from a wide range of places, the vast majority of them incorporate the kinds of background sounds and audio quality associated with cell phones. Just as the 1920s audiences thought the sounds of coughing spectators coming through their kings' broadcasts made them feel real, these audio clues tinge the timestamps with an aura of everyday life. They do not necessarily do so by making the *NPR Politics Podcast* timestamps sound like completely true, indexical reproductions of their locations (whatever that might be), but by linking them to conversations listeners have had with friends and family over the phone. In making that link, the entries make it possible for listeners to recognize themselves as part of this mobile, politically active nation.

By using sounds so closely associated with technologies listeners are likely to use, the timestamps represent the community back to the listener in which the listener has the ability to actively participate. In doing so, its claim to authority is in that it truly represents a participatory, continually flowing conversation.

The podcast tempers this representation of participatory, continual connection with one running through homogenous empty time. The part of the timestamp in which the journalist says the time is tied to the authoritative sound of traditional radio and modes of public circulation based on narrative time. Radio created a culture of sound that endowed authoritative voices with the trustworthiness to represent the imagined community to itself. As constructions of authority have changed, the qualities of that voice have changed. One does not have to look far to find debates about how the vocal aesthetics of NPR reporters are or are not authoritative:

discourse around vocal fry, for example, debates the reliability and professionally of young women's voices and the extent to which they deserve authority.

While the timestamps' listener submissions are authoritative because they are live members of an imagined community, the radio announcer derives her authority from her trained, educated voice and connection to professional recording equipment and professional spaces. These sounds express the journalist's relationship to traditional modes of publication within homogeneous empty time.

The part of the timestamp in which the journalist says what time it is, down to the minute, defines its space as solely professional, even to the extent that it does not say where it is geographically. In an iTunes review from June 8, 2018, Honker71 notes that in so doing, the timestamps do not perform the basic function of actually noting the exact time. The complaint begins with the title "Love the time stamps but" and continues

> I listen in Pacific or Mountain Time - other listeners listen in time zones around the world. The line "things may have changed" is true so much so the podcast needs to identify the time zone. I assume it is always recorded in DC but I for one would like to hear the time stamp was "recorded at XYZ Eastern Standard time."

This comment points out that, although stating the time at the beginning of the podcast is meant to relate it to the political narrative (down to the minute!), this relation is more of a performative or aesthetic one than a practical one. Instead, the recordings incorporate the authoritative sounds of radio (saying the time in a recording studio) thereby evoking homogeneous empty time over finely positioning their speech specifically within a national narrative by telling its audience what time they record.

In other reviews, listeners implicitly reference the ways in which modes of authority affect their enjoyment of the show. In a May 24, 2018 one-star review entitled "Get Rid of the Listener Intros," socialworktech complains, in full,

> Hi there, first time, long time… Seriously, no one gives a flying F about these people. It makes me want to unsubscribe. It's stupid. I really, really hate it. It ruins the rest of this intelligent, quirky, well-thought-out show. These people aren't interesting or special and I don't care that they're ex-pats voting abroad from khanahar. I don't care that about their marriage proposals or milestones or that they're some washed-up singer or that they're living here or there. There's Twitter for that bull ish. No, no no, please make it stop. It ruins the entire show. Here's your one-star rating. You can get rid of everyone except Mara Liason, Asma Khalid, and Nina Totenberg, and those listener intros would still ruin the divinity of that Holy Public Radio Trinity.

In this post, socialworktech cites the reason for their (strongly worded) dislike for the introductions as being their reference to liveness. They do not like that the people are not special (a quality that increases the perception of access) because of the expectation to hear professional, or special, voices in media. Socialworktech also says "there's Twitter for that bull ish [bullshit]," saying that the kinds of speech represented in the timestamps belong on an online media platform based entirely on the ability for anyone to address the community and access public speech (also, through alerts, Twitter accesses its users). Socialworktech argues that these qualities "ruin the rest of this intelligent, quirky, well-thought-out show." That the show is "intelligent" and "well-thought-out" relates to its relationship with professional journalists, or the "Holy Public Radio Trinity" of "Mara Liason, Asma Khalid, and Nina Totenberg." These personalities have large media presences in print and radio cultivated around authority based on expertise and professionalism. In this review, then, socialworktech complains that the podcast does not stick to claims of authority formed through podcasting's relationship to radio listening and a nation imagined through a developing national story and instead incorporates modes of authority based on concepts of participation and access found in social media technologies like Twitter.

The debate over these timestamps reflects the contested nature of how the national imaginary should be constructed. That this balance exists in different places for different podcasts is evident. There is also an overlap between media embedded within homogeneous empty time and media with claims of participatory liveness, and this overlap can shift along the course of a show. What is clear, though, is that podcasting is not entirely involved with narrative unfolding, and instead creates moments of recognition during which past and present moments of time are experienced simultaneously.

Intimate Communities and the Nation

Podcasting uses intimacy to describe the continuous connections that Couldry describes as live (see Chapters 1–3). This self-description informs the quality of connections among podcasting's network. Where podcasting's network overlaps and connects with a national one, the medium's cultural construction of intimacy—and closeness—describes the national connections among members of the United States' imagined national community.

Andrew Ti and Tawny Newsome's *Yo! Is This Racist?!* podcast usually consists of the hosts and a guest talking briefly about current events in a reflective, not particularly time-sensitive manner and answering listener questions about whether or not things in their lives are racist.[4] This premise is perfectly set up for modes of podcasting intimacy based on friendly parasociability, reciprocity, and conversational liveness. Not only is there a strong listener–submission component that highlights this accessibility and reciprocity, listeners can then recognize themselves in either the questions being asked (most of which are read out-loud or played as recordings) or

the responses to those questions. This recognition and the intimacy implied in *Yo! Is This Racist?!*'s format creates communal connections among its listeners while the show's commentary on American politics adds a layer of national recognition onto those connections.

The podcast, however, does not only encourage national connections among its listening audience. Through political commentary, *Yo! Is This Racist?!* presents the close connections of its (assumed left-of-center, sometimes racist) audience as in opposition to an imagined right-of-center, often racist other. Because Anderson's imagined communities are formed "not by shared convictions or consensual fictions but by linked communicative practices that thrive on debate, controversy, and even polemics" (Kelleter "From Recursive Progression to Systemic Self-Observation" 103), the podcast does not present two separate nations, but imagines its intimate listening community as within a larger, not-so-intimate one. That *Yo! Is This Racist?!*'s listening community is national does not mean that it is the entire nation, or even that it presents itself as such.[5]

Yo! Is This Racist?!'s intimate (or live) temporalities exist, and sometimes overlap, with a nation imagined through a developing story. Along the lines of Appadurai's theory of neighborhoods (184), the podcast's production of its own intimate community works to establish its other (the racists) and the national context through which the podcast can be understood. The interdependence between these ways of imagining national connections is particularly visible in the days following the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States. The Trump election instigated a quick shift in the national conversation, leading podcasts with a delayed production and distribution schedule (like *Yo! Is This Racist?!*) to release content recorded before the shift happened. The podcast's reaction to the failure of their production to react to an important event reveals the limits of these kinds of reflective, recognition-based, not entirely time sensitive forms of connection in dealing with disruptive change.

In "The Aftermath to Performative Wokeness" episode, released on November 15, 2016, Ti notes that the podcast's format was not sufficient in allowing him to participate in more narrative forms of community following the Trump election. "Oh man," he says, beginning a long introduction interspersed with nervous, depressed laughter.

> Donald Trump won the election, which does make the recorded pre-election but just kind of winging it for post-election episode of this podcast a—a mosquito trapped in amber (laughter) that maybe should not have seen the light of day. Uh, I think that maybe everything I said on that was wrong except for the fact, the general idea, that racism is wrong. Any fact or prediction I made, down the toilet.

His previous podcast is a "mosquito trapped in amber" because the context needed for recognition had changed so much with Trump's election that it

could no longer create the moments of recognition needed to create intimate connections.

His following episode released on November 22, 2016 entitled "Post-Election Protest Culture" explains this contextual shift.

> Yo, hello everyone, you are listening to the *Yo! Is This Racist?!* podcast, the podcast that has failed in its mission. My name is Andrew Ti. Usually, in a typical time, I take your calls about racism and other stuff, bigotry and what's going on, what's bad, and I guess I'm still doing that, but we are recognizing the heavy times might not be as jokey, might be as jokey, uh, maybe it will be super jokey, who knows?

Here Ti divides the contexts for recognition between a "typical time" and "heavy times." He notes that the national conversation shifted after the Trump election. His previous episode is "trapped in amber" not because it was released after it was recorded (all of his episodes are), but because it was released after this shift. In this episode, he references his need to change to fit this new conversation. The shift from "typical" to "heavy" occurred through narrative national change (an election), but it is relevant to Ti's podcast to the extent that it changed the contextual environment for basking. Ti' podcast also contributes to that contextual shift in delineating and naming these shifts in time. The podcast creates a community—or neighborhood—as it perhaps "unwittingly" takes part in the "creation of contexts that might exceed the existing material and conceptual boundaries" of that community (Appadurai 185). Ti, in other words, constructs a nation moving forward through time by creating the context for his own listening community. In order to create moments of recognition, Ti expresses the need to adjust the aesthetics of his work to fit these changing times by making it more or less jokey, but does not come to a conclusion on how best to do so.

That the podcast's community can be described as intimate stems from the portrayal of members of its imagined community as close to each other in time and space along the lines of podcasting's own self-descriptions. In constructing these national communities as close, niche political podcasts present their audiences as working within a larger national imaginary that includes both opposing views, regardless of how stringently the hosts of the podcast disagrees with those views, and a larger contextual national imaginary. Because the podcast creates an intimate national community among its listeners, in other words, it also imagines a larger not intimate one.

Conclusion

Podcasting is not a mass medium and is not solely responsible for creating a national imaginary. Instead, it works within a larger media environment to produce and reproduce the nation. Podcasting's contribution to the national imagined community can work as traditional media do: it can imagine a

nation as moving forward through space and time in a developing storyline. The qualities of interaction that podcasting most often describes as intimate, however—its interaction, reciprocity, physicality—can also present the nation as a closely linked distributed network in which each member of the nation continuously creates and recreates national belonging. The niche sensibility of most podcasts, in turn, form national connections among smaller, more intimate, listening communities. As they do so, these podcasts do not cast these communities as being the entire nation, as radio has done (Loviglio, Kelleter "Trust and Sprawl"), but present their intimate grouping as opposing another within a larger national imaginary. These podcasts therefore work equally to create their own intimate communities, an outside other, and the national context in which they argue.

Notes

1 In the episode "Weekly Roundup: Friday, December 4," for example, the reporters chat about taco restaurants in Des Moines, Iowa.
2 For a more complete analysis of recognition and how it fits sound research and podcasting specifically, see Chapter 1.
3 For more on the link between basking and intimacy in podcasting, see Chapter 1.
4 During the 2016 election year, Ti did not have a co-host. At the time of writing, he is joined by Tawny Newsome.
5 Ella Waldmann speaks of similar dynamics, and their auditory dimensions, in her work on the *S-Town* podcast. *S-Town*, she argues, uses its main character's regional southern accent to distinguish him from the familiar voice of the northern NPR reporter interviewing him (3). This aural marking constructs the American south as separate, but in conversation with, the (authoritative) north.

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5 Conclusion

What does it mean to be close to someone? How is it possible to be close through media? In describing itself as intimate, podcasting communicates a desire for closeness in time and space. The listeners, hosts, producers, critics—all of the people who are part of podcasting's medial network—who embrace intimacy are telling each other: this is what it means to be close and connected through media, this is me trying to be close to you. These descriptions, these attempts to create connection, form a code through which to understand and interpret individual experiences within podcasting. This code builds on historical forms of intimacy, including allusions to family, friends, and romantic partners, and reworks them to describe the relationships formed by media. Sometimes these allusions take the form of specific references to people or spaces like the home and sometimes they reference the types of interaction, as they do in speaking of reciprocity. The entire time, though, intimacy and the language connected to intimacy negotiate how podcasting communicates and, in so doing, forms close communities through the intimate connections it describes.

To be intimate can mean to be close in space. "Touching Podcasts" reflects on that closeness and the ways in which both Media Studies and popular descriptions of podcasting consider the haptics of sound. As sound moves the body, it carries with it a certain affectivity. Following Richard Grusin and others, feelings are felt within the body and media can create a physical response. The podcast *Within the Wires* uses this physicality in its eroticism and horror, but it also speaks to the inseparability of space, time, and community. As the podcast's textual repetition creates physically affective, poignant moments of recognition, it builds a community of listeners who can recognize themselves, and each other, through the podcast. Through *Within the Wires*' reception and self-reflection, it becomes clear that the podcast's intimacy is not a natural part of its sound, but an intentionally executed storytelling strategy that works to create intimacy.

The next chapter shifts to focus more thoroughly on time and conversationality. As it does so, it draws on the interrelation between intimacy and liveness: both concepts describe medial relationships that are close in terms of time and space in different ways. The friendly chat associated with many

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podcasts, and here exemplified by *The Flop House*, connects parasocial intimacy and podcasting's own self-descriptions with the structural qualities of intimate reciprocity within podcasting's medial network. The liveness of *The Flop House*'s conversation then creates a feeling of friendly interaction that encourages listeners to think of themselves as closely connected to the hosts and to each other.

Through the combination of podcasting's physical presence and the liveness of its interactions, *Hello from the Magic Tavern* creates an ever-present secondary world, Foon, that listeners can contribute to building. This world extends beyond the content of the podcast itself, into other media and even into actual buildings and landmarks in Chicago. Podcasting's self-description as intimate through its ability to integrate into the daily lives of listeners, the ways in which its seriality implies interaction among members of its community, and its ability to incorporate itself into the listener's routine, all come together here to describe the formation of an imagined community connected in their shared ability to build a fictional secondary world.

There are many kinds of imagined community, though, and creating worlds is not solely a property of fiction. In turning to the creation of a national imaginary, podcasting's self-description as intimate influences how the medium contributes to an American imagined community. As podcasts form explicitly national connections among members of their communities, and the medium's codes for intimacy classify those connections as close, podcasting creates niche intimate communities within the nation. These intimate connections do not stand in for the entire nation, however. Instead, they position themselves against disagreeing, non-intimate others and create the larger national context needed for their own interpretation.

Just as nations, or any communities, entail a process of continual imagination, so does intimacy. As podcasting negotiates its own mediality, it draws on, creates, and recreates what it means to be close to others. This process of creation is not natural, biological, or innate. To return to intimacy as inherent is not to defend podcasting's—or audio's—power, but to deny its power to create itself.

I would like to end by returning to this power. My approach in learning about intimacy and podcasting here has been to describe and, to a certain extent, delineate it more than to critique the power relations it involves. I made this decision because of the ways in which the networks of intimacy and podcasting interact are incredibly complicated and are, as a whole, not entirely subversive or oppressive. In choosing to study podcasting in its breadth, my contribution to a critique of podcasting's power relations has been to destabilize the inherency of intimacy within podcasting. The next step in learning about podcasting intimacy is to dismantle the ways in which it reforms and reproduces structural power. Intimacy, after all, is a continually negotiated description of close connection and close relationships are important. That intimacy is made does not make it any less powerful.

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