Abstract

In 2019, the BBC described podcasts as “a cinema for the ears”. In both popular and academic contexts, this application of a visual rhetoric to describe an audio-only experience seems contentious, but results in an attempt to define what is still a relatively new medium. This claim is, on the surface, opaque and counter-intuitive; is it ever truly possible to consider something cinematic without the presence of moving images? Assertions in favour of the cinematic nature of podcasts often employ the visual imagination of listeners evoked by heightened audio characteristics that a particular show may possess. Yet, by focusing on film-centred podcasts specifically, which, in terms of content and form, are implicitly and often explicitly concerned with properties of the cinematic, we open ourselves up to more conceptual avenues for analysing the idea of a visual form of audio. There are, of course, myriad film-oriented podcasts, offering a bewildering array of themes and subgenres. Principally, these provide a supplementary platform for the affirmation of cinema culture rather than manifesting a unique cinematic experience of their own. However, there are examples of film-centred podcasts that attempt to actualise what I will call an “audio-cinematic” experience, deploying the creative potential of the podcast to manifest an experiential aura that evokes cinematic imagination.

In this article, I draw upon Francesco Casetti’s reconceptualisation of the cinematic as a “process of assemblage”, and apply it to podcasting’s phenomenological listening practices. Furthermore, reflecting on the conceptual lineage of Sound & Radio Studies and sound-focused Film Studies, I posit the “audio-cinematic” potential of podcasts, which utilises the imaginative space created by the ‘lack’ of an image, whereby audio experiences that call to a listener’s memories, interpretations and emotions associated with cinematic engagement are produced. Finally, the sonic dimensions of audio-cinematic podcasts are analysed through indicative examples including You Must Remember This, Phantom Power, Radio Atlas, along with a self-reflexive examination of my creative work on The Cinematologists Podcast.
As part of the submission criteria for the BBC's 2019 commissioning call for audio programming, a list of “commandments” defined the “dos” and “don'ts” of podcasting. One of the points asserts that podcasts are "a visually powerful form of audio, they can be a cinema for the ears". This claim is, on the surface, opaque and counter-intuitive. Even if we accept that sound is intrinsic to the concept of "the cinematic", how can images not be deemed essential to any understanding of a cinematic ontology? The technological transformations of the digital revolution are forcing a re-evaluation, not only of our multi-faceted engagements with the visual-audio, but of the theoretical language we employ to make sense of these changes. Such a process is underway in many aspects of Film Philosophy and Film Studies. Francesco Casetti, for example, asserts that, rather than a fixed set of technological and spatial conditions, the cinematic should be thought of as mode of experience: "(it) is first and foremost a mode of seeing, feeling, reflecting and reacting…a particular way of relating with the world" (2015, p.5). Even within Casetti’s metamorphic agenda, the visual remains the axiomatic component defining the cinematic, yet his opening up of the cinematic experience as an embodied, perceptual and imaginary subjectivity, provides a conceptual framework through which we might unpack the notion of a ‘cinema for the ears’.

Although spoken analysis and discussion of cinema and film culture is the underpinning of film podcasting, most also interweave sonic elements using modes of aural production that directly call to the listener's cinematic imagination; the use of audio film clips, trailers, film scores and effects are obvious examples. However, in most film podcasts, the artefact of the film itself, and by implication the process of film watching, is implicitly sanctified as a separate medium, and practice of mediation. Podcasting is simply a secondary platform whereby sound properties are utilised to affirm the primary experience of cinema. Drawing on Girish Shambu (20-14), podcasting is “elsewhere” to cinema’s “there”. However, there are also examples of podcasts that attempt to actualize an “audio-cinematic” experience; this idea draws on a conceptual lineage spanning Sound & Radio Studies, sound arts.

---

1 BBC commissioning brief No: 103002 (see appendix)
http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/radio/commissioning/PodcastCommissioning_PopCulturesSubCultures.pdf
practices and sound-focused Film Studies. Such disciplines theorise sonic experiences in terms of their capacity to shape the spatial recognition of sound through the materialisation of an environment via technological apparatus, and the semiotic triggering of the combinations of sounds that arguably create a cinematic aurality. The possibility of an audio-only experience that evokes intensity, scope and figurative power, such that the experience is deemed cinematic, is counter to what Clive Cazeaux (2005) instead suggests is a discourse of “lack” associated with non-visual artforms. Analysing the experiential qualities of radio drama, he reframes sound-only art as possessive of a “positive invitational quality” and a “calling for completeness” (p.158) where listener engagement requires a cognitive process of active imagineering.

In this article, I explore how podcasting has created the potential for audio-cinematic experiences that utilise the imaginative space created by this posited lack of an image, playing on a listener's memories, interpretations and emotions associated with cinematic engagement. I conceptualise podcasting as audio-cinematic through two interrelated conceptual strands. Firstly, I explore a parallel between podcasting and cinema in terms of how technological and spatial configurations are associated with the nature of the experience they create; there are “practices” of engagement with both types of media that orient the listener/watcher, thus structuring, shaping or perhaps even determining a specific cognitive experience. For this, I utilise Casetti’s concept of assemblage to explore how, in the digital context, two seemingly very different media are defined by processes in which users (re)create the conditions of experience in contingent circumstances facilitated by technological expediency. Secondly, I explore the use of sound aesthetics as a form of sonic imagineering which interpellates (or calls to) a listener's intellectual/emotional sensibility and memory with regard to cinema.

By differentiating between podcasts that are about cinema and podcasts that manifest an audio-cinematic experience, I argue that voice, not just in terms of speech content, but through texture and tone and through integration with film music and sound effects, triggers our cinematic memories. But, more than this, I examine how recording, editing and sound design are utilised to create sonic aesthetics that invite the listener to immerse themselves in a process of active imagineering. Audio-cinematic experiences, in this sense, offer an idea of the cinematic beyond conceptions bounded by apparatus and content, beyond hierarchies of image and sound, and towards dynamic subjectivity that can emerge from many media-sensory-cognitive contexts.
Applications of the term “cinematic” are often somewhat abstract. Anything of, or pertaining to cinema, can be deemed cinematic, and its use in broad parlance often implies a rather tenuous frame of reference. However, it is perhaps most often deployed in terms of aesthetics; cinematic language, for example, points to the semiology of the visual artefact and how meaning is created through representations constructed by the film image itself. Yet, the notion of a film (or any media) being cinematic functions to demarcate a certain idea of quality, grandeur, mood, or spectacle, that transcends beyond mere representation. The term cinematic also denotes an overarching system – when we say cinema instead of “film” or “movie”, the cinematic alludes to the product of an industrial history, i.e. the cinema, and, in turn, a social and economic context for the viewing of moving images. This draws emphasis on the very situation of watching; “going to the cinema” implies entry into a specific set of technological and spatial conditions within which a unique, mediated perception is on offer. We then seem to come full circle, as the cinematic, or cinematic films, are alluded to as being specifically created with this kind of viewing situation in mind. When thinking about podcasting in these terms, not only does one have to acknowledge the conceptual slipperiness of the cinematic, but also the fundamental differences between the two media in terms of basic form, historical development, socio-cultural context, and apparatus of engagement.

When thinking about podcasting in a cinematic framework, I want to start by examining how questions regarding conditions of consumption, particularly in the context of digital technologies and digital culture, have opened up new practices and modes of thought as to what constitutes the cinematic. My entry point, drawing on the work of Francesco Casetti, is the notion of “cinematic experience”. “Experience” itself is conceptually nebulous, but, for Casetti, it allows for a re-articulation of the vast complexities of process and interaction with regards to cinema, in the light of digital technological transformations. Casetti posits experience as an activation of the senses in a given situation, constituted by a recognised process of perception induced through sensory phenomena. In this sense, we can think about experience as something that we objectively constantly immersed within, an addendum to our being in the world and our very consciousness of it. One’s recognition of their own subjective situation leads us to the notion of having “had an
experience”, and “being experienced”. The conditions of any specific experience may be set in place for us through environmental and technological apparatus, or indeed as we see more and more in today’s world, we can cultivate our own individualised experiences as technologies are designed for the creation of autonomous practices. For Casetti, experience is:

“not only a matter of perception but also implies a reflexivity and a number of individual or social practices. It is a perceiving, a consideration of what is perceived and of ourselves, and a way of dealing with the context...In this sense, it is a cognitive act, but one that is always rooted in, and affects, a body (it is “embodied”), a culture (it is embedded”), and a situation (it is grounded”)” (2015: 5).

The foregrounding of experience in the context of how we understand cinema is a move that is designed to free Casetti from a rigid grounding of the cinematic in the traditional, culturally ingrained and technologically specific apparatus of the movie theatre. He asserts that such “reflexivity of perception” and the possibility of “dealing with the context” provides a sense that the cinematic is a mode of experience that has moved beyond, or transmuted out of, a set of unified, ingrained conditions that mediate our relation to the world. The sensory resonances that are associated with cinematic experience, find form in so many situations that aligning solely it to a rigid set of prescribed conditions is no longer tenable.

One of Casetti’s primary aims, then, is to challenge the legacy of apparatus theory and the notion that the cinematic experience is only truly available through the idealised configuration of film spectatorship: the cinematic dispositif. In the context of film theory, the dispositif emerges from Jean-Louis Baudry (1975) who theorises that the specific technological and spatial apparatus of spectatorship gives rise to a unique subjective perceptual experience. Baudry draws upon the Platonic questioning of the relationship between knowledge and perception in the Cave allegory to suggest that the dispositif is an interpolative machine between the two, which manifests an illusory subjectivity; the apparatus of space, screen and projected image serves to sublimate the spectator into the pseudo reality of the film world. In this context, is easy to empathise with strands of film theory that assert ideologically negative outcomes of such a “passive experience”, and the structural grounding of Metz’s psychoanalytic film theory. Indeed, the implication of the dispositif describing the uniqueness of the auditorium experience, up until very recently

---

2 As Bryukhovetska (2010) points out there is no specific translation Baudry’s intended meaning of ‘dispositif’ with terms "apparatus," "device," "mechanism," "arrangement" and "situation" often inadequately substituted.
drove both the economic structuring and cultural sentiment of the film industry along with both popular and academic discourses of idealisation with regards to how film should be viewed.

Conceptual critiques of a rigid, apparatus-centred approach to defining the cinematic experience are part of the phenomenological turn in Film Studies that foreground the embodied subject and her material situatedness in relation to cinema (Sobchack, 1992; Marks, 2000). Related to this are historical studies of cinema that challenge the assumed stability of the cinematic dispositif by examining non-conformist cultural practices (Kepl, 1996; Farmer 2000). Furthermore, there are contestations and hybridisations positing a multitude of dispositifs that structure spectatorship practices across many contexts of moving image exhibition (Parante and Calvalho 2008) along with discourses around expanded, extended and post-cinema (Atkinson, 2014; Denson & Leyda, 2016).

Casetti suggests that the digital transformation represents a category change necessitating a new theoretical language in order to accommodate today’s multifaceted, unfixed, mobile, hybridised modes of audio-visual engagement. Developing a concept by Agamben (2009) and Deleuze (1992), Casetti forwards the idea that:

“The cinematic dispositif no longer appears to be a predetermined, closed, and binding structure, but rather an open and flexible set of elements; it is no longer an apparatus, but rather an assemblage. And it is not the ‘machine’ that determines the cinematic experience; rather, it is the cinematic experience that finds – or even configures the ‘machine’” (2015, p69).

This concept of “assemblage” suggests a reconfiguring of technological and environmental components that may be constructed by the subject herself (think of the home cinema; watching a film on your laptop with earphones), or be partly found in a particular circumstance (watching a film on a long-haul flight). Such heterogeneous reformations are termed “strategies of repair” by Casetti; a cinematic experience is assembled by the subject in order to negotiate imperfect conditions. For Casetti, the process of assemblage possesses four characteristics: 1) The presence of image and sound, 2) a definitive practice of consumption, 3) a reterritorialization of experience, and 4) the creation of symbolic connections to the cinematic. The very idea of assemblage as a “strategy of repair” is open to critique if resultant experiences are ultimately always perceived as “lacking” (i.e. they are never truly ‘repaired’), but the concept, as I will demonstrate,
invariably opens avenues of thought in terms of how we might broaden the experiential criteria of the cinematic.

Akin to the early history of cinema (or any ‘new’ medium that obtains a cultural relevance), analysis of podcasting’s emergence, evolution, embryonic industrial structure and aesthetic criteria is informed by arguments about how the technological determines the social, and vice versa. Podcasting has been described as a hybridised, flexible and liminal medium (Llinares, 2019), because its ontology is based on an assemblage of technologies and practices that are associated with other media contexts. For instance, the distribution technology Really Simple Syndication (RSS), originally a mechanism for blog sharing, was adapted for audio and is often imbued as the essential DNA of the medium, particularly in terms of separating it from radio (Berry, 2006). Apple’s iTunes (now Apple Podcasts) was another key element in podcasting’s functionality – “the first service to offer what scholars note as a ‘platform’ service for podcasting, in that it provided a centralized repository of podcasts for ease of discovery, while also enabling podcasters to easily reach audiences by bundling their respective RSS feeds into a seamless digital interface.” (Sullivan, 2019, p4) iTunes created an open source infrastructure for producers to upload, and consumers to download, audio content for free (after one had purchased the hardware of course), and sorted shows into specific categories, creating podcast charts and other lists that aided discovery.

Another vital component of podcast consumption was synchronisation with the iPod, which freed the consumer from a stationary access point, thus facilitating the temporal and spatial mobility of listening practices. Because the podcast experience is imageless, facilitated by mobile technologies, and synchronisable across devices, the medium is inherently ‘time-shifting’ and ‘space-shifting’ (McElearney and Middleton, 2013). Even though cinema can be reterritorialized, along with the technologies that allow image and sound to be synchronised across devices, the focus on visual image means a cinematic assemblage necessitate a fixing of subjectivity in a different way to podcasting. A podcast experience is one of fundamental unfixity in a phenomenological sense; what the eye sees and the ear hears are decoupled, meaning attention to the “outside world” can be maintained in parallel to an inner world shaped by the podcast. The autonomy of podcasting practices of consumption evolved again when iPhones became ubiquitous. WiFi enabled podcasts to be downloaded directly to the iPhone, bypassing computers altogether, and in 2014 the iOS 9 podcasting app made this a more efficient and integrated
With smartphones came an explosion of ‘podcatcher’ apps (all still reliant on the iTunes directory for RSS feeds) which are now the primary distribution platforms and consumer interfaces that allow users to subscribe, download, search, review and share podcast content, thus shaping a multimodal form of engagement. For Morris and Paterson, podcatcher apps are “mobile cultural intermediaries that create audiences, shape listener experiences, and encourage engagement through the digital features that allow greater control and personalisation over a user’s audio environment” (2015, p225). There is the implication here of an apparatus that orients the user experience, but, rather than a fixed set of conditions, flexible configurations stress autonomy over the engagement process, offering a highly personalised user experience (Boling & Hull, 2018).

Podcast assemblage is not a “reterritorialization of experience” in the way that Casetti formulates it, where the conditions of consumption are in need of a spatial fixing that repairs the cinematic, but is instead built around integrated technological functions that create an autonomous, mobile mediatory experience. However, even in the podcasting context, there is discourse which looks to assert the notion of an idealised dispositif which amalgamates technology, environment, embodiedness, to create a unique experiential outcome: intimacy. The notion that podcasting is an intimate medium is omnipresent in podcasting research. Berry (2006) suggests intimacy is a product of a certain type of address that offers listeners a more personal sense of connection to host and subject, an idea echoed by Meserko (2015) in his analysis of podcasting take-up by comedians in both live and domestic settings. Lukasz Swiatek defines podcasting as an “intimate bridging mechanism” which facilitates connectivity inside and outside of interest and expertise, and across geographical and socio-cultural boundaries (2019, p.174).

Despite these approaches, the connection between podcasting and intimacy still remains somewhat amorphous in its formulation. Spinelli and Dann forward the most concrete analysis, characterising podcasting’s intimacy as a combination of: particular kinds of aesthetic production (sound forms that are tailored to an implied individual rather than mass audience), personal and emotional address (which they relate to the content of specific podcasts such as The Heart and Love+Radio), and “the physicality and aural mechanics of podcast listening” (2019, p84). Drawing upon research analysing the phenomenology of earbud listening (Bull, 2007; Stankievech, 2007), Spinelli and Dann argue that in-ear headphones (differentiating between earbuds, over ear headphones, and
room speakers) function to create an embodied/cognitive barrier against impositions of the outside world, along with interiorising the podcast sound/voice in the body:

“With earbuds the sound enters directly into the body, the external architecture of the torso, shoulders, head, and ears do not filter the sound…thus any acoustic sense of distance, exteriority, and even otherness becomes impossible…earbuds allow for a hyper-intimacy in which the voice you hear is in no way external, but present inside you” (2019, p84-85).

Their assumption, that hyper-intimacy is derived from the sonic experience embodied by listening with earbuds, is supported by statements from the producers they interview. So, if we were to formulate a podcast dispositif, the visual would be unimportant. It would instead be the earbud earphones, which collapse the cognitive into the physical/embodied, that would create the apparatus of experience through which the emotionally layered sound aesthetic and personalised mode of address are delivered, thereby manifesting the uniquely intimate experience of podcast listening.

Using earphones to immerse oneself into a personal space is not only a form of media environment but reflects a social practice that is arguably as culturally ingrained at the beginning of the 21st century as cinema-going and family television-viewing has been in different periods of the 20th. Sherry Turkle has called this the “pilot in the cockpit phenomenon” (2016, p28) and, indeed, it is highlighted by Casetti as an aspect of cinematic assemblage underpinning immersion and intimacy as part of the strategy of repair:

“The truly decisive element is for the user to succeed in constructing a bubble in which to seek refuge and to find a personal space in which to manoeuvre…when I nestle into it, I abolish my surroundings, and I re-create a sense of intimacy” (2015, p71).

So, there are parallels between podcasting and cinematic assemblage in that the function of the earphones is to reorient the conditions of the embodied subject (how one hears/sees) so one becomes immersed in an experiential cognitive space; maybe the plugging in of the earphones is analogous to the moment of the lights dimming in the cinema auditorium. Like with the cinematic dispositif, there are fundamental caveats with re ideal apparatus for podcast consumption. One must acknowledge the myriad complexities and variations of engagement (in terms of the technologies and the spatial
and temporal choices) listeners have. Spinelli and Dann’s assertions draw from podcast producers’ speculations around an implied audience rather than empirical data regarding actual listening practices, which Nyre (2015) suggests are highly situational. Assemblage can be achieved in a multitude of ways depending on listening conditions, technologies, and practices of the individual listener. Indeed, concepts like intimacy and immersion may be understood as fundamental to podcasting, but can be associated with many mediating processes and forms of content. It remains a rather abstract, subjective phenomena used to describe an ephemeral media effect.

Reflecting on Casetti’s four characteristics of assemblage, what I have outlined above relates to elements 2 and 3; a practice of consumption and a reterritorialization of experience. Podcasting has its own set of dimensions related to these two aspects (in terms of the creating of a specific podcast experience), but there are certain affinities with cinema in the way we might consider a process of assemblage rather than specific apparatus-based dispositif. The notion of a strategy of repair is less apposite to podcasting however. When assembling the experience of podcast we are not repairing imperfect conditions, indeed the autonomous decision as how, where and when one listens is intrinsic to the medium. Indeed, the concept of a strategy of repair is the most problematic aspect of Casetti’s arguments, as the very terminology implies the (futile?) reassertion of ideal dispositif one that can never be fully repaired in the digital cultural consumption (and is perhaps an entirely socially-constructed phenomena in the first place). The ontology of the podcast is essentially one of assembling disparate technologies to manifest an experience that imbues phenomenological, socio-cultural and cognitive components. This brings us to the elements 1 and 4 of Casetti’s assemblage; the presence of image and sound and the creation of symbolic connections to the cinematic. These facets require us to examine the podcast as a sound artefact in itself, and the very properties in terms of form and content that could engender an experience conceived as a “cinema for the ears”.

**Film-Centred Podcasts as Cinematic “Elsewhere”**

At the time of writing, there are over one million podcasts in Apple’s directory.³ This makes the question of what a podcast is, from an aesthetic, artefactual perspective, a complex

³ [https://podnews.net/update/one-million-podcasts](https://podnews.net/update/one-million-podcasts)
question (and beyond the scope of this piece). Furthermore, a straightforward taxonomy is
difficult where fluidity and hybridisation define podcasting as a form. Apple podcasts
recently reorganised its genre taxonomy in an attempt to help listeners navigate the
expansion of content. TV & Film is one of the headline categories with a further subdivision
into five sections: After Shows, Film History, Film Interviews, Film Reviews and TV
Reviews. Yet, this is still inadequate in covering the diversity of film related shows,
including cross-genre approaches and idiosyncratic production forms aimed at an
atomised audience whose niche interests may fall into varying sensibilities: casual
filmgoer, cinephile, fan, industry insider, aspiring filmmaker, academic, etc.

The first (and obvious) aspect of film-centred podcasting is that most shows are structured
around spoken word commentary and analysis of specific films, filmmaking or cinema
culture more broadly. Theme and structure of content may differ greatly, as does rhetorical
style and vocal tone, but film-centric speech content is clearly the core identifier. I
foreground this, rather obvious point because it reflects how the podcast medium functions
as a platform for the discursive expansion of film knowledge, appreciation and culture.
Film-centred podcasts therefore contribute to what Girish Shambu defines as “The New
Cinephilia” (2014) exemplifying a “deep engagement with cinema’s richness” online. This
has, Shambu claims, expanded cinema’s “elsewhere” outside of the specific “there” of film
watching, whereby indulging “the imagination and labour of reflection, discussion, criticism
and theorisation – all the work done “elsewhere” – to create and bring this engagement
into being” (2014, p90). In demarcating a “there” and an “elsewhere” of cinema, Shambu
references Catherine Fowler (2012) and visual artist Pierre Huyghe who, in a similar vein
to Casetti, recognise the requirement of expanding how we conceive of the cinematic
experience in the digital age. The “there” is the moment of encounter with film images, in
whatever form that might manifest, whilst the “elsewhere” is an augmentation of (or
supplementation to) the objective encounter, often derived from imagination and memory,
and which can “become an active and generative part of one’s cinephilia” (2014, p90).

Across film-centred podcasts there are hybridised subgenres that manifest this
“elsewhere” in many different forms. Mark Kermode and Simon Mayo’s Film reviews
(BBC), The Guardian Film Show, The Empire Film Podcast and Truth & Movies (Little

---

4 Mark Kermode and Simon Mayo’s Film Reviews is broadcast first as a weekly radio programme and
subsequently posted as a podcast online with extra content added. This points back to a the key question of
podcasting’s relationship to radio and particularly how is it utilised as a ‘catch-up’ or ‘listen again’ platform for
traditional broadcast content (Berry, 2016).
White Lies) are examples of the magazine/review format. Built around familiar elements, such as the box office top ten countdown, new release reviews and star interviews, they are generally aimed at broad audiences, amalgamating elements of the popular print magazine, TV review and chat shows, and cinema-focused segments found in entertainment/arts radio. Produced under the umbrella of larger media institutions, they establish brand quality by association and have familiar presenters with contributors adding professional, critical authority. Cinema chains themselves have also moved into podcast production, The Curzon Film Podcast, Picturehouses Podcast, The Bigger Picture (BFI) being opposite examples. These are often hosted by company staff, with varying formats, themes and production values. Such examples often utilise recorded content from exhibition events, curated seasons and post-screening Q&As. Many film podcasts, such as Filmspotting, Mad About Movies and Slash Film Daily, also reflect the magazine/radio format but are independently produced. Another variation is exemplified by podcasts that self-consciously aim for a more cinephile-inflected or academic approach to analysis. Podcast shows such as Film Comment Podcast, The Cinephilacs, The Projection Booth and Projections Podcast often explore particular modes of critique and conceptual frameworks which presuppose a certain degree of cinephilic knowledge in the listener.

One of the intrinsic differences between podcasting and radio is the lack of temporal boundaries that define the broadcast flow. Freedom from time constraints has given podcasting an informal, conversational tone, arguably revitalising what had become the rather tired format of the long-form interview. WFT with Marc Maron, Kevin Pollack’s Chat Show Podcast, The Film Scene with Ileana Douglas and Talk Easy with Sam Fragoso are podcasts that seem to reflect a renewed willingness of filmmakers and stars to engage in more in-depth, personal discussions about what might be viewed as an antidote to the anaemically formulaic press junket. The production company A24 has taken advantage of this with its own podcast that trades on its current ‘hipness’, involving in-depth conversations between filmmakers without a host acting as intermediary. Other strains of film-centred podcasts include those that focus on filmmaking craft (Scriptnotes, Curious about Filmmaking Podcast, No Film School Podcast), industry insider news (Indie Film Hustle, Film Trooper Podcast), and of course, the tumultuous number of shows that indulge the propensity for fan obsessiveness (Inside Star Wars, The Nerdist, Weekly Planet). There are also podcasts that expand gender, ethnic and class perspectives on cinephile culture such as The Bechdel Cast, Black Men Can’t Jump, Girls on Film and Black Girl Film Club.
Undoubtedly, many film-centred podcasts also indulge the medium’s potential for niche ‘cultishness’. The Worst Idea of All Time podcast features hosts who pick a ‘terrible’ film (e.g. Grown Ups 2) and proceed to watch and review it every week for a year. How Did This Get Made trades on revelling in a supposedly ‘bad’ film, Denzel Washington is the Greatest Actor of All Time, Period is for those obsessed with the Hollywood A-lister, and Wiiging Out is a revere for actor Kristin Wiig’s movie wig-wearing. The inherent seriality of podcasting is often taken advantage of in shows that constitute the ‘deep-dive’ approach. Star Wars Minute and One Heat Minute Productions are formatted around one-minute excerpts, one per episode, played as an audio clip sequentially until the entire film is covered.

All the podcasts mentioned above are discussion-oriented and therefore cinema discourses articulated through voice are the primary activation of the listener experience. Voice inherently structures podcasting in its articulation and aesthetic shaping of content, its storytelling function, and its political/cultural currency. One could suggest that the fundamental popularity of film podcasts draws on the pleasures of discussing, sharing, arguing, and generally voicing opinions about films; the pre-film anticipation, the post-film analysis, the ‘pub argument’, the mentoring session and the Film Studies seminar are all modes of discursive engagement that inform podcasts in their creative fashioning of the cinephilic ‘elsewhere’.

But, the question remains, can simply listening to people talk about film activate a cinematic experience or be considered cinematic at all? One suggestion is that audio recorded discussions of film could be considered symbolic of the cinematic, to go back to Casetti’s criteria of assemblage. Indeed, a presenter may be particularly effective in describing a scene from a film which triggers a memory or provokes the imagination. Furthermore, in film-based podcasts, one often hears the voices associated with cinema. Interviews with actors/stars are prefigured on a recognition that is aural, not visual, whereby hearing a famous voice from the movies could be seen to create a cinematic recognition in the listener. This is augmented even more when the voice one hears is in character as part of an audio film clip, suggesting that film-centred podcasts utilise cinematic sound beyond the voice to expand the listener experience. Film trailers and clips are often woven into the sonic fabric of the show; they may be part of a podcast’s introduction, a precursor to an interview, the subject of review, or can be embedded into a
critic’s argument as a kind of ‘sonic quotation’. Aural creativity facilitated by podcast editing and sound design thus utilises the implied symbolic associations with cinematic experiences. If a podcast, for example, used the theme from *Jaws*, there would be an intention to elicit a specific response in the listener, a phenomenon that we might consider symbolic of the cinematic.

In both form and mode of address, the aforementioned podcasts preserve the ‘there/elsewhere’ dichotomy; they act as a secondary platform through which cinema, as the primary medium of interest, is affirmed. Furthermore, most film-centred podcasts refer to an implicit ‘lack’ of image; i.e. It is a prerequisite of all film podcasts, to a certain degree, that they refer to something that has been seen or needs to be seen. It is, however, assumed and accepted in the very act of podcast listening that there will be no images present, so this lack doesn’t automatically manifest itself in a dissatisfaction. Indeed, the examples cited above could be conceived as cinematic in that the spoken discourse and sonic structures evoke thematic, intellectual and emotional cues that resonate with the listener’s cinematic sensibility. Furthermore, there are podcasts in which the imagelessness is not even perceived as a lack, but as a space for sound to materialise the cinematic through engaging the listener’s imagination. This approach is how I conceptualise the audio-cinematic experience, which dissolves the there/elsewhere dichotomy, reconciles the idea of ‘seeing’ without images, and prefaces the possibility of a “cinema for the ears”.

**Sound Aesthetics and the Audio-Cinematic**

In support of the possibility of an imageless audio-cinematic experience, there are several theoretical avenues that are instructive. The first of which is the focus on film sound itself. In holistic approaches to the interrelationship between sound and moving image, the work of Michel Chion is most prominent. A central pillar of his thought is the assertion that sound and image should be understood as *integrated elements* in terms of signification and emotional effect. Chion uses the concept of ‘audio-vision’ as a ‘perceptive process’, whereby considering sound as an ‘added value’ that modifies the image and shapes its meaning: “This value – be it sensorial, informative, semantic, narrative, structural, or expressive – which a sound heard in a scene leads us to project onto the image, can create the impression that we view what in fact we ‘audio-view’.” (Chion 2000 p202).
'Audio-viewing' implies the vitality of sound in creating an 'impression' that is as much sonic as visual. Yet, the use of the phrase 'added value' implies that sound is still the secondary component, attendant to primacy of image. There is, however, an element of Chion’s work that points to an imageless cinematic experience: the concept of *acousmêtre*. Drawing upon Pierre Schaeffer, the composer, sound engineer and musicologist, *acousmêtre* refers to sounds heard without seeing their originating phenomena. Podcasts, like radio and the telephone, are fundamentally acousmatic media, the opposite of what Chion calls visualised sound (when the image and sound are synchronised), and his work particularly on the voice in cinema explores the complexity of onscreen/offscreen, diegetic and non-diegetic sound as part of the language of cinematic creativity (Chion 1999).

Vivian Sobchack deploys the acousmatic to challenge the image-sound hierarchy further, using an analysis of a series of promotional trailers produced by Dolby in the late 1990s and early 2000s. These trailers were shown before features, to advertise the technological capabilities of new multiplex theatres and the three-dimensional, immersive sound mixes that they produced. Drawing on Gaston Bachelard, Sobchack calls the trailers “purposefully oneiric ‘dream devices’” whose animated sound spatialisation serves to visualise the shape of environmental acoustics:

“The paradox of the Dolby trailers is that - as Cinema – they must promote an attention to listening not only by sounding the invisible but also by visualising it (my emphasis). In this regard the invisible (and offscreen) ‘acousmatic imagination’ of the Dolby trailers provides a compelling and compressed onscreen visual glossary of what are acoustically perceived to be sound shapes, sound aspects and sound effects” (Sobchack, 2005, p4).

The implication here suggests that the aural design, semiotically and spatially materialised by the 5.1 surround sound system that Dolby is advertising, is the primary driver of the visual effect. In other words, this points to a way of seeing sound; the “onscreen visual glossary” – a CGI train arriving at a station, in something of a homage to the Lumièrè brothers – is a manifestation of the dynamic sonic-shaping. Referencing philosopher of technology, Don Ihde, Sobchack argues that these trailers offer a decentring of visual dominance, making the audience actively attend to the difficulty of listening (the difficulty of focussing on listening as the primary function in audio-visual engagement).
Ihde’s research into sound is pertinent here, through his concept of the “auditory field” which, like Chion’s audio-vision, suggests an “intimate relation between animation, motion, and sound (that) lies at the threshold of the inner secret of auditory experience” or, in other words, “the timefulness of sound” (2007, p83). Even in the silent era (where films actually had musical accompaniment), the notion of an ‘auditory field’ was as much a part of the essential ontology of film. But more than this, and particularly pertinent to the emergence of podcasting, his elaboration on the “auditory imagination” points to the cognitive possibilities that sound triggers in situating our experience beyond the level of perception. In other words, like image, we tend to think of sounds as perceptual cues that are linked phenomenologically to a causal origin; we use sound to orient ourselves in relation to what we perceive as the outer, objective world. This process is utilised in film when what we see on screen corresponds in a realist sense to what we hear (even though this perceptual coupling is a manipulation of the filmmaking illusion). Yet, similar to the idea of acousmêtre, Ihde examines the depth to which we deploy auditory imaginings to structure our experiences. He states: “I turn to “inner” experience in the mode of the imaginary, I note that these experiences may “echo,” “mimic,” or “re-present” any “outer” experience. Imagination presentifies “external” experience” (2007, p119). Along with this “presentification” of what we perceive aurally, Ihde suggests our auditory imagination has “polymorphic capacity” and is “susceptible to further and further refinements, discriminations, and enrichments”, which orients a subjective experience in highly complex ways.

For Ihde, these inner imaginings can work in copresence with perception to give a holistic coherence to the self, but auditory imagination always has the potential for moving subjectivity, beyond stasis in the objective sense, into the realm of memory, fantasy or other emotional, or even physical resonances. Our sonic experience is complex, and there is rarely a simple causal link between what we hear and where it comes from. This opens up fascinating questions both about the connection between image and sound, but also how an experience such as listening to a film-centred podcast may engender the auditory imagination in a cinematic way. Indeed, it suggests that audio has an expansive capacity to engage the “mind’s eye”.

Interestingly, coming at this possibility from the opposite direction provides further instructive possibilities; Sound & Radio Studies explicitly focuses on how acousmatic dimensions of sound constitute the primary mode of mediated experience, and such
approaches deploy the language of both the visual, and even more specifically the cinematic, to grapple with sonic meaning-making. Radio theorist Tim Crook argues that radio drama functions to spatialise thought, where the listener is provoked into a visual kind of cognition by sound aesthetics, wholly separate from the eye. Radio drama is “auditory in the physical dimension but equally powerful as a visual force in the psychological dimension” (1999, pp7-8). Alan Beck reframes radio’s blindness not as a ‘lack’ (as is often the default), but as a freeing of the possibility for a ‘listening-in’ that acts synaesthetically. The absence of the visual is filled in through the phenomenological/cognitive activity of the listener: “The ongoing mystery is how radio offers us aural data which seem to have materiality – surfaces, three-dimensionality and a dynamic (performers in movement), a materiality that has been shaped or processed so as to exhibit information for more than just sound itself” (2007, p14).

Clive Cazeaux echoes Beck in his phenomenological challenge to the rhetoric of “blindness” and “lack”, with regards to radio drama. Cazeaux uses Merleau-Ponty’s embodied interaction account of human epistemology to argue that all art is expressive rather than directly representational. Visual arts can be considered distinct, however, as they possess a coherence; their direct reference point can bypass the intermediaries of artist and form. Photography and moving images in particular are often considered objective rather than representational, as the comprising visual documents correlate directly to reality. For Cazeaux, “the apparent incompleteness of a form of representation, for example, ‘blind’ radio drama, is not an incompleteness at all but instead the gap or opening wherein invitational relationships constitutive of a work’s expressive potential can be constructed” (2005, pp166-167).

The notion of an audio-cinematic experience that has no image reference would undoubtedly require the imaginative labour that is implied in Crook’s “listening-in” and Cazeaux’s “invitation to imagine”. These conceptions can be equated to the acousmatic functions of imageless media to which radio and, of course, podcasts qualify. However, a visualisation process that is triggered by sound does not necessarily have to be perceived as cinematic. A “cinema for the ears” could simply be a catchy moniker for a phenomenon that is commonly understood as the way we foreground vision to make sense of our experience; the general conception of a mind’s eye. Yet, there are podcasts that, circling back to Casetti’s assemblage, are symbolic of the cinematic in their content, and through their invitation to sonic imagineering, fashion a particular audio-cinematic experience.
You Must Remember This

Written, produced and narrated by Karina Longworth, You Must Remember This is a podcast that is derived from its’ host’s obsession with the “forgotten and/or hidden history of old Hollywood”. Longworth’s voice-over narration offers a storytelling style that is playful and insightful, recalling famous scenes, moments of dialogue and iconic images that interpellate cinematic memories.

The dynamics of stardom are at the centre of the discourse, and critical reflections on the seminal films of, say, Audrey Hepburn (click image for clip) are suffused with a comprehensively researched informational milieu that is simultaneously film-historically literate, analytical, visual and gossipy. Stories of scandal, tragedy and triumph are voiced with an arch tone that unapologetically indulges the mythos of Hollywood’s golden age. Spoken content is further augmented (particularly in the opening sequence) using a sonic tableau that incorporates echoes, fades and balance shifts that deliberately utilises the spatial phenomenology.

Longworth does not employ the use of film clips, recorded interviews, or any other “found” spoken audio, relying instead on her voiced descriptions, interpretations and storytelling, though the occasional referencing of an academic or critic underpins some of the more subjective assertions. In the episode above, Longworth cites critic Molly Haskell to argue for the feminist influence of Audrey Hepburn as an accessible star in comparison to the unattainable movie goddesses of post-war Hollywood. The digitally distorted/fractured sound of Dooley Wilson’s As Time Goes By (as if a scratched and dusty gramophone record had been discovered) serves as the theme to the podcast, and throughout each episode Longworth’s monologue is underscored by music from relevant films. This adds pace and structure to the script, and forges a listening texture in which the voice articulation is imbued with a resonant mood.

In an interview on the Longform Podcast in 2015, Longworth outlines show’s sensibility:

“I knew I wanted to be having this conversation about old movies in a cinematic way without using images. I knew I wanted to have it feel sort of like a cocktail party conversation where you might be telling anecdote and then you sort of do a voice…when you’re reading a magazine article and you read a great quote you sort of hear it in your head. And then when you tell your friend over drinks about the magazine article you do a little voice. And then I had this idea that it has got to
feel something like a dream, and it should feel like old radio but it shouldn’t actually sound like old radio, it shouldn’t have that affectation in the voice, but it can have an affectation where it is like a lullaby” (Longform Podcast interview Oct 7, 2015) (20:13- 21:20).

Longworth’s conception of You Must Remember This employs a rhetoric that is highly symbolic of a cinematic experience, but one that is cultural, nostalgic and almost dreamlike. She directly discusses her aim to create a cinematic experience without images within the first sentence of this quotation, and it is clear that voice is the pivotal expressive tool. Her podcast focuses on cinema as a subject while the audio aesthetic arguably pushes the experience into the realm of the symbolic, just as if the implied audience is ready to be “transported back” to Hollywood’s golden age. Longworth also intimates the idea of voice as tone and texture, whereby descriptions paint a visual picture of what the listener should ‘see’ in her imagination. Her explanation calls to mind Ihde’s definition of the inner voice as an “imaginative modality” (i.e. our mind’s eye is not just how we perceive reality, but a powerfully creative space where we imagineer subjectivity). Longworth’s sonic style has an interpellative loquacity that seeks to manifest the feeling of cinema through a dreamlike intimacy. However, You Must Remember This remains very much voice-centric, and the potential to conceive it as audio-cinematic depends on the extent to which the combination of form and content provokes in the listener the capacity for imagineering a unique cinematic experience.

Movies For the Blind

Produced and hosted by voice-over artist Valerie Hunter, Movies For the Blind uses public-domain films (US) with added narration and audio description of the visual action to create a cinematic experience for the visually impaired. The podcast’s aim is primarily self-evident in its title, though Hunter’s qualifying statement, “where you can enjoy films without looking at a screen”, encapsulates the unqualified aim to produce an audio-cinematic experience. In a similar vein to You Must Remember This, Hunter begins the episodes by regaling the listener with historical background concerning the dramatic elements of a star’s career and personal life. Episodes are split into two or three parts covering a film’s entire running time: Episode 191 focuses on the final part of Behind Office Doors, a 1931 romantic drama.
directed by Melville W. Brown, starring Mary Astor (click image for clip). The scripted introduction and her tone of delivery are much more straight-forward than Karina Longworth’s, with less accenting of words and less rhetorical conjuring designed to manifest a mythical aura. After the short intro theme, there is no musical underscoring or sound effect added beyond the soundtrack of the film. However, it is when the podcast transitions into the audio-described voice-over supplementing the film’s audio track that one might posit an audio-cinematic effect.

Hunter’s audio-descriptions are interwoven with the original audio track and dialogue in a way that assists the sight-impaired listener in comprehending dramatic flow, spatial positioning, and interaction between characters. A sophistication of imaginative labour is required to make sense of the sonic landscape (a process of engagement that is likely advanced in sight-impaired listeners), and there is an assumption that the listener is visualising the action based on the aural references they are receiving. The very texture of the sound also adds to the overall experience: A background hiss underlying the crackly dialogue evokes the aurality of an old, archaic sound recording and thus a sense of pastness. This is not a deliberately created sound effect designed to elicit nostalgia – the recording holds within it an analogue materiality. Hunter’s edited-in audio descriptions are much clearer (obviously recorded on contemporary equipment), and her interventions, short and instructive, deliberately aim to guide the listener with as much efficiency and clarity as possible. Obviously, Movies For the Blind has a specific purpose and audience, and, in this context, one might concede that audio description circumvents the lack of an image merely for functional aims. Yet, this podcast experience requires what Ihde calls the copresence between perception and imagination (2007, p.124); material descriptions of place and action in the film world intimate through image-sound connection (i.e. a person walking through a doorway is presentified by a creak, footsteps and a slam), but a listener’s manifestation requires a process of subjective Imagineering that is unique (intimate?) to them.

Radio Atlas: Colette’s Podcasts

Radio Atlas tackles one of podcasting’s inherent shortcomings: the boundaries of language. Produced by Eleanor McDowell, it allows English language listeners to access fictional and documentary audio from around the world, by subtitling the voices on each
episode, which can then be read on the user’s mobile phone as they listen.
Engagement through the smartphone may not seem inherently cinematic, rather more evidence of podcasting’s cross-medial flexibility, however reading text on a phone whilst listening specifically adds a visual component to the experience, reterritorialising the subject (akin to the strategy of repair required of a viewing assemblage). *Radio Atlas* also holds live events where the subtitles are shown on an auditorium screen for an audience who listen/watch communally as they would any other movie. This clip is from *Colette’s Podcasts*, taken from a 2014 ARTE radio broadcast produced by Charlotte Bienaimé, in which Colette Bertin, 82, plunges into her archive of French radio programs on audio cassettes recorded over the years. Colette possesses an almost transcendental appreciation of the pleasures of listening, using metaphorical flourish that is deeply visually evocative. Even for the monolingual speaker, Collette’s articulation, in her own voice, of what hearing means to her – how she describes the sound entering her body, leaving an imprint, a trace that activates memory – is emotionally captivating. But, beyond what she says, it is the sound of the voice; the material resonance, its intonation, phrasing and timbre, even filtered through the translation of the subtitles, that is the essential ingredient of an experience that is akin to Beck’s synaesthetic listening.

This podcast is fascinating as it reflects on the phenomenological paradox between dispositif and assemblage that structures both cinema and podcasting, albeit in different ways. Because listening to podcasts on a mobile phone is inherent to the medium, using the phone’s screen to deploy the subtitles in their instrumental role of translating the language of the voice-over is not a challenge to podcasting’s identity. The essence of the podcast is retained even though what results is a unique symbiosis of sound, text and image. Yet, having listened to/watched this podcast in an auditorium with an audience, it was striking how traditionally cinematic the experience was. There were no images as such; the subtitles functionally translated the language spoken as they do on the mobile phone app. Yet, watching on the ‘big screen’ in the classic cinematic dispositif, amplified the sense of an immediate, communal experience that is associated with cinema’s traditional configuration. I could not help but think of Sobchack’s analysis of the Dolby
trailers; though in this instance it is projected text (rather than animated images) that manifests the experience of “seeing yourself hearing” or, rather, “a cinema for the ears” “Watching” this podcast in a traditional cinema configuration reopens the messy question of how we define a podcast in the first place, and how much our digitally mediated experiences are a plurality of engagements contingent on ever-shifting conditions.

**Phantom Power: The Sound of Silents**

Like *Radio Atlas*, *Phantom Power* is not a film podcast per se, as it focuses on the sonic arts and humanities. Produced and hosted by sound technologist Mack Hagood and documentarian and composer Cris Cheek, episodes explore a range of sound arts practices from historical and theoretical perspectives. As you might expect, based on the producers’ backgrounds, there is a premium here on high quality production values, with the podcast exuding an aesthetically complex, immersive and even seductive sonic environment. The soundscapes of each individual episode comprise a combination of discussions with a sound artist, technologist, producer, composer, historian and philosopher. Examples of indicative sound arts practices (often the work of the guests themselves) are discussed with analysis from the two hosts, often with added sound effects and design which give the show an integrated, holistic structure. Indeed, the experiential scope of the podcast alongside its use of the material spatialization of sound to orient the listener, and the complexities of semiotic referencing that plays with perception and imagination, could be conceived as cinematic.

Episode 17 of *The Sound of Silents* is explicitly film-centred; mining into the history of film sound found in the research of scholars Dr Rick Altman and Dr Eric Dienstfrey. It recounts, using sound clips as direct reference points, how theatres used the carnivalesque, employing automatic pianos and small orchestras, as well as synchronized sound systems, voice-actors behind the screen, and filmed conductors on-screen. Phantom Power reflects the genre hybridisation of podcasting, amalgamating elements of audio documentary, long-form interview, academic seminar and experimental sound artefact. Voice interviews with Altman and Dienstfrey are cut in to sections, which are commented on and contextualised by the hosts, and are underlaid with the aural connecting tissues of music and sound effects from samples that evoke the aura materiality of early...
cinema. In the adjacent clip, Altman roleplays the Nickelodeon ‘ballyhoo’ sound, even using the effect of the Nickel being dropped on an imaginary counter. One of the most salient points from the episode, in relation to how we conceive of the sound-image relationship, is the argument that audiences were drawn to proto-cinema events as much by live orchestras or recognisable musical performers; moving images (sometimes animated, sometimes non-narrative live action), were used as affective accompaniments to the music, which was the primary driver of the experience.

The clip exemplifies the central intellectual theme of the show: how early phases of cinematic formation are parallel to the current crisis or transformation (depending on your perspective) instigated by the digital era. The argument is made throughout, again by deploying sonic cues and creative editing alongside voiced discussion, that early experimentations with technology, art and social-cultural practice had many configurations of sound and image, and many assemblages that created proto-cinematic phenomenological and cognitive experiences. Though such an allusion is not explicitly made in the episode, the podcast medium itself, particularly in how *The Sound of Silents* sonically visualises cinema’s past, interrogates how perception is shaped by the form and content of mediation.

**The Cinematologists: Knowing Sounds and The Cinematic Voice**

In evaluation of the audio-cinematic, my own work on *The Cinematologists Podcast* is central in both theoretical and practical terms. The podcast was established in 2015 by myself and my co-host, Dr Neil Fox, as an analytical project with the core focus being the nature of cinema in today’s digital context. The show is centred on recorded analysis that take place at screenings organised within university auditoria and at commercial cinema venues. A 10-minute introduction would be taped to contextualise the film and potential themes of discussion, then, following the screening, a 20/30-minute open forum would be recorded with a roving microphone for audience comments and questions. We generally did not have the filmmaker present, meaning the conversation was free to go in a more critical direction. The sound recording’s ‘liveness’ aimed to evoke within the listener an ‘auditorium-viewing’ experience. Holding events in many different venues, with diverse audiences, was indicative of the uniqueness of individual screenings; depending on the film and the audience, the emotional impact and interpretive direction would be quite
different. Recording in the live venue gave the podcast a sense of immediacy, and the unscripted freedom of discussion captured powerful, personal and collective experiences in sound.

To augment the listening experience, we integrated interviews with filmmakers, critics or academics into the show’s overall structure, offering a rich blend of voices and viewpoints. Furthermore, relevant film-audio clips were incorporated, not only to give an aural sense of the film in focus, but as a method of emphasising or exemplifying the points raised in discussions. We began to expand the environment in which we recorded the podcast, with episodes recorded at Berlinale, the Screenplay Film Festival in Shetland, and the Film-Philosophy conferences in 2019 and 2020, to try and capture the essence of different cinematic environments beyond the film-watching itself. We also integrated dimensions of the auditorium events into the sound design and editing to create an experience that would situate the listener spatially. For instance, the episodes on the topics of Making Waves: The Art of Cinematic Sound and The Lobster featured a live scoring by the Solem Quartet.

My continued experiments with different forms of voiced analysis aimed at producing an audio-cinematic experience (recording in different environments, mixing musical score and film soundtrack) is most evident in Knowing Sounds. This episode is formed from a collage of sound fragments, all of which possess a cinema resonance but are decoupled from their original context. Sound fragments are repurposed with the aim of giving the listener space for interpretive imagineering (click image for clip), and voiced comments from audience members and hosts are edited in, which frame the episodes. These frames of speech and sound, removed from their original context and then layered together, create an abstract mix of sound cues and vocalised thoughts whereby the listener is actively encouraged to make their own associations, interpretations and engage their cinematic imagination.

I developed this approach to the creation of an audio-cinematic experience in Episode 98 entitled The Cinematic Voice (March 17, 2020). Here, I invited several film scholars to record an audio monologue exploring how the voice is utilised cinematically. In the editing process, these recordings were integrated with relevant clips, marrying up descriptions and interpretations with scenes from relevant films, and the commentators’ voices were
overlaid with those of characters in the discussed films. The spoken theoretical analysis in tandem with examples of the sound function in practice explored the subject of the cinematic voice as a specific sound aesthetic and as specific cinematic device (i.e. the use of voice-over) Both the specific examples I have cited here reflect a philosophical praxis that underpins the production ethos of The Cinematologists Podcast: This is not just a film-centred podcast, but a podcast that attempts to create an experience that is, itself, audio-cinematic.

Conclusion

Whether one accepts the premise that a cinematic experience can occur without images is predicated on how one conceives of the cinematic itself as a conceptual category. Casetti’s broadening of the philosophical sensibility underpinning what we understand as the cinematic experience is a necessary first premise. Furthermore, digital transformations have undoubtedly disrupted the anchoring points of cinema’s ontology across production, distribution and exhibition practices. The concept of assemblage provides a framework for exploring how podcasting as a specific experience is created through technological, spatial and social functions, providing an embeddedness, embodiedness and groundedness which can orient what we might consider a cinematic experience. In order to argue for an audio-cinematic experience however, the construction of the sonic artefact must tap into symbolic associations through which the listener is interpellated in both perceptive and imaginary senses. Film-centred podcasts, in their spectrum of addresses, effects and compositions are built on the pleasures of exploring and expanding discourses of cinema as a subject.

However, in my analysis of case studies I have cited, I suggest how certain podcasts reflect sonic aesthetics that are designed to cross the “there”/“elsewhere” divide, drawing the listener into an experiential mode that is literally without images, but induces a resonance of the cinematic. The scope of this article has been broad. In attempting to introduce the parameters of the audio-cinematic from a wide set of contexts, in is clear that a more focused exploration of specific podcasts, and how their aesthetic design provokes the imagineering I have discussed, requires further analysis. Along with this, a move towards audience research methodologies could undoubtedly explicate how listeners process their practices of podcast engagement. The link between cinema and podcasting can be expanded in other “trans-media” directions; Jennifer O’Meara’s work on the
seminal true crime podcast *Serial*, for example, analysing its documentary structure and paratextual engagements manifest a cinematic immersion (2015). “A Cinema for the Ears” could be dismissed as a neat soundbite; a rhetorical tagline for a medium the definition and status of which is still in a burgeoning phase. Yet through this analysis and development of the audio-cinematic, I have attempted plant some conceptual foundations that specify how we might understand podcasting as visually powerful form of audio, but also how we might consider modes of media experience that move beyond ingrained ideas of subjectivity in relation to the audio-visual.

References


