

LITERATURA LUDOWA

Λ V Λ

Journal of Folklore and Popular Culture



P O D C A S T I N G:
RE-ORALIZATION OF CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

Founded by the Polish Ethnological Society in 1957
vol. 66 (2022) no. 2

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OD REDAKCJI

EDITORIAL

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Introduction: Podcasting as the Marker of Cultural Shift in Media

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Podcasts have entered the mainstream media culture, becoming a considerable source of entertainment and education, devices for self- and artistic expression. It is predicted that there will be almost 500 millions of podcast listeners worldwide by the end of 2022 (Ruby 2022). There are countless podcasts that vary in genre, formats and modes of production, from passionate ramblings from one's closet and independent, crowd-founded titles to professionally produced, complex ventures and podcasts that are by-products of the radio and other media. There are also attempts to monetize the podcasts' popularity by other mass media producers. However, a cross-media translation from podcast to streaming series, which was the case of Facebook Watch's *Limetown* (2019) and Netflix's *Archive 81* (2022), had mixed results so far. To repeat the success of a podcast series is not an easy task. It could be attributed to the fact that podcasting is a highly self-aware medium using meta-narration tools such as found footage (in this case, found recording) which also is the subject of reflection in papers collected in this issue.

It was Ben Hammersley who first used the term "podcast", combining the words "iPod" and "broadcasting", in his 2004 *The Guardian* article entitled *Why Online Radio is Booming*. It is significant that the term itself as well as the title of the article draw our focus to technology, distribution of content in digital era, listenership and radio – a medium that is still the most common point of reference for podcasting in emerging podcast studies, although the comparison between podcasting and radio has its limitations: as Dario Llinares wrote "podcasting has a »subcultural logic« that demarcates it from institutional and production structures of radio" (2018: 128). This "subcultural logic" is highly

visible (or, rather, audible) in the independent podcasts that offer a platform to marginalized and disowned voices. It is no coincidence that half of papers in this issue touch upon the matters of representation and queerness. As Emilia Ferreyra convincingly proves, podcasts are a source of quality representation, maintaining a close relationship with their audiences, responding to their needs. Similarly, Michał Pokrowiecki offers a case study of the Polish podcast *Familia*, focusing on the problems of homophobia and of straight-washing queer family stories in mainstream media – a problem that is not limited to Polish context as Netflix's *Archive 81* straight-washed one of the main characters, bluntly ignoring the very aspect of the story that made this podcast so popular in the first place. Martin Spinelli and Lance Dann (2019) argue that podcasting is a form of “audio media revolution” and it is difficult to disagree as podcasts offer to cover niche interests in stories told by passionate independent voices that engage with their audiences on a more egalitarian, familiar and intimate level. Podcasting marks another shift in our rapidly changing media landscape and could be taken as symptomatic of new ways of production, distribution and reception of digital content.

Richard Berry proposed the idea of “Golden Age of podcasting” (2015; 2016). For Spinelli and Dann this “Golden Age” started in 2014, the year of simultaneous launching of Apple podcast app built-in on every iPhone and the multiple award-winning true crime podcast series *Serial*; according to Spinelli and Dann, the “Golden Age” is still going on with the increasing visibility of podcasts in contemporary media landscape (2019: 31). They proposed eleven major podcasting features and concepts (discussed in detail by Szewczyk, Doliwa and others in the context of the Polish podcast *Raport o stanie świata*) that can be categorized as modes of consumption (intimate listening via earbuds or headphones, on the move and on demand, which requires active engagement on the part of the listener) and modes of production (appealing to the niche interests, using social media, operating on “freemium” model, the everlasting supply of content, the possibility of editing all podcast content and the lack of gatekeeping and constraints characteristic for broadcast media) (Spinelli, Dann 2019: 22). As such, podcasting fits within the widely discussed shift from Web 2.0 to Web 3.0 – a term coined in 2014 by Gavin Wood. The key concepts of Web 2.0 were user-generated content, platform economy, ease of use, participatory culture and interoperability. It led to the monopolization of the digital space by media concerns, such as Facebook (now known as Meta). Web 3.0 could be characterized as an attempt to take the Internet back from the media giants via decentralization, privatization, block-chain technologies and token-based economy. Web 2.0 made Internet more interactive and social for the price of user privacy and, paradoxically, subjectivity (data-gathering algorithms used to recognize users' habits and interests with the goal to sell more advertisements, in turn changing users into consumers). Web 3.0 supposedly gives the power and ownership back to the users via decentralization. It may be coincidental that the discussion of Web 3.0 started in the same year as the “Golden Age

of podcasting” but the podcast experience (as a podcaster and as a listener) is exactly what Web 3.0 promises: ownership of media content, control upon one’s media experience and subjective approach to the users. It is also possible that Web 3.0 will fall prey to monopolization, especially on the minefield of crypto currency, but so far alternative forms of production and engagement with digital content have been on the rise, also for podcasting with platforms such as Fable and Folly Network or Rusty Quill.

The “audio media revolution” has yet another dimension to it – one that could be attributed to a wider cultural shift. Ceallaigh S. MacCath-Moran, producer, writer and the voice of *Folklore & Fiction* podcast, draws attention to the notion of re-oralization in contemporary culture. In the interview presented in this issue we discuss the popularity of podcasting in the context of the human need to tell and hear stories. The intimacy of podcasts’ listenership comes not only from using the headphones, which makes podcast the audio-field of the listener, but also from the simple act of hearing a voice of another human being, a voice that conveys emotion and gives one an illusion of proximity. During the pandemic and quarantine, listening to podcasts was, for many people, the only way to hear the voices of others, a substitute of human contact. In that sense, the podcast is close to some of the already established media forms of communication (telephone etc.) as much as it is a “radio renaissance” on the Internet. Of course, the phenomenon of podcasting is not limited to these comparisons, as it has its own structure and identity, which are the subject of emerging podcast studies. The notion of re-oralization does not stop at podcasting, but also includes other media practices, such as video essays or even the “sound-sharing” feature of TikTok. As much as our media landscape is shifting from Web 2.0 to Web 3.0, our media culture as a whole is putting more emphasis on the audio part of the “audio visual culture” which may be attributed to the distrust toward the highly artificial, simulative structure of the visual media. As we cannot trust the pictures to be real, podcasting maintains a close relationship with listeners via social media, Q&A episodes, transparency and live shows, presenting humanity behind the voice.

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ARTYKUŁY
ARTICLES

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LGBTQ+ Representation in Fictional Podcast Series

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ABSTRACT: The article offers an analysis of the frequency and quality of LGBTQ+ representation in fictional podcasts. I examine how frequently and with what intent LGBTQ+ characters are included in this medium. This research aims to fill the gap in academic work on LGBTQ+ representation in podcasts. Though scholars note an increase in representation in mainstream media, LGBTQ+ media consumers, especially young people, still look to other sources for validation of their identities. Many LGBTQ+ people look to fictional podcasts as a source of quality representation, especially because podcasts are small-scale and rely on the funding, and thus the opinion, of listeners (Bottomley, 2015). In this paper, I analyze four fictional podcast series for LGBTQ+ inclusivity. I note how many LGBTQ+ characters are included and in what proportion. I assess the quality of representation in four ways: diversity, depth, and the frequency and type of stereotypical LGBTQ+ tropes. My findings show a high frequency of LGBTQ+ characters and diversity of personalities and backgrounds, opportunities for these characters to express their sexual and/or gender identities as well as LGBTQ+ trope subversions. Thus, we see that fictional podcasts, as a medium that sustains itself by listeners' patronage, present stories that their audience can relate to. As a result, fictional podcasts create more niche stories that make connections with smaller demographics of media consumers.

KEYWORDS: LGBTQ+; representation; podcasts; new media; niche audience; patronage

Introduction

This study quantifies LGBTQ+ representation in fictional podcast series and analyzes its quality. First, I count all recurring, canonically queer characters in each studied fictional podcast series as well as how many episodes they appear in. I then compare these numbers to those of straight or unconfirmed queer

recurring characters in the show. Finally, I find any instances of perpetuation or subversion of popular queer tropes in the media. By focusing on podcasts, I show how LGBTQ+ representation differs in media that rely on listener support, compared to representation in mainstream television and movies. Also, my research on LGBTQ+ representation in fictional podcast series offers a new perspective in the academic discourse on representation in media overall. The increased and higher-quality LGBTQ+ representation in podcasts offers an alternative to larger-scale media saturated with heteronormativity, homophobia, and queerbaiting. The ease of access and plentitude of podcasts is important so that people listening, LGBTQ+-identifying or not, can be exposed to a variety of positive queer stories and characters.

Smaller scale forms of media tend to include more LGBTQ+ representation. For example, 35 percent of 'Art House' films, produced by small studios as opposed to feature film studios, were LGBTQ+-inclusive. With the exception of 20th Century Fox, these 'Art House' films outnumber those made at any of the other major studios (Stokes 2019). Studies show that streaming services produce the most representation-dense and diverse content compared to broadcast and cable television, though the latter still make significant strides, to mention only FX's *Pose*, which "features the largest number of transgender series regular characters on a scripted U.S. series ever" (Stokes 2019: 4), and CW's introduction of a transgender superhero, Nia Nal, in *Supergirl* (Ellis 2019).

The niche medium of podcasts provides a variety of LGBTQ+ representation. Bottomley's case study of *Welcome to Night Vale*, a radio drama that stars a gay main character, shows an independent podcast's success amongst those made by professional media producers like affiliates of the NPR public radio and celebrity entertainers. Within a year of its airing, the show was listed in the Top 20 Podcasts on iTunes. Its popularity is unprecedented primarily because the creators eschew advertising in their episodes. Instead, they support themselves and the podcast through "crowdfunding, merchandising, live performances, and select premium or bonus content" (Bottomley 2015: 181). Despite being a radio drama, a format that thrived from the 1930s through the 1950s, and adopting LGBTQ+ themes, this podcast boasts a niche audience and long-standing popularity. Furthermore, there are many other podcasts available that cater to LGBTQ+ fans. Because these smaller, independent podcasts rely on funding from their fans, creators are motivated to make them feel heard (Bottomley 2015).

While some may argue that any representation, even if stereotypical, is progressive in that it achieves greater exposure for marginalized groups, McLaughlin notes that while more exposure is linked to more identification with LGBTQ+ characters, there was "no significant relationship between exposure to homosexual television characters and levels of prejudice" (2017: 15). Thus, it is vital that representation in media is humanizing and accurate, as exposure as such is not enough. Quality LGBTQ+ representation provides a larger, more accurate, and diverse image of the community, free of hypersexualization, two-dimen-

sionality, stereotyping, and disproportionate misfortune for two main reasons: educating people who would not otherwise interact with LGBTQ+ people, and providing role models, sources of pride, and reassurance for those who are realizing their identities and debating coming out (Gomillion, Giuliano 2011).

Creating more numerous representation of better quality is also important as it may help people define and feel more comfortable with their identity. According to a survey distributed at a Pride festival asking for participants to identify influential LGBTQ+ media, more gay men recalled *Will and Grace*, and more lesbian women named *The L Word* (Gomillion, Giuliano 2011), showing how people most easily identify with characters like themselves. Even with some LGBTQ+ representation, people of color, transgender people, bisexuals (especially bisexual men), asexuals, and those with disabilities are unlikely to see themselves in mainstream media (Ellis 2019). As stated by Crisler, “some LGBTQ individuals use media as a coping mechanism to escape from the realities of discrimination” (2019: 4), and still cannot find any acknowledgement or validation of their existence in the media. Though there has been a wave of academic research evaluating LGBTQ+ representation in some media, the same cannot be said about fictional podcasts. Bottomley muses that “there is certainly still space in podcasting for independent, non-hegemonic voices and perspectives” (2015: 182). This article aims to correct this lack of research.

Methodology

Four fictional scripted podcast series that include LGBTQ+ representation of some kind (especially of underrepresented subgroups) have been chosen for analysis. All selected fictional podcasts series have at least 10 regular episodes. Since some of the studied podcasts have a large number of episodes, each title has been assigned a sample size. The first 20 episodes of podcasts that, on average, are less than 20 minutes long have been studied, while for podcasts with longer episodes only the first 10 episodes have been studied. I have counted the LGBTQ+ and cis straight characters in each podcast, as well as their number of appearances. To determine the quality of this representation, I have looked at how well developed a character is (flat, static character versus well rounded, dynamic character, with a backstory, motivation, personal characteristics, etc.), how many LGBTQ+ tropes (positive, negative, or neutral) apply to the story or characters, whether LGBTQ+ characters are in non-platonic relationships, are able to express attraction, or are able to display affection, what good or bad things happen to these characters, and what good or bad characteristics these characters possess. Because “good” and “bad” or “positive” and “negative” are so subjective, these categorizations will be taken in context of the story, setting, and other characters.

Podcast Name	Sample Size of Episodes
<i>Welcome to Night Vale</i>	20
<i>The Strange Case of Starship Iris</i>	10
<i>The Penumbra Podcast (Juno Steel)</i>	10
<i>FRUIT</i>	20

Figure 1: Sample Size of Episodes

***Welcome to Night Vale* (WTNV)**

Welcome to Night Vale has been selected for this study because of its unusual success. Despite being an independent, surrealist horror, resurrected radio drama podcast with prominent LGBTQ+ representation and no ad revenue, WTNV has consistently ranked highly in podcast charts nearly since its inception. However, the story-telling structure of WTNV is also unusual, and thus, difficult to apply to the determined methodology as it is.

The show mimics the presentation of community radio, where only the radio host and the rare guest speak. Thus, few characters make “appearances” (have speaking roles). Of these few characters with appearances, Night Vale Community Radio host, Cecil, is the only recurring character. As follows, given the formulation of methodology for the present text, Cecil would be the only character investigated for the study, while the existence and actions of the rest of the characters living in and passing through Night Vale as reported by Cecil would be ignored. To fix this issue, for this podcast only, characters mentioned repeatedly have been included in the count. The purpose of counting was to observe how many LGBTQ+ characters are speaking, appear in more than an episode, and otherwise have more than a fleeting presence in the story. However, in the podcast’s first twenty episodes, with the exception of Cecil and his crush, Carlos, WTNV is composed entirely of fleeting characters with no speaking roles or plot significance. Thus, LGBTQ+ characters without speaking roles in the show are not necessarily less significant than non-canonically-LGBTQ+ characters. The classification is blurred, and the inclusion of several other characters in the count has been decided on a case-by-case basis, but generally, for this podcast, characters who have been included in the count are intelligent individuals with recurring appearances or mentions in the show. Thus, of the 39 characters who qualified, only two are confirmed members of the LGBTQ+ community: Cecil and Carlos the scientist. Still, of these two, one is the main character and the other is the main character’s love interest and the character with the third most mentions/appearances in the first 20 episodes.

The first impressions of Cecil are based on his classic, low-toned radio voice. Since a lot of his dialogue consists in reading pre-written news, announcements, and advertisements, most of Cecil’s characterization comes from his delivery, his comments on and interpretations of information he has just read out, and his occasional digressions about his personal life (i.e. his crush on Carlos).

Side characters are characterized by basic identifiers (i.e. Telly the barber, Old Woman Josie out by the car lot, etc.), what they are reported to have done, and how they chose to deliver their own reports. These details are scarce, making most characters in this podcast, LGBTQ+-identifying or not, very flat and static. One of these characters, Carlos, is a newcomer, a Latino scientist with a “perfect and beautiful haircut”, “a square jaw”, “teeth like a military cemetery” (WtNV 001), and also the object of Cecil’s affections. With the exception of a voicemail where he warns about time slowing in Night Vale that is played over the radio, Carlos’ antics are reported by Cecil. Thus, the image of Carlos delivered to audiences is far more biased (though more in-depth) than those of other characters.

While this podcast does not feature an abundance of canonically LGBTQ+ characters, a gay man leads the story, a less-frequent-than-desired occurrence in mainstream media. Cecil expresses his attraction towards Carlos to the podcast listeners as well as to his community on public radio within the first minutes of the first episode. Thus, at least in Night Vale, the setting is tolerant enough that Cecil is comfortable with openly expressing attraction to another man. Any restraint he expresses in later episodes is in the name of professionalism rather than fear of homophobic backlash. The writers revealed Cecil’s sexuality very early in the story, subverting the “ambiguously gay” trope in which writers include a queer-coded character and either take a very long time to or never confirm their identity. Both this trope subversion and WTNV’s classification as horror, a genre that is favored more by LGBTQ+ audiences than the straight ones (Stokes, 2019), make it clear that this podcast caters specifically to the LGBTQ+ community.

The Strange Case of Starship Iris (TSCOSI)

The Strange Case of Starship Iris is a short podcast about a group of outlaws on a spaceship who rebel against an intergalactic regime, a popular trope in dystopian science fiction. *TSCOSI* took and adapted this trope to include more diverse characters than had been done before. It has recurring, intelligent, individual characters that are not human due to the story taking place in space, after first contact with aliens has occurred. However, because these characters have large, plot-relevant, speaking roles and interact with other human characters as equals, their inclusion in the count of characters is unambiguous. In this podcast, there is a very high percentage of canonically LGBTQ+ identifying characters. In other words, the characters in this podcast just happen to be queer. Every recurring character, whether they were in the main ship crew or not, appeared in a great majority of episodes, perhaps due to budgeting of a small independent podcast. This allowed significant time for the development of each of the characters.

The listeners are first introduced to Violet Liu, or Vi for short. She is a biologist, working for the Republic, when she finds herself marooned on a malfunctioning ship (the Starship Iris). Vi manages to connect to someone on another

ship who introduces themselves as Kay Grisham. Even though they quickly bond, Vi remains skeptical of Kay and through clever conversation is able to uncover that the woman she is speaking to is lying about who she is and what her motivations are. Still, with few other options, Vi is rescued onto the other ship, *Rumor*. The first episode paints Vi as smart and level-headed, a flattering depiction of the podcast's main, lesbian character. The *Rumor* is a smuggler ship with a crew of enemies of the Republic, or of what they like to call the Regime. There, Vi meets Arkady Patel (first shipmate, con-artist, hacker, registered subversive, army deserter, and crew muscle) who was pretending to be Kay before. There are also Sona Tripathi (ship captain, ex-mechanic and leader of the uprising on Crestwin Landing), Brian Jeeter (ship translator and cook), and Krejjh (pilot and ex-Dwarnian-soldier). Of these crew members, Arkady and Vi share sexual tension, Brian identifies as a transgender man, Krejjh as a nonbinary alien, and Brian and Krejjh are in a romantic relationship, engaged to be married.

Arkady is the only character that has a "tragic backstory." The uprising that Sona led was on a prison colony planet that Arkady was born and raised on. Now, Sona tries to be attentive to Arkady's needs and emotions, aware of the effects of her past experiences as well as the mental toll of mostly being useful to the crew as someone capable of inflicting harm on foes. Throughout the ten episodes, Vi and Arkady grow closer to each other, hinting at a possible relationship. Even though they got along when they first met, Arkady's dishonesty set them back. Also, Vi still had to unlearn Republic (Regime) propaganda before she was in a position to be more understanding of the plight of the crew on the *Rumor*, particularly Arkady's. Throughout the story, they grow close by being emotionally supportive of each other and sharing common interests (i.e. Vi being a biologist and Arkady keeping an herb garden on the ship). At the end, once everyone narrowly escapes after successfully infiltrating the Regime, Vi and Arkady finally exchange awkward, but affectionate confessions and become a confirmed couple.

The already established relationship between Brian and Krejjh is also good representation. Transgender and nonbinary people are already barely represented in media, not to mention the presence of healthy romantic relationships involving either. Both characters are skilled and smart people with their own independent and in-depth characterization. Jeeter is soft-spoken, emotionally intelligent, and good at making gentle jokes. He has done an advanced study of linguistics and is working to become fluent in his spouse's native language. Krejjh is a Dwarnian, an alien race that waged war on the humans several years ago. They were a pilot who fought in the war, but later defected. They came from a good upbringing and are cared about by their family, even if their family may not understand their decision to be in a relationship with a human. Krejjh is bubbly, loud, and self-assured, making them an easily lovable character. Together, Brian and Krejjh are very publicly in love. They openly

flirt, encourage, and spend time with one another. This is unusual because even when healthy LGBTQ+ relationships appear in media, they are often portrayed as chaste and private.

Agent McCabe (using they/them pronouns) is a wide-eyed rookie working for the Republic to investigate and catch the Rumor and its crew. Even though transphobia does still exist, Agent McCabe is accepted in their place of work. Agent McCabe shares a lot of similarities with Vi before she came aboard the Rumor. Like Vi used to, they still believe the propaganda that the Republic has fed them and fear what would happen if they questioned anything, especially after their coworker gets taken away for interrogation. Agent McCabe and their coworker, Agent Park, later defect and join the crew on the Rumor at the end of the tenth episode.

In the world of *TSCOSI*, there is an alien race called the “Dwarnians” that do not abide by the gender binary. Thus, the three Dwarnian characters (Krejhh, Thasia, and Eejhgreb) all identify as nonbinary. However, this may be seen as reflecting a trope whereby nonbinary characters are equated to being inhuman. Thus, nonbinary characters tend to be aliens, monsters, robots, or other non-human entities. The creators of *TSCOSI* listened to this criticism and addressed it in later episodes by introducing a human nonbinary character, Agent McCabe. *TSCOSI* also consistently subverts the “ambiguously gay” trope. Relatively soon in Vi’s first monologue of the pilot episode, she muses about another woman she was attracted to back in college. Later, Arkady Patel (then going by Kay Grisham) openly flirts and expresses attraction to Vi. However, because Arkady was lying about her identity and directing the conversation to get Vi’s trust, the transactional nature of the flirtation with covert motivation disqualifies this interaction as canonical confirmation of Arkady’s sexuality. Regardless, in the next episode, once everyone’s intentions are revealed and discussed, Arkady’s sexuality is properly confirmed. The fact that Dwarnians, within the confines of the English language, identify as nonbinary is swiftly addressed after Vi’s first in-person meeting with Krejhh. Agent McCabe is in the habit of saying their pronouns as a part of their usual introduction. Finally, although Brian Jeeter waits until the fourth episode to explicitly say he is transgender, this statement still comes relatively early in the story, as soon as Vi has built enough trust with Brian for him to offer up the information. Thus, these characters’ gender and sexual identities do not feel like they are being withheld from the audience. There are two opposing sides in *TSCOSI*: the crew of the Rumor and the government agents under the Republic trying to investigate and catch them. Both groups include characters that openly identify with the LGBTQ+ community and are accepted by others within their respective groups, removing any moral implications of their gender and sexuality. Sexism and homophobia are still referenced as being very real, albeit relatively detached from the story at hand. Most instances of this kind of discrimination have occurred in past events and in different settings.

The Penumbra Podcast (Juno Steel)

The Penumbra Podcast (TPP) is a podcast that features several, separate LGBTQ+-character-dense stories ranging from a single episode to several seasons in length. For the purpose of this study, I focus on the storyline that follows Juno Steel, a prickly private investigator living in Hyperion City on a terraformed Mars, far in the future. Juno Steel solves cases over 2–3 episode arcs, while he deals with overarching corruption, ancient Mars artifacts, his personal demons, and tumultuous romance. While Juno Steel's story is set on a different planet, where Martians were rumored to have once existed, there are no alien or otherwise non-human characters in the show. Thus, when counting recurring characters, the “intelligent” qualifier has no longer been needed and has not been considered in this count.

Juno Steel's story is modeled after case-of-the-week detective noir shows, which typically showed hypermasculine characters and settings. Thus, by making most characters canonically queer, including the main character, and making many other characters queer-coded, the podcast writers are not only adding more characters that just happen to identify with the LGBTQ+ community, but also intentionally trying to subvert the hypermasculinity once inherent in these kinds of stories. Most recurring characters only appear for one arc (2–3 episodes). Some return in future episodes, especially the main love interest, Peter Noreyev. However, for the first ten episodes, the focus falls on Juno Steel and his trusty assistant/sidekick, Rita.

Juno Steel is a jaded private investigator. He uses he/him pronouns, but identifies as a lady, classifying himself as nonbinary. He carries a lot of emotional baggage from being raised in an abusive household where his brother was killed by his mother in a fit of rage during his childhood, growing up in a poor and dangerous community, getting kicked out of the police force, and all his subsequent failed PI cases. Juno clearly takes these events to heart and is self-loathing and depressed as a result. His mental illness causes him to be largely pessimistic and distance himself from others by working cases alone and being rude to everyone. Juno Steel also possesses a lot of negative personality traits, which sometimes begets negative behavior. These traits make for a poorly represented queer character, at first glance. However, Juno Steel is the protagonist and framed so that he is still likeable. Thus, Juno is written as one of the most famously complex types of characters, the antihero.

Rita is Juno Steel's assistant who is addicted to watching reruns of bad soap operas and eating snacks on the job. She gets excited easily, is susceptible to going off on tangents, speaks with a thick accent, and operates as Juno's tech support while he works his cases. Rita is quoted as describing herself, when asked about her sexuality, as “ain't choosy” (*TPP* 011), implying bisexuality or pansexuality. Rita acts as a constant source of support and encouragement to Juno for all except the last story arc, where Juno breaks contact to go on an investigation with his love interest, Peter Noreyev.

Peter Noreyev is first introduced in the pilot, under the pseudonym Rex Glass. He poses as a Dark Matters agent sent to assist Juno Steel with a case concerning an ancient Martian artifact that he actually intends to steal. Peter Noreyev is a skilled thief and the embodiment of the trope “be gay, do crime”, a counter to the queer-coded villains trope that results in making villainy look appealing. Peter is a fun, likeable, and intelligent character that is attracted to Juno Steel, letting himself be lured into a kiss at the end of the case and almost getting caught. Peter Noreyev is largely absent for most of the remaining studied episodes, leaving Juno to process his feelings for Peter, until the ninth episode where they agree to work a case together again. After a particularly tumultuous case, they confess their feelings for each other and agree to start their relationship properly. However, because of Juno’s mental state, he promptly walks out on Peter and returns to Hyperion City to process his trauma.

An important area of focus for the writers of *TPP* consisted in the effects of mental illness and its slow healing process. Juno Steel lives with a large amount of ignored trauma that prevents him from being emotionally available to Peter Noreyev by the end of the tenth episode. Yet, Juno Steel’s story is far from over. There are dozens of episodes dedicated to Juno’s healing and later rekindling with Peter. While Juno has not been granted a happy ending by the tenth episode, he is still supported by his close friend, Rita, with the promise of further development.

As mentioned when discussing the LGBTQ+ character ratio earlier, the writers of Juno Steel’s storyline in *TPP* intentionally subvert the hypermasculine undertones of detective noir stories. This is achieved not only by including more LGBTQ+ characters, but also by creating a futuristic society where gender norms, heteronormativity, homophobia, transphobia, racism, etc. are no longer relevant. While this may seem like a utopia, moral depravity, political corruption, and late-stage capitalism are still rampant, providing plenty of work for Juno Steel.

Juno Steel’s storyline in *TPP* is, surprisingly, the only one of the four podcasts studied that featured a majority of confirmed recurring queer characters, most of whom had their identities confirmed at their introduction or, at the latest, by the end of their first 2–3 episode arc. Still, queer characters are the majority by a small margin. In the first listen of the podcast, when the characters had not yet been counted, the original impression was that the vast majority of the characters were canonically queer, when in actuality, upon closer inspection, many are just queer-coded, but never confirmed. This may qualify as the “ambiguously gay” trope. However, when considering that heteronormativity is no longer present in this society, straight and cisgender persons are no longer the default and any unconfirmed characters cannot be assumed as such. Either way, most unconfirmed characters are only present for a single arc, and their sexuality or gender identity is simply not relevant enough for their characterization in such a short period of time. Also, there are no confirmed cisgender, heterosexual characters.

In this world, bad things happen and bad people exist, but they do not occur because of a character's gender identity, sexuality, race, or ethnicity. The targeting of LGBTQ+ characters is not intentional, but with so many canonically queer and queer-coded characters in the show, instances of LGBTQ+-identifying characters as villains or of LGBTQ+-identifying characters being mistreated and/or having unfortunate things happen to them are bound to occur relatively often. This is especially true because the genre necessitates evil-doers to exist and unfortunate events to occur in order to bring about the cases that the protagonist must investigate.

FRUIT

FRUIT is a podcast within the sports genre, less popular amongst LGBTQ+ audiences, which is about the coming-out journey of X, an anonymous NFL player. This podcast is the only one of the four studied podcasts with no transcripts available, limiting its accessibility to certain audiences and making it difficult to study. There are four canonically gay male characters in the show. Besides the protagonist, all other gay characters are either a love interest or a mentor to the protagonist. While the percentage of canonically queer, recurring individual characters is low, it makes sense when considering that the hypermasculine environment that professional football can produce is not conducive to having multiple openly gay characters.

X is a rookie professional football player trying to become popular while privately investigating his possible homosexuality and uses the pseudonym "X" to conceal his identity in the recordings. The podcast is a recorded testimonial, which at the end is revealed to have been prepared for a news story after X publicly comes out as gay. X is a Black man raised by two Princeton professors, later graduating from Princeton himself and getting drafted into the NFL. X's identity as a Black man and a Princeton alumnus is noticeable in the mix of formal and colloquial language he uses and the way he chooses to tell his story. X is clearly an introspective person, paying attention to his emotions and motivations as events transpire. X is a well-rounded character who, by being a Princeton-educated, professional football player, subverts tropes of gay men as well as Black men. Initially, X struggles a lot with confusion and internalized homophobia. Still, he forms a romantic relationship with Gerard, who is patient with his inexperience and trepidation. At the same time, he maintains a casual romantic relationship with his friend, Siya, while accidentally falsely making her believe that there is something more between them.

Gerard is a furniture designer who gave X his number at a club. While at first patient, he realizes that any future relationship with X would either be secretive or under a scrutinizing eye as he would become the boyfriend of one of the first openly gay football players in the NFL. As a result, Gerard breaks off the relationship, leaving X in a vulnerable emotional state. Gerard is a relatively flat character. He does still exercise his own agency when he considers his needs compared to X's and subsequently ends the relationship. There are

enough details provided to make Gerard seem like a real person, but he largely only exists in the story to advance X's realization of his sexual identity and to be a secret that X must work to conceal even after their breakup.

Siya is a sports agent who struggles to work her way into the gentlemen's club that is the sports industry. She is characterized as hard-working, intelligent, and independent. Black female characters are often characterized this way. While on the surface it is not inherently negative, stereotypes can contribute to viewing a group as a monolith rather than a diverse array of people. While Siya wants to be taken seriously at work, she still craves emotional support in her personal life and she seeks it out in X. Unfortunately, X's lack of emotional availability causes turmoil and confusion even after they eventually break up. This confusion motivates Siya to investigate the root of X's distance, where she finds out about Gerard. In the final episode, Siya confronts X about this, hurt by his dishonesty and gives him ultimatums concerning his sexuality.

Before either relationship ends, X is sent a threatening text message containing photographic evidence of him and Gerard kissing. After further investigation, it is revealed that the mystery sender was actually Siya's assistant, Luke, who is also gay, and who claims to have done so as a warning to be more careful. While his methods are questionable, causing panic in X for several days, Luke is honest in his intentions and later becomes a platonic mentor, helping guide X through accepting his sexuality. Luke is also a very flat character who exists only to guide X through his coming out journey. However, he is an outwardly gay man, openly expressive of his identity even in the professional football industry, albeit just as Siya's assistant. Still, it is valuable to see his success in such an environment for both X and the audience.

Finally, Hugo Alexander is the President and founder of the Alexander Group, the sports agency that Siya works for and X is signed onto. After a scandal arises that requires Hugo to come into the office personally, he meets X, who catches his eye. For a while, Hugo invites X to big parties and fancy dinners that lead to sex. After the break ups with both Gerard and Siya, X is excited about the novelty of this relationship. However, Hugo soon cuts ties with X without much hassle, revealing Hugo's exploitative intentions. X feels used and deeply hurt by this turn of events.

Most of the adversity that X encounters as a gay protagonist causes him a lot of stress and emotional labor. However, the blackmail from Luke, the ultimatums given by Siya, and the sexual exploitation by Hugo are all particularly malicious. Most of the negative actions that X has perpetrated have been due to his confusion, indecision, or obliviousness. Still, multiple characters have been negatively affected by his actions.

The world where this story takes place is nearly the same as the one we are in now, with the same social issues. The professional American football industry is known for being very hypermasculine, if not actively perpetuating toxic masculinity. Thus, it is a particularly suffocating work environment for someone other than a large, strong, masculine, aggressive, and unfeeling man. X differs

because of his sexuality. His Princeton upbringing and education is also unusual for professional football players, especially those from Black communities, which is noticed by fellow teammates and held against him. Other characters also struggle in this environment due to being different in the NFL. Siya, as a woman, keeps getting talked over and passed up for promotions at her place of work. Craig Laurelson, a fellow professional football player, suffered severe hazing at a spring training camp several years ago, and has been ostracized and discredited for trying to speak out against his harassment and the lack of accountability for the hazers and the higher establishments responsible ever since. The mental toll he suffered from this treatment leads to his public suicide and calling out the actions of the Alexander Group, which is covered up soon after. This is not just a story about a gay person in a homophobic environment. There is intersectionality between homophobia, toxic masculinity, sexism, racism, and classism. After all, if a space is not safe for queer people, it is likely not safe for other marginalized groups, either. The issues are not separate from each other and this has been exemplified well in *FRUIT*'s story, setting, and characterization.

FRUIT is a social critique of sexuality and its social politics. Thus, X is made to suffer because he is gay. While this is an honest portrayal of actual experiences of closeted queer people, it is important to note that difficult coming out stories seem to be a favorite for queer representation in feature film and mainstream television industries. Perhaps some skepticism is due as regards the necessity of this kind of story and the intentions of the people producing it. *FRUIT* focuses on the emotional labor of questioning one's sexuality and figuring out how this identity may fit in an unwelcoming environment. However, while the ending implies that X has eventually come out publicly, the point where the story is left off lacks the closure of many well-written coming-out stories where the protagonist has achieved a level of self-acceptance, and, ideally, acceptance from family, friends, and their community. X has been left with a strained relationship with his best friend in addition to two consecutive rejections by male romantic interests, all while he was still in an exploratory stage of questioning his identity. With no news of a third season in sight, the ending fails to give a conclusion that does not leave the protagonist, a gay man, in a worse state than when the podcast started.

Discussion

Counting the characters in two of the studied podcasts has resulted in very low ratios of recurring canonically queer characters: *Welcome to Night Vale* and *FRUIT*. The other two have close to 50-50 ratios, with *The Penumbra Podcast* taking the slight majority. None of the podcasts have canonically queer characters taking a large majority, but all have queer relationships with different degrees of public openness, healthiness, and explicitness. Cecil from *WTNV* repeatedly talks on community radio about his crush on Carlos. In contrast, X from *FRUIT* has been in two brief, secret, sexual relationships, one of which has included a significant power imbalance.

All podcasts have well-developed queer main characters. However, the same could not be said for all characters in all the podcasts. In *WTNV*, Cecil is the only well-developed character, and he is still arguably very static as the unchanging, vague, disembodied, newscaster voice he is supposed to be. Because of the case-of-the-week structure of Juno Steel's storyline in *TPP*, the show features many flat characters that serve to advance the plot of the episode and then be forgotten about, whether they are canonically queer or not. All the gay men in *FRUIT* other than the protagonist, X, are flat characters that are either his love interest or his mentor. In other words, they only exist to advance X's character development.

No recurring, canonically LGBTQ+ characters die in any of the studied podcasts. However, when considering the spirit of the "Bury your gays" trope rather than its letter, only Juno Steel from *TPP* and X from *FRUIT* appear to be enduring more negative conditions than the other characters in the story. Still, because there are no straight characters in the story to compare to, Juno Steel cannot suffer more because of his sexual and gender identity. X in *FRUIT*, alternately, is purposefully made to endure a lot more stressors than his fellow straight professional football players.

TSCOSI, Juno Steel's storyline in *TPP*, and *FRUIT* all have canonical or queer-coded villains/antagonists. Agent RJ McCabe works for the Republic in *TSCOSI*, but they are more a cog in the machine than an actively malicious character. In fact, by the end they defect from the Republic. Also, there are non-binary characters on the "good" side, too. Thus, being nonbinary is not linked to villainy. As for *TPP*, when nearly all the characters are at least queer-coded, some will have to be the perpetrators of the crime and some – the victims. Hugo from *FRUIT*, who is intentionally written as a bad person (e.g. sexually exploitative, promotes a toxically masculine workplace that dodges accountability in the name of making money), is only able hurt X because he is gay.

Most of the selected podcasts are either Horror or Science Fiction, the two genres that LGBTQ+ fans are more likely to select as favorites than straight audiences would (Ellis 2019). In fact, when searching for fictional podcast series with LGBTQ+ representation, most resulting shows fit in those two categories. *FRUIT* provides diversity in the data pool with respect to genre. It is also unique as the only podcast including negative attitudes towards homosexuality in the story. *FRUIT* contains no reference to any LGBTQ+ identity besides that of a cis, gay man. Perhaps this is why sports fiction stories are less popular amongst the LGBTQ+ community. They are too closely tied to an unwelcoming reality.

The literature review references an article that discusses the strange phenomenon that is *WTNV*'s sustained success, despite its niche genre and its method of fund-raising. Many other podcasts have forgone the inclusion of advertisements, opting for *WTNV*'s model of sustaining themselves via the support of a small, but committed fanbase, *TSCOSI* included. Thus, in order to ensure success, *TSCOSI* writers must be aware of the audience they cater to and

make them feel like their wants and criticisms are being heard and addressed. An instance where this occurred was after they had aired their first couple of episodes and it was revealed that Krejjh was an alien who identified as non-binary. Even though Krejjh is otherwise a well-developed character, listeners critiqued that making Krejjh nonbinary followed the trope that nonbinary people are inhuman. Listening to their audience's commentary, the writers added a new recurring character in the next episode by the name of Agent RJ McCabe, who is a nonbinary human. This event exemplified the influence listeners may have on the content creators make, allowing them to push for better representation that they can easily identify with.

Conclusion

LGBTQ+ representation in the media is growing. This has prompted academic research into what LGBTQ+ representation can be found in media, how much, and what is its standard of quality. The purpose of this article has been to conduct an initial study of LGBTQ+ representation in fictional podcasts, a medium that appears to have had virtually no attention from the academic community. In the literature review, a trend has become apparent whereby larger scale productions tend to be less inclusive. Thus, the hypothesis for this study has posited that due to podcasts being smaller, cheaper and easier to produce, it is less risk-averse and even beneficial for their creators to include more diversity. This study has involved four case studies of queer fictional podcast series. For each podcast, the number of canonically LGBTQ+ recurring characters has been counted and compared to the overall number of recurring characters. Then a qualitative analysis has been conducted, finding any tropes the shows perpetrated or subverted, as well as gauging the amount of development and relevance the featured LGBTQ+ characters in the story have been given. All podcasts tell strong interesting stories with well-developed queer protagonists. None of the podcasts have been able to uphold a golden standard in which all queer characters are well-developed and dynamic, are no worse people than their cisgender straight counterparts, endure no worse than their cisgender straight counterparts, avoid reinforcing old tropes, and even subvert some of them. However, most of the podcasts do not transgress so much that they are no longer enjoyable and are difficult to identify with. The podcast *FRUIT* is questionable due to the protagonist suffering more misfortune than his straight counterparts because of his sexuality.

The most significant limitation of this study has been the small sample size. Even though *The Strange Case of Starship Iris* and *FRUIT* are short enough to be studied in their entirety, only fractions of Juno Steel's storyline in *The Penumbra Podcast* and *Welcome to Night Vale* have been studied. Thus, the protagonists' personal and romantic development have not been fully explored within the confines of the study.

Even though this study is restricted to fictional podcast series only, LGBTQ+ representation exists in a variety of genres in podcasting. There are role-

playing game (RPG) podcasts like the *Adventure Zone* and *Critical Role*. Also, in nonfiction, there are LGBTQ+ slice-of-life, confessionals, history, and news podcasts, podcasts where examples of LGBTQ+ media are discussed, and podcasts with queer hosts. Hopefully, future researchers may see the potential for queer representation in podcasting and study its quality across the range of genres.

The other limitation of this study is that this research does not focus on the impact of the availability and easy accessibility of these inclusive and well-written stories to LGBTQ+ and questioning listeners. The impact of LGBTQ+-inclusive fictional podcast series to me personally is what has inspired me to pursue this research question. Perhaps future research will quantify how pervasive LGBTQ+-inclusive podcasting's influence is.

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Antifascist Mothers and Folk Healers: Queer Reinterpretations of Polish and Regional Cultural Archetypes in Familia

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ABSTRACT: The article serves as an analysis of *Familia*, a Polish independent fiction podcast from 2020 produced by the Teraz Poliz theatre as a response to increase of state supported homophobic propaganda in the recent years. By pointing out similarities and differences between the podcast in question and mainstream Polish audio series, as well as drawing comparisons to popular globally distributed independent audio fiction produced in English, the author aims to prove the unique position of *Familia* as a sole representative of a politically conscious podcast drama presenting a specifically Polish perspective on queer emancipation. The author then proceeds to analyse the narrative content of the podcast, presenting the ways in which the story plays with elements of traditional, Polish national identity, reframing them via a radical lens as potential symbolic tools for LGBTQ+ emancipation and antifascist resistance in everyday life, while at the same time warning of the limited scope of use for such tools.

KEYWORDS: audio series; familia; folk healers; nationalism; podcast; Polish mother; queer; theatre

Introduction

There is no doubt today that in the last few years podcasting has become an integral and crucial part of the modern digital media landscape, especially its vast, English-speaking part with an almost global reach. A lot has been said about the unique features that set podcasting apart from both the radio – often seen as its closest predecessor – and other digital and internet based media. From its early days podcasting was seen as a disruptive technology, reshaping the established practices of the radio business owing to the principles of free access and automated delivery (Berry 2006: 144). As a convergent medium,

podcasting reshaped the relationship between content creators and listeners. For the early adapters of the technology it seemed like an opportunity to reclaim the radio and use it to create otherwise impossible content, liberated from often restrictive programming guidelines (Hammersley 2004). As later observations show, that opportunity has been, at least in some extent, seized by creators stemming from a wide range of marginalised groups. Through podcasting about their lived experiences, such creators have been able to facilitate a media community that finds strength in what Lance Dann and Martin Spinelli call experiential diversity:

Conceiving of diversity in this way means seeing it as a nexus of making, listening, sharing, social interaction, and group and individual identity formation around a podcast. This is a conceptual evolution still very much in process and vestiges of older approaches to diversity are still present, even in the minds of our respondents. Indeed one of our ethnic-minority respondents acknowledged that he “might be naïve” when he says that in his experience of podcasting (participating in a podcasting scene and making and listening to podcasts) he has not felt any discrimination. He and others seem more interested in experiencing and contributing to “difference” than they do in tallying exclusion, inclusion, or misrepresentation (2019: 160).

While the authors of *Podcasting: The Audio Media Revolution* describe this phenomenon in the context of Podium.me, a youth initiative focused on non-fiction content, diversity, both experiential and its more established, representational kind, has been an important factor fuelling the rapid growth of the independent audio drama podcasting scene. It was after all the depiction of a homosexual relationship between two men in *Welcome To Night Vale* that – according to its co-author Jeffrey Cranor – guaranteed the show’s success among the young queer users of Tumblr, hungry for honest representation and frustrated by the mainstream media portrayal of LGBTQ+ characters or, rather, the lack thereof (Weinstock 2018: 3). The standard set by *Night Vale* was quickly picked up and improved upon by other audio fiction creators, many of them members of marginalised communities themselves, saturating the medium with stories both celebrating unique identities and serving as social commentaries of systemic issues specific to such groups¹. One of such audio dramas is *Familia*, which tells the story of a queer, multigenerational family of restaurant owners and their struggles against increasing homophobia in their country. What makes *Familia* unique is the fact that according to my best knowledge, it appears to be for the time being the only example of an original, independent Polish audio series

¹ Some noteworthy examples include *Ars Paradoxa*, a time-travel sci-fi podcast focusing on the institutional mistrust and invigilation faced by members of racial and sexual minorities during the Second Red Scare or *Greater Boston*, whose central plot revolves around the struggle of the city’s poorest citizens for affordable living in the wake of the housing crisis.

with wider recognition and as such is an important subject for Polish podcast studies. In this article, I shall analyse the place of podcasts in the Polish audio media market, its relation to other Polish media traditions and modes of distribution and, most importantly, its narrative, hoping to identify core concepts the podcast uses to tell its story and how they are rooted in Polish culture, national mythology and ethnic traditions. By answering those questions I hope to initiate an inquiry into how a Polish independent audio drama may differ from its global counterpart.

Familia and the Polish Audio Fiction Market

In a study conducted in 2015, Agata Włodarczyk and Marta Tymińska reached out to Polish members of the *Welcome To Night Vale* fandom, hoping to identify cultural differences between Polish and American understanding of the podcasts content. All 21 participants of the study declared familiarity with the English language, contrary to the initial assumption that some Polish fans may actually participate in fandom without any level of proficiency in said language² (Tymińska, Włodarczyk 2015: 3.3–3.5). As an audio based medium, podcasting faces difficulties when it comes to translation. Unlike movies or TV shows where the problem is solved by applying captions to unedited visual component, translating a podcast without robbing it of its unique properties related to specific listening modes would de facto require producing a completely new phenomenon. Those conditions result in limiting the reach of the English-centric independent audio drama movement mostly to the developed countries of the West, in turn making fiction podcast a fringe interest elsewhere. This, among other factors, might contribute to local creators being unfamiliar with the idea of using podcasting as a medium for disruptive and radically inclusive storytelling, therefore allowing the mainstream oriented, commercial initiatives to dominate the local audio fiction landscape. Such is the case of the Polish audio drama market. Audio fiction podcasts in Poland are currently produced by established multimedia companies with countrywide reach, mostly those involved with the local audiobook market, such as Empik Go or the local branch of Storytel. An interesting, although somehow lacking analysis of the Polish audio series³ market is offered by Anna Gawrońska-Piotrowska in her article titled *Audio series in Poland as a modern form radio play*. Basing her conclusions on five most popular Polish audio series and their promotional materials, Gawrońska-Piotrowska observes some of the leading characteristics of local audio fiction. All of the productions feature popular Polish actors in their cast, usually in both leading and supporting roles. All of them are also heavily promoted with use of other modes of media, such as video trailers or even video episodes fully integrated into the plot. With some

2 The assumption was based on the fact that during their research, Tymińska and Włodarczyk identified at least two fan-lead attempts at translating *Night Vale* to Polish, possibly as a way to make it accessible to those non-English speaking fans.

3 The term used in Polish is “serial audio”, popularised by Storytel.

exceptions⁴, the audio series in question are only available to users willing to pay subscription fees required to enter the publisher's platform. What is even more interesting is the fact that Gawrońska-Piotrowska's research proves to some extent the lack of awareness about independent audio drama among Polish people interested in audio fiction. At one point in her article, the author quotes Jakub Barzak, a representative of Storytel, who in 2018 claimed that "according to their information, nobody in the world have yet produced an audio series" (Gawrońska-Piotrowska 2021: 139). Not only does Gawrońska-Piotrowska not confront this statement in any way, but throughout her whole analysis she seems to see Polish audio series as a uniquely local medium, an evolved form of Polish radio plays rather than a part of a global phenomenon (2021: 139–153). Although the author makes no note of that, it is worth mentioning that all provided examples of commercial Polish audio fiction, as well as many others I am aware of myself, do not feature any content related to topics of emancipatory struggles and social injustice, so prevalent in countless English-speaking podcasts. With aforementioned monthly subscription fees and content curated for a wide audience, Polish audio series seem to be a safe, depoliticised medium addressed to city-dwelling members of the middle class, rather than a radically inclusive space for thought-provoking social commentaries that many of Western audio series aim to be.

Familia, whose secondary title could be roughly translated to "the first podcast series about a non-normative family" was released in 2020 by Teraz Poliz, a feminist independent theatre based in Warsaw. Written by Weronika Murek and directed by Jakub Skrzywanek, it tells the fictional story of a multigenerational, openly queer family of restaurant owners falling victims to identity erasure committed by representatives of Polish Television in a manipulative documentary about their business. Presented as a traditional and deeply patriotic establishment, rather than a place of cultural and sexual freedom it was throughout the ages, the restaurant attracts the attention of a group of Polish neo-Nazis looking for a place to organize an event. While the clearly politicised plot of the podcast sets it apart from other Polish audio dramas, it is not the only thing that makes *Familia* unique in the local audio media landscape. Unlike series by Empik Go or Storytel, *Familia* is available to everyone on streaming platforms free of charge. What is also notable is the fact that unlike star-power driven mainstream audio dramas, *Familia* employs actresses of Teraz Poliz in most of its roles, with its two only "stars" being recognisable LGBTQ+ activists and performers: Michał Piróg and the drag queen Twoja Stara⁵.

4 Gawrońska-Piotrowska notes that the audio series adaptation of Bolesław Prus' *The Doll* is available free of charge, as it was partially financed by The National Centre for Culture, a state institution.

5 The drag name is a Polish maternal insult.

Production, Financing and Media Genealogy

Before taking an in-depth look at the narrative presented by *Familia*, it is important to understand where the podcast originates, how it is related to other Polish and international audio series and other media and how it is promoted and distributed. Answers to those questions might also provide some insight into the target audience of the series. As mentioned earlier, *Familia* is produced by a feminist theatre group; therefore, most of the people involved in its conception are mainly experienced in theatrical storytelling modes, often reliant on visual components such as stage design or the movement of performing actors. As Wiktoria Tabak points out in her analysis of *Familia*, “a podcast is not merely a recorded audio track of a theatre play, but a completely different form, requiring explicit modifications to the actors’ mode of expression”, arguing that the series at times fails to communicate its message due to its characters speaking in a more theatrical manner (Tabak 2021). An even harsher opinion on the show’s nature was voiced by Katarzyna Niedurny in her review for “Dwutygodnik”, in which she calls the narrative unfit for the “stiff and creak form resembling a radio drama more than a modern podcast” (Niedurny 2020). What I find interesting about those opinions is their usefulness in situating *Familia* in relation to other media, especially different kinds of audio series. In her previously discussed article, Gawrońska-Piotrowska makes an attempt at defining an audio series, or more specifically a Polish audio series, as she frames the phenomenon mostly in relation to Polish media traditions. While formulating that definition, the author references Agnieszka Pawlik and her work concerning radio theatre, proposing to see Polish audio series as a modernised form of a radio novel, continuing the tradition of stories produced by the Polish Radio Theatre while employing a wide range of advanced audio effects. In Gawrońska-Piotrowska’s opinion an audio series is thus closer in its nature to visual media such as a movie, TV show or theatre (2021: 130–138). Interestingly, even though it is produced outside of the commercial mainstream of Polish audio series, *Familia* does match a lot of elements contained in Gawrońska-Piotrowska’s definition, making it a text closely tied to Polish theatre or even a wider category of performing arts. This becomes even more explicit if we consider how the podcast is promoted and distributed and what audiences are exposed to it.

According to the official website for the series, *Familia* is a podcast aiming to increase awareness about tolerance, equality and knowledge about human rights, especially concerning members of the LGBTQ+ community and their visibility. It is described by its authors as an answer to the increasing levels of hate speech towards non-heteronormative people. Teenagers and young adults facing systemic discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation are cited as the target audience of the podcast, which is supposed to offer them a glimpse into a queer family they are barred from starting themselves due to Polish homophobic legal regulations. The political mission of the podcast is also clear due to its open involvement with Polish NGOs or initiatives concerned

with the fight for emancipation of the LGBTQ+ community in Poland as well as providing help for queer youths facing discrimination. Each of the four episodes of the podcast features a short announcement given by one of the actors, addressing the listener and acknowledging hardships they may face in an increasingly homophobic country, pointing them to one of the four initiatives partnered with the project that might offer them help with their struggles. Another element that suggests a desire to reach a wide audience of Polish youths regardless of their place of residence is the free-of-charge distribution model of the podcast using popular platforms such as YouTube or Spotify. At the same time, before the first episodes of the podcast were released to the public online, *Familia* premiered its first two entries during a public event held at Resort Komedii, an improvisational comedy club in Warsaw. As the event took place during the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic, the attendees were required to confirm their presence by e-mail, making a limited physical space of the club even more restricted due to public safety regulations. The club itself is advertised as an “American comedy club done in the Polish way”, referencing *The Office*, *Fleabag* and Bo Burnham as some of its main inspirations. This, in turn, paints a picture of a place catering to a rather defined audience familiar with not only Western media in general, but a specific subset of stand-up comedy and culture associated with it. Considering this and the fact that the event takes place in the country’s capital, its largest and most developed city, it seems that *Familia* might suffer from the same problem a lot of modern LGBTQ+ media do, that is, the limitation of its reach to the economically privileged, culture savvy members of the metropolitan middle class. Despite its efforts, *Familia* might then be a text familiar mostly to citizens of Warsaw interested in the city’s independent theatre scene, rather than to a general population of queer youth in Poland, spread across the country and lacking the knowledge of the niche in which the audio series was brought to life. It is worth noting that both aforementioned works concerning *Familia* are written by representatives of theatre studies, further confirming the notion that it is seen as an eccentric extension of theatrical work rather than a text belonging to its own medium. Of course, those familiar with history of modern fiction podcasts will know that many now widely recognised productions started in similar circumstances. *Welcome To Night Vale* was born out of New York off-off Broadway theatre traditions with its writers being members of a company known as The Neo-Futurists, while before it became a podcast, *Thrilling Adventure Hour* parodied old time radio as a live comedy show (Spinelli, Dann 2019; Settembre 2010). As independent audio fiction is taking its first steps in Poland, it has plenty of room to grow into a medium of its own, forging its identity regardless of its roots being theatre or analogue radio.

It is also worth mentioning that the funding for the project was acquired through a public contest under the name Diverse Warsaw, held by the office of the President of Warsaw. The contest’s goal was to fund public tasks concerning culture and arts in the city, thus deeming the winning initiatives to

be important in the eyes of the local government, known for its more liberal leanings, at least compared to the national government's stance. This public backing for the project led to *Familia* being targeted by Polish right-wing media in their attempt to attack the city's president, depicting him as a "madman sponsoring sodomites" and declaring this decision an affront to Warsaw's historical heritage. As Tabak points out in her analysis, the herein described overreaction is clearly a mechanism of othering in work, targeting the minority as a danger to cultural values and depicting the aggressors as merely victims, defending their identity (Tabak 2021). The backlash against *Familia* shares at least a few characteristics with "Ur-fascism" described by Umberto Eco, mainly the condemnation of non-normative sexual identities as well as an obsession with an outside plot, here perpetrated by "deviants" and the liberal city government, thus in a way serving as evidence of dangers the text wants to warn its listeners about (Eco 1995: 6–8). Although from its conception *Familia* was clearly a politically motivated podcast with a declarative mission, the hostile reception further situates it as an act of what Fiske would call exercising localising power, in this case by women and queers against the Polish power-bloc, formed with the aligning interests of mostly Catholic, straight men among different economic classes in mind (Fiske 1993: 5–12). It is worth noting that in its funding model, *Familia* resembles some other European independent fiction podcasts, which seem to be officially associated with NGOs or public institutions more often than their American counterparts. A good example of an English language podcast with a similar mission and funding model would be *Radio Elusia*, telling a story of a pirate radio operated by youth activists fighting against an authoritarian regime to regain their digital privacy. The podcast was born out of international cooperation of European youth theatres and as such was co-founded by the Creative Europe programme of The European Union. While the fact that a public institution in Poland was willing to actually fund a queer podcast openly advocating for equality does inspire some optimism about further opportunities for the development of the local independent audio fiction scene, it is worth remembering that involvement in official funding channels and procedures could be detrimental to some of the promises offered by podcasting; as a medium dependent on local government funding, the podcast could easily become a neutered text embracing only the most normative of the non-normative social models LGBTQ+ community has to offer and avoiding a wider critique of the shortcomings of the current political system. It seems, however, that such fear would be unfounded. As it will become evident during narrative analysis, *Familia* strives to be a story of a radical social change, even if some of its critical points are voiced more strongly than others.

The Narrative of *Familia*

Familia is set in modern day Warsaw and all of the events of the story take place at a family-owned restaurant called "Jak u Mamy" ("Just Like Mom's"). Although its name references a rather traditional archetype of a Polish mother

responsible for keeping the household, the restaurants owners and staff are far from the conservative norm. The business was funded sometime between the World Wars by Grandma Leoncia (Twoja Stara) and was later passed down to her daughter, Regina (Dorota Glac), who now co-runs it with her life partner Majka (Adrianna Kornecka), an ethics teacher with doctorate in human sciences. The lesbian couple is often assisted by their daughter Kasia (Marta Jalowska), a revolutionary radical activist who also happens to work as an accountant. The last character associated with the restaurant is Magda (Kamila Worobiej), a cook and a vegetarian online influencer who runs the establishment's kitchen. The lack of men in the family as well as the presence of an openly queer couple from an older generation are enough for a Polish listener to understand how far the protagonists stand from the social norm, yet the podcast does not stop at that. As the narrative structure is based on the restaurant being a subject of a documentary, one of the first jokes uttered in the podcast serves to inform the Public Television journalist (Maciej Pesta) that a souvenir mug is the most heteronormative thing he could find there. The protagonists are not only aware of being outside the norm, but take pride in it and strive to make the restaurant seen as counter-normative as well. During the interviews for the documentary, listeners can learn that "Jak u Mamy" was a place of safety and acceptance for the oppressed from the day of its conception, serving as a hotspot for anti-fascist operations during the Second World War and as a place where a gay Polish soldier could place a kiss on the lips of his Russian lover without a fear of persecution. As Magda shows the documentary crew her kitchen, she makes sure to note that while the food is inspired by traditional cuisine, especially dishes from her home region of Podlasie, her goal is to adapt the menu to be fully vegetarian, as according to her, switching to such diet is a crucial step in ensuring the survival of all life on Earth, thus questioning to some extent the dominant anthropocentric viewpoint. Using once again Fiske's terminology, the antifascist queer eco-friendly restaurant is depicted as a place, a physical space in which social identities, relations and histories are formed and maintained through time in opposition to imperialising power (Fiske 1993: 11–13). The exercise of localised power manifests mostly through cultivating the local queer oral history with Leoncia and her family as first-hand narrators from three generations. This practice allows the characters to, as Gramsci would put it, subvert cultural codes and tropes crucial for the conservative, Polish hegemonic narrative. The greatest subversion happens in the restaurant's name as the queer family redefines the understanding of the social myth of the Polish Mother, established during the period of the partitions (late 18th to early 20th century) and still rich in meaning today. Born out of war and uncertainty, the archetypical Polish Mother – with her husband imprisoned or in combat – was burdened with taking care of the whole household, heroically surviving titanic amounts of housework and providing her children with patriotic education, often with the devastating knowledge that their

lives will also be sacrificed in insurrectionist combat. The myth would return whenever Polish society struggled against oppressive rule, both during the Nazi occupation or in its modernised form among the women involved in the anti-communist opposition movement of the Polish People's Republic period. In modern times, the myth is often employed as a part of the Polish right-wing rhetoric attempting to undermine feminist ideals by contrasting them with the exalted, special position in society already held by Polish women and equating the Polish Mother with "normal", usually Catholic women who fit into traditional, established gender roles (Imbierowicz 2012: 431–435). As evident in the description provided, a lot of duties ascribed to the Polish Mother fit into the definition of care work, especially of the unpaid kind. A lot of the activities undertaken by the restaurants staff throughout the ages fit into the presented archetype. As an establishment ran by women, "Jak u Mamy" provided care for Polish revolutionaries during the war, offering them food and a place to hide and conspire. However, rather than focusing on national identity, the restaurant cared for all antifascists regardless of their place of origin, as evidenced by the story about the gay Soviet soldier. While the Polish Mother teaches her son the value of patriotism, the mothers of the titular family pass down values of freedom and resistance to their daughters, culminating in Kasia's work as an activist, infiltrating Warsaw's far right groups to gain critical information. By introducing Magda's ecological ideals to the restaurant's agenda, the care provided by the place is, in a limited scope, extended towards non-human beings, suggesting the place is ready to question its politics in order to embrace a non-anthropocentric understanding of diversity. The care traditionally provided by the Polish Mother is thus transformed into its more collective and inclusive version, focused especially on socially excluded members of the LGBTQ+ community, promising them motherly love and empathy without judgement. However, the same symbolic core used by the podcast's protagonists to establish the inclusive identity of "Jak u Mamy" is shown as incredibly helpful in distorting their narrative by the Polish Television and their documentary team.

During the first episode of *Familia* it is quite clear that Robert, the documentarian sent in by the Polish Television is a rather loyal representative of the government-controlled public media outlet and, as such, he adheres to the values upon which said government constructs its identity. He interrupts the women he is interviewing, usually whenever he feels the opinions they voice or stories they tell are impossible to fit in the normative framework. While most of the issues Robert tries to avoid are tied to queerness and non-heteronormative identities, he also seems to be wary about vegetarianism and modern culinary trends. One of the comedic interactions featured in the first episode takes place in the restaurant's kitchen, where Magda explains her modernised approach to traditional cuisine. One of the core concepts of her cooking style is preparing dishes rich in High Doses of Vitamin C for their supposed health benefits, which she describes with a four letter initialism

WDWC⁶. Whenever WDWC is mentioned in the interview, panicked and almost fearful Robert interrupts her loudly with almost nonsensical exclamations, such as names of old-fashioned, traditional dishes or outdated onomatopoeic words for cooking. The fear of this initialism is clearly meant to mirror the fear of another such abbreviation, that is, LGBT, which in the last few years, especially during the election period, has often been demonised by the politicians of the ruling party and in state controlled media. Using the term “LGBT ideology”, the Polish government representatives created a powerful narrative about culturally foreign political influence meant to indoctrinate children into sexual deviancy, thus destroying the moral foundations of the nation. That narrative shares, of course, many common points with the notion of Cultural Marxism, a conspiracy theory developed by American conservative thinkers in the 1990s, now popularised among supporters of right wing movements all over the world thanks to global mechanisms of disinformation born out of privately owned social media platforms. Jérôme Jamin describes the foundations of that theory as follows:

With the fall of the Berlin Wall the Communist threat disappeared, and yet only a few years later there emerged a literature claiming that the fight was still not over, and in many ways, the threat had passed from economic to the cultural arena. According to the analysis, the former ‘proletarians’ who needed saving from capitalism made way for the new ‘proletarians’: women, gays, sexual minorities, ethnic minorities and immigrants. They must defend themselves against the ‘White man’ with new weapons such as the fight against racism, sexism, male chauvinism, the struggles which Lind regroups under ‘politically correct’, which is nothing other than a thought control capable of suppressing everything that is not thought or spoken ‘correctly’ (2014: 84).

As Barkun points out, almost all conspiracy theories share three principles – a strong conviction in lack of accidentality, distrust towards appearances and a belief in interconnectedness of all things in reality through hidden patterns (2003: 3–4). Considering Cultural Marxism is one of them, it is no surprise that one of its recent developments is seeing any aspect of cultural change, including culinary culture and shift towards plant based cuisine as another way of destroying the “proper” way of life. Although the name of the theory itself is not uttered in the script, Robert’s avoidance of all non-familiar concepts encountered in the restaurant strongly suggests he and his supervisors adhere to such optics. Whenever possible, Robert attempts to steer the conversations into normative territory, asking mostly about the heroic deeds of Polish war-time conspirators that met at the restaurant or obsessing about the fact that

6 It stands for “Wysokie Dawki Witaminy C” which should be translated as “High Doses of Vitamin C”.

Leoncia was born in 1920, the year of the Battle of Warsaw, which up to this day plays an important role in patriotic, anti-communist narratives due to the unexpected triumph of Polish troops over the invading Red Army – a victory often called the Miracle on the Vistula and ascribed at least in part to God and St. Mary, specifically the Black Madonna of Częstochowa (Davies 2003: 17–87). In one of the more telling comedy scenes, the journalist persistently corrects the way Leoncia is supposed to walk in front of the camera, subtly insinuating that her movement is not “straight” and as such does not belong on public television. Robert’s intent to strengthen the hegemonic, conservative narrative becomes clear in the third episode of the podcast when the protagonists watch the complete documentary on TV. Through careful selection of published materials and liberal editing of the conversations, the restaurant is depicted as an extremely traditional establishment with its identity rooted in narrowly understood Polish patriotism. The queerness of both the owners and typical patrons is omitted, while the segment of the program set in the kitchen falsely depicts the dishes as meat-based. A lot of the narrative in the documentary is performed by Robert himself, who speaks with pathos about suffering endured by oppressed Polish Catholics during the war. This false depiction of “*Jak u Mamy*” quickly draws the attention of a far-Right organisation called Eagle and Nest, whose freshly appointed Chairman⁷ (Michał Piróg) is searching for a venue fit for their celebratory meeting. Describing his organisation as “a small group of friends with nationwide reach” and stating that the friends in question are brought together due to “small differences in their difference of opinions”, he attempts to communicate the nature of his group to the owners with euphemisms, hoping that the subtext will be understood by people he now perceives as traditional conservatives allied to his cause. As the Chairman offers a large sum of money for the organised event, the owners decide to allow it to happen, hoping that through an elaborate ruse they will be able to publicly discredit the group and its members during the celebration while securing the funds for the restaurant’s development.

It is through this plan that another cultural figure, this time drawn from regional folklore, emerges to take an important place in the podcast’s narrative. It is hinted throughout the story that Magda is knowledgeable not only in cooking, but in plant-based folk medicine as well. At one point during her conversation with Robert, she openly mentions that methods of *szeptuchy* (plural of “*szeptucha*”) are close to her heart. As explained by Ewelina Sadanowicz, a *szeptucha*⁸ is a specific type of a folk healer and magic practitioner characteristic for rural areas of Podlasie, a region of Poland adjacent to the Eastern border and thus culturally influenced by the rich devotional customs of the Orthodox Church. Usually perceived as a “good” practitioner, a *szeptucha* was considered knowledgeable about the higher powers and expected to heal the

7 An unnamed character introduced in the Polish credits as “Prezes”.

8 Can be loosely translated as “whisperer”, a “wise woman”.

sick and undo harmful curses, in return being widely respected among representatives of folk culture. The practice is still alive in Podlasie, especially near Hajnówka and Bielsko Podlaskie, as the region is characteristically conservative, especially when it comes to opinions and practices concerning healthcare (Sadanowicz 2018: 190–192). With exceptions, most of such folk healers are women, hence the feminine grammatical gender of the term (Weber 2014: 209). Therefore, once again we encounter a specific social role performed by women which puts them in an elevated position in a rather patriarchal society. In *Familia* it is Magda who embraces her folk culture heritage and as a modernised szeptucha offers to spike the drinks served to the nationalists with psychedelic herbs, meant to alter their perception so that they would see their surrounding as incredibly large, thus making them, in turn, feel small and insecure. By reaching for her ethnic traditions, Magda aims to destabilise a conservative, traditional, hegemonic identity with one that, while also traditional, cannot be integrated with Polish nationalism due to the fact that it stems from a cultural root that is considered foreign and, thus, is excluded from the dominant narrative. Folk traditions of Podlasie become representative of ideas of multiculturalism and coexistence of different ethnic traditions as opposed to the idea of a homogenous Polish state. The plot quickly backfires, however, when one of the things that manifests itself as great to the fascist partygoers (and Majka, who accidentally tries the potion) is Poland itself, strengthening their convictions and serving as a reference to the concept of Great Poland, an imperialistic vision of the country as a superpower. The situation complicates further as Leoncia arrives at the scene, performing a 19th century poem by Wincenty Pol as a song. In the final scenes of the podcast, the Chairman seems moved by the images of Poland destroyed by war and abandoned by its people and realises that it is those people that he truly yearns for. However, as the story ends with a cliff-hanger, it is uncertain if his understanding of who constitutes the people of Poland is changed.

While the main focus of the podcast is clearly the conflict between the queer family and the fascist organisation in which the listeners are supposed to side with the restaurant owners, the narrative is far from uncritical praise for the protagonists and finds time to address some problems present in the homonormative structure as well. The internal conflict among the protagonists presents itself in two distinct, yet interconnected ways. Firstly, while united by general leftist values, the family is shown to clash along generational lines, especially when it comes to the relationship between Kasia and her mothers. While the young woman is doing dangerous field work and advocating for radical action, Regina and Majka are shown to be much more politically moderate, living as an openly lesbian couple but limiting their activism to maintaining a culturally significant place, operating within the boundaries of the current system. While Majka distances herself from the conflict through theoretical, slightly absurd academic work and recreational drug use, Regina becomes responsible for the workings of the restaurant, handling most of the financial

aspects of running a business. It is Regina who first among the protagonists considers accepting the nationalists' offer, which to her daughter seems like a complete betrayal of family values. Both mothers are also accused by Kasia of inaction and apathy during their youth, being partially to blame for the lack of progress for queer emancipation in Poland. These differences drive Kasia to team up with her grandma and, unknowingly to Regina, modify some elements of the planned ruse as to further humiliate the nationalists. The second area of conflict is rooted in the restaurant's dependence on the flawed economic system and as such is tied to Regina's leadership. It is revealed during the course of the plot that although Magda is responsible for the kitchen – arguably one of the most important aspects of a restaurant – she was never offered a proper employment contract and is working at “Jak u Mamy” on the grounds of a contract of commission, unfit for the type of work performed and in this case recognised as an abuse of the legal system meant to free the employer from the burdens of workers' rights guaranteed by the Polish labour law. When the injustice and unfair redistribution of profits is called out, Regina initially tries to stand by the way things are by appealing to leftist solidarity and pointing out the financial troubles the restaurant is facing. She caves in to Magda's demands only after the rest of the family agrees with the cook, threatening they will also abandon the establishment. By including this criticism of exploitative work environment in a queer-centric story, the podcast plays into a larger debate among the members of the LGBTQ+ community concerning the ways they should fight for social recognition. While the younger generation, supported by the anti-fascist grandma, represents a more intersectional approach, demanding radical change to the whole social order, Regina serves as a character much more in line with the idea of normalising same-sex relationships within the current, neoliberal system regardless of other injustices it produces, thus fitting into what Peter Drucker calls “gay normality” (2015: 219–306). By framing Magda's situation as clear injustice, *Familia* thus can be read as a text critical of attempts at normality, siding to some extent with queer, anti-capitalist critique.

Conclusion

After considering both the podcast's narrative and the circumstances in which the audio series exists, it is possible to say that *Familia* seems to be a so far unique production both among Polish and international audio dramas. Its complex scenario aims to provide a nuanced view of the current socio-political situation in Poland, focusing on both real and hypothetical interactions between Poles of different, often antagonistic identities. By showing queer and feminist recontextualizations of historical events, cultural myths and folk traditions, it aims to show that, contrary to prevalent opinions, minorities are and always have been an integral part of Polish society, rather than a foreign, invasive force born out of ill intent and conspiracy. At the same time, the story seems to be cautious about such recontextualizations, showing that while they might empower those who use them to legitimise their emancipation, they might also

hinder the progress due to their strong ties to traditional and conservative viewpoints. As many of the elements of both the story and the way it is edited reference factual events from modern day Poland, *Familia* makes sure it is understood as a direct social commentary and not merely a work of fiction unrelated to current problems. As such, the audio drama by Teraz Poliz becomes an interesting starting point for future independent fiction podcast made in Poland. Just as American independent fiction podcasts, *Familia* still struggles to find its identity as a podcast, borrowing heavily from its theatre and radio drama roots, yet differs from such shows when it comes to its content. While the early days of fiction podcasting were full of apolitical mystery stories written for white, millennial, middle-American geeky men, *Familia*, with its mostly female and queer cast and a strongly relevant themes of rampant fascism and homophobia, is already much more similar to mature stories that lately gained foothold in the global audio drama landscape (Dann, Spinelli 2019: 130). Probably due to the fact that the Polish market for normative stories is dominated by large scale businesses, we might expect that if local independent audio fiction develops further, it will continue in *Familia*'s footsteps, providing a new space for politically conscious storytelling in the Polish media landscape, as well as amplifying the voices of those fighting for emancipation.

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I Am in Eskew: Soundscape, Cityscape and Mindscape of Hostile Architecture

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ABSTRACT: *I Am in Eskew* is the epitome of an independent podcast, written, produced and performed by two people – Jon Ware and Muna Hussien. It tells the story of David Ward (Jon Ware), a man trapped in the city of Eskew, where nightmares become real. The story offers manifold answers and interpretations, depending which genre and mode of reception we choose to follow. On a literal level it is a fantasy horror story about a cursed city that tortures its entrapped residents by creating cityscapes full of monsters, spatial and body horror (Eskew as a landscape); on a metaphorical level *I Am in Eskew* is a representation of mental illness and mental disorders (Eskew as a mindscape). The present article discusses the use of medium in *I Am in Eskew* and the capabilities of podcasts in creating an immersive horror story (Eskew as a soundscape) as well as possible interpretations of the podcast, focusing on the concept of hostile architecture as an expression of the late capitalist inclination to dehumanize various aspects of human life (space, relationships etc.). The article discusses hostile architecture as a form of narration and narration as a form of hostile architecture through the lense of Derridian hauntology.

KEYWORDS: hauntology; ghost city; media representation; mental illness; hostile architecture; horror podcast

Introduction

I Am in Eskew is a 30-episodes-long horror podcast that aired from January 2018 to November 2019. It was written by Jon Ware. In 2021 *I Am in Eskew* became a part of the Rusty Quill Network, a British entertainment and podcast company, known for being the producers of *The Magnus Archive*. *Eskew* is the epitome of an independent podcast, written, produced and performed by two

people (Jon Ware and Muna Hussen) within minimalistic conditions. As Ware noted, the process of production per episode was very quick, with recording and audio-editing happening during the weekends out of necessity (Ware 2018). The popularity of *Eskew* allowed Ware to continue his career in podcasting with the ongoing production of *The Silt Verses*, a much more developed title with professional audio production.

I am in Eskew tells the story of David Ward (Jon Ware), a man trapped in the city of Eskew where nightmares become real. The first-person narration is autobiographical and presented in the form of meta-fiction – it emphasizes its own medium as David acts as independent podcast host. It makes it possible for the audience to take the dispatches from Eskew in a “pseudo-documentary” style of reception, thus “ascrib[ing] credence to it and enter[ing] into [it] imaginatively, while remaining aware that it is make-believe” (Mheallaigh 2018: 403). The semi-anonymous style of production (Ware 2018), the play-pretend mode of reception and the carefully styled soundscape are the means of immersion into the existential horror of Eskew to the extent that the listener may also experience the city of Eskew with dread and terror. As such, *I Am in Eskew* is an embodiment of the medium’s capabilities.

I Am in Eskew exhibits numerous tendencies of contemporary podcasts in its style and content, including an incisive critique of late capitalism as an inhuman force. In case of *Eskew* it takes the form of corporate-created spatial horror of hostile architecture, integrated in the cityscape, thoroughly crafted so as to be a source of discomfort and enmity for its inhabitants, leading to the escalation of violence and mental illness. The podcast is quite ambiguous in its meanings, allowing a multiplicity of interpretations, be it as a story of a literal ghost city (Eskew as a haunted cityscape) or as a story of a neurotic, anxious man whose mental illness forces him to see a city as monstrous (Eskew as a mindscape, projection of the protagonist’s fears and paranoia).

The present article discusses the use of medium in *I Am in Eskew* and the capabilities of podcasts in creating an immersive horror story as well as possible interpretations of the podcast, focusing on the concept of hostile architecture as an expression of the late capitalist inclination to dehumanize various aspects of human life (space, relationships etc.). *I Am in Eskew* presents narration as a form of hostile architecture (David and other prisoners of Eskew creating their own torture through the stories about their fears) and hostile architecture as a form of narration (fate) of a character living within the cursed city (spatial determinism).

Methodology

The concept of hauntology comes from Jacques Derrida’s 1993/1994 French and English publication of *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* and is rooted in Marxism as well as psychoanalysis, with its key notions being those of inheritance and intergenerational trauma. Hauntology refers to a disjunction of time, marking the specter

as a differed presence, a remnant of the past (Derrida 1994: 20–21) as well as an *arrivant*, a harbinger of “what has not yet arrived” (Blanco, Peeren 2013: 13). Avery Gordon applied hauntology to social studies in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and Social Imagination*, stating that “[...] haunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with (slavery, for instance) or when their oppressive nature is denied (as in free labor or national security)” (Gordon 2008: xvi). The sociological approach to hauntology, especially in the *arrivant* mode of the specter (Blanco, Peeren 2013: 13), is efficacious in analyzing social problems or, to be more accurate, in diagnosing which current social practices will produce the “ghost” of the future. Not only do we live within the specters of the past but we also actively contribute to production of future ghosts by various forms of exclusion and oppression. Hostile architecture, for example, is a social practice that turns contemporary cities into ghostlands, haunted by the everlasting presence of “unwelcomed”. *I Am in Eskew* takes the metaphor of hostile architecture literally, presenting the city as determined to devour its citizens and by that emphasizing the dehumanizing aspect of this social practice.

The relationship between cityscape and soundscape has been a subject of numerous studies in such fields as anthropology, cultural geography and ethnomusicology, whose conclusion is that space and sound cannot be considered separate entities but, rather, a single entity as we experience places through all the senses (Feld 2005: 179). As Colin Ripley puts it: “the qualities of a space affect how we perceive a sound and those of a sound affect how we perceive a space” (2007: 2). Eckehard Pistrick and Cyril Isnart discuss sonic practices as place-making, emphasizing “the role of sound in appropriating and humanizing space, turning it into a place, a site of human intervention and sociocultural practice” (2013: 503). The opposite is also true – an unfamiliar sound in a familiar place is the most effective tool of triggering the sense of unease, which also results in de-familiarization of space. Sound effects are the core element of horror cinema, the “jump scare” (the harsh contrast between silence-stillness and noise-movement) being the most obvious example. Interesting remarks from Rowland Atkinson (2007) about how urban spaces are demarcated by sound with the most important distinction between sound and noise (unwanted sound) could be used to broaden the notion of hostile architecture as silence (or control upon the soundscape) in urban spaces becomes a privilege of the few who can afford distancing themselves from the unwanted sounds (police sirens, neighbors’ screams, advertisements etc.). This could also be read through the lens of hauntology, as the noise in this context becomes a Derridian specter, unwanted and incorporeal reminder of the (returning) displaced. *I Am in Eskew* thematizes the structure of urban soundscape, especially its hostile aspects, as the city of Eskew relentlessly sends vocal and audio messages to its inhabitants (and by extension – the audience). The podcast literally provides voice for the hostile architecture, as the horror city messages those

living within it, telling them to dig, run, hide and kill themselves. The podcast carefully crafts its soundscape to convey the sense of danger, unfamiliarity and unease, de-familiarizing ordinary sounds (rainfall), places (a railway bridge) and social situations (therapy) to the point of inducing paranoia in its listeners. It should be noted, however, that this article is a case study in podcast studies and, therefore, it only uses the concepts of soundscape (and its relation to cityscape and mindscape) to analyze the sound effects of *I Am in Eskew* (mostly as tools of immersion).

I will use the concept of a “mental image” introduced by Kevin Lynch in 1960 to describe a subjective perception of a city (Lynch 1990: 2). For my purpose here I will use the term “mindscape” (a mental or psychological scene) to emphasize that the perception of a given environment is not separable from the quality of the personal experience of space itself. The concept of mindscape is especially useful in the context of podcasts as pre-recorded audio files that offer displaced, incorporeal sounds “addressing the mind rather than the sight” (Soltani 2018: 194). The concept of “mindscape,” therefore, will be used to describe the fictional characters’ experience of Eskew as well as the listeners’ perception of the world in terms imposed by the podcast (dehumanizing practices of late capitalism metaphorically presented as “hauntings”). Andy McCumber offers an interesting analysis concerning the construction of place in the podcast *Welcome to Night Vale*. McCumber based his analysis on classic works from Barbara Johnstone (1990) and Kent Ryden (1993) concluding that “»invisible landscape« of social meaning [is] superimposed on the physical one” as “place is created socially, and through a process that calls into question any clear distinction between real and imagined” (McCumber 2018: 73), which makes it possible to conceptualize Night Vale as a place, even though not a physical one. According to McCumber, Night Vale is constructed through the listenership and “in terms of a central contradiction between its own rules and those of its listeners’ world” (2018: 76). Eskew, on the contrary, is “placed” at the beginning as a nightmare realm; it later becomes apparent that Eskew’s monstrosities are just exaggerated features of our reality. The relativity of the concept of space sounds like a truism in the discourse of contemporary social constructionism but its implications in the city landscape spiked with hostile architecture – a reminder of unwelcoming non-presence of certain people that is haunting the landscapes – are yet to be discussed in connection with hauntology and sound studies; all of which *I Am in Eskew* puts into practice.

An ASMR Immersive Horror Podcast

I Am in Eskew operates within the genre of existential horror, which is presented as the sense of isolation, loneliness, insignificance, inevitability, uncertainty, meaninglessness, lack of choice or a lack of consequences despite the choice being made as if one’s deeds have no real impact upon the world. Existential horror is a prominent mode of horror production across many popular fictional podcasts, such as *Welcome to Night Vale*, *The Magnus Archive*, *Archive 81*,

TANIS, *The White Vault* and more. The intimacy of the medium¹ and the means of perception emphasize the message of existential terror – the listener experiences the story precisely as a lonely individual within the vast and unfriendly world, as the soundscape of the podcast becomes the soundscape of the listener. As Farokh Soltani notes, listening through headphones creates a situation where there “is no distance between the listener and the source of sound: the audio-drama is plugged directly into the listener’s inner ear, obscuring most day-to-day sound; it does not occur within the auditory field – it becomes the field itself” (2018: 203). As such, the “podcast becomes the entire content of the listener’s world—experienced through direct perceptual encounter within the auditory field, rather than through deliberative focus” (2018: 203). The process of immersion into the fictional world becomes almost involuntary, as the listener is positioned within the fictional reality – articulated through the sound – that surrounds them completely, although not physically. Therefore, listening to the podcast creates a specific mindscape, crafted by the means of the sound.

In the case of *Eskew* the intimacy of the medium becomes claustrophobic, closing around the listener. The threat of being in *Eskew* is presented precisely as inevitability, the horror that is yet to come and that nothing can be done about. Not only does David promise the diegetic audience of his podcast (and by extension – the extra-diegetic audience of *I Am in Eskew*) multiple times that they will come to *Eskew* (episode 2, 3), but also by episode 19 we are aware that *Eskew* is, indeed, expanding, and, therefore, it will become impossible to escape the city as it will be everywhere. The city of *Eskew* is the Derridian *arrivant*, a specter of a terrible future that will come, a future where every city is like *Eskew*. Most importantly, *Eskew* is creeping upon us with its soundscape over the process of listening, in a perfect combination of form and content, showing off the possibilities of the medium as the metaphorical border of *Eskew* is crossed with the sound.

The way in which *Eskew* leaks into the “reality” (both the “reality” beyond the ghost city in the fictional world and the reality of extra-diegetic listeners) is through the sound of rainfall. It is rain that announces our arrival in *Eskew*, which can happen on a London street as well as on a rail station of a nameless Italian city (episode 30, 14). Every episode starts with the sound of rainfall. The sound is also a background noise throughout almost every episode, because in *Eskew* it always rains, which evokes a depressive autumn atmosphere. The environmental soundscape and sound effects draw extra-diegetic listeners into the landscape of *Eskew* together with the narration, letting them physically experience the podcast in the manner typical to ASMR (autonomous sensory meridian response) audio and video. Stimuli used in the ASMR productions cause a general state of relaxation, a nearly meditative state of mind and body. In the case of *Eskew*, the soothing sound of rain accompanies the voice of

1 Podcasts are most likely to be listened to on headphones or within private spaces in a single sitting per episode (see Berry 2016; McHugh 2016).

a tired, resigned and depressed person who describes disturbing daily events in the city of terror and body horror through which the city has perverted its inhabitants. The sound and the narration bluntly contrast with each other, resulting in the most unsettling effect². The sound of rain becomes unnerving in comparison, an ominous sign of getting closer to Eskew and its spatial horrors and a specter itself as an ordinary and familiar sound becomes a disturbing noise, harbinger of Eskew's terror.

The voice of Jon Ware is the link between the soundscape and narration as it conveys emotional profundity, giving the narration an emotional texture. As a voice actor Ware perfectly expresses depression and hopelessness, staying seemingly emotionless and unmoved throughout the course of various horrid events, but also suggesting the depth of hurt inflicted upon the character by Eskew. Thus, the apparent indifference can be seen as a carefully crafted shield against the world or a psychological coping mechanism, a strategy necessary to survive in the hostile world of Eskew. Indeed, almost everything that David does is a coping mechanism of some sort; even the podcast itself serves this function as David confesses: "I share Eskew, my experiences of Eskew, in the hopes of forgetting what's happened to me" (episode 2), which also makes him an unreliable narrator, purposefully omitting and ignoring some aspects of his experience.

Are We (in) Eskew? The Blurred Sounds of Fiction and Reality

The immersion into the fictional world and its sense of existential horror also emanate from narrative tools. The line between fiction and reality becomes blurred through the justification of the use of the podcast format so that the story is presented as semi-fictional, in a pseudo-documentary manner. Another example of this blurring is the relationship between the narrator and the implied (and extra-diegetic) audience.

Fictional horror podcasts use various narrative tools to justify or motivate the use of recording and broadcasting (investigating journalism in case of Pacific Northwest Stories productions such as *TANIS*, *The Black Tapes*, *Rabbits*, *The Last Movie* and *Fairies*; a radio program from an unknown town – *Welcome to Night Vale*; found or discovered recordings – *Archive 81*; a recording of archival materials or a "real-time" recording of supernatural events – *The Magnus Archive*, *The White Vault*). In this way the podcasts evoke an early tradition of

2 Episode 23, *Mindfulness*, is produced in the same manner. It is the only non-fictional episode in the series, accompanied by the sound of crashing waves instead of the rainfall. Jon Ware reads the fourth of the nine-tape collection of a guided meditation course. It seems at first to be a normal stress relief exercise where the listener is relaxing on the beach, except it is gradually revealed that there is a gigantic sea creature under the water a few feet away from them and a monstrous monkey creeping up in the trees behind them. The tide is rising and the listener is forced to decide which creature will prey on them. The narrator mocks the listener for failing to relax in these circumstances: "Already you've ruined this. Forget the breathing. Clearly you can't be helped". The contrast between the form, the sound effects (specially the calm voice of the narrator) and the narration is stressed here to the maximum.

literary fiction, the topos of “the discovered manuscript”, whereby a tale is presented as a manuscript (in this case – an audio recording) found and prepared for publication by other hands. In other words, fictional podcasts use various tools to presents themselves as non-fictional. The purpose is to give the story the pretense of authenticity, a condition for the listener to play-pretend with the possibility that the weird and dreadful events actually took place, making it possible for (or forcing) them to rethink the rules and structures of their world. Danielle Hancock and Leslie McMurtry attribute this pseudo-documentary stylization to what they call a “post-*Serial* model of production” which can be summarized as “someone uncovers a supernatural conspiracy” (Hancock, McMurtry 2018: 82). The popularity of the true crime podcast *Serial* has resulted in “develop[ing] a new form of audio fiction based consciously within the podcast media form [...] represent[ing] the next movement in audio-fiction form” (Hancock, McMurtry 2018: 100). Pseudo-documentarism and post-*Serial* production represent self-conscious fiction but also the tendency to present fiction as real for the immersion and pleasure of the also self-conscious recipient³.

Fictional podcasts emulate non-fiction podcasts in order to establish their format and position within the podcast market in the same way that early literary fiction imitated non-fictional forms (letters, diaries etc.) to institute itself. The play-pretend of fictional podcast within a pseudo-documentary style also creates a particular relationship with its audience. It is possible to distinguish between two types of audience for pseudo-documentary podcasts: the implied audience within the fictional world who can engage with the podcast’s content by sending mails and audio-recordings (which was used by Pacific Northwest Stories) and the extra-diegetic audience who is – to a certain extent – forced to posit themselves as the implied audience (and who may also participate in play-pretend by engaging themselves by sending emails etc.). This can be done in the name of immersion and the listener’s pleasure. In the case of *I Am in Eskew*, however, the silent audience is positioned as one of the malevolent forces by the means of which Eskew oppresses its inhabitants.

In the beginning, David makes his recordings in the style of a travel podcast, presenting the various “attractions” of Eskew (the Commemoration Gallery etc.) and the everyday life in the city, which frame the horror as something of an oddity and provide the formal and emotional distance between the audience and the story. Within the context of the whole story it becomes clear that the format of the travel podcast has been just another form of David playing his role for Eskew – modifying his cry for help in the way that the city might allow. The first breakthrough in the relationship between David and the au-

3 A similar tendency can be found within the “found footage” horror movies, popularized by *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and brought back by the *Paranormal Activity* (2007) franchise. In that case we can also identify a broader movement within the contemporary horror where the fear comes from the fictional assurance of the extra-diegetic source of plotlines, to which we can also ascribe paranormal investigation such as the *Ghost Adventures* series (2008-present) and the phenomenon of analogue horror.

dience comes in episode 5, *Illumination*, which is the story of an old railway bridge that was “born as a ruin”. David – upon the listeners’ advice – has started seeing a psychiatrist and claims to “do a lot better now”. Of course, Eskew perverts every form of seeking help, as there is

[...] the second psychiatrist, the one who stands in the very corner of the room with his back turned to me, his extraordinarily long and moon-like face a silhouette against the darkness. Motionless as far as I can tell but forever emitting a scratchy and unpleasant sound, as if he’s writing with an old pen on rough paper [...] It’s as if there’s something buried in the darkness of his mouth and chin that’s making the noises for him. Something chitinous, and hairy, and itching.

Despite the effort to take care of his mental state, David becomes suicidal, which is inflected upon him by the city in the form of darkness below the bridge. David crosses the bridge every day on his walk to the work and the bridge has started affecting him, tempting him to jump into the darkness. The need to jump (and die) is presented as something external to David, as the city starts to message him to “jump” at every opportunity, through the words of co-workers and passers-by. At the end of episode, the messages from listeners also tell him to “jump” and David responds to it “I don’t know if you can hear me. If you can do anything other than take on shapes, and mimic, and distort”, treating the implied listeners as one of Eskew’s forces. The position of implied audience is the one of terror, a source of menace; David’s confessions are pointless as he cannot be heard by a friendly ear.

In episode 10 David asks directly “How long can you keep listening to this... and not help me?”, which takes the agency away from the extra-diegetic listeners, marking them as another example of uncaring, indifferent forces of the universe, as is the case with the implied audience. Just as Eskew wants to be witnessed (episode 7) in all its monstrous glory, we want to witness David’s suffering for our entertainment, meaning we are no better than Eskew, the city of horrors. David’s desperate cry for help is also highly relatable for anyone whose suffering stays unnoted, which is common in the case of a mental illness that does not display any physical signs to be seen by others. As a result, the existential horror of *I Am in Eskew* consists simultaneously in identifying with David’s suffering as a victim of cruel forces of the world and in being a cause of said suffering, as the audience becomes the implicit extension of the city’s forces. This double position corresponds with the double position of the self-conscious recipient of pseudo-documentary fiction, who at the same time, believes and does not in the “realism” of the presented fiction. In the case of *I Am in Eskew* to engage in play-pretend and believe in what is proposed in fiction is to accept our part in the fictional world’s cruelty.

A Multi-Genre Horror Podcast

In episode 6 the character of Riyo Dual is introduced: a British-Somali former special agent of an unspecified government agency, known as the Gray Room, currently working as an investigator of some sort. She is hired by a single mother living in London to find her missing son, who disappeared three years ago. Soon we find out that the woman is Mrs. Ward, David's mother, and Riyo's task is not to find David, but to solve the mystery of a haunting that started to take place in Mrs. Ward's apartment a few weeks before. It is connected to the event from episode 4, where David recalled his mother and the strange rhyme she sang to him (A.A. Milne's poem *Disobedience*). Now Mrs. Ward can hear herself singing it as she did when David was a child. Soon Mrs. Ward is dead, eaten by the mold from David's old journals and Riyo is on her way to discover Eskew (episode 8). By episode 8 it becomes clear that David and Riyo's plots represent two different genres: paranormal/psychological horror and spy thriller with elements of urban fantasy, respectively. Riyo's approach is intellectual as she follows bits of information from the Gray Room that lead her to professor John Henley, who discusses the concept of hostile architecture as a form of weaponry aimed at the civil population (episode 12). With his help Riyo enters Eskew and finds David, hell-bound to destroy the city of nightmares (episode 21). David's perspective is an emotional one, as he lives through and experiences the nightmares of Eskew first-hand.

Riyo's narration is presented in the form of voice messages she leaves on her partner's telephone. The nameless man is also an agent, met in training with the Gray Room. At first it appears that he is away on a mission without any means of contacting her. Riyo speaks about the hope of meeting him by chance on an airport. Later we learn that he is dead and Riyo had received a formal notification about his death from the Gray Room but she cannot accept the reality of it. She is in denial and grieving, unable to perform the work of mourning so as to move on with her life. Not only is she haunted by the ghost of her past, but she also becomes like a ghost herself, which explains why she decided to work on Mrs. Ward's case of a strange visitation. She is drawn to Eskew by her mourning, hoping to find there a ghost she cannot live without. She is like a ghost herself, not in the sense of being undead but in that of being un-alive. Unlike David, she never abandons the narrative tools, consistently talking directly to her loved one, even when the narration does not supply her with the opportunity to make a phone call. Here the audience is positioned as eavesdropping, violating someone's privacy and hearing what is not meant for them. It is another form of aggravating the extra-diegetic audience and taking the agency away from them.

The third significant character in the podcast is Eskew itself, the city that "just wants to be witnessed" (episode 7). Riyo has made the same remark about the ghost, wondering "If the ghost wants nothing more than to be witnessed, why would it appear behind you, and not in front of you?" (episode 6). The

two statements correspond with each other, positioned closely in the series, marking Eskew as the ghost city, not in the sense of being destroyed or abandoned but in the sense of the city being a ghost itself, haunting its inhabitants. Eskew has its arc, it is anthropomorphized (has wants and needs) and personified, able to possess its inhabitants and speak through them. Throughout the course of events it becomes clear that the city romances David and provides him with perverted versions of his desires: to grant a love story (episode 1), friendship (episode 7), and family (episode 22), even a false sense of agency when he is appointed to bring Eskew's history to life (episode 23). At the same time, Eskew tries to expand beyond its borders into the "real world", destroying every hope of escaping the city and its nightmares. What Eskew wants is submission and acceptability in its terror. Therefore, the humanity of David, and later of Riyo, is at stake.

Interpretations

The most pressing question here is what exactly Eskew is and what it represents. The story offers manifold answers and interpretations, depending which genre and mode of reception we choose to follow. On a literal level it is a fantasy horror story about a cursed city that tortures its entrapped residents by creating cityscapes full of monsters. The city arc stays inconclusive on this level, as the audience does not receive any explanation as to how Eskew came to be or what its expansion means for the fictional world. By the end of the series Eskew is at war with the rest of the world and it is winning. The emotional arcs of David and Riyo are resolved: David accepts his hope and lets go of the grief; Riyo accepts her loss and grieves her hope; they "carry on" with living even if they "carry Eskew on with [them]" (episode 30), although David's state of being is unclear while Riyo just drives out of the city (if there still is an "out of the city"). It seems that David overcomes his double – a monster created by the city – and by doing so, he falls into the darkness which, for him, is the only way of escaping the city: "climbing out of ruins of himself" (episode 30).

The most compelling element of this interpretation is the fact that Eskew is in love with David or, rather, that the relationship between Eskew and David can be described as an abusive codependence of an unhealthy love affair. This becomes clear in the first episode, which lays out the core conflict of *I Am in Eskew*: Eskew is courting David in a horrifying way, desiring his submission (understood as losing the sense of himself as Mrs. How and Mr. Why did it [episode 1]), punishing him when it is denied; David is unable to accept what the city has to offer, but at the same time he also desires it and despises it, and despises himself for wanting it. In first episode David is almost seduced by the city's vision of a grand love affair where the sense of oneself is no longer needed as in the relationship between Mr. How and Mrs. Why, a couple who exchange their names as a symbol "of their closeness [...] Their compatibility. For How and Why, there is no gender, there are no roles. They might as well be one another" (episode 1). For David, the monstrous love affair of How and

Why, complemented with chocolate boxes and flowers made of human flesh, is an “entire show [that] has been put on for my benefit and my participation” (episode 1). Yet, while he is tempted by the sight of How and Why – “its eyes are not level, since one eye is brown and set into the undulating flesh of two merged foreheads and the other eye is bright sapphire blue and protruding from a bulging throat that has conjoined with a second, paler throat” (episode 1) – it brings him to a heartbroken conclusion: “I can’t tell you how it feels, at that moment, to witness absolute beauty. But I can tell you that I find myself utterly lacking in my ability to accept it [...] Something was crafted for me, by this city, and [...] I didn’t have the strength to accept it” (episode 1).

As terrified as he is by Eskew, David is also unable to leave it and walk away, which is the source of tension in the podcast’s dramaturgy. David chooses Eskew over and over again: he walks into the city from London (episode 30); he leaves the safety of the burn unit in the hospital to go back into the city (episode 9); he kills the daughter that the city made for him, a child who sees the city nightmares instead of him (episode 22); he rejects Kenneth’s pleas for help in escaping the city (episode 13). Almost every episode ends with David choosing Eskew once again because it is the only place where his fears are justified and do not just consist in a creation of his neurotic mind. In some sense he is safe in Eskew because he can be sure that the city is as he sees it: monstrous and dangerous, a place where he is right to be afraid. Eskew is a manifestation of the symptoms of his mental illness and also an external source of reason why he feels like he is a broken shell of a man. Without Eskew, David would have to acknowledge his mental problems. In Eskew he is not suicidal; it is the cursed railway bridge that is forcing him to jump; his need for isolation is not an unhealthy inadequacy in the face of interpersonal relationship, it is self-defense against the monsters of the city. The true horror would be to feel that way in any other place than Eskew, where paranoia is not justified. Somehow, Eskew is a source of comfort. The true horror lies outside its borders.

It is clear that on a metaphorical level *I Am in Eskew* is a representation of mental illness and mental disorders. In this case, we follow David through his delusions as he isolates himself from people, develops paranoia and depression which lead him to suicidal tendencies (episode 5) and self-harm (episode 7). He is hospitalized (episode 9) and seemingly starts to feel better, even entering a relationship with Allegra (episode 10), and starting a new job in a corporation (episode 11). The stressful job and the possible death of his co-worker due to his own mental illness (episode 13), cause another breakdown and David becomes homeless (episode 16), wandering without help through the city until he sees Allegra again (episode 19). They start a family (episode 22) as David tries to once again get back on his feet, but their daughter dies and their relationships breaks up. The podcast ends with David’s suicidal jump from the window in the hotel (episode 30) but all these events are presented through the lens of supernatural horror genre, rendering the question ‘is it real or is

David just crazy?’ – unsubstantial. To some extent, the narration uses even disguised medical language: the phrase David says in many episodes, especially in the beginning – “My name is David Ward and I am in Eskew” – is a rephrase of the group therapy introduction: “My name is David Ward and I am mentally ill”; this also pertains to “My name is David Ward and I am doing a lot better now” (episode 10). Therefore, David’s narration resembles therapy session confessions. The podcast itself could be a therapy tool. We also know that David takes (or at least buys) risperidone, an atypical antipsychotic used to treat schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, which is casually mentioned (episode 2) among his other daily chores. The literal and metaphorical levels of interpretation are entangled and inseparable as they represent the reality of mental illness: Eskew is an externalization of David’s symptoms because that is how they are experienced by him – as something external from him. It illustrates the entanglement of cityscape and mindscape as well: the experience of the city is never separated from the state of observer’s mind.

The Askew Architecture: Eskew and Beyond

Hostile architecture is an urban-design strategy that uses elements of public spaces to restrict physical behavior of people within them. It is a tool of prevention and exclusion that makes certain aspects of public spaces uncomfortable and impractical, it “guides behavior both physically and psychologically” (Chelley 2016: 18) by making certain people feel unwanted in public spaces, putting the “public” part of the term into question. Beside the infamous “anti-homeless” spikes, this also includes water sprinklers that become activated by movement but do not water anything; there being only cold water in public toilets; bolts on the front steps of buildings; locked up trash cans as well as surveillance cameras etc. The phenomenon of hostile architecture is symptomatic of the late capitalism as it does not solve any issues but only obscures the visual manifestation of problems created by capitalism itself, such as homelessness. It also reveals who is considered to be “undesirable” in contemporary society. The fact that hostile architecture also impacts other individuals (pregnant people, people with children, elderly, people with disabilities etc.) does not seem to be enough to renounce it. In that case it is possible to wonder to what extent inhabitants troubled by designs of hostile architecture in their everyday life are, in fact, also “undesirable” in the contemporary cityscapes or who exactly are the cityscapes made for? Which is to ask – who is the implied citizen here?

I Am in Eskew presents the concept of hostile architecture taken literally. Eskew is a city where “[t]he streets wind too far in on themselves, the stairs climb too high, and both buildings and inhabitants can act in peculiar, obsessive, or frightening ways” (Ware 2018), where it is places, not people, that are frightening (episode 1). The monsters of Eskew are born out of its architectural solutions. The hostile and dangerous space creates citizens corresponding to its own design. To live in an inhuman city is to become inhuman. Thus, an unspeakable truth about hostile architecture is revealed: the visible lack of

something (marked by spikes and other designed signs of unwelcoming) does not make it disappear but become non-present. It only works as a reminder of exclusion. Following the supernatural metaphor, the designs of hostile architecture work as tokens of performed exorcism, like a ring of salt that can be removed at any given moment, letting the unwelcome creatures in. In that sense, hostile architecture is a “designed paranoia” (Chellew 2016), an everlasting reminder of the dangers in contemporary society (such as social and class conflicts and tensions). Cara Chellew writes about the signs of hostile architecture, stating that “once you see it, it is impossible to stop noticing its use around the city” (Chellew 2016: 18), which can be also said about haunting as understood by Gordon (2008: xvi).

Even though the term “hostile architecture” appears in the podcast is episode 12, the concept itself is introduced as soon as in episode 2 in the form of the Commemoration Gallery: an impossible building, one of Eskew’s beautiful monstrosities. The “spiny and colossal temple that is the Commemoration Gallery” is positioned on the Hound’s Hill and is closed to the public as it remains unfinished. Its very name functions as a taboo in Eskew: “They all stare at me when I mention the gallery, as if I’ve got a word wrong in my translation. As if I’ve cited something that doesn’t exist in their reckoning of the city”. The Commemoration Gallery works as a representation of Eskew in microcosm: a vast, unfriendly space, where navigation “is an uncoiling” (episode 1).

Blank white floors bleeding into blank white walls into blank white ceilings. The lights above the gaping emptiness of the lobby, glowing and blazing, sending reflections out across the void in contorted shapes and shifting motions.

Perfect, at first, so perfect that you’re afraid to blemish it with your own shadow, your own echoing footsteps.

And then, gradually, it becomes overwhelming, dizzying in its absolute emptiness, a space and shape without anything to anchor you within it. Only the next frame of a doorway, and the next frame of a doorway, to prevent you from becoming lost in the void.

I stumble, and the architect catches me by the arm.

‘I know,’ he says, with a touch of pride to his voice. ‘It’s too much’ (episode 2).

It is an emptiness demanding to be filled. As glorious as it is horrifying, it could only be completed by something inhuman. But it is not static. The peculiar feature of the Commemoration Gallery is that it is ever changing, removing its rooms as one walks through them. It is the ultimate labyrinth where one cannot retain any sense of one’s location: “[...] it’s safe to walk here, so long as you keep to the corridors and the rooms that feed back into each other, like a living system. Don’t walk into a dead-end room, somewhere superfluous with just a single doorway that may cut you off unexpectedly, leaving you stranded

in an empty cell with four walls and no exit". The heart of Gallery, the only place that never changes, is a workroom full of blueprints: every plan for Commemoration Gallery ever made and more of them arriving every day because whatever is wrong with the Gallery "is still spreading, still multiplying". And as the Daedalus labyrinth – the archetype for hostile architecture – the Commemoration Gallery has its monster, wandering through the different plans of this place, waiting to devour lost ones. As the labyrinth and the Minotaur become one, so the Commemoration Gallery and Eskew become their own monsters, a predator preying on its inhabitants.

The Commemoration Gallery is a city image out of a nightmare: an illegible space of total disorientation (Lynch 1990: 2), actively working on trapping passers-by. A blueprint cannot serve as a map as one would not be able to predict which version of the Gallery they are in and there are too many blueprints to be useful. As Lynch notices, the most important part of a positive city image is its legibility, the possibility of recognizing space and one's location within it. This may be done with tools such as maps, street numbers or familiar sights, "[t]he need to recognize and pattern our surroundings is so crucial, and has such long roots in the past, that this image has wide practical and emotional importance to the individual" (1990: 4). "But let the mishap of disorientation once occur, and the sense of anxiety and even terror that accompanies it reveals to us how closely it is linked to our sense of balance and well-being. The very word 'lost' in our language means much more than simple geographical uncertainty; it carries overtones of utter disaster" (1990: 4). To be in Eskew is to be lost and to have lost. Maps have no use in Eskew: "Open one up, and you may find yourself entirely lost. Staring in wonder at roads and squares that do not exist, and bear no relation to the signs and crossings before you" (episode 3). The lost sense of orientation occurs simultaneously with the loss of the self, the disintegration of one's personhood that leads to the total submission so desired by Eskew. To be lost is to be at Eskew's mercy.

Hostile Architecture as Narration and Narration as Hostile Architecture

Architecture has certain narrative qualities. The metaphor of "reading the city" is well established in social and cultural studies, referring to how a city is perceived, understood and interpreted by its inhabitants. *I Am in Eskew* presents the city as a living organism, an entity which engages in monstrous relationships with its citizens. In other words, when one reads Eskew, Eskew reads them back. The omniscient nature of Eskew can be understood as standing for the representation of surveillance in contemporary cities, the unspoken knowledge that a city stores information about us, knows more about us than we are comfortable sharing. But, more importantly, it complicates the metaphor of "reading the city" by signaling that it is a mutual relationship. Just as we have an opinion of the "city", so it has its opinion about us and the hostile architecture is a way of expressing it, to let us know how the city "wants" us to behave, what to do, how to interact with it and with each other. Eskew, a city

employing hostile architecture, writes the story for its inhabitants in the form of restrictions, orders and rules by a series of structures that constrain our actions, determine our choices, predict outcomes with an alarming accuracy. Our cities are not passive spaces to be read but active entities controlling our lives in order to “discipline us into primarily consumption based modes of interacting with and in the city” (Smith, Walters 2018: 1), to constrain the freedom of movement, to take the agency away from us and to sustain the *status quo* of exclusion. Therefore, hostile architecture is a form of narration, a way of telling the story of the city, wherein the city is an active character with agency. However, this agency is gained at the expense of the citizens. Hostile architecture creates an explicit form of the implied citizen, an analogous structure to the implied reader, the embodiment of how a text structures response. An implied citizen is an obedient one, preferably one who does not see the signs of exclusion or who actively participates in discriminatory practices by the power of their capital, social class and identity that assures admittance to public spaces “in both construction and access” (Smith, Walters 2018: 3).

Moreover, *I Am in Eskew* presents narration as a form of hostile architecture in the sense that narration is a tool of isolation, restriction and control. Depending on who “holds the pen”, a story can give or take away the agency of a certain group of people. Much as hostile architecture, narration is an unfeeling structure. Eskew gives David the lines he does not want to say and a role he does not want to play; he survives by bowing when city wants him to bow (episode 20). What David wants is not to be a part of the story of Eskew. Instead, the city assigns him to become its herald and the “celebrity victim” of Eskew (episode 27). Even though David refuses to become what Eskew wants him to be, the podcast itself constitutes exactly what Eskew wanted David to do: “Speak of your trauma, and your pain, and the hidden things that lurk in every street and every face...and be understood [...] Be the brave man who warns humankind of the invisible threat massing upon the threshold, consulted by governments, examined by scientists, the one voice of unpalatable truth” (episode 27). Therefore, the podcast reflects the soundscape of Eskew, becoming a tool of satisfying the city’s need to be witnessed, presented and perpetuated. By listening to *I Am in Eskew* extra-diegetic audience arrives in the city and the podcast’s title refers to David’s state as well as ours as we contribute to Eskew’s extension by listening.

There is no escape from Eskew and there is no escape from various deterministic social, class, geopolitical etc. forces that shape our biographies as a form of narration. The spatial horror of Eskew is a metaphor of social and cultural infrastructure of late capitalism, incapable of sustaining human life without destroying or perverting it into an acceptable form of a predestinated social role. This is highlighted in Kenneth’s arc as “he embroidered his existing lies, creating this scenario with his wife and daughters turning murderous to try and draw me out, and he kept pushing it harder and harder, hoping to force me to admit the truth about my life here” (episode 13). But Eskew deliv-

ers, and by the end of the episode, David “can sense him trying to mouth the syllables of a horror which he invented, and which Eskew faithfully brought to life” (episode 13). Kenneth tells his sad and terrifying story in the hope of hiding and escaping, but, instead, the city materializes it. Kenneth’s story was one of a perfect citizen of Eskew, haunted and afraid and, as invented by him, was a form of agency: something he told about himself before others wrote his story for him. Eskew used the same story to take the agency away from him, making him a prophet of his own doom. Kenneth’s arc showcases how narration can become a trap, even if it is our own creation. It demonstrates how Eskew – a hostile city – will not be satisfied with mock submission but will demand a real one instead.

Another archetype of hostile architecture could be a haunted house, the classical horror venue that inspired Ware: “the idea that certain places can simply go wrong – and once these bad environments have been established and ostracized by society, they can’t be exorcised. They simply keep accruing power through the individual stories that play tragically out in their shadow” (Ware 2018). The curse of a haunted house is what causes its inhabitants to repeat the mistakes of previous generations. The haunted house is a cycle of repetition, re-living past tragedies and sustaining the environment that caused them. It serves as a narrative structure of human suffering as much as a spatial pattern of human environment.

Production of Future Ghosts

Hauntology uses the metaphors of ghost and haunting to describe the return or persistence of certain elements from our cultural or social past. We create our ghost through the sin of omission, forgetfulness and deletion. To not reckon with past is to create a ghost and the return of the dead is the return of the repressed. But contemporary culture and society also produce repression and hostile architecture is an example thereof. The “unwanted” are pushed outside of what Henri Lefebvre calls the “representation of space”: city space conceptualized by planners and social engineers (1991: 39). His concept of the spatial practice, the representation of space and the representational space could be interpreted as the Id, Ego and Superego of the city, respectively, if we follow Eskew’s notion to treat the city as a living organism with its own agency. The “unwanted” (homeless people, youth, poor people and minorities) exist in the spatial practice of the city but are repressed in the representation of space by hostile architecture. As repression – and, therefore – as a defense mechanism, hostile architecture ensures that the visual signs of capitalism’s crimes (dispossessed people) will not be seen in the representation of space, the conscious part of the city. But the signs of repression itself remain in the form of spikes, inconvenience and the impractical use of space. The “unwanted” are non-present, physically removed but ever-present in the cityscape due to the signs of their exclusion. They become contemporary ghosts, haunting the city as an unspoken threat, in the same way as a spectre in a haunted house works as a reminder of past sins.

Eskew itself is a city of the “unwanted”, people who do not fit into society. Allegra describes her experience before Eskew through the reaction she got from people as they “despise you for your strangeness, your coldness, your lack of ease in any place or amongst any people” (episode 14). David talks about his relationship with his mother as she was “[f]rightened for me, because in such a neurotic, lonely, unhappy child there could be no great success in the life to come” (episode 30). Allegra and David were predestined to come to Eskew due to their unfitness into society. They were the ghosts of the contemporary world, unable to succeed in life. The same pertains to Riyo, a person homeless, because for her a “home” is not a place but a person who is lost. For her, Eskew is the city of ghosts and death, a place strangely fitting her current mental state and that is why she seeks it. When Riyo describes the state of Mrs. Ward – “She doesn’t want this problem solved. She wants to carry on living with these ghosts, these sudden and inexplicable visitations. Because if she exists in a world where nothing is certain and probability plays no part... then she may yet look up from her casserole one night and see her son, standing in her kitchen doorway again” (episode 6) – she is talking about herself. Eskew welcomes her when she admits that she is haunted and lost (episode 21).

Riyo brings the notion of hauntology (episode 6) into *I Am in Eskew* as well as introduces the concept of hostile architecture (episode 12), giving the audience terms and words to describe David’s experience. By the time Riyo appears in narration we already know that Eskew wants to be witnessed but it is Riyo who recognizes this need as the quality of a ghost, simultaneously expressing something that could be a credo of hauntology: “If the ghost wants nothing more than to be witnessed, why would it appear behind you, and not in front of you? The only answer I can think of is this: it appears behind you because it already knows, to an absolute certainty, that you will have no choice but look back” (episode 6).

In hauntology, a reckoning with ghosts – looking back at them – is inevitable as it is the only method of fixing the social, cultural and psychological problems and tensions. *I Am in Eskew* expands hauntology with the message “don’t wait for our problems to become future ghosts; treat them as such now”. The position of the implied reader gives the audience the choice to look – to witness – Eskew and suffering it causes much like hostile architecture in contemporary cities leaves us with no choice but to notice it as a sign of exclusion and discrimination.

Conclusions: We Are in Eskew

The soundscape of *I Am in Eskew* produces a mindscape for the listener: by becoming their auditory field, it draws them into the city of terrors. So does the narration: by the end David does not need to assure us that we will be in Eskew because we already are in the city – as its part or as its victims. The expansion of Eskew is an unsolved plot point because it has already happened: we are in Eskew since Eskew is all that is left in contemporary, capitalist so-

ciety. The Orion Building Concern, which brought Eskew to life, exists inside and outside of Eskew to underline the unstable nature of the city border. What created Eskew lies outside of it, marking Eskew as a symptom of broader social problems. It proves the podcast's capability to create an immersive horror story that makes it possible for the audience to perceive fiction as an extension of the real world.

The soundscape of the podcast contains the cityscape of Eskew which provides the listeners with tools to create a mindscape, a way of seeing and experiencing the world within the framework of hauntology. *Eskew* gives audience interpretative tools to deconstruct their personal experience of city spaces, to see the unseen and recognize the contemporary ghost of the dispossessed. It recognizes hostile architecture as a process of taking away agency from citizens and presents it in David's arc. A mindscape here is the personal experience of the contemporary urban environment – meaning a hostile, haunted space and an active agent imposing rules and restrictions on its inhabitants in the name of inhuman market forces. *I Am in Eskew* makes it clear that we are, indeed, in Eskew, a city of horrors.

I Am in Eskew epitomizes many tendencies of contemporary podcast culture, including an experimental use of the medium, overtones of counter-culture and a critique of capitalist market and society. It is also an important representation of mental illness as it makes it possible for the audience to not only acknowledge it but also experience the reality thereof through the supernatural metaphors treated literally.

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Opinie na temat podcastu *Raport* o stanie świata wśród patronów wspierających go finansowo

Opinions on the Podcast *Raport o stanie* *świata* among Sponsors Supporting the Podcast Financially

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ABSTRACT: The podcast *Raport o stanie świata* (*Report on the State of the World*) is a recognizable brand on the Polish media market because of the quality of production and the personality of its creator – Dariusz Rosiak. *Raport...* is a subjective commentary on world events by Rosiak and his associates. Its recipients are

a faithful and very conscious group of listeners who have a clear opinion about this production. This applies especially to the podcast patrons who support its activities financially and guarantee its functioning. The aim of the study was to find out what the patrons' opinions about the podcast are. In this context, it was also important to check who the respondents are and from what perspective they evaluate it. The members of the research team joined the closed group of patrons of the *Raport...* on FB. It was used to conduct a survey with 80 respondents. The research took place between May 10 and May 21, 2021. The survey was created and distributed on the Google Forms platform. In addition, four pre-structured interviews with patrons were conducted via the Messenger application, which allowed for the implementation of some qualitative research. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The participants of the research point towards the high professionalism of the production, its educational character, as well as the independence of the creators. They also appreciate the fact that the program is distributed in the form of a podcast, which allows one to peruse it repeatedly, anywhere and anytime.

KEYWORDS: podcast; radio; new media; sponsor

Wprowadzenie

Podcast *Raport o stanie świata* zdobył na polskim rynku medialnym pewną markę. Bez wątpienia zawdzięcza to profesjonalizmowi i osobowości twórcy – Dariuszowi Rosiakowi, jednemu z najbardziej rozpoznawalnych dziennikarzy¹. *Raport* jest swego rodzaju subiektywnym komentarzem na temat wydarzeń na świecie, realizowanym przez Rosiaka, a także grono współpracowników (Rosiak, b.d.). Rosiak, prezentując tematykę podcastu, informuje: „Przyglądam się światu i opowiadam o nim przy pomocy słów i innych dźwięków: rozmów z ludźmi, którzy znają się na rzeczy, relacji reporterskich z różnych miejsc na świecie i muzyki, która zawsze jest na temat” (Rosiak, b.d.). Są to narracje wielopoziomowe, obejmujące kwestie polityczne, społeczne, kulturowe. Autor *Raportu* w opisie na stronie internetowej zawarł także znaczące stwierdzenie: „*Raport* stał się domem dla tysięcy Słuchaczy, którzy chcą poznawać świat w całym jego bogactwie, świat skomplikowany, ale fascynujący, niejednoznaczny, inspirujący. Chciałbym, abyście ze mną zostali na dłużej, najlepiej na zawsze” (Rosiak, b.d.). Rosiak, opierając się na doświadczeniach zdobytych podczas prowadzenia audycji w Programie Trzecim Polskiego Radia, udowodnił, że z powodzeniem może przenieść swoją działalność reporterską do internetu. Odbiorcami podcastu są wierni i bardzo świadomi słuchacze, mający wyrobione zdanie na temat produkcji, której są użytkownikami. Dotyczy to zwłaszcza patronów, którzy wspierają działalność finansowo i są nieodzownym elementem tego przedsięwzięcia – bez nich nie miałoby ono szansy przetrwać. W artykule przyjrzymy się więc bliżej ich opiniom na temat *Raportu*².

1 W 2020 r. jego autor, Dariusz Rosiak, otrzymał tytuł Dziennikarza Roku w konkursie Grand Press.

2 Artykuł stanowi swoiste dopełnienie tekstu, gdzie omawiamy motywacje, którymi kierują się patroni podcastu, wspierając go finansowo (Doliwa, Szydłowska, Szczepańska, Stachowicz, Kaźmierczak, w druku).

Podcasting

Wśród najczęściej wymienianych cech nowych mediów wskazuje się ich interaktywność i wymiennność ról – użytkownicy mogą być zarówno odbiorcami, jak i nadawcami komunikatów. Wyznacznikiem nowych mediów są również: obfita produkcja, podaż i swoboda wyboru. Miejscem do rozwoju nowych mediów jest internet, który stanowi atrakcyjną przestrzeń kreacji dla twórców (McQuail 2007: 57).

Podcasting jest często definiowany jako forma internetowej publikacji dźwiękowej, najczęściej w postaci regularnych odcinków, z zastosowaniem technologii RSS (Stachyra 2016: 1) i jest obecny na rynku medialnym od niemal dwóch dekad³. Pojęcie zostało spopularyzowane przez Bena Hammersleya w 2004 r. (Hammersley 2004). Jest to połączenie dwóch słownych segmentów: „iPod” – produktu firmy Apple – i fragmentu określenia *broadcast*, czyli ‘transmisja, przekaz’ (Berry 2015b: 8; Bonini 2015: 21). Pierwszy człon słowa przypisuje się także angielskiemu akronimowi *Personal on Demand*. I jest to o tyle zasadne, że definiuje użyteczność nowego zjawiska, zatem *podcasting* to jednocześnie możliwość produkcji plików audio i ich dystrybuowanie oraz rozpowszechnianie (Gillmor 2004: 34), a także odtwarzanie w dowolnym czasie na telefonach komórkowych, urządzeniach MP3 itp.

Hammersley w artykule poświęconym podcastingowi, opublikowanym w „The Guardian”, analizował przyszłość mediów w kontekście gatunkowym i funkcjonalnym, wskazywał na uwarunkowania technologiczne i społeczne, dając asumpt do dyskursu wokół podcastingu. W pierwszych tekstach na temat podcastingu wiele uwagi poświęcano temu zjawisku w kontekście rozszerzenia radia (Berry 2006; Madsen 2009). Miał być on swego rodzaju pomostem między radiem internetowym a radiem tradycyjnym – formatem tymczasowym w drodze do pełnej cyfryzacji tego medium (Menduni 2007). W ostatnich latach odnotowujemy jednak ekspansję podcastingu, określaną przez badaczy mianem „złotej ery” – podcast staje się niezależnym od radia zjawiskiem medialnym (Berry 2015a; Bottomley 2015).

Podcast został scharakteryzowany w 11 punktach przez Martina Spinellego i Lance’a Danna (2019: 7–8). Badacze wskazują, iż:

1. Najbardziej popularny sposób słuchania podcastów odbywa się za pośrednictwem dousznych słuchawek. Sprzyja to uwewnętrznionemu, intymnemu stylowi odbioru i znacząco różni się od słuchania przy użyciu głośników czy nawet klasycznych słuchawek.
2. Podcast jest medium mobilnym, z którego możemy korzystać w przestrzeni miejskiej, np. podczas transportu, na ulicach i w innych miejscach publicznych.
3. Podcast daje większą kontrolę słuchaczom. Można go łatwo odtwarzać i słuchać wielokrotnie. Analogicznie można też słuchać wybranych fragmentów. Pozwala to na zastosowanie różnorodnych praktyk produkcyjnych i sposobów kształtowania treści.

3 Jest to zagadnienie godne uwagi i odrębnej analizy.

4. Słuchanie podcastów wymaga większej selektywności i aktywnego zaangażowania ze strony odbiorcy. Można skorzystać z różnych opcji odbioru. Ta technologia zaliczana jest do gatunku *push-pull*. Odbiorcy są „przyciągani” (ang. *pull*) do podcastu na etapie jego wyboru, kiedy zaś zasubskrybują dany podcast, wdrażane są działania z zakresu wywierania na nich wpływu poprzez proponowanie określonych nagrań (ang. *push*). Wybór danego materiału audio odbywa się w inny sposób niż w radiu, w dużo mniejszym stopniu może być dziełem przypadku.
5. Podcast może docierać do niszowych odbiorców, którzy jednak mogą z niego korzystać na całym świecie. W związku z tym podejmowane tematy nie są zakorzenione w problematyce określonych materialnych społeczności, regionów i krajów (jest to zarazem ich zaleta i wada).
6. Podcasty są wplecione w media społecznościowe i jako takie mają zwiększoną zdolność do wzmacniania zaangażowania odbiorców i aktywizowania ich. Te same urządzenia mobilne, które są używane do korzystania z mediów społecznościowych, mogą być wykorzystywane do słuchania, a w niektórych przypadkach także produkowania podcastów. To ułatwia przeskakiwanie pomiędzy tymi aktywnościami.
7. Podcasty mogą być produkowane i rozpowszechniane bez zgody wydawców, korektorów czy selekjonerów informacji. To oznacza, że twórcy mogą pracować z dużą swobodą, ale muszą też liczyć się z niewielkim wsparciem instytucjonalnym.
8. Podcasty są zwykle rozpowszechniane w ramach modelu biznesowego nazywanego *freemium model* (połączony model biznesowy *free* i *premium*), w którym wersja podstawowa jest powszechnie dostępna, dochód jest zaś generowany poprzez dodatkową działalność.
9. Podcasty są „evergreenami”: teoretycznie dostępne nieustannie, co utrudnia uzyskanie unikalnego efektu programu nadawanego „na żywo”.
10. Nie istnieje ostateczna, niezmienna forma danego podcastu, błędy można poprawić, w razie potrzeby zamieszczać przeprosiny, rotować reklamy, remiksować dźwięk.
11. Podcasty nie muszą wpasowywać się w sztywne ramy czasowe i harmonogramy, które są typowe dla klasycznych mediów audialnych. Mogą mieć różną długość i być publikowane w dowolnym momencie (Spinelli, Dann 2019: 7–8).

Podcasting funkcjonuje dwutorowo: jako aktywność amatorska lub profesjonalna, kiedy jest anektowany przez radiowców, którzy postanowili realizować się w tej formule (Stachyra 2017: 29). W wypadku omawianego podcastu mamy do czynienia właśnie z drugą sytuacją.

Z badań nad polskim podcastingiem wynika, że jest on nastawiony bardziej na merytoryczny przekaz niż rozrywkę. Podcasty są tworzone przez ciekawe osobowości, które potrafią interesująco opowiadać o swoich pasjach, często połączonych z aktywnością zawodową (Doliwa, Chyczewska, Grobelski, Łatacz 2020).

Sylwetka Dariusza Rosiaka i *Raport o stanie świata*

Dariusz Rosiak jest absolwentem filologii angielskiej, a swoją przygodę w mediach rozpoczął w latach 80. ubiegłego wieku. Jego pierwszym miejscem zatrudnienia była francuska stacja radiowa RFI. Później przeniósł się do Londynu, gdzie spędził dekadę, pracując w polskiej sekcji BBC. W międzyczasie współpracował m.in. z „Życiem Warszawy”, „Życiem”, „Architekturą” i „Machiną”. Po powrocie do kraju związał się z Polską Agencją Prasową, a w 2001 r. objął stanowisko zastępcy redaktora naczelnego „Newsweeka”. Rosiak był także współtwórcą i redaktorem naczelnym tygodnika „Ozon”, pisał dla „Rzeczpospolitej”, a najdłuższą współpracę podjął z „Tygodnikiem Powszechnym” (Rosiak, b.d.).

Rosiak ma na swoim koncie kilka książek, m.in.: reportaż *Oblicza wielkiej Brytanii*; *Podróż śladami bliskowschodnich chrześcijan*; *Żar*; *Oddech Afryki*; *Agent, filozof, antykomunista*; *Ziarno i krew*, za którą otrzymał Nagrodę im. Beaty Pawlak i był nominowany do Nagrody Literackiej Nike w 2016 r.

W 2006 r. Dariusz Rosiak rozpoczął pracę w Polskim Radiu. W Programie Pierwszym był autorem audycji *Więcej świata*, w radiowej Dwójce – *Puls świata*. Prowadził także poranne wydanie audycji *Zapraszamy do Trójki i Klubu Trójki*. Dziennikarz brał udział w projektach: *Trójka przekracza granice* (przekazywał relacje z Afryki), *Trójka przekracza granice 2* (relacje z Ugandy, Etiopii, Angoli i Ghany) oraz *Trójka przekracza granice. Raport o stanie USA*. W 2007 r. na antenie zaczął ukazywać się jego autorski program, *Raport o stanie świata* – subiektywny przegląd najważniejszych międzynarodowych wydarzeń politycznych, społecznych i kulturalnych. W 2015 r. Dariusz Rosiak zdobył reporterską Nagrodę Polskiej Agencji Prasowej im. Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego za *Raport o stanie świata z Kurdystanu*. Audycja dotyczyła napiętych stosunków między Kurdami a samozwańczym Państwem Islamskim. Dziennikarz nadawał bezpośrednio z Erbilu, stolicy irackiego Kurdystanu (kw 2015)⁴.

Raport o stanie świata ukazywał się na antenie państwowego radia przez ponad 13 lat. W tym czasie audycja zdążyła zdobyć wielu wiernych słuchaczy. W styczniu 2020 r. Rosiak został zwolniony z Polskiego Radia, bez podania przyczyny, z anteny zniknął także *Raport o stanie świata* (Bochyńska 2020). Wywołało to liczne protesty⁵.

Rosiak skomentował tę sytuację na publicznym profilu na Facebooku. We wpisie podziękował zarówno fanom audycji, jak i wszystkim, z którymi mógł współpracować podczas jej tworzenia. Najważniejsza była jednak informacja o tym, że koniec jego kariery w Polskim Radiu nie oznacza dla niego końca *Raportu*: „Raport o stanie świata jako autorski program Dariusza Rosiaka przestaje istnieć w Trójce, co nie znaczy, że przestaje istnieć w ogóle – przynajmniej

4 Nagroda PAP im. Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego jest przyznawana autorom najbardziej rzetelnym i obiektywnym, ze wskazaniem, iż przekazywane przez nich informacje muszą być poprawne warsztatowo – niezależnie od medium.

5 Protestowali nie tylko słuchacze, ale też np. Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich Adam Bodnar i Stowarzyszenie Dziennikarzy Polskich.

taką mam nadzieję. Przechodzi raczej w stan czasowego zawieszenia. Będę Państwa informował o jego dalszych losach” (Facebook 2020a). Dziennikarz, wraz z zespołem, za namową słuchaczy postanowił kontynuować funkcjonowanie *Raportu o stanie świata* poza strukturami Polskiego Radia⁶.

Pozaradiowy debiut audycji w formule *live* odbył się 6 lutego 2020 r. w Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego. W spotkaniu wzięło udział 150 osób – reszta zainteresowanych, z uwagi na brak miejsc na widowni, śledziła transmisję w internecie (Instytut Wolności 2020). 25 lutego 2020 r. na portalu Patronite została utworzona zbiórka. W ciągu niecałego dnia na podstronie Patronite dotyczącej *Raportu* udało się zebrać 5000 zł. Wówczas Rosiak zapowiedział pierwszy odcinek podcastu (Facebook 2020b). 7 marca 2020 r. opublikowano pierwszą audycję w serwisach streamingowych (Facebook 2020c). *Raport o stanie świata* szybko znalazł się w rankingu 10 najpopularniejszych podcastów serwisu Spotify (Kurek 2020). Grupa wspierających wzrastała proporcjonalnie z liczbą wyprodukowanych odcinków. Są one do teraz publikowane cotygodniowo, w każdą sobotę. Powiększająca się z każdym dniem kwota i rosnące grono patronów przyczyniły się do rozszerzenia projektu o nowe segmenty. 25 marca 2020 r. powstał pierwszy odcinek *Raportu na dziś*, monotematycznego komentarza wydarzeniowego (Facebook 2020d). Kolejnym podcastem w rodzinie *Raportu o stanie świata* stał się *Raport o książkach* – subiektywny przegląd literatury. Pierwszy odcinek programu został opublikowany 12 października 2020 r., przed mikrofonem zasiadła Agata Kasprolewicz. W tym czasie do zespołu dołączyli także kolejni dziennikarze współpracujący wcześniej z Trzecim Programem Polskiego Radia i powstawały nowe odmiany *Raportu* (Erlling 2020). Sukces *Raportu o stanie świata* jako grupy podcastów, odważnego przedsięwzięcia cenionego dziennikarza, nie pozostał niezauważony. W grudniu 2020 r. Dariusz Rosiak został nagrodzony tytułem Dziennikarza Roku w plebiscycie Grand Press.

Metodologia

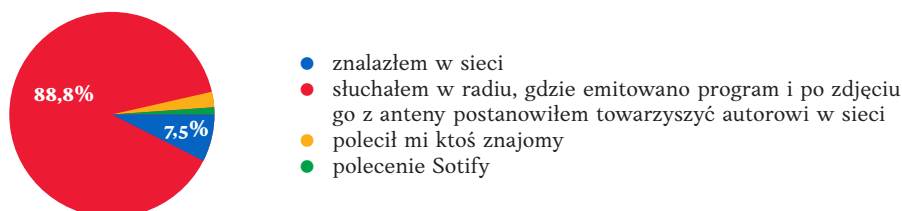
Badanie miało na celu poznanie opinii patronów *Raportu o stanie świata* na temat podcastu. W tym kontekście istotne okazało się sprawdzenie, kim są badani i z jakiej perspektywy postrzegają podcast i samego autora. Członkowie zespołu badawczego dołączyli do zamkniętej grupy patronów *Raportu* na Facebooku. Za jej pośrednictwem zostało przeprowadzone badanie ankietowe, w którym udział wzięło 80 respondentów. Badania odbyły się między 10 a 21 maja 2021 r. Ankietę utworzono i dystrybuowano na platformie Google Forms. Dodatkowo, na początku czerwca, za pośrednictwem aplikacji Messenger przeprowadzono cztery ustrukturyzowane wywiady z patronami podcastu, co pozwoliło na zrealizowanie części badań o charakterze jakościowym. Wywiady zarejestrowano i przetranskrybowano.

6 Już wcześniej *Raport* pojawiał się w formie podcastu na platformie streamingowej Spotify, jednak była to jedynie archiwizacja programu nadawanego w Trójce.

Wyniki badań ankietowych – analiza środowiska patronów podcastu

Badania środowiska patronów podcastu pozwoliły na scharakteryzowanie grupy, która zdecydowała się wziąć udział w badaniu: 58,8% ankietowanych stanowiły osoby w wieku 31–45 lat, a 17,6% 46–55 lat. Można więc przypuszczać, że są to osoby aktywne zawodowo (ponad trzy czwarte respondentów). Osoby do 30 roku życia stanowiły 22,5% ankietowanych. Większość badanych to osoby dobrze wykształcone, aż 88,8% ma wykształcenie wyższe, 3,7% niepełne wyższe, 5% deklaruje wykształcenie średnie, a 2,5% było w trakcie studiów. Interesujący jest również poziom dochodów respondentów. Zarobki brutto patronów są na stosunkowo wysokim poziomie, 42,5% deklaruje zarobki powyżej 7000 zł miesięcznie, 29,9% to grupa zarabiająca od 4000 do 7000, w przypadku 18,8% zarobki mieszczą się w przedziale 3001–4000 zł. Jedynie 8,8% zaznacza swoje dochody w przedziale do 3000 zł. Jest to więc grupa dosyć dobrze sytuowana materialnie. Finansując podcast, za pośrednictwem serwisu Patronite, można wpłacać od 5 do 1000 zł miesięcznie. Większość ankietowanych wspierała go comiesięcznymi kwotami w wysokości 10–20 zł. Są to progi niskie, jednak systematyczność wpłat zabezpiecza stabilność projektu.

Badani w większości, i to wydaje się interesujące, są słuchaczami *Raportu* niemal od momentu jego powstania na antenie radiowej. To dzięki sympatii do programu radiowego stali się słuchaczami podcastu.



Wykres 1. Odpowiedzi na pytanie: Jak stałeś się słuchaczem *Raportu o stanie świata*?

Źródło: badania własne.

Zdecydowana większość ankietowanych (88,8%) słuchała *Raportu o stanie świata* w radiu i po zdjęciu go z anteny przeniosła się razem z autorem do internetu. Kolejne 7,5% znalazło podcast w sieci.



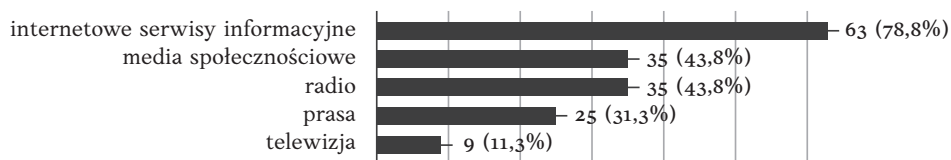
Wykres 2. Odpowiedzi na pytanie: Od jak dawna jesteś patronem podcastu? Źródło: badania własne.

Patronów cechuje przywiązanie i lojalność wobec projektu. Ponad połowa, bo 58,8% ankieterowanych słucha podcastu od samego początku jego istnienia, 26,2% nie dłużej niż rok, ale nie krócej niż sześć miesięcy. Może to być świadectwem aprobaty i pewnego rodzaju przywiązania do podcastu. Znamienna jest także stosunkowo niewielka liczba „nowych słuchaczy”, choć grono to nieustannie się powiększa.

Następne pytanie miało charakter otwarty – dotyczyło oceny współpracy autorów z patronami. Ankieterowani podzieli się na dwie, niemal równe grupy. Jedni wskazywali, że współpraca na linii autor–patron jest zadowalająca, drudzy odpowiadali, że nie jest to dla nich istotne, gdyż interesuje ich bardziej sam podcast i nie oczekują pogłębionych relacji z jego autorem. Troje respondentów zwróciło jednak uwagę na bardzo ograniczoną interakcję między twórcami i patronami.

Podobny charakter miało kolejne pytanie: Co znaczy dla Ciebie przynależność do grupy patronów? Odpowiedź na nie miała charakter opisowy. Również w tym pytaniu ankieterowani podzielili się równo. Jedna część wskazała, że przynależność do grupy patronów to przede wszystkim satysfakcja ze wspierania wysokiej jakości dziennikarstwa i bycie częścią pewnej elitarnej społeczności. Dla drugiej grupy nie ma to znaczenia, nie są aktywni w tej społeczności.

Pytanie zamykające ankietę dotyczyło źródeł informacji, z których na co dzień korzystają respondenci.



Wykres 3. Odpowiedzi na polecenie: Wskaż dwa główne źródła, z których pozyskujesz informacje. Źródło: badania własne.

Wśród źródeł pozyskiwania informacji dominują internetowe serwisy informacyjne (Wirtualna Polska, Onet, Gazeta.pl itp.), na drugim miejscu z takim samym wynikiem (35 głosów) znajdują się media społecznościowe (Facebook, Twitter) i radio. Nieco rzadziej wskazywano na prasę (25 razy), a dopiero za nią znalazła się telewizja (dziewięć głosów). Cyfrowe media w tym wypadku są zatem podstawowym źródłem informacji dla badanych.

Analiza wywiadów

Analizując wywiady i wyrażone w nich opinie patronów, warto odwołać się także do charakterystycznych cech podcastu, zdefiniowanych przez Spinello i Danna, aby sprawdzić, które z tych aspektów funkcjonowania *Raportu* są ważne dla uczestników badania (Spinelli, Dann 2019: 7–8). Okazuje się, że rozmówcy bardzo często zwracają uwagę na wiele cech podcastu opisanych przez wspomnianych badaczy.

Badani często wskazują np., że bardzo dużą zaletą *Raportu* jest to, iż można go słuchać w dowolnym miejscu, podczas wykonywania innych prac, jest on więc medium mobilnym. Justyna Nestorowicz-Wyborska zauważa: „Można robić jakieś prace domowe, które nie angażują specjalnie uwagi”⁷, i przyznaje: „Głównie słucham w samochodzie lub przy robieniu obowiązków domowych”. Konrad Adamczyk także wskazuje na fakt, że podczas słuchania podcastu równocześnie wykonuje inne czynności: „Zdarzało mi się w samochodzie, jadąc na jakieś zlecenie, i w pracy, montując po prostu jakiś film, ale przede wszystkim to chyba w domu, przy wykonywaniu jakiś czynności domowych”. Analogicznie odpowiada też Tomasz Gąsecki:

Podcast wymaga uwagi o tyle, że trzeba go słuchać i skupiać się na tym, co się słyszy. Natomiast można połączyć to z inną czynnością. Zwłaszcza taką, która nie wymaga dużej koncentracji. Na przykład przysłowiowe obieranie ziemniaków – mogę spokojnie słuchać podcastu, obierając ziemniaki i przygotowując obiad.

Podcast jest formatem stosunkowo wygodnym, można go odtwarzać kilkakrotnie, wracać do wybranych fragmentów, potwierdzają to także nasi rozmówcy. Konrad Adamczyk podkreśla:

Ja tak ze swojego doświadczenia wiem, że często, jeżeli właśnie wykonuję dodatkową pracę, to muszę sobie cofać. Akurat słucham na Spotify, więc to cofanie jest dosyć proste i to jest wszystko w aplikacji, ale rzeczywiście bez tego bym miał problem, żeby trochę zrozumieć kontekst. Audycja trwa dwie i pół godziny, no to czasami sobie ją słucham trzy godziny, poprzez to powtarzanie, cofanie. Wracam do jakichś wątków, które mi umknęły.

Na tę cechę podcastu wskazuje także Justyna Nestorowicz-Wyborska: „Czasami nawet, jeśli rozproszę się czymś, to sobie cofam wątki albo przesłuchuję ponownie. Zazwyczaj właśnie forma podcastu sprawia, że materiał można odsłuchać później i przewinąć. Ale to z reguły się rzadko zdarza, bo nawet pozornie coś nieinteresującego może zainteresować”.

Nestorowicz-Wyborska wskazuje również na uniwersalność tematyczną i szeroką optykę problematyki, pod warunkiem oczywiście, że odbiorca zna język polski:

Jak najbardziej można zacząć słuchać z „marszu”, dlatego że za każdym razem, jak materiał dotyczy różnych spraw, to zawsze przedstawiane jest tam jakieś tło. I goście, i prowadzący pozwalają słuchaczowi na to, jeśli nawet nie są do końca zorientowani w sprawie, to mogą wejść w temat,

7 Cytaty w dalszej części artykułu – jeśli nie oznaczono ich inaczej – pochodzą z wywiadów przeprowadzonych w ramach badań. Wykaz wywiadów umieszczono w bibliografii.

a jeśliby chcieli jakieś sprawy poszerzyć, to forma internetowa (repozytorium programów) na to pozwala. Także jak najbardziej można powiedzieć, że ten program pozwala upowszechniać różne tematy. Niewątpliwie każdy może zacząć słuchać.

Inni rozmówcy też wskazują na walor poznawczy *Raportu o stanie świata*. „To jest największa siła tego podcastu, że tam są wybrane tematy i one są omówione na tyle szczegółowo, że jeżeli ktoś chce dotrzeć do głębszych informacji, to je otrzyma, nawet jeśli nie ma orientacji w tym temacie”, zauważa Maciej Seweryn. Zdaniem Tomasza Gąseckiego podcast Rosiaka wymaga jednak pewnej wiedzy bazowej: „Żeby tego słuchać, to trzeba się chociaż troszkę tym interesować albo mieć chęć poznania. Natomiast są takie rzeczy, które odkrywam, i są takie rzeczy, które powodują, że po prostu swoją wiedzę czy swoje rozumienie pogłębiam”.

Co więcej, jak wskazuje Joanna Nestorowicz-Wyborska, wiedza zdobyta dzięki słuchaniu podcastu okazuje się przydatna w codziennym życiu.

Każdy podcast jest związany z inną sprawą. Jeśli mówimy o środowych, to one są poświęcone jednej sprawie. Sobotnie wydanie zawiera kilka wątków. Ale prawdę mówiąc, ja w ogóle patrzę na sytuację naszą krajową, w Polsce, zazwyczaj poprzez pryzmat tego, co się dzieje na świecie. Czyli można powiedzieć, że w jakimś sensie to pozwoliło, już dawno temu, powiedzmy ponad rok, jak były pierwsze informacje na temat pandemii i tak dalej, to wiadomo, że słuchanie tego, co się dzieje w innych krajach, jak sytuacja się tam kształtuje, faktycznie pozwoliło mi dosyć trafnie przewidzieć czy orientować się w tym, co może się zdarzyć w Polsce. Ta sytuacja i geopolityczna, i taka czasami też, w sumie gdzieś tam wątki gospodarcze bądź też teraz związane z pandemią, niewątpliwie tutaj pomogły mi kilka trafnych decyzji podjąć, ale dodatkowo też, no można powiedzieć, to jest takie lustro, w którym człowiek przegląda się, właśnie patrząc na sytuację w kraju. Bo jeśli koncentrujemy się tylko na tematyce takiej krajowej, to możemy po prostu niejako błędnie interpretować sytuację, w której się znajdujemy, ale niewątpliwie to jest kilka takich ciekawych tropów, które można później odnieść do tego, co się będzie w przyszłości działo. To na pewno.

Podcasty mogą być produkowane i rozpowszechniane bez zgody wydawców, korektorów czy selekcjonerów informacji. To oznacza, że twórcy mogą pracować z dużą swobodą. I to się odbiorcom wyjątkowo podoba. Jak zauważa Nestorowicz-Wyborska, *Raport* jest dla niej: „Jednym z niewielu przejawów niezależnego dziennikarstwa”.

Charakterystyczną cechą podcastów jest także to, że są one wpisane w rzeczywistość nowomiedialną. Widać to także w komentarzach dotyczących *Raportu* – Tomasz Gąsecki twierdzi, że: „Ludzie szukają alternatywnych źródeł

wiedzy, internet pozwala na nielimitowany dostęp w czasie, twórców jest coraz więcej. Coraz więcej się subskrybuje rzeczy”. Słuchanie podcastów wymaga jednak, co również podkreśla Gąsecki, większej selektywności i aktywnego zaangażowania ze strony odbiorcy:

Treści, które nas interesują, są niestety rozproszone. Teraz zaczynamy szukać takich treści, które nas interesują samodzielnie w różnych miejscach. Nie ma zbyt dużo tego typu programów o takiej tematyce, robionych w taki sposób, z takim profesjonalizmem. Podcasty w tej chwili przeżywają swój rozkwit. To jest bardzo modne. Ja sam słucham tych podcastów kilku, może kilkunastu. Nie tylko o takiej tematyce, ale jako medium podcast jest dla mnie dosyć przyjazną formą. To jest dla mnie bardzo wyjątkowa rzecz.

Jak wspominają rozmówcy, jakość *Raportu* wybija się jednak na tle innych produkcji podcastowych. Zwraca na to uwagę np. Maciej Seweryn: „Jest bardzo dobrze zrobiony – jakościowo. Z jednej strony ma świetną jakość techniczną, nawet jeśli jakiś rozmówca łączy się telefonicznie, to jest to tak edytowane, że tego się da słuchać. Jest to też przykład dziennikarstwa wysokogatunkowego, stara szkoła – można powiedzieć”.

Kończąc analizę, warto nadmienić, że większość patronów to dawni słuchacze Trzeciego Programu Polskiego Radia, którzy z *Raportem o stanie świata* „zaprzyjaźnili się” dzięki jego obecności na antenie radiowej i za pośrednictwem internetowych kanałów docierania do odbiorców. Konrad Adamczyk wskazuje: „Ja wspierałem od początku właściwie, kiedy jeszcze nie wiedziałem, czy ten podcast jakoś sobie poradzi, ponieważ ja akurat słuchałem jeszcze, kiedy było to w radiowej Trójce. Słuchałem za pośrednictwem Spotify, kiedy jeszcze prawa należały do Trójki”. W podobnym tonie wypowiada się Justyna Nestorowicz-Wyborska:

Od samego początku mojego świadomego życia słuchałam Trójki i, zdaje się w 2007 r., jak Dariusz Rosiak przyszedł do Trójki, i jak się pojawił *Raport o stanie świata*, to go słuchałam regularnie. Znacząco, dla mnie zawsze było ważne, że audycję można było odsłuchiwać o danym czasie, więc nie trzeba było w czasie emisji materiału być przywiązany do radia i właśnie ta forma mi zawsze bardzo pasowała.

Również Tomasz Gąsecki zalicza się do grona audytorium radiowego *Raportu*:

Audycji pana Rosiaka słuchałem w Trójce nie tyle od początku, ile od naprawdę kilku ładnych lat. No i powiedzmy, cała ta sytuacja, która się zadziała w Polskim Radio, bardzo mnie zabolęła, bowiem Trójka to było właściwie jedyne radio, którego byłem w stanie słuchać spokojnie i bez jakiegos tam większego stresu.

Są jednak od tej reguły wyjątki. Zalicza się do nich Marcin Seweryn:

Ja nigdy nie byłem słuchaczem radiowej Trójki. Ja byłem tam na kilku koncertach, ja o radiowej Trójce wiem, znam historię *Listy Przebojów*, natomiast nigdy nie byłem takim słuchaczem radia, że koniecznie muszę jakichś konkretnych audycji posłuchać. Trójka też nie była moim pierwszym wyborem, jeśli chodzi o radio. Sytuację Trójki znam z mediów, o panu Rosiaku też dużo słyszałem i gdzieś było zawsze moim celem, żeby być uczestnikiem *Raportu o stanie świata*, jeszcze w wydaniu trójkowym, natomiast nie jestem gotowy, żeby skonsumować media w starej formie.

Respondenci planują dalej współtworzyć społeczność patronów, umożliwiając dalsze prowadzenie działalności, zgodnie z zasadą opisaną przez Martina Spinello i Lance'a Danna jako *freemium model*. Mimo że podstawowy przekaz jest dostępny dla każdego za darmo, znajdują się chętni, by dołączyć do grona patronów podcastu i korzystać z szerszego spektrum usług i benefitów z tym związanych, w tym nieformalnych, takich jak duma z tego, że mogą przyczynić się do istnienia tej wartościowej produkcji medialnej. Można wręcz odnieść wrażenie, że część patronów, np. Maciej Adamczyk, ma do podcastu i jego autorów wręcz osobisty stosunek: „Rzeczywiście związuję się z tymi autorami [...] Zbliża się człowiek do tych nadawców. Zamierzam dalej wspierać podcast. Od razu zapłaciłem za cały rok z góry, a gdyby była opcja zapłaty za pięć lat z góry, to też bym to zrobił”.

Jest jeszcze jeden aspekt wpływający na pozytywną ocenę *Raportu* przez patronów – fakt, że w pewnym sensie czują się docenieni przez twórcę. Jak zauważa Tomasz Gąsecki: „Bardzo mi się podoba to, że ciągle jest odniesienie, że audycja powstaje we współpracy [z patronami] czy dzięki patronom. To, że pan Rosiak za każdym razem o tym przypomina, uważam, że jest fair. Wydaje mi się, że ta współpraca jest ok”.

Podsumowanie

Internet jest szybkim i niezwykle zasobnym źródłem. Mnogość danych jest zapewne atutem, jednak pobieżna ich konsumpcja nie sprzyja refleksji, głębszemu zrozumieniu. W tym kontekście *Raport o stanie świata* – podcast intelektualny, edukacyjny, na co wskazują respondenci, staje się miejscem atrakcyjnym poznawczo. Poznanie, kategoria epistemologiczna, jest tu istotnym motywem poszukiwania określonych treści i można odnieść wrażenie, że jest to bodziec, będący emblematyczną cechą słuchaczy *Raportu*. Formuła stałego towarzyszenia, czyli stanie się patronem, z uwagi na jakość przekazu, wydaje się w tym miejscu walorem. To zaangażowanie i inny rodzaj percepcji treści należą zresztą do cech wyróżniających podcasty (Spinelli, Dann 2019). Owa wypracowana relacja w wypadku *Raportu* ma określony charakter i swojego rodzaju subtelność. Jest to naturalnie także forma pewnej zależności między autorem i odbiorcą, wpisująca się w technologię *push-pull*. Unikatowa społeczność, stworzona

przez twórców i zorganizowanych słuchaczy, sprzyja budowaniu relacji i mieści się w ponadczasowym stwierdzeniu, iż: „Dziennikarstwo to jedna z najbardziej zbiorowych profesji na świecie, jako że bez innych nie możemy nic zdziałać” (Kapuściński 2013: 21).

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SPIS WYWIADÓW PRZEPROWADZONYCH W TRAKCIE BADAŃ

- Konrad Adamczyk, wywiad przeprowadzony przez Piotra Kaźmierczaka, 10 czerwca 2021 r.
- Tomasz Gąsecki, wywiad przeprowadzony przez Magdalenę Szydłowską, 8 czerwca 2021 r.
- Justyna Nestorowicz-Wyborska, wywiad przeprowadzony przez Paulinę Szczepańską, 16 czerwca 2021 r.
- Maciej Seweryn, wywiad przeprowadzony przez Urszulę Doliwę, 16 czerwca 2021 r.

ROZMOWY I ESEJE

ESSAYS AND CONVERSATIONS

Contemporary Folklore and Podcast Culture: Towards Democratization of Knowledge and Re-Oralization of Culture. A Conversation between Ceallaigh S. MacCath-Moran and Aldona Kobus

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CEALLAIGH S. MACCATH-MORAN is a PhD candidate in the Folklore Department at Memorial University of Newfoundland, a writer, a poet and a musician. Ceallaigh's research interests include animal rights activism as a public performance of ethical belief, which is the topic of her dissertation, and creative applications of folkloristic scholarship for storytellers. Her *Folklore & Fiction* podcast, "where folklore scholarship meets storytelling craft", launched in 2021.

KEYWORDS: podcasting; folklore; contemporary folklore; oral culture; aural culture

AK: What is *Folklore & Fiction* about?

CM: The purpose of the podcast originally was, and continues to be, bringing good folklore scholarship to people who are writers, storytellers and creators of various kinds. I thought this would be a really good opportunity to explain, as a folklorist, what a myth is, what a legend is, what a tall tale is, what a fairy tale is. Give it some folkloristic context, talk about what scholars have had to say. There is plenty of useful research for writers in narrative scholarship. I was a writer first and then a scholar: when I started school in 2016, I had already been writing and publishing for about 14 years, and I had put aside my writing career and gone back to school for my doctorate. So I wanted to help creators to write myths that sound like myths, legends that sound like legends. These old patterns resonate with us because we have heard them over and over again already in various versions. I believe as a writer that taking these patterns, the bones of a story, and putting them into something new, perhaps very different or alien, can make your writing more approachable for readers.

Because when you are giving readers something they encountered before, they may not know why they feel so comfortable in the story already and you can use these folk narrative patterns to express something new without alienating the audience.

AK: What compelled you to start a podcast?

CM: Back in 2016 it just sort of ruminated around in the back of my head, because, as you well know, as a graduate student, you have no time for anything but your studies. And then in 2018 I also went to a writer's conference called *When Words Collide* in Calgary. I talked with some friends about this, asked for their opinions. I got wonderful advice from them. And so in January 2019, I started it as a blog series. For two years I wrote on folklore genres: on myths, legends, tall tales, fairy tales, but also personal experience, narratives, memorates. I talked about performance theory and conspiracy theories. And after two years, I thought, well, I need to do more with this. I have this little sound studio; I'm going to start podcasting. My blog was quite academic. The podcast is more approachable, I think, because my numbers went up with the change of the form. I had nearly 2000 listens last year, and I'm almost at that now, in March. I wanted to reach more people. And, as my husband said, people like podcasts. I try not to make my register too high, and I try not to speak in academese all the time.

AK: But you did your first year of podcasting on Aarne-Thompson-Uther-Index which is one of those field-specific things where if you're not really part of the field you won't know about it.

CM: From my experience a lot of writers are using the *ATU Index* in science fiction and fantasy anyway, some have written stories specifically based on the *ATU*. This year, my second year of podcasting, I'm working from various motif indexes: Thompson's *The Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, *Motif Index of the Child Corpus*, which is for Child ballads, various other indexes which get right down at the motif level, which is a favorite place for me to be as a writer because you can take those motifs and do anything with them, even something incredibly strange. Frankly, I'm doing it because those books are really hard to get hold of, especially if you are not an academic. It's not a matter of approachability but accessibility. I would like to break that barrier of knowledge between academic and non-academic. In the podcast, when I cite the motif, I give you a full number and the name of the motif; I bring those citations right into the podcast so you would know what you are working with. It democratizes the knowledge.

AK: Podcast seems to be a democratic form because it is easy to start one and put it out there for people to listen to.

CM: It's easy to start a podcast but it's difficult to do it well. My podcast takes place in a soundproofed room, I have a mike and a sound kit, and I'm very careful about sound quality production. My partner does all the post-production on it, adding music, bringing it all together. There are technical production steps in the process of making a podcast if you want to do it well. I care if I produce something that is listenable. And it depends on what kind of podcast you want to have. You can just talk into microphone with all the background noises, but I personally like more produced sound. I am also a singer; I use the same setup to produce music, so I'm very sensitive of how I sound. Also my podcast is read. I write and read the transcript, which comes from me starting as a blogger. I still want to give people the information they came for.

AK: Popularization of an academic knowledge is always at the crossroads between approachability and accuracy. What is your experience with it?

CM: I needed to make a decision about what sort of podcast I wanted to produce. Even my own niche – folklore podcasting – is a wide, receptive and often competitive market. There are podcasts made by non-academics for non-academics, talking about folklore tales, beautiful illustrations in folklore books, ghost stories etc., and I think there is a place for that. There are people who love a sort of traditional, vernacular understanding of folklore, and podcasting provides it for them. I struggle with that, because the most popular podcasts, the most appealing ones, are made in those terms of vernacular approach to folklore. But then I hear from people like you, who recommended my podcast to their students, who are using it in their research, and I know I do a good job within my field. I've gotten requests from teachers, musicians, and writers to cover specific topics. At the same time I feel like I don't fit into the fully developed, popular, vernacular folklore podcast culture which is weird because I am a folklorist. Or maybe it is because of it. One of the most popular definitions of folklore comes from Dan Ben-Amos: "folklore is artistic communication in small groups". Vernacular understanding of folklore sees it as something static, as an object, and so do most podcasters within folklore podcasting. A story, an old piece of lore is an object for them, to be presented and analyzed as an artifact from the past. It was very common during 18th and 19th Century when folklorists were doing what we call today "saved from the fire" folklore: the conviction that the old stories are dying, the people who know old tales are going to die so we have to collect everything quickly or it will be lost forever. There is this sense of folklore as fixed, static. But I was taught very differently: to see folklore as a communicative process and as a process of performance, as an interaction. In this way you are always looking for what is in motion, what is changing, for nuances. However, vernacular ideas of folklore are comforting; they look at the past, they're nostalgic. It comes back to the idea of "authentic folklore" popularized in contemporary consciousness.

AK: So what people expect from a folklore podcast is another discussion of Grimm's tales.

CM: Exactly. And I contributed to this to some extent by focusing on traditional narratives for the first year in *Fiction & Folklore*. I try to avoid framing said narratives as "old stories". I try to bring up the examples, mostly from the public domain but also from TV series and contemporary novels, of the modern use of folk narratives. This is also why I sing so much in the podcast. If there is a ballad I am talking about, I am going to sing it because this is how it should be experienced but also for copyright reasons, which is one of many elements that you have to take to consideration during the production of a podcast.

AK: A lot of folklore-as-communicative-process is happening now on Internet as it is the main medium of communication: memes, urban legends, creepypastas, and documentation of urban exploration, dark tourism and fan practices as cosplay and fan works. Most of these practices are our way of storytelling: to communicate our understanding of world and our place on it. Internet has emphasized our need for storytelling and podcasts are just the next form of satisfying this need. Do you think that popularity of podcasts marks the comeback of oral culture?

CM: Yes, but I don't think it is going back; it is going forward. Oral culture becomes literary, at least within folklore, by writing down a few versions out of hundreds of variations. For instance, *The Maid Freed from the Gallows* – Francis James Child wrote 11 variations of it in his *Child Ballad Index*. He created an official record by omitting most of the folklore practice surrounding this ballad. And in a literary culture we have the tendency to see everything written down as more valid than the orality that preceded it. Now we see the second part of this cultural process that started in 18th Century. From literalization of oral culture we are going into re-oralization of literature. So now when I want to introduce to the podcast *Child Ballad No. 10 The Twa Sisters*, which I did in Episode 4, I can change it. I can subvert it. The recorded version always vexed me. In my version, instead of one sister pushing the other to her death, they push the boy off the cliff together (and this version will be included on my EP album, coming soon). It is a good example of re-oralization. We can see it also with folk performers today who are not afraid anymore to change and subvert recorded folk songs.

AK: The structure and formality of the academic text is a way of legitimizing the knowledge we produce but it also excludes everyone without a proper training within the field. With the rapid changes in the media landscape we should at least try to adapt other forms than text – video, podcast etc. – as learning tools. Podcast is not so far from a lecture. But also new media could be incorporated

as a device for conducting analyses. It is not only easier but also more efficient to use video to analyze a movie and a podcast to analyze folklore, especially in the vernacular sense of it, or the storytelling.

CM: How wonderful it would be if universities paid and provided for those academics who want to podcast! And how useful! I am developing teaching material with *Folklore & Fiction*, there are webinars, and I will write book on folklore topics for writers. Every episode requires research.

AK: But so far your podcast is a time-consuming hobby, unrecognized by academia because of its extremely narrow and outdated sense of what is a proper way of producing and distributing knowledge. Meanwhile people are already using various social media – Youtube, TikTok etc. – as learning devices and we are staying behind. For universities social media are tools of promotion and information, not teaching. There is suspicion and reluctance toward new media and alternative forms of teaching and I think is partially because text is seen as objective and impersonal while podcast is immediate and personal. With podcast and video essay you cannot hide behind the wall of written words.

CM: The voice conveys emotion; you emphasize or deemphasize. In a podcast, this makes a difference in the way someone is receiving what you are saying. Podcasts are quite intimate and immersive. It is a different experience from a voice actor who was hired to read a novel, so there are two narrative consciousnesses happening there: of the author and of the actor. But with a podcast it is often one narrative consciousness. If the podcaster is also a reader and a producer you can feel that, as an audience, you are closer to the person. I have written a short science fiction story titled “For Want of an Ash Fall” about archive recordings of letters – the archivist or the collector was writing letters and people would write him back, contributing to the archive – about global tragedy. I love writing in this form because it is immediate. You have to remember to write in the voice of person who is speaking at a given moment.

AK: “The voice of the character” is what you have, as an audience, in the very immediate way in the podcast. It that sense podcasting is taking some aspects of literature – like polyphony – to the next level. At the same time the phenomenon of popularity of podcasts marks a cultural shift away from “the Gutenberg Galaxy” to re-orality in culture.

CM: Not only podcasts but audio books as well. I have had for almost 20 years now a subscription to an audio book service, and I listen to audio books constantly. I listen to podcasts from time to time. I am not an avid podcast listener, but when I do, I also listen to stories. There are several science fiction magazines – “Beneath Ceaseless Skies”, “Clarkesworld Magazine”, “Lightspeed” – that

have podcasts where they read the stories from the magazine. Besides interview podcasts, I don't think there is a big difference between listening to an audio book and listening to a podcast. So the re-oralization of culture started before the emergence of podcast culture. Maybe the pandemic made it more visible: not only that podcast culture is a fully shaped phenomenon but also the basic human need to listen to someone's voice, to tell and to listen to a story.

AK: What is your experience of podcasting after almost two years of doing it?

CM: I'm better at it now, and I still enjoy doing it. However, the work is time-consuming, and my efforts to earn an income from it have been modest at best. It occurs to me that digital content is popularly seen as a sort of extension of the Internet itself; a perpetually free resource. But it isn't. Podcasting costs the podcaster first; in time, expertise, and equipment. It should cost the listener as well, but it often doesn't because the paradigm of digital content creation favours the consumer and not the creator. Indeed, this paradigm also holds for writers, musicians, and other artists, whose ability to earn an income has plummeted in the face of ebook piracy, digital music streaming services, and the like. There is a separation of interests here that doesn't exist in electrical repair and grocery shopping; I wouldn't ask an electrician to repair my wiring for free and only pay him if I felt so inclined, nor would I pirate chocolate from a grocery store. The same should hold true for those of us who create digital art and scholarship, but I'm not certain how to help that cultural shift along without losing my audience.

AK: Is podcasting a way of communication? Does it create a community or is it a solitary experience?

CM: I think this depends on how it's advertised. A podcast by itself can be a solitary endeavor, but sharing that podcast online invites interaction and communication. Sometimes that communication is satisfying, and other times it's frustrating! Does podcasting create community? Well, I do have a Facebook group associated with my podcast, and there are several people who post somewhat regularly to it, so my group could be called a community of sorts. But that's the extent of the communication and community I've experienced. I've seen larger communities around more vernacular, non-academic folklore podcasts. They appeal to a larger crowd with different needs, while my work is more narrow in scope and appeals to learners and teachers. So I think the issues of communication and community may be contextual and related to content and popularity.

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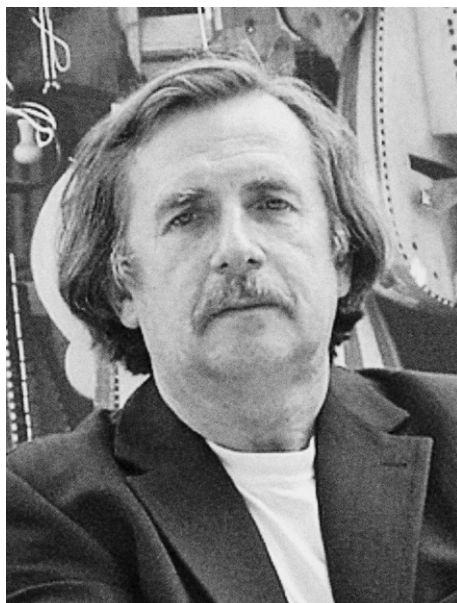
Sofia Josypowna Hryca. Zamiast nekrologu

Sofia Josypowna Hryca: Instead of an Obituary

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Sofia Josypowna Hryca.
Fot. Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine



Mychajło Chaj.
Fot. Narodowa Akademia Muzyczna we Lwowie

OD REDAKCJI: To osobiste, emocjonalne i nawiązujące do aktualnych wydarzeń wojennych wspomnienie o znakomitej ukraińskiej folklorystce i etnomuzykolożce, Sofii Josypownie Hrycy, ma wyjątkowy charakter. Zupełnie nieoczekiwanie stało się ono bowiem jednym z ostatnich tekstów autora, który zmarł 15 października 2022 r., a więc publikujemy je również jako jego pożegnanie. Mychajło Chaj był muzykologiem i wybitnym znawcą ukraińskich tradycji lirniczych, autorem wielu publikacji na ten temat, w tym monografii *Mykoła Budnyk i kobzarstwo* (Lwów 2015). Pracował jako profesor w Instytucie Historii Sztuki, Folklorystyki i Etnologii im. Maksyma Rylskiego Narodowej Akademii Nauk Ukrainy. Był także praktykującym lirnikiem – koncertował, nagrywał płyty, miał olbrzymi wkład w odrodzenie się w Ukrainie środowisk lirniczych i kobzarskich. Angażował się również w ukraiński ruch niepodległościowy; w roku 2014 występował na kijowskim Majdanie w czasie antyrosyjskiego powstania.

Są straty nagłe, nieuniknione, są straty przypadkowe, są też takie, które można później zrekompensować materialnie lub moralnie, są wreszcie straty, których nikt nigdy w żaden sposób nie naprawi... Jest to utrata najdroższej i najbliższej ci Osoby, która poświęciła się bez reszty całemu naszemu środowisku, zmieniając przy tym wszystko w sposób fundamentalny i niepowtarzalny. A jeśli mówimy o Człowieku bezgranicznie oddanym nauce i pracy, w którego działaniach paradygmaty nie przysłaniały badanego zjawiska, a wręcz przeciwnie, zbliżały do Prawdy Boskiej i naukowej – poczucie straty staje się trudne do zaakceptowania i rzeczywiście nieodwracalne... Taka była i na zawsze pozostanie w pamięci wszystkich, którzy ją znali, czytali jej książki, mieli szczęście jej słuchać i rozmawiać z nią, Sofia Josypowna Hryca, która nie powróci już i nie oświeci nas ponownie tym niewiarygodnym, wcześniej nie widzianym Światłem.

Sofia Josypowna miała trudne (również zawodowo), ale na swój sposób szczęśliwe życie, które na wskroś wypełnione było pasją do ukochanego przedmiotu badań i refleksji naukowej, czyli folkloru muzycznego i jego bodajże najbardziej złożonej formy, jaką stanowi epika pieśniowa. Jednakże w żaden sposób nie można dziś powiedzieć, że jej fundamentalny wkład w naukę został w pełni rozumiany i należycie doceniony przez nas – niewdzięcznych uczniów. W jej nekrologu napisano:

Jej serce nie wytrzymało największej tragedii narodu, tak doświadczonego przez cierpienie, ukochanego przez Nią ponad wszystko, którego tradycyjnej kulturze muzycznej poświęciła się bez reszty. Brutalna wojna wywołana przez najbardziej podstępного okupanta z Moskwy – tyrana ludzkości i całego cywilizowanego świata – wyrwała z ładu światopoglądowego ludzkości jedno z najdoskonalszych ogniw naszego rozwoju społecznego i egzystencji [...] – Sofię Josypowną Hrycę.

Ochronić ten ład i sam tryb rozumowania ludzkości przed dominacją formalistów, ludzi zawistnych i miernych, będzie teraz o wiele trudniej.

Uczeń Sofii Hrycy, prof. Anatolij Iwanickij, w poświęconej jej publikacji bibliograficznej pisał tak: „Każdy, kto przyszedł na ten świat, przybył z tajną misją. Ale nie bez powodu Bóg dał nam wolną wolę. Nikt nie zna swego przeznaczenia, ale On dał nam wybór – wybór należy do nas. Możemy nie wiedzieć, jakie jest nasze przeznaczenie, ale refleksja duchowa – kto jest do niej zdolny – wskaże myślącym drogę do wieczności i godności” (Ivanyts’kyy 2002: 3). Wydaje się, że nasza Wielka i Droga Nauczycielka, podążając za autorem tej maksymy, nie tylko była zdolna do wspomnianej refleksji duchowej, ale także całkiem świadomie, przez całe swoje życie i drogę zawodową, realizowała „tajną misję” powierzoną jej przez Boga. Niestety ze względów zdrowotnych Iwanickij nie mógł sfinalizować prac nad biografią swej nauczycielki, a zatem sporządzenie nie tyle „portretu”, ile pełnowymiarowej monografii oraz dogłębne zrozumienie terenowego, analitycznego i publicystycznego dorobku tej wybitnej Osoby, spoczywa na nas, uczniach i kontynuatorach jej badań.

Myślę, że jest to dobry moment, aby opowiedzieć, jak zostałem uczniem Sofii Josypowny Hrycy. W 1977 r. po nieudanej próbie dostania się na studia doktoranckie do Instytutu Historii Sztuki, Folklorystyki i Etnologii w Narodowej Akademii Nauk Ukrainy los zaprowadził mnie (dzięki staraniom Hrygorija Sztonia, przyjaciela z czasów studenckich w Drohobyczu, który w tym czasie pracował już w Instytucie Literatury im. Tarasa Szewczenki) do Iwana Liaszenki – kierownika tamtejszej katedry o dziwacznej nazwie, która od razu zapadła mi w pamięć, była to bowiem Katedra Teorii Rozwoju Artystycznego Mas w Dobie Rozwiniętego Socjalizmu. Iwan Fiodorowicz pierwotnie zamierzał zrobić ze mnie socjologa **muzycznego (socjologia radziecka jako pseudonaukowa dziedzina „epoki rozwiniętego socjalizmu” przenikała wszystkie gałęzie humanistyki i traktowano ją z wielkim „szacunkiem”)**, ale po krótkiej wymianie zdań ze mną i Hrygorijem Sztoniem stwierdził: „Socjologa z ciebie nie będzie – powinieneś pójść do Hrycy”. Kiedy wyraziłem obawę, czy Hryca się zgodzi, uderzył pięścią w stół i odpowiedział: „A od czego ja tu jestem?”. Tak wyglądało brzemienne w skutki spotkanie z człowiekiem, który przyjął mnie bez większego entuzjazmu, ale zrobił dla mnie więcej niż wszystkie konserwatoria i studia podyplomowe razem wzięte (Markovych 2019: 86–87).

Wspominam o tym nieprzypadkowo, ponieważ Hryca musiała niejednokrotnie wypełniać różne dyrektywy kierownictwa, spotykała się z niezrozumieniem swoich prawdziwych kwalifikacji zawodowych, a także nieuważnością, a nawet niewdzięcznością studentów. Chyba tylko sam jeden Bóg wie, ile musiała włożyć wysiłku, żeby zmienić standardy naukowe, wprowadzić nowe terminy (np. „paradygmat pieśniowy”, „modus intonacyjnego myślenia”), a także żeby unikać obowiązkowych w tamtych czasach dla każdej publikacji odniesień do „klasyków marksizmu-leninizmu” oraz zrealizować ideę Gabinetu Etnografii Muzycznej. Ta ostatnia inicjatywa była pomysłem Klymenta Kwitki; Gabinet został wprawdzie otwarty w 1922 r. za czasów hetmana Pawła Skoropadskiego, ale zamknięto go w koszmarnym 1937 r., a wznowienie jego działalności nastąpiło dopiero w 2009 r. pod kierownictwem Sofii Hrycy, która wymyśliła dla niego nazwę Katedra Etnomuzykologii.

Jak zauważa Anatolij Iwanickij,

rozmyślenia o niesprawiedliwości społecznej skłoniły Sofię Hrycę do kontynuacji badań w tej dziedzinie nawet w czasach sowieckich. Ponieważ nie można było wówczas postawić problemu tak bezpośrednio, zaszyfrowano go w ramach socjologicznych badań folkloru środowiskowego społeczności skupionych wokół wielkich propagandowych budowli socjalizmu. W 1975 r. wyruszyła ekspedycja do elektrowni atomowej w Czarnobylu, w 1977 r. do hydroelektrowni w Bursztynie i Nowodniestrowsku, a w 1983 r. ponownie do Czarnobyla. Według kwestionariuszy opracowanych przez Sofię Hrycę przeprowadzono wywiady z ponad 300 mieszkańcami i ludnością napływową” (Ivanyts’kyy 2002: 9).

Jako uczestnikowi ostatniej czarnobylskiej ekspedycji przypadła mi w udziale trzydniowa misja biegania po piętrach wieżowców z tendencyjnie opracowanymi ankietami i dosłownie błaganie wszystkich o „niezbędne” informacje. Rozumiejąc całą dwuznaczność sytuacji, niektórzy pobłażliwie, a niektórzy z nieukrywaną ironią, udzielali odpowiedzi na pytania zawarte w tym absurdalnym kwestionariuszu. A tymczasem Sofia Josypowna nie przeprowadzała wywiadów, lecz w okolicznych wsiach nagrywała pieśni lokalnej ludności na nowiutki japoński dyktafon stereofoniczny, pożyczony jej właśnie przez jakiegoś dobroczyńcę (później w hotelu zachwycała się jakością dźwięku stereofonicznego). W ramach rekompensaty za wielogodzinne rozmowy z mieszkańcami wieżowców pozwolono mi zostać na kolejne dwa dni, żeby odszukać skrzypków i innych instrumentalistów. Ponieważ nasze badania, oprócz odnalezienia klubowego muzykanta harmonisty, nie przyniosły niczego więcej, musieliśmy nagrać w całości przebieg ceremonii ślubnej we wsi Rzeczycza i przekazać nagrania właścicielowi wspomnianego dyktafonu. Ten epizod to tylko jeden z przykładów tego, w jakich warunkach musieliśmy wtedy pracować, każdego dnia zmagając się z niezrozumieniem ludzi, reprezentujących inne stanowiska metodologiczne.

W środowisku etnomuzykologów – od Lwowa po Charków, Petersburg, Moskwę i Warszawę – krążyły legendy o niezwykłych wymaganiach Sofii Hrycy. W istocie prawdziwą „szkołę” dostawali tylko ci, którzy wytrwali do końca, natomiast liczba tych, którym się to nie udało, prawdopodobnie wielokrotnie przewyższała liczbę „szczęśliwców”. Oto przykład z mojego „szczęśliwego” doświadczenia.

Trzeba uczciwie powiedzieć, że przez ponad połowę z 12 lat mojego stażu badawczego w zespole Hrycy, urodzona we Lwowie nauczycielka patrzyła na mnie czysto po lwowsku, czyli jak na „małe piwo”. Na zajęciach „leciały wióry” i nie było żadnych słów zachęty. Pracowałem wtedy usilnie nad sporządzeniem suplementu nutowego do większej monografii i dopiero gdzieś na szóstym roku studiów, kiedy wszedłem do wspomnianej wcześniej Katedry Teorii Rozwoju Artystycznego Mas, i po przywitaniu się bez słów rzuciłem na stół wypełniony

drobnym pismem muzycznym i uporządkowany pod względem gatunkowym suplement, sytuacja moja nieco się zmieniła. Sofia Josypowna, ironicznie uśmiechając się do swoich kolegów, którzy byli oszołomieni takim wybuchem „małego piwa”, spokojnie wzięła notatki i zaczęła je przeglądać. Przerzucała zapis nutowy to do tyłu, to do przodu, sprawdzała „uchem wewnętrznym” podstawowe próbki modeli paradygmatycznych i gdzieś po 20 minutach powiedziała: „No, teraz może coś z tego wyjdzie”. Wszyscy obecni odetchnęli z ulgą. Później były jeszcze całe „walizki” zapisanych małymi formułkami „paradygmatycznych labiryntów” i nie mniej skomplikowana praca nad ich uogólnieniem oraz ustalanie inwariantów i wyciąganie wniosków końcowych.

Po obronie pracy doktorskiej moje konsultacje z Sofią Josypowną odbywały się już niemal na „równych zasadach” i dotyczyły wspólnych artykułów, zbiorów etnoinstrumentoznawczych, ekspedycji terenowych, nagrań w radiu Żłote Klucze, doboru zespołów na konkursy folklorystyczne itp. Ale wciąż daleko było do uznania mnie za folklorystę teoretyka. Za każdym razem, kiedy wypadało coś omówić, Sofia Hryca zaczynała snuć opowieść o tym, jak poznała w Truskawcu lirnika, który pod rzeźbą Matki Boskiej w sposób natchniony i zaskakująco „autentyczny” wykonał *Lament niewolnika* z repertuaru Iwana Skubija (połtawskiego lirnika) w zapisie Fiłareta Kolessy. I za każdym razem jej entuzjazm nie miał granic. Trwało to do momentu, aż moja cierpliwość w końcu się wyczerpała i po kolejnym podobnym przedstawieniu wyrzuciłem z siebie: „Sofio Josypowno, przepraszam, ale jeśli nie ma Pani nic do powiedzenia o mnie jako folklorystcie, to trudno, ale proszę, nigdy więcej nie mówić o tym, jakim to ja jestem wspaniałym lirnikiem!”.

Sofia Josypowna Hryca miała jeszcze jedną ważną cechę charakteru, która stała się szczególnie zauważalna w ostatnich latach, w naszym mrocznym i niesprawiedliwym świecie, a mianowicie bezkompromisowość. Pod koniec lat 90. XX w. Fundacja Fulbrighta podjęła starania o przejęcie digitalizowanych ukraińskich kolekcji fonograficznych, w tym bezcennych zbiorów naszego Instytutu Historii Sztuki, Folklorystyki i Etnologii. Sofia Josypowna, która niezwykle rzadko podnosiła głos, zareagowała wtedy bardzo zdecydowanie i krzyknęła zdenerwowana: „Jak oni sobie to wyobrażają? Ktoś ciężko pracował w tak niewiarygodnie trudnych warunkach, a oni chcą to wszystko przywłaszczyć sobie ot tak, hurtowo? Nie ma mowy!”.

Sofia Josypowna – jak wspomniałem – urodziła się i wychowała we Lwowie, jednak miejscowi folklorysty odrzucili jej nowatorski i niezrozumiały dla nich paradygmat badawczy oraz fascynację globalnymi problemami światowej myśli folklorystycznej. Mimo to przez całe życie gromadziła w swoim prywatnym archiwum przede wszystkim materiał pieśniowy z regionu karpackiego, którego organiczności i głębi intonacyjnej nie zdołał pojąć żaden ze współczesnych folklorystów, poza Fiłaretem Kolessą. Istniała obawa, że ten unikalny materiał, który nie został zdigitalizowany ani nawet umieszczony w zasobach archiwalnych Narodowej Akademii Nauk Ukrainy, może zostać pominięty w procesie badawczym i nie zwrócić niczyjej uwagi albo wręcz ulec zniszczeniu w świecie

wstrząśanym tragicznymi wydarzeniami. Zwłaszcza że w ciągu ostatnich trzech lat życia Sofia Hryca była uwięziona w swoim mieszkaniu na czwartym piętrze, na które nie były już w stanie wejść jej nogi, wspinające się niegdyś po zboczach Karpat. Wreszcie jednak doczekała dnia, kiedy – dzięki pomocy wieloletniej asystentki Walentyny Mykołajewny Ponomarenko – w niesamowicie trudnych warunkach materialnych i organizacyjnych jej wyjątkowa kolekcja ujrzała światło dzienne i została opublikowana w książce zatytułowanej *Nieobrzędowy folklor zachodnich regionów Ukrainy. Antologia regionalno-gatunkowa* (Hrytsa 2020). Pisząc recenzję tej publikacji, podkreślałem, że „znajdujemy w niej podsumowanie całego okresu działalności ekspedycyjnej i naukowo-teoretycznej jednej z najbardziej znaczących postaci światowej myśli etnomuzykologicznej i kobzaroznawczej, założycielki nowej [...] paradygmatycznej metody badania typologii strukturalnej ukraińskiej muzyki tradycyjnej” (Khay, w druku).

Sofia Josypowna Hryca do końca swoich dni zachowała jasny i żywy umysł. Jeszcze 13 października 2021 r. wygłosiła online referat pt. „Paradygmatyczny model badania folkloru” na I Międzynarodowym Kongresie Kobzaroznawców i Etnoinstrumentologów, który odbył się w zbombardowanym obecnie Irpieniu. Weszła w 90 rok swojego życia, po czym trzeciego dnia tzw. wojny na wielką skalę jej dusza odeszła do wieczności.

Przełożyła Iwona Rzepnikowska

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RECENZJE I OMÓWIENIA
REVIEWS AND DISCUSSIONS

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Wszyscy czasem *idiotkujemy*. O terapeutycznym wymiarze podcastu

We All Do as Idiots Sometimes: On the Therapeutic Dimension of a Podcast

Recenzja podcastu:

Joanna Okuniewska, *Ja i moje przyjaciółki idiotki*,

Spotify, 19 lutego 2019 – 28 kwietnia 2022

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Motyw miłości i budowania relacji intymnych między ludźmi obecny jest w każdej znanej nam dziedzinie sztuki i nauki. Na przełomie wieków definicja miłości zmieniała się wielokrotnie, lecz na temat „fenomenu historyczno-społecznego, z aparatem kulturowych technik, służących do standaryzowania intymnych relacji” (Bieńko 2017: 51) wylano morze atramentu. Pozornie wydawać by się mogło, że jest to materia dogłębnie opisana i przeanalizowana, a każda próba rzucenia nowego światła na romantyczne więzi międzyludzkie już na początku skazana jest na porażkę i nałożenie na autora etykiety dystrybutora spowszedniałych refleksji. Wyprowadzenie oryginalnych wniosków z rozważań o miłości jest bez wątpienia trudnym zadaniem, ale jak się okazuje – możliwym. Idealnym tego przykładem jest podcast zatytułowany *Ja i moje przyjaciółki idiotki* Joanny Okuniewskiej.

Seria została zapoczątkowana 19 lutego 2019 r., kiedy to w serwisie Spotify pojawił się pierwszy, niespełna sześciominutowy odcinek, z informacją, kim w założeniu autorki jest tytułowa idiotka oraz „dlaczego wszystkie jesteśmy dumnymi idiotkami” (Okuniewska 2019–2022). Oficjalny opis podcastu, zamieszczony wraz z opublikowanymi odcinkami, brzmi: „Złamane serca, miłosne rozczarowania i historie bez happy endu. Czyli historie Twoje i innych mądrych dziewczyn, które miały odwagę się głupio zakochać, a teraz umieją się z tego śmiać” (Okuniewska 2019–2022).

Nie sposób nie zauważyć, że Okuniewska w podcaście odnalazła miejsce na osobiste przemyślenia dotyczące miłosnych rozterek. Podstawą początkowych odcinków były doświadczenia autorki i jej najbliższych znajomych dotyczące nieudanych randek lub związków, w których to bohaterowie „dawali się robić”¹. Szybko jednak okazało się, że wiele osób utożsamia się z Joanną i jej miłosnymi perypetiami. Twórczyni umożliwiła zabranie głosu i opowiedzenie własnej historii swoim słuchaczom oraz słuchaczkom. Liczne opowieści, które fani nadesłali do podcasterki za pośrednictwem portalu Instagram oraz adresu mailowego, stały się swoistą bazą danych i punktem odniesienia dla autorskich teorii. Tym sposobem *Ja i moje przyjaciółki idiotki* stały się zbiorem humorystycznych anegdot, przestroóg i pomysłów, które każdy z odbiorców i odbiorczyń może dowolnie przyswajać i interpretować. Podcast skupia się więc na praktycznych doświadczeniach w relacjach intymnych i romantycznych, nie oferuje zatem ich wyidealizowanej lub udratycznionej wizji, typowej dla kultury popularnej.

Warto podkreślić, że Okuniewska nie jest ekspertką w dziedzinie psychologii, socjologii czy psychiatrii. Część odcinków powstała we współpracy ze specjalistami i specjalistkami, m.in. z Centrum Praw Kobiet czy przytaczanym w odcinkach psychoterapeutą Tedem². Autorka wielokrotnie zaznacza w swoich nagraniach, że treści, które przekazuje, nie mają charakteru diagnozy ani nawet rady – wszystko jest wyłącznie luźną myślą, która wybrzmiewa jak podczas przyjacielskiej rozmowy przy kawie. Mając to na uwadze, można zadać sobie pytanie, po co właściwie powstał tego typu podcast, w którym to w niezobowiązujący sposób mówi się o sprawach zgoła oczywistych, czyli o miłości, i to zdecydowanie częściej o jej cieniach niż blaskach.

Odpowiedź wydaje się prosta – chodzi o wiedzę i sposób jej przekazywania. Poszczególne odcinki podcastu mają tytuły sugerujące pewien rodzaj klasyfikacji osób ze względu na zachowania w związku bądź cechy charakteru, m.in. typ zapominalski, oznaczający osobę, która gubi się w swoich opowieściach,

1 Sformułowanie „dawanie się robić” po raz pierwszy pojawiło się w drugim odcinku serii, zatytułowanym *O dawaniu się robić*, opublikowanym w serwisie Spotify 19 lutego 2019 r. Określenie to odnosi się do zachowań w związkach, w których jedna osoba manipuluje drugą, wywołując u niej m.in. poczucie winy lub przekonanie o niewystarczającym zaangażowaniu emocjonalnym. Celem manipulatora/manipulatorki w założeniu twórczyni jest wymuszenie na partnerze/partnerce przywiązania i pełnego zaufania, którego rezultatem jest usprawiedliwianie nieuczciwego postępowania manipulatora/manipulatorki.

2 Imię fikcyjne.

nieuczciwie prowadząc co najmniej dwie relacje jednocześnie, lub typ krokodyl, który „ma za krótkie łapki do pracy, ale wielką paszczę do jedzenia” (Okuniewska 2019–2022), co właściwie jest opisem „leni i finansowych pijawek” (Okuniewska 2019–2022). Nie są to terminy naukowe, jednak bez wątpienia mogą pomóc w zrozumieniu pewnych problemów psychologicznych i behawioralnych. Rezultatem takiego przedsięwzięcia jest zjawisko identyfikacji znanych słuchaczom i słuchaczkom postaw, z którymi mogli spotkać się w swoim życiu prywatnym, jednak nie potrafili ich nazwać, a przede wszystkim nie mieli narzędzi, które umożliwiały im przepracowanie przykrych wydarzeń i relacji.

W przypadku serii *Ja i moje przyjaciółki idiotki* instrumentem umożliwiającym poradzenie sobie z traumatycznymi przeżyciami stał się humor. Wielu badaczy już dawno zauważyło, że komizm jest nie tylko mechanizmem obronnym, ale także elementem łączącym ludzi, którzy znaleźli się w podobnej sytuacji bądź mają zbliżone doświadczenie życiowe (Rusek 2012: 124–125). Nie sposób pominąć tego, że żartobliwa forma komentarza autorki wobec przytaczanych historii przepełniona jest wyrozumiałością oraz szacunkiem wobec bohaterów, a mottem podcastu jest zdanie „każdy może idiotkować, z kim chce” (Okuniewska 2019–2022). Recenzje użytkowników i użytkowniczek zamieszczone w serwisie internetowym Chartable (b.d.), służącym do analizy zasięgu podcastów, zawierają treści świadczące o uniwersalności treści podcastu Joanny Okuniewskiej – przytaczane historie są pomocne niezależnie od płci osób słuchających. Bez wątpienia Joanna Okuniewska jawi się w tym przypadku jako świadoma twórczyni, która prócz rozrywkowego chce nadać swojemu podcastowi także wymiar edukacyjny, postulując równość, solidarność i empatię.

Za sukcesem serii *Ja i moje przyjaciółki idiotki*, uwidaczniającym się w rozpoznawalności twórczyni³, tysiącach odsłuchów jej podcastu⁴ i trwającym procesie przełożenia serii na serial (Kołodziej 2022), nie stoi szereg kampanii reklamowych, medialne wsparcie czy korzystne znajomości. Elementami, które zapewniły powodzenie autorce, są: autentyczność, brak stawiania się w pozycji ekspertki, skracanie dystansu między nią a słuchaczami i nieocenione poczucie humoru, które pozwoliło tysiącom odbiorców i odbiorczyń utożsamić się z poszczególnymi opowieściami, a co najważniejsze – zdystansować się do sytuacji, w której się znajdują lub znajdowali/znajdowały, zyskują bowiem świadomość, że nie są jedynymi osobami dotkniętymi niefortunną relacją z drugim człowiekiem.

Terapeutyczny wydźwięk serii Okuniewskiej, który opiera się na budowaniu poczucia bezpieczeństwa i zrozumienia, można porównać ze znaczeniem bajek terapeutycznych w procesie rozwoju dzieci. Bajki terapeutyczne są skierowane do dzieci, które samodzielnie mogą pracować nad zrozumieniem własnej sytuacji, emocji czy sposobów działania, utożsamiając się z bohaterem opowieści, który pozwala im zdystansować się do własnych przeżyć i doświadczeń (Molicka 2002: 18).

3 Profil Joanny Okuniewskiej *Tu Okuniewska* na platformie Facebook ma 66 tysięcy obserwujących, natomiast w serwisie Instagram ponad 231 tysięcy obserwujących (dane z września 2022 r.).

4 W serwisie Chartable w sierpniu 2022 r. seria Joanny Okuniewskiej plasowała się na 24 miejscu wśród liczącego 200 miejsc rankingu najczęściej odsłuchiwanym podcastów w Polsce.

Poczucie solidarności, jakie wytworzyło się wśród społeczności słuchaczy i słuchaczek, jest w tym przypadku wartością naddaną twórczości Joanny Okuniewskiej, ale z pewnością można uznać je za element nadający podcastowi rozrywkowemu dodatkowych walorów. Grono głosów identyfikujących się z serią *Ja i moje przyjaciółki idiotki* bezustannie się powiększa, tworząc pewien rodzaj terapii grupowej, gdzie nikt nie jest ekspertem, wszyscy są równi i nikt nie jest oceniany. Mimo że opis podcastu w serwisie Spotify stale mówi tylko o odbiorczyńach, wśród „idiotkowej społeczności” swoje miejsce może znaleźć każdy⁵.

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5 Recenzje w serwisie Chartable pisane są z perspektywy osób różnych płci.



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