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INSIGHTS INTO PODCASTS AS PUBLIC PERSUASION

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PODCAST RHETORICS

INSIGHTS INTO PODCASTS AS PUBLIC PERSUASION

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

Asserting that professional podcasts serve as an important platform for arguments regarding issues of public importance, *Podcast Rhetorics* advances rhetoric and writing studies scholarship by moving beyond the dominant focus on the medium's utility for multimodal composition pedagogy to address podcasting's rhetorical dimensions outside the classroom. Seeking an overarching theory of podcasts as public persuasion, I identify technology, sound, and conversation as the medium's central rhetorical components. Drawing on philosophy of technology, rhetorical sound studies, and theories of demagoguery and circulation, I analyze these elements as they function in a variety of popular podcasting platforms, shows, and episodes, including content that grapples with the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic. In shaping how podcasts are regulated, recorded, produced, delivered, received, organized, promoted, played, discussed, and monetized, technology, I argue, may be unmatched as a prevailing rhetorical force on the medium. Listening multimodally for both affect and argument, I find sound contributes structure as well evidence, builds persuasive immersion, and guides a listener's relationship to rhetorical content in highly produced podcasts, potentially impacting audiences' points of view on public issues. As with other elements of podcast rhetoric, conversation can both support and undermine democracy—deliberative-style conversation foregrounds complexity, while demagogic conversation flattens complex public issues into simplistic narratives of right and wrong that appeal to audiences' preexisting beliefs.

Podcast Rhetorics

Insights into Podcasts as Public Persuasion

Chapter 1: The Argument for Rhetorically Analyzing Podcasts

> **Marc Maron:** The next time you hear me, I'll be talking to the President of the United States [*chuckles*] in my garage! It's crazy! It's crazy! Alright, I'm about to cry.
>
> [*recording of Maron playing guitar*]
>
> **Barack Obama:** Am I in the orange chair?
>
> —audio from "Episode 613 – President Barack Obama" of the *WTF with Marc Maron* podcast, released June 22, 2015

I. INTRODUCTION

Before podcasting obtained its recognizable technological characteristics—and, shortly thereafter, its name—Boston-based public radio host Christopher Lydon and producer Mary McGrath partnered with the Berkman Center for Internet & Technology at Harvard University in 2003 to improve "public conversation" through the internet (Locke).

Lydon and McGrath had reasons, both personal and visionary, to turn to the internet over traditional public radio to create their ideal form of public address. In 2001, the pair was suspended with paid leave and then let go from WBUR because they tried to negotiate in their contract for "an ownership stake" in "The Connection," a call-in radio program that Lydon had hosted since 1994 and on which McGrath served as senior-producer, after NPR picked up the show's syndication at the beginning of the year (Siegel; Kahn; Jurkowitz). In addition to the fresh sting of being fired while still ascending to new heights of success and national recognition, Lydon and McGrath felt that contemporaneous news media, including public radio, was restrictive and lacked appropriate guidance. Specifically, Lydon thought that "public conversation" had degraded as traditional news media rushed to cover the lead-up to the U.S.

invasion of Iraq (Locke). In "The First Podcast: An Oral History" for *Wired* in 2017, Lydon reflected, "The conventional stewards of public conversation were asleep, and the country was unbelievably uninformed. I was dying to say something" (Locke). Likewise, McGrath "thought that the internet could erase the limitations of radio. The online format we imagined could be honest and frank, and it didn't have to have that kind of false balance that so much media had been encumbered by" (Locke).

These notions of podcasting as an alternative to mainstream media have carried through. In a 2015 interview for the *Los Angeles Times* about actor, comedian, and former radio host Marc Maron's recently recorded, and at the time yet to be released conversation with then President of the United States Barack Obama, Maron asserted that the medium of podcasts "offers an alternative space for people to express themselves on these mics outside of the corporate paradigm" (qtd. in Kaufman). Maron's comment about the medium's "alternative" status might be initially met with skepticism—he did interview a sitting president, after all—but compared to the interviews and appearances a president might make on national television, sitting down for *only* one podcast seems less mainstream, especially considering the interview's location: the podcaster's garage. Maron's comment speaks to the fringe identity many podcasters assume as a badge of honor, rhetors who claim as their audience selections of those on the margins, even when such audiences disenchanted with more traditional public news radio may number in the millions. When comedian and podcast host Joe Rogan agreed to a $100 million multiyear deal with Spotify for exclusive rights to his *Joe Rogan Experience* (*JRE*) podcast, he assured fans the show would keep its alternative identity (Koetsier). To do otherwise would probably devalue JRE in the minds of fans who crave the often controversial "freethinking" conversation that occurs on the podcast (Peters; Quah).

Podcasting began nobly as an intervention in public conversation, a democratic, less centralized technology that could, perhaps, argue for a better world. And yet, in podcasting's beginnings, we can also see the medium's possible weakness. In serving as a rhetorical platform for those "dying to say something" sans "false balance," podcasted arguments might also cause public harm through the spread of misinformation, poor reasoning, lies by omission, or other lapses. The more popular podcasting becomes as an alternative to mainstream entertainment and news like streaming "television" programs and broadcast radio, the greater this potential for podcasts to influence public conversation.

In *Podcast Rhetorics: Insights into Podcasts as Public Persuasion*, I analyze three related dimensions of podcast rhetoric—technological rhetoric, sound arguments, and conversational demagoguery and deliberation—in order to lay the groundwork for a general theory of podcasting. In contrast to most rhetoric and writing studies (RWS) work on podcasts that focuses on a single aspect of the medium (and is usually pedagogical), this dissertation argues that podcasts can only be understood through an ecological approach that encompasses the medium, supporting technologies, and content, linking questions such as:

- How do the technologies of podcasting shape podcasting as a platform for public-facing discourse, and in what ways do commercial and other contextual forces influence podcasting's most influential rhetors and their arguments?
- How do sounds—those of human vocality (speech, singing, yelling, grunting, laughing, tone, crying, and all other modes of vocal expression), as well as music, ambient and environmental noise, and audio samples—and sonic composing choices and techniques synergize with language to form holistic audio arguments in podcasts?

- What persuasive moves do podcasters make through long-form conversations to argue their reliability to audiences?

Addressing these questions, I contend, offers important insights into a relevant rhetorical medium, one that has, thus far, been incorporated into rhetoric and writing studies (RWS) pedagogy yet largely been ignored as a form of public persuasion in RWS scholarship.

Throughout the rest of this introductory chapter, I'll expand on my argument that podcasts *should* be studied rhetorically. First, I define what podcasts are, both in terms of existing scholarship as well as my own, more rhetorical definition. Next, I examine the exigence for studying podcasts in RWS in the form of calls for scholarship on sound. I then offer my own arguments regarding why RWS scholars should study podcasts. Finally, I end with a more detailed look at the rest of the chapters in the dissertation, particularly how they approach podcast rhetorical analysis in relation to three discrete yet related subject areas: technology, sound arguments, and conversational/episodic persuasion.

As a whole, the introductory chapter you're currently reading argues *why* podcasts should be analyzed rhetorically. My argument hinges on how other scholars and I define podcasts, which situates the medium as a site of rhetorical activity.

II. RHETORICALLY DEFINING PODCASTS

Scholarly Definitions of Podcasts in Rhetoric and Writing Studies

In RWS, not all scholarship on podcasts defines the medium, particularly as podcasts become even more mainstream in popular culture. Scholarship that does define podcasts, however, reach a level of specificity and technical exactness that is vital to rhetorically analyzing podcasts on a variety of levels, particularly on the level of technology. Below, I consider how Steven Krause (2006); Doug Dangler, Ben McCorkle, and Tim Barrow (2007); and Jennifer

Bowie (2012) define podcasts, with Krause's definition serving as the foundation. I use Krause, Dangler et. Al, and Bowie's definitions because, in addition to helping us understand how podcasts function technologically, they also argue that the technological functions of podcasting affect how the media functions rhetorically.

In 2006, just two years after the coining of the word "podcast," Krause, with his *Computers and Composition Online* webtext "Broadcast Composition: Using Audio Files and Podcasts in an Online Writing Course," supplied the first scholarly definition of podcasting in RWS. In his article, which argues that using teacher-made podcasts to deliver content in online writing courses can help students engage with course readings and connect with instructors and fellow students more than written lectures,[1] Krause does more than just define the medium. In fact, he argues against the accuracy of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) definition[2] and even against "the obvious connection between the words 'podcast' and 'iPod,'" which incorrectly suggest that users need a portable digital music player with onboard memory like an iPod to listen to the media, and that podcasts are basically 1:1 remediations of talk or dramatic radio. Here, Krause demonstrates plenty of forward thinking: today, far more people listen to podcasts on smartphones, computers, and smart speakers than on iPods. Contemporary podcasts are, in fact, quite different from radio, not just in alternative content but also as multimodal productions tied to websites and social media, as well as the occasional video or live stream. Krause argues podcasts are downloadable files—ranging from simple audio to more audio-based files "enhanced with images and video"—that are distinct from other audio-inclusive media files published on the Internet in that they are enabled with a syndication technology that allows users

[1] Krause also admits that having students "post audio files or publish podcasts of their own" would probably be "the best way to develop community between students," but decided against that approach because of technological constraints at the time.

[2] Krause cites the following definition: "a digital recording of a radio broadcast or similar programme, made available on the Internet for downloading to a personal audio player."

to automatically receive updates, much as subscribing to print magazines results in them being delivered to your mailbox on a regular basis. He also identifies and explains the technology making podcast subscription possible. "The technology that allows for this syndication or 'feed,'" he writes, "is called RSS, an abbreviation for 'Really Simple Syndication.'" He gives examples of sites that use it, including "CNN, The New York Times, and USA Today," and how audiences often use "an Aggregator or 'Reader'—to read the information broadcast by the feed." Remarkably, Krause even provides instructions for how readers can set up their own RSS feed and submit their podcasts directly to iTunes (now Apple Podcasts). Krause's arguments that audio, downloadability, and internet-based subscription are podcasts' defining features—they are what distinguish podcasting from broadcast (AM/FM), satellite, and streaming radio—rhetorically connects podcast content with technological features. The subscribable nature of podcasts perfectly suits online learning, ensuring course content arrives almost effortlessly to student devices after initial subscription. Krause's definition shows that in practice, the common denominator between podcasts is the technology they share, a technology that *could* support Lydon and McGrath's desires for a more informed public, but that does not *have* to.

In 2007, with "Expanding Composition Audiences with Podcasting," another *Computers and Composition Online* webtext, Dangler et al. built on Krause's definition by highlighting the connection between podcast content and audiences. Looking beyond just students and teaching, Dangler et al. "contend that by conceptualizing the world of composition studies as a network of several sites[3] made of distinct audiences, we can imagine more innovative uses for podcasting" than audio lectures. Because series can be subscribed to, they assert, "the podcast model of data delivery creates a particular assumption for an audience—namely, the expectation for regularly

[3] These sites include "classroom audiences," "writing center audiences," and "professional audiences" [specifically "the professional composition conference"].

updated, topic-consistent content." By mentioning audience, perhaps the most important consideration for rhetoric, the trio demonstrates the possible relationship between podcasting's technological features and persuasion. Dangler et al. define podcasting in terms of content: "Podcast topics typically include entertainment, religion, politics, and any other subject on which a podcaster, the producer of a podcast, has an opinion. Such content is similar to that of weblogs (blogs)."[4] Aside from pointing out the limitless possibilities for niche podcast content with the connection to blogs and the authors' own narrow focus on composition audiences in particular—not to mention also inadvertently arguing that podcasts mainly feature the human voice—Dangler et al. also tie podcasts to arguments and persuasion with the word "opinion." According to the definition Dangler et al. supply, podcast content is not just a topic, but a topic that a podcaster "has an opinion" about. While left unsaid here, presumably, a podcaster discussing a topic that they have an opinion about will make arguments detailing that opinion. Since opinions express a subjective point-of-view on a topic rather than an objective observation of reality (if such a thing is possible), a podcaster's opinion may or may not be in service of what others might deem public good. So, while a podcaster's opinion may be "honest and frank," as Lydon and McGrath envisioned, and free of "false balance," it may be harmful to society, perhaps even more so. Discussions of discourse on internet-based communication platforms often assume that malicious opinions will be leveled out by some "larger conversation," but the *idea* of a larger conversation where many different ideas interact in a back-and-forth dialectic is itself a myth. Users typically seek out content that aligns with their worldview and interests, and if content does not align with their expectations about either worldview or interests, they have no reason to continue listening.

[4] Dave Winer, one of the co-creators of podcasting because of his role in updating RSS, specifically wanted to develop audio blogs: "my idea was that we could do blogging with our voice"; in fact, podcasts were originally "called audio blogs" (Locke).

Bowie's definition of podcasting, the last we'll cover here, appears in her 2012 *Kairos* webtext, "Rhetorical Roots and Media Future: How Podcasting Fits into the Computers and Writing Classroom" and is most notable for discussing the rhetorical dimensions of how podcast playback technology impacts content delivery and reception. Her article serves as one of two companion articles—the other being "Podcasts in a Writing Class? Considering the Possibilities"—and examines how podcasts—primarily audio podcasts, but also "sometimes video podcasts"—relate to and transform the classical canons of invention, considerations of "audience, tone, purpose, and context," as well as how the skills developed composing podcasts may transfer to "print text writing." Bowie focuses on two different types of what she calls "classroom podcasts": "student-produced," podcasts made by students for classroom assignments, and "teacher-produced," which are podcasts teachers make for their students. Discussing podcasting "backronym[s],[5]" Bowie cites a source asserting that one of the most accurate is "**P**ersonal **O**n-**D**emand narrow**cast**ing" (as opposed to "**P**ersonal **O**n-**D**emand broad**cast**ing") (emphasis in original). "Narrowcasting," Bowie relays, "is a more accurate term as it refers to distributing content to a select, narrow audience, whereas broadcasting refers to delivering content to a wide audience, such as everyone who receives the TV or radio signal."[6] In addition, Bowie identifies "the time- and location-shifted aspects of" podcasts as important for audience. While Krause and Dangler et al. also mention this feature ("downloadable" and playable offline cover it), Bowie is more specific: "People may listen anytime, anywhere—they are not chained to a specific time or place. Since many podcasts may be listened to on Mp3

[5] A "backronym" occurs when a word that already exists, e.g., "podcast," is turned into an acronym by associating letters of the term with another word. In the case of podcasts, the example backronyms above help define the media by its technological function(s), which is likely why Bowie spells them out.

[6] While Bowie does not say so, this distinction between broadcasting and narrowcasting is important for the study of professional podcasts and the technology of podcasting because, we'll see in the second chapter, it determines how podcasts are federally regulated in the U.S., ultimately making podcasters freer to express themselves than radio hosts overall.

players or cell phones, there are increased opportunities to listen wherever." Bowie hints that users might listen to podcasts in chunks, making them great for educating "nontraditional students who may have additional time constraints." Narrowcasting and portable, time-shifted listening are two of the most significant technological affordances of podcasts as a rhetorical medium. Narrowcasting allows for specific topic selection in audiences, rather than broadcast audio that must appeal to a mass public audience. This doesn't mean the audience will be small—as we'll see with discussions of the "long tail market" of the internet in Chapter 2—but rather that the audience will be particularly engaged with the subject matter and/or point of view of the podcast/er.

This high level of engagement has major rhetorical implications. Consider, as an extreme example of highly specific narrowcasting, students in a single composition course for which a teacher makes a podcast. Those listeners are likely to be influenced by this podcasted material because it is directly relevant to them as students. A professional podcast won't have such a limited audience and scope, but it may still nevertheless possess an audience already primed to share or support the perspective and arguments communicated by the show, since those audiences opted in as listeners. Meanwhile, the portable nature of podcast playback all but ensures such audiences have an opportunity to listen—in full, since they control playback start to finish—at whatever time or location is convenient to them.

Altogether, Krause, Dangler et al., and Bowie provide a highly serviceable definition of podcasting as a subscribable, downloadable, audio-based form of Internet media that, when stored, can be played offline; such files are typically part of an episodic series or show, and podcast can refer to an individual episode and/or a complete show. Through them, we get a sense of how podcasts are different from radio, their obvious counterpart. But much in the same way as

Krause offered adjustments to the *OED* definition of podcasts, my own definition focuses on some of the finer points to foreground a holistic rhetoric of podcasting that hinges on the persuasive choices podcasts uniquely afford as a technological medium enshrining human voice. First, however, I make clear what I mean by "podcast" as well as clean up some of the murkiness of what counts as a podcast, since many shows are now being released as both broadcast radio programs *and* podcasts, a relatively recent development over the last few years as podcasts continue to generate more and more advertising dollars.

How I Define Podcasts for Rhetorical Analysis

Podcasts are a low-cost, sound-based, subscribable, downloadable, internet native medium—a technology—whose primary content is audio of the human voice. When I say "podcast," the term can refer to an episode, a series, or both. If a show is released as a podcast in any form, I consider it to be a podcast, at least for the episodes are subscribable and downloadable. At the same time, such a show can have multiple identities, depending on technological constraints and platforms. Consider the podcast *On Being with Krista Tippett*. If we look at the *On Being* website, we'll see that it calls itself both a "radio show and podcast." The site includes metrics related to both: "*On Being with Krista Tippett* airs on more than 400 public radio stations across the U.S. and is distributed by PRX, the Public Radio Exchange. The podcast has been played/downloaded more than 200 million times" ("On Being"). In other words, *On Being* is *both* a podcast and a radio show. This dual-nature is important rhetorically because the radio show version of *On Being* delivers content differently than the podcast form, as the former is tune-in only and interrupted by commercial breaks, while the latter offers on-demand listening and a more seamless listening experience for audiences. But my conception of "podcast" encompasses more than just subscribable, downloadable audio files; it also includes

the people making podcasts and the technologies that make their production and promotion possible. “Podcasters” refers to the people involved in podcasting, although typically, the term refers to the host rather than the producer or production team if the host isn’t also solely responsible for production. Closely related to podcasts and podcasters, the term “podcasting” means making a podcast as well as, in my definition, the entire realm of production, content, and associated history, technology, criticism, fandom, and related commerce. Podcast rhetoric involves all three: *podcasts* as episodes/series, *podcasters* as hosts and others involved in production, and *podcasting* as all associated technologies and media. In short, my definition of podcasting includes not only the communication medium, but also an ecosystem of interrelated technologies, rhetors, and commercial interests that in total comprise text, author, and context. My expansive definition of podcasting is strategic because *all* these aspects shape the rhetoric of a particular episode and/or series.

Connecting podcasters and podcasting to my definition of podcasts is important because doing so opens more than just audio and video podcast files for analysis and allows us to consider the technological and multimodal ecosystems supporting podcast rhetoric, including host and show social media accounts as well as show and parent media company websites. Such podcasting nodes often perform important rhetorical functions by promoting a show or host’s ethos, addressing misinformation, and furthering a position on a topic of public importance. In addition, the technologies that make podcasting possible ought to be discussed in relation to podcast rhetoric because of the rhetorical choices they provide, as I’ll demonstrate in the next chapter. Podcasts themselves are rarely just subscribable, downloadable audio files. As we’ll see in the next chapter, podcasting directories—platforms like Apple Podcast and Spotify that index podcasts and allow them to be searched, subscribed to, and organized, among other things—

require more than just audio. As a result, podcasts typically contain visual images in the form of logos (not *logos*, but that too) and episode art, series and episode descriptions in alphabetic text, and a title, as well as media like release dates and overall rating on the platform. Such technologies are neither neutral nor benevolent. "The crucial weakness of the conventional idea" that technologies possess a neutral moral standing, writes philosopher of technology Langdon Winner, "is that it disregards the many ways in which technologies provide structure for human activity" (6). Such structure is often problematic. "[I]n America," Cynthia Selfe observes, "technology supports social divisions along race, class, and gender" (*Technology* xxi). If we ignored the technologies that make podcasts possible, we might remain ignorant to how the medium itself possesses and argues particular values in addition to shaping podcasting content.

Finally, my definition offers an additional key point, one implied but left unspoken in the scholarship we've considered thus far: the primary content for podcasts is the human voice. For all the possibilities podcasts offer in terms of material, sound, and other media, from the start of podcasting to our current moment in U.S. culture, the *sound* of human vocality (speech, singing, yelling, grunting, laughing, tone, crying, and all other modes of vocal expression) is and remains the main **content** for podcasts. With podcasts, human voice is central—it's the primary mode of expression, and it's the focus, the centerpiece. That's not to say that other modes don't matter, as they absolutely do, just that without vocality, podcasts become something else, even if they possess all the other technological features we've noted up to this point. I wouldn't consider any of the files Bowie mentions as a podcast—".pdfs, .docs, .ppt, .rtfs .pdfs, doc files, PowerPoints, rich text files . . . and more"—if audible human vocals aren't primary. For the moment, at least, the term "podcast" is inextricably tied to human sounds, and I don't foresee that changing anytime soon. Yet, scholarship often ignores the affective qualities of sound, preferring to focus

on sound as mere text, as language stripped of vocality. “To ignore affect, however,” communication studies scholar Greg Goodale argues, “is to ignore rhetorical force” (3). The sophist Gorgias was more direct about the affective power of the human voice: “The effect of speech upon the condition of the soul is comparable to the power of drugs over the nature of bodies” (Sprague 53). Even if Gorgias also refers to the general argument communicated through speech, there’s little reason to think that the sound of language is not part of speech’s impact on listeners.

III. A CALL FOR PODCAST SCHOLARSHIP

> *My ultimate goal in exploring aurality as a case in point is not to make an either /or argument*—not *to suggest that we pay attention to aurality* rather than *to writing. Instead, I suggest we need to pay attention to* both *writing* and *aurality,* and *other composing modalities, as well. I hope to encourage teachers to develop an increasingly thoughtful understanding of a whole range of modalities and semiotic resources in their assignments and then to provide students the opportunities of developing expertise with* all available means *of persuasion and expression, so that they can function as literate citizens in a world where communications cross geopolitical, cultural, and linguistic borders and are enriched rather than diminished by semiotic dimensionality.*
>
> *—Cythia L. Selfe, “The Movement of Air, The Breath of Meaning: Aurality and Multimodal Composing” (618)*

Arguably the most significant and the most widely cited call in RWS podcast scholarship is Cynthia Selfe’s 2009 article for *College Composition and Communication*: “The Movement of

Air, the Breath of Meaning: Aurality and Multimodal Composition."[7] In "The Movement," Selfe, as seen in the call above, urges scholars to include aural composing in their pedagogy to empower students with a fuller range of "semiotic resources" that reflects their lives and communicative contexts, rather than confining their rhetorical agency within "the limits of their teacher's imaginations" (645). Selfe's call is the most significant because in addition to being widely cited (317 times[8]), it also helped legitimize sound studies work in composition and rhetoric by historicizing its practice and arguing for teachers to include more sound in their pedagogy. Providing a clear, direct call for such work, voiced by one of the most well-respected scholars of composing and composing technologies, "The Movement" influences many key works in multimodal composition, sound studies, and sonic rhetoric (Palmari; Ceraso; Jones; Comstock and Hocks; Ahren; Hawk; Anderson; Hocks and Comstock), which in turn have influenced scholarly approaches to podcasts. Selfe argues that a tradition of privileging writing above other composing modalities has left our professional practices and pedagogies deficient (617). Selfe is mainly concerned with aurality, i.e., sound, which she contends is central to students' lives (617). Selfe argues we need to add aurality to the classroom "to provide students

[7] I argue that Selfe's points in "The Movement" about the relevance of auralcy are more influential than podcast-focused pieces like Dangler et al. for several reasons. First, her call for teachers to study and teach aural modes of communication are broader than just podcasts, which are only one iteration of aural composition among many relating to speech, sound, and music (646). Second, Selfe's arguments are immaculately well-researched. Not only does she couple her call with a thorough consideration—a history—of how composition as a field has privileged print over aural composition, particularly in the nineteenth century, she also examines how "aurality has also persisted in the work of scholars who focused on the rhetorical contributions and histories of marginalized or underrepresented groups," including Jacqueline Jones Royster, Beverly Moss, Scott Lyons, Malea Powell, Anne Ruggles Gere, and Geneva Smitherman (634-635). Further, she historicizes contemporary approaches to aurality in scholarship and pedagogy, noting the connection between recent work and scholars interested in digital composing technologies. (According to *JSTOR*, Selfe's article contains an impressive 223 references.) Third, Selfe's article is traditional—it's printed in *College Composition and Communication*, a publication far more mainstream than *Computers and Composition Online* or *Kairos*, which publish webtexts and focus exclusively on digital scholarship. Selfe references sonic compositions with her "Aural Composing" subsections, but readers would have "to leave this printed text" in order to "listen" to them (619). For these three reasons, Selfe's work is more useful for scholars contending with niche research on podcasts—particularly podcast pedagogy—who may need to convince print writing-centric scholars who may be dubious of the value of studying podcasts. Selfe's work is not only a call to open up more fully RWS to aurality, it is also a strong, detailed argument for why this expansion *should* happen.

[8] According to Google Scholar, as of March 16, 2021.

the opportunities of developing expertise with *all available means* of persuasion and expression, so that they can function as literate citizens in a world where communications cross geopolitical, cultural, and linguistic borders and are enriched rather than diminished by semiotic dimensionality" (618, italics in original). By including sound, Selfe contends, we honor our students' "rhetorical sovereignty," their ability to pick meaningful and relevant forms of persuasion "for the communicative contexts within which they operate" (618).

While Selfe is focused on the classroom, it's clear she envisions her students as rhetorical citizens of a rhetorical, multimodal world where sound serves as a powerful form of persuasion. Thus, through Selfe's insistence on the importance of sound for students, we can infer that sound is rhetorically important to broader publics. Selfe's article contains many, many more aspects of aurality, but the arguments I outline above are central to podcast scholars, most of whom share her preoccupation with the classroom and sonic composing, rather than an interest in the arguments professional podcasts make to a wide audience through the medium, which I argue ought to be of chief concern.

Equally important to podcast scholars who cite "The Movement," Selfe explicitly identifies podcasts as an example of an aural composing technology, legitimizing the study of podcasts not only thanks to her status as one of the most lauded scholars of composition and composing technologies, but also because such references connect them directly to Selfe's arguments about the rhetorical importance of auralacy. Selfe references podcasts multiple times throughout her article, usually listing podcasts alongside other multimodal technologies—some aural, some not. While all these references are noteworthy for podcast scholars, perhaps the most impactful mention occurs in the opening line of the article, where Selfe includes "the podcasts [students] produce and listen to" in her description of students' "fundamentally important . . .

sonic environments" (617). The impossible to miss placement of this reference is a big deal. If the article were a newspaper, podcasts would show up as a frontpage headline. Selfe's two other body text references to podcasts are also significant; she supplies "podcasts" as one of the "emerging forms of communication in digital environments" studied by multimodal theorists (639), as well as an example of an experimental assignment topic used by "compositionists . . . that encouraged students to create meaning in and through audio compositions" (640). With these latter references, Selfe points out that podcasts have already appeared in both serious scholarship and pedagogy, communicating to the field that podcasts are already a worthwhile aural assignment option.

But I think Selfe's article is indispensable for grounding the rhetorical analysis of podcasting because she takes sound seriously as a persuasive medium. "To make our collective way with any hope for success," Selfe contends in her closing lines, "to create a different set of global and local relations than currently exists, we will need *all available means* of persuasion, all available dimensions, all available approaches, not simply those limited to the two-dimensional space of a printed page" (645, italics in original). With these few words, Selfe situates podcasts and other aural communication technologies as rhetorically fundamental to redesigning a more equitable, humane world. By referencing the available means of persuasion, Selfe bridges composition with rhetoric, ultimately suggesting that rhetoric is the prime reason for including aural composing in the classroom.

While podcast scholars have proven eager to take up Selfe's call for student production, they have largely ignored her implied argument that we ought to pay attention to—or rhetorically analyze—the sonic communication platforms shaping the public lives of our students, the technologies possessing that strange and tantalizing "semiotic dimensionality." Beginning with

Krause, whose work precedes "The Movement," podcast scholars have, with few exceptions, gravitated toward pedagogy, by far the dominant focus in RWS literature on the medium.

IV. PODCAST SCHOLARSHIP IN RHETORIC AND WRITING STUDIES

> *There has been a huge boost in scholarship on sound by authors from across the humanities and social sciences. Yet little work has been done on how to teach students to design or participate critically in sonic interactions.*
>
> *—Steph Ceraso, Sounding Composition, p. 3*

As a new media aural composing technology, podcasts and their potential for education—both in the form of student projects and instructor generated learning materials—intrigued RWS scholars almost immediately (Krause; Dangler et al.; Tremel and Jesson; Jones; Bowie). While Dangler et al. worried the medium "could be used as a technological distraction from . . . questionable teaching practices" like recorded lectures or mass-produced education for university profit, they also acknowledge the benefits podcast assignments focusing on audience and serialized delivery offer students in terms critical media literacy: "[such assignments, like "public service announcements addressing a pertinent social issue"[9]] help foster a more dynamic and less abstract model of audience that better reflects a real-world context, thereby positioning students to become critical consumers and producers of media products in the future." Note the careful wording here: "positioning . . . to become," which suggests students may *eventually* develop an ability to rhetorically analyze podcasts, but that such analysis is not part of the curriculum. Podcasts could also allow instructors to "present important materials—particularly

[9] These PSAs were intended to be short, "roughly 30 seconds to one minute in length," which makes them closer to a commercial than a podcast. But, the rhetorical nature of the PSAs, including the possibility of asking "for donations or volunteer efforts or some sort of political action" and the student's obligation to make them "clear and persuasive" demonstrates an awareness of podcasts—or at least audio—as persuasive media students should be prepared to engage with critically.

non-print materials—in an online setting" and allow students to explore composition in modes other than print, letting them "take creative risks," such as consciously adopting and performing an expert persona or "introducing, explaining, and analyzing . . . musical quotations" (Krause; Jones; Tremel and Jesson;). In fact, Leigh A. Jones argues that the "multimodal performance" inherent to student podcasts, as well as the scripting a pre-planned episode requires, supplies "a means of mending the speaking/writing division that we have instated in our pedagogical practices" (77). Bowie says similar: "podcasting may be used in classrooms to help students rethink the 'old' writing concepts we have been teaching, such as audience, tone, purpose, and context—along with the five canons—in new ways" ("Rhetorical Roots"). Scholars like Krause, Dangler et al., Jones, Bowie, and others are also quick to assert how "accessible" podcasts were for students and teachers alike, particularly as "a fairly low-cost addition to a class" (Bowie). Writing program administrators discussing the implementation of required podcast projects in first-year writing programs acknowledge the larger challenge of mandating a podcast assignment in a standard curriculum, but argue any obstacle is possible to overcome (Cushman and Kelly; Faris et al.). Tackling the issue of preparing teachers, including new graduate teaching assistants, to educate their students about a medium they themselves may be unfamiliar with, Jeremy Cushman and Shannon Kelly point out, "Teaching and learning communication practices—writing—right now just won't slow down enough for mastery or control. If it ever did." It's okay, they reason, if "'teaching' a podcast turns into 'figuring out' a podcast alongside students." Cushman and Kelly also argue that the affective qualities that make evaluating audio so difficult are actually a positive of the assignment sequence because they breathe new life into, as Selfe puts it during the pair's interview with her, "the tropes and the mechanisms of those written essays" that are so "familiar . . . they're invisible" to instructors. Overall, most RWS podcast

scholarship speak highly of the medium's creative potential (Krause; Dangler et al.; Tremel and Jesson; French and Bloom; Green; Detweiler), with some even demonstrating composing possibilities through audio-based multimodal webtexts accompanied by downloadable transcripts (Krause; Bowie; Cushman and Kelly; Lambke).

While the early narrative lauding podcasts as creative and technologically accessible occasionally includes concessions to address students who might find acquiring the appropriate technology difficult, Sean Zdenek argues convincingly that discussions of "access" in podcasting should also address disability. In "Accessible Podcasting: College Students on the Margins in the New Media Classroom," Zdenek presents a powerful critique of normative pedagogical tendencies and "ableist assumptions" and calls for "podcast-ready pedagogies that are sensitive to the needs of a diverse student body." He urges educators to "start with the body" and preface our conceptions of "web audio and video . . . on a deep awareness of the body and bodily difference." Zdenek supplies information from W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines on achieving the lowest level of acceptable compliance: "provide a written transcript for audio-only content," "provide captions for prerecorded web video," "ensure all information is keyboard accessible," and "provide audio descriptions of video content (i.e. [sic.] all visual information that is not conveyed aurally must be described in a separate, synchronized audio track or long text description for screen reader users)."

In discussing transcripts as mandatory for accessibility, Zdenek provides a new metric for accessing not only teacher- and student-produced podcasts, but also professional podcasts as well. A professional podcast with no transcript argues that it does not value disabled audiences. With his arguments about podcasts and bodies, Zdenek primes podcast scholarship for a later connection to sound studies, particularly scholarship that incorporates theories of material and

embodiment, such as Ceraso's work, which "attend[s] to the ecological relationship among sound, bodies, environments, and materials" (*Sounding* 3). However, Ceraso argues that most podcast assignments—which draw attention to "the similarities between sound and text"—ignore that "sound is also a distinct mode with distinct affordances" ("(Re)Educating" 113-114). For example, sound, as a physical wave, can be experienced by the entire body, not just the ear; thus, it is possible to see sound by how it affects other materials, such as water, and also to feel it, even when deaf (*Sounding* 9-10, 31).

Along with creativity, low technological learning curves, and production using commonplace technology, classroom-minded scholars have also lauded podcasting's connection to speech through the classical rhetorical canons of invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery (Jones; Bowie). Jones, for example, argues that performing the role of an authority in the podcasts they create, "articulat[ing] their topic aloud," and envisioning their work reaching a wider "public" than just themselves and their instructor heightens the invention taking place and helps students recognize their own burgeoning expertise (79-80). When played for other students, podcast performances also allow students podcasters "to bear witness to an audience listening to their work," which makes the connection between rhetor and audience more salient (French and Bloom). Including music also proves an interesting inventive choice for students, a choice that's also tied to arrangement and delivery, which are intermingled in podcasting (French and Bloom; Tremel and Jesson; Bowie; Lambke). Memory, Bowie argues, comes into play with both invention, (students must remember and scripting relevant examples for their podcasts) and delivery (a student might remember and discuss an unscripted example while recording their podcast). Delivery in podcasts, Bowie also notes, isn't relegated to voice and sound alone—it also extends to promotion, including websites, artwork, episode descriptions, transcripts and

social media. Curiously, Bowie thinks of podcasting style in terms of vocal elements, such as accent and diction, which I think may be too literal a translation of speech-oriented classical rhetoric. I see room for discussions of podcasting style to include non-verbal elements of invention (choice of podcasting style in terms of what sort of show the student creates), arrangement (how little or highly a podcast is edited, as well as in what ways, is a matter of style), and perhaps other canons as well. If delivery extends beyond an audio file, why not style?

Overwhelmingly, references to the classical rhetorical canons focus on pedagogy and rhetorical education. Scholars tend to use the canons to justify what students *gain* from completing a podcasting assignment, rather than turning to the canons or other rhetorical theory for the insight they might provide if used in a rhetorical *analysis* of podcasts, professional or otherwise.

The focus on not just education but production education shouldn't be too surprising. In general, pedagogy permeates podcast scholarship, serving as the main topic for just about every publication (Krause; Dangler et al.; Tremmel and Jesson; Zdenek; Jones; Bowie; French and Bloom; Green; Cushman and Kelly; Klein; Faris et al.). Exceptions to the *podcasts = pedagogy* equation are few. Detweiler writes about podcasting's creative possibilities as a partial counter to pessimistic analysis; Abigail Lambke, in one of the only rhetorically focused pieces of RWS podcast scholarship, analyzes arrangement and delivery in professional podcasting in order to update scholarly conceptions of those two canons to include digital sound; and Courtney Cox, Devon Ralson, and Charles Woods examine how podcaster Payne Lindsey, host of the true crime podcast *Up and Vanished*, contends with the ethics of enlisting audiences to assist in his amateur investigation of cold case involving a suspicious disappearance ten years prior. Of the three exceptions, only Lambke and Cox et al. study mainstream professional podcasts, and both works,

while interesting, fall short of analyzing podcasts as a site for public argument. Lambke relies on her findings about vocal presence and vocal engagement in podcasts in the *Radiotopia* podcast network to draw conclusions about how rhetorical canons are interrelated, adding sound to the conversation about how "an ecological relationship between the canons of arrangement and delivery" exists. In other words, Lambke uses podcasts to support a larger point; for her, podcasts make convenient artifacts to advance the study arrangement and delivery as rhetorical canons to include sound, but she does not examine arrangement and delivery's contribution to public argument in podcasts. On the other hand, while Cox et al., are severely constrained by the limitations of published conference proceedings, they nevertheless manage to raise interesting points about power dynamics and ethos, both of which they relate to host, audience, a supportive technological ecosystem, and advertising. Yet, their chief aim appears to be locating areas of concern for teachers who might be interested in adding true crime podcasts to their writing classrooms, without providing any arguments as to *why* teachers might want to do so in the first place.

Overall, existing RWS podcast scholarship demonstrates a narrow focus on pedagogy, with little attention paid to professional podcasts and their rhetoric. Students are taught to create podcasts, often in service of and with deference to essay writing. At the same time the medium is regarded as a sandbox for sonic play, its rhetorical impact as a unique, alternative public communication platform is ignored. Students may learn how to compose with sound more comfortably or to be better writers in general, but they are not learning how to be "literate citizens" of sonic publics and "public conversation" in podcasts. Nor, for that matter, are most scholars. Given these circumstances, we must ask, in failing to theorize the rhetoric of professional podcasts, what have we missed?

V. THE NEED TO RHETORICALLY ANALYZE PODCAST RHETORIC

> This is the product of listening to [radio host Rush] Limbaugh like he is a friend in the living room or automobile. We are susceptible to manipulation when we trust our 'friends' as we sit with family in the parlor or alone in our cars.
>
> —Greg Goodale, *Sonic Persuasion: Reading Sounds in the Recorded Age* (150)

> Podcasting was where people could use four-letter words and speak a kind of raw, angry opinion that a great mass of the population believes and wants to hear. To be yourself, to be political, to talk the way that we talked at home, in the kitchen, even in a bar . . .
>
> —Chris Lydon, "The First Podcast: An Oral History" (Locke)

Let's start with why we should rhetorically study podcasts at all. A greater number and variety of the U.S. public is listening to podcasts than ever before (Webster). When Edison Research began tracking podcasts in 2006, an estimated 22% of Americans ages 12 and older were aware of the term podcasting ("The Podcast"). By 2018, that percentage had almost tripled to 64%, or an "estimated 180 million" people living in the U.S. From 2006 to 2018, the percentage of Americans ages 12 and older who have listened to at least one podcast has skyrocketed from 11% to 44%, with roughly a quarter of the population having listened to a podcast in the last month, and 17% in the last week, according to Edison. Podcast listenership is split almost evenly among men and women (the only genders available in the survey), 52% versus 48%, respectively (Edison "The Podcast"). And while the share of audio time spent listening to podcasts (as opposed to music, radio, and other options) was only 4% in 2018 for

Americans aged 13 and over, that's still double the share from 2014. In addition, podcast audience composition almost perfectly matched the demographics of the U.S. population in 2018, whereas in 2008 white listeners comprised an oversized 73% of the total audience despite accounting for only 58% of the total population (Webster). On average, podcast listeners spend around six and a half hours listening weekly (Edison, "The Podcast"). In 2020, Edison research asserted that "over 100 million Americans" listen to podcasts each month ("The Infinite"). That's a massive audience for public conversations and argument.

Podcasts are becoming a big business, with the podcast industry garnering increased public attention and drawing traditional media companies to the fold, all of which serves to help legitimize podcasting and the arguments podcasts make in the public eye. While podcasts began on the media fringe as an outside alternative to public radio, which Lydon and McGrath felt was burdened by "false balance," they're projected to become a billion-dollar industry in 2021, more than doubling the $479 million advertisers spent on podcasts in 2018 (Reyes). Hoping to catch the wave of podcast growth as well as expand and diversify their digital footprint, traditional media companies have, in recent years, launched a variety of news podcasts, including *The New York Times* (*The Daily*), *NPR* (*Up First*), *The Wall Street Journal* (*What's News*), *The New Yorker* (*The New Yorker Radio Hour*; *Politics and More*), *The Washington Post* (*Post Reports*), *Bloomberg* (*Bloomberg Businessweek*), *ABC News* (*Today in Focus*), and *The Guardian* (*What Next*) (Peiser). Presumably, as news offerings become more and more available as subscribable podcasts, greater numbers of listeners will turn to podcasts for their daily news. In fact, Edison Research estimated that in 2020, *The New York Times* weekday news show *The Daily* had the second largest podcast audience in the U.S., behind only *JRE* ("The Top 50"). If podcast consumers trust podcast news, might they trust other information sources from the medium, or

rely on non-news podcasts, such as *JRE,* for their information? If so, there may be two general categories of podcast listener—those trusting traditional outlets like *The New York Times* and *NPR* regardless of platform, and those who trust podcasts like *JRE,* conservative news program *The Ben Shapiro Show,* or the progressive news series *Pod Save America* because they offer a rawer, more entertaining, on-demand, sonic alternative to pre-podcast brands. Who are listeners more inclined to believe, a few lines of text on a website from a new, unfamiliar journalist who is replaced with most every new article, or their trusted "friend" speaking their take on the news into your ear? While these, of course, are not the only two options, the example demonstrates how much more personal podcasts can feel to their established audiences.

Podcast journalism stars pursuing a wide range of topics are also growing the medium's reputation by receiving prestigious accolades that recognize, I argue, in part the compelling arguments podcasts make about issues of public importance. On May 4, 2020, Ira Glass announced that *This American Life*, available as both a radio program and a podcast, "won the very first Pulitzer Prize ever given to audio journalism, for 'revelatory, intimate journalism that illuminates the personal impact of the Trump Administration's 'Remain in Mexico' policy.'" That's right—a Pulitzer for *podcasting*. Podcasts have also received Peabody Awards, which Glass's announcement notes, "were established in 1940 partly because the Pulitzers wouldn't give out awards to this newfangled medium called radio." The *Serial* podcast, hosted by Sara Koenig, received a Peabody in 2014. In 2020, *Inside Radio* reports, *four* podcasts received a Peabody, representing a range of topics: "criminal justice, environmental activism, and racial justice," as well as "an in-depth series about music legend Dolly Parton" ("Four Podcasts"). One of those podcasts, *In the Dark,* hosted by Madeleine Baran, was returning for its *second* Peabody. Moreover, in 2019, In the Dark became the first podcast to receive a George Polk

Award, "[o]ne of journalism's top honors" ("First Podcast"). According to John Darnton, the curator of the Polk Awards, "the podcast, as a delivery vehicle spread over multiple episodes . . . makes listeners feel it is unfolding in real time right before their ears" (qtd. in "First Podcast"). But the podcast is not just notable for its journalistic argument that its subject, "death-row inmate Curtis Flowers" had his constitutional rights violated by a District Attorney who had in four separate trials "used all three dozen of his peremptory challenges to block African Americans as potential jurors" ("Supreme Court"). Largely because of the incredible labor of the *In the Dark* investigative team that, among mountains of other evidence, resulted in two key pieces of testimony—including a cellmate who said Flowers confessed to him and a witness who said she had seen Flowers running from the scene of the crime—being recanted, "the U.S. Supreme Court overturned [Flowers'] conviction" in 2019; in September of 2020, "[t]he Mississippi attorney general's office dismissed all charges" (Alfonsi). Along the way, *In the Dark* surpassed 42 million downloads, likely equating to *millions* of people being persuaded to think differently not only about Flowers' particular case, but also the U.S. criminal justice system and racism at large (Alfonsi). This is the type of powerful rhetorical force RWS scholars are missing when they focus solely on student production in their scholarship.

Even as these awards add to podcasting's credibility as a potential outlet for serious journalism, such credibility is always subject to change. The *New York Times,* for example, returned the Peabody its podcast *Caliphate* won in 2018 for their work trying to uncover the motivations individuals had for joining ISIS (Schneider). After conducting an "internal investigation in the veracity of the podcast," the Times decided that the interviews granted by the podcast's primary subject, Shehroze Caudhry, were likely inaccurate. If the *New York Times,* one of the most well-respected news media companies in the world, can be dazzled enough by the

promise of an entertaining story to lower its fact checking standards and present untrue information, what is preventing other podcasts from also being problematic, especially for topics that are closer to home? While retractions are common for news publications of all sorts, it is shocking for an entire series—and an award-winning one at that—to be retracted. The *Caliphate* example demonstrates that, whether accurate or inaccurate, audio, particularly longform audio, is highly convincing, even to the company bankrolling its production.

VI. Introducing Three Analytics of Podcasting: Technology, Sonic, and Conversational Rhetorics in a Public Argument Over Mask Wearing in *The Joe Rogan Experience*

To help communicate what's at stake, I provide an example below about podcasts and public argument. In my example, I also preview the three approaches I use in later chapters to rhetorically analyze podcasts, where I examine technological rhetoric, sonic rhetoric, and the rhetoric of appearing reasonable while delivering arguments through spoken conversation. The example I use—which I transcribed myself[10] to convey more than just spoken words—is from the *JRE* podcast, a long-form interview podcast hosted by comedian Joe Rogan that reaches millions of listeners a month and which often makes headlines for controversial guests and opinions (Flynn). This particular episode, which featured Rogan's friend, comedian Bill Burr, was published in mid-June 2020, at a time when the COVID-19 death toll in the U.S. had already reached well over 100 thousand (Whalen). Rogan gave his point of view unprompted, interrupting Burr, as the latter was opening up, poignantly, about how the pandemic had given him time to reflect on how the inertia of his childhood and past held so much influence over his

[10] In addition to including speaker tags and a textual representation of spoken words, my transcript also notes where speech overlaps, highlighting contentious moments as well as conversational flow, an aspect of speaking absent from traditional transcripts. Using my best judgement, I also describe the tone a speaker is using, noting if they are serious, joking, frustrated, sarcastic, and so on. Describing tone is an act of interpretation, but it is invaluable for conveying the manner of delivery and thus contextualizing what's spoken. In addition, I include non-speech verbal actions, such as laughing or making particular noises—these often indicate an interlocutor's reaction to a portion of conversation—to provide a fuller representation of the podcast as a sonic event. Finally, because JRE is a video podcast, I also note gestures when I feel they relate to what's being said or argued.

present experiences. Burr, to his credit (and later, to public acclaim), switched gears effortlessly, seamlessly transitioning from vulnerability to objections and counter arguments while roasting Rogan in the process.

The example begins with Rogan interrupting Burr with his unprompted opinion about COVID-19 in the U.S. as the guest muses about how the downtime from not performing standup comedy during the pandemic has given him time to think:

> **Burr:** [. . .] It's all—I really learned a lot more about myself during this quiet time of not running around and going to airports and kind of sitting with myself and being like well I thought I was way further down the road working on myself then I was, but I have a lot of fucking childhood issues left over [*Rogan laughs*] I gotta like—
>
> **Rogan:** Isn't that crazy? [*Overlaps with "I gotta like"*]
>
> **Burr:** Like I really started like all these puzzle pieces just started coming in, and I was able to look all the way back where I was to where, where I am now and how I got here, and these little fucking things that happen to me. You know, good things and bad that just sort of just knocked me down this road that I'm on it was—
>
> **Rogan:** Just sitting alone with alone time? [*Initial portion overlaps with "it was"*]
>
> **Burr:** Yeah, well, you know, my wife was going through, you know, the third trimester, you know when, you know when they just over it, and you're like 'Oh, god [*says "Oh, god" in a low mutter*], there's six weeks to go' [*Rogan whistles with barely stopped laughter and Burr chuckles*] 'I'm ready to have it now" [*Here, Burr imitates a distraught, crying wife*] and you're like, 'Oh, no.' Um [*Burr draws out "um" to distance next words from his joke*], you know, I finally, you know, get my daughter to bed, get her to bed, everything was good, made sure all the doors were locked, and then I was just sort of like

why—you know, all these years of doing stand-up, I'm just up at that hour—

Rogan: Right [*No overlap*].

Burr: So I was just sort of, you know, sitting kind of by myself, like I, I, I— [*Burr repeats "I" as he searches for the words to describe his thoughts*]

Rogan: I'm worried about a second wave of the corona. I'm worried about them locking things down. Someone's got to step in and stop them from doing that. Next, next wave you guys got to be proactive. You've got to do something about people's immune systems. You got to lock down old people and sick people. Let regular people do whatever the fuck they want. You can't, you can't just lock people's freedom down for something that killed a small fraction of what you thought it was gonna kill. The whole thing is… It's just fucking creepy to have guys like [City of Los Angeles] Mayor Garcetti be in charge of telling people whether or not they get to work. Like that's not what a governor's [sic.] supposed to be— [*Rogan speaks quickly (and confidently) here, leaving little space for interruption*]

As the transcript shows, Rogan's opinion, while related to the overall topic of the pandemic discussed, replaces Burr's interior contemplation with an external argument about how society should act. If we limit our initial analysis to the opening argument using a speech-to-text approach and separate it from the medium of podcasting, Rogan's take on the pandemic, while frustrating, does not appear particularly remarkable. He quickly leaps from understandable worry over the virus intensifying to concerns about restrictions on personal activities. Accepting that the virus exists (stasis of fact) and deadly (stasis of definition), his arguments are of quality (only "a small fraction" of people died from the virus) and policy (governments shouldn't regulate people's behavior *if* they're "regular" and not "old" or "sick"). Considering that over 100,000

people in the U.S. had died of coronavirus by this point, we can assume that "freedom" is a Burkean god term for Rogan representing personal mobility and individual quality of life, with the caveat that at risk populations should be restricted (299-300). This contradiction is a perfect example of a condition Chantal Mouffe terms "the democratic paradox," the reality that a democracy must house two competing "logics" that are often "incompatible" and ultimately impossible to "perfectly reconcile[e]": those of collective human rights and individual freedom (4-5). Clearly, in this instance, Rogan values individual freedom over collective rights, even if he has previously expressed support for socialist political programs like universal basic income (Andrew Yang). Rogan's comments about improving "people's immune systems" are standard for his bio-hack worldview and role as a financial stakeholder in a supplement company that has an entire line of immune system boosting supplements ("Onnit Pro"; "Immune System"). Overall, we might summarize this argument as wishful thinking (the pandemic isn't that dangerous to most people or to society) with casual disregard for at-risk populations, whose vulnerability poses an economic and routine lifestyle-denying crisis to the healthy and able.

However simple and contradictory Rogan's opening argument might seem on the surface, the technological, sonic, and conversational reliability rhetorics of podcasting equip his extemporaneous speech with the potential for devastating impact, especially when coupled with the directness of his arguments. While all three rhetorics operate simultaneously in JRE, here, for Rogan's initial argument, I'll apply the lens of technological podcast rhetoric, which can help us begin to understand why fast opinions can impact the public through the medium in general and *JRE* in particular. Later, I'll discuss sonic rhetoric and conversational reliability rhetoric together, a natural choice given that the sounds in this example inflect the words being spoken, while in other podcasts, sounds may be exogenous to the words being spoken.

Technological Rhetoric

The technology of podcasting—not just RSS but the ecosystem of related technologies, including recording equipment, social media, and playback hardware and software—allow Rogan to, with hardly a second thought, voice and live stream an off the cuff opinion to a massive audience. There are, as Lydon and McGrath wished, practically no gatekeepers preventing Rogan from speaking his opinion, and so long as Rogan does not infringe on copyright or overtly incite violence with his show, the only regulations he faces arise from the terms and conditions of whatever platform he's using or are entirely self-imposed. This lack of oversight would not be the case with broadcast or even satellite radio, which are subject to FCC regulations. Podcast technologies also allow Rogan to publish that audio pretty much *ad hoc*[11] to an even larger audience.

How large? In 2020, after only three months of exclusivity on Spotify, JRE became the streaming service's most popular audio show *in the world* for the *entire year* as well as the second most popular among U.S. based listeners, and an Edison Research survey of approximately 10,000 podcast fans asserts that JRE was the most listened to show in the U.S. of 2020 (Jarvey; "Edison Research"). As of early March, 20201, the episode being discussed, which remains available on YouTube, has over 10.75 million views—a metric that fails to capture the potentially much larger number of audio-exclusive listeners who were delivered the episode via RSS subscription (PowerfulJRE). Theoretically, Rogan could edit the show's audio and remove his outrageous statement, but such self-expurgation would be unheard of for him and JRE, and could potentially cost him money in both the short and long term through lost advertising revenue. Related to rhetoric of reliability, podcast technologies also support the show's format as

[11] In the context of live streaming, there are no edits in the sense of changes to existing content. When episodes are published the same day as podcasts, Rogan typically adds commercials and a quick introduction and conclusion to the beginning and end of his podcasts.

a longform, unedited conversation between guests, as there's no time slot the show must fit into because listening is on-demand. A longer show has many positives for listeners—more content and unprecedented access to host and guest chief among them—but it also means more opportunities for opinions and arguments free from fact-checking and scientific rigor.

What's more, data shows that podcast listeners are likely to be persuaded by podcast hosts, as least in terms of purchasing the products recommended by host-read ads. "Host-read ads" occur when the host of a show, such as Rogan, delivers the message of an ad in their own voice, often personalizing ad copy with their own words and testimonials. According to Nielsen, host-read podcast ads are "50%" more effective at persuading consumers to buy and recommend a product "when compared against non-host-read ads" ("Host-Read"). Nielsen's findings suggest that podcast listeners trust their podcast host's opinion enough to literally buy what they sell. It's quite possible that this selling power translates to podcast host influence when a trusted host voices their opinion on a topic of public importance, such as mask wearing during the coronavirus pandemic. When a podcast boasts as many listeners as JRE, that is a lot of opportunity for persuasion, including persuasion that may be voiced off the cuff.

The potential lack of rigor for an extemporaneous, conversational podcast like JRE is exacerbated by the nature of audio itself. As a flowing, linearly progressing medium, audio supports but technologically discourages rewinding and backtracking, which are disruptive to the listening experience. Unlike traditional alphabetic text, one cannot easily review audio content on an as-needed basis, especially the further playback moves from a particular moment. As a result, not only are opinions spoken quickly, they are also listened to quickly, and listeners must conduct critical analysis—if they even wish to—on the fly, moment to moment. But even as they perform such critique, new audio content arrives, making it challenging for audiences to keep up.

And that explanation does not even account for the variability of voice, which also distances listening from reading, that we'll cover as we discuss the sonic rhetoric of the medium.

In sum, a brief consideration of the technological rhetoric suggests that technology of podcasting supports and even encourages Rogan and his guests to voice unscientific opinions to large audiences, while at the same time making it difficult for those audiences to deeply consider the opinions being spoken, especially as they may already have built a trusting relationship to the podcaster.

Returning to the conversation, Burr objects to Rogan's rant. Burr interjects, cutting Rogan off twice to halt the rant, which allows Burr time to offer a gentle counter to Rogan's libertarian-based criticisms of Eric Garcetti, the mayor of Los Angeles, California:

> **Burr:** But—[*Burr's objection overlaps with the last few words Rogan says: "supposed to be"]*
>
> **Rogan:** That's not what a mayor is supposed to be—
>
> **Burr:** But they're trying [*initial part of Burr's second objection overlaps with "That's not what a mayor is supposed to be"*] to look out for your best interests and trying to get 400 million people to all pull in the same direction. It, it's fucking . . . [*Burr briefly trails off*] You can't get 40 [stand-up] comics to pull in the same direction, so like—
>
> **Rogan:** But they did. [*Overlaps with "so like"*]
>
> **Burr:** They have like an impossible [*Burr registers Rogan's objection*] Well they did and they didn't. There was people fucking right—the whole fucking time there's been fucking assholes on my street walking around no masks, you know, not quarantining like the people that come by the houses you see the fucking, you know the same people that were

> going in and out of the house who are not part of their families still going in and out of the house—

Faced with an unanticipated argument, yet clearly feeling a need to respond, likely as a matter of public good, Burr does admirable work here to refocus the conversation about public health. He points out the impossible task government officials are faced with in trying to coordinate individual behavior in response to the pandemic. When Rogan interjects, Burr provides relatable, if profanity strewn, examples: people were not following quarantining instructions. Nothing unexpected here—most of us have probably experienced similar moments of heated conversation with friends over topics we care about. Yet, what appears simple becomes more complicated when we consider this moment as a sonic podcasting event where two seasoned comedians and podcasters[12] compete for audience/public attention as well as each other's admiration and respect, a contest that becomes more apparent as the conversation continues.

Despite being able to convey something of the vocal richness of interrupted and interjecting speech, my transcript fails to capture the comedic energy and pacing of Burr's profanity laden, Boston accented reposit as an entertaining and rhetorical sonic event. In fact, Rogan's appreciation for Burr's talent for attention-grabbing, fiery responses might explain why Rogan keeps pushing Burr's buttons in the next few movements. Rogan considers Burr "a legend" for the latter's impromptu lambasting of a contentious Philly crowd of thousands over the course of 11 straight minutes, one of the most famous unscripted moments in modern standup (Tanenbaum; JRE Clips). It's possible, maybe even likely, that Rogan did not expect he had any chance to win an argument with Burr, who "knows how to rant better than anybody [Rogan]

[12] Burr is no stranger to podcast. His own show, the "Monday Morning Podcast," boasts over 850 episodes (as of mid-March, 2020) and an average rating of 4.8 starts among 27.4 thousand listeners on Apple Podcasts ("Monday"). Interestingly, Burr's podcast takes the form of an extended rant, typically with Burr as the only speaker; thus, not only is Burr an accomplished podcaster, he could quite possibly be the most successful podcast ranter.

know[s]" (JRE Clips). Yet that also does not mean Rogan does not stand by his own initial position, or that his points were ineffective, as we'll later discuss.

After Burr objects, Rogan challenges Burr to explain the latter's position on mask wearing. Here, Rogan responds to Burr's earlier observations about noticing an abundance of people without masks:

> **Rogan:** You want people to walk down the street with a mask on?
>
> **Burr:** *clicks tongue* Let's not start this, Joe.
>
> **Rogan:** Do you though?
>
> **Burr (serious):** Let's not start this. Okay?
>
> **Rogan (playful):** Let's start it.

Despite Burr's objections to continuing the conversation on the topic of masks, Rogan presses for a response. Again, I'm not convinced Rogan has any purpose in mind other than hearing Burr go off on an entertaining rant, which I hope the "(playful)" descriptor I include in the transcript conveys. His opening question, "You want people to walk down the street with a mask on," appears to be classic bait. Burr's apparent resistance, mixed with Rogan's coaxing and prodding, serves to heighten audience anticipation—how is Burr going to react? Note that Rogan is directing the flow of the conversation here, offering challenge after challenge to fence Burr in to providing the content that Rogan, as host, wants to hear.

The conversation continues with back and forth between host and guest. Burr tears into Rogan with a controlled comedic reaction:

> **Burr:** I don't want to start this *bullshit*—I'm not gonna sit here with no medical degree listening to you with no medical degree with an American flag behind you smoking a

cigar acting like we know what's up [*Rogan bursts out laughing*] better than the CDC. All I do is I listen—I watch the news once every two weeks. I'm like [*Burr imitates asking someone a question from across a room*] 'Mask or no mask? Still mask? All right, mask.' That's all I give a fuck about. I don't care.

Rogan: But even they say you shouldn't wear a mask unless you're treating a coronavirus patient. The World Health Organization literally said that—

Burr: Yeah, but they didn't say that initially, they didn't say it initially [*overlaps with "Organization literally said that"*]

Rogan: No, they didn't.

Burr: They did[n't]. And then it gradually—[*Rogan attempts to interrupt; Burr shuts him down by shouting a stream of halting interjections uninterrupted by breath:* "wait-wait-whoa!"]—then everybody wore the fucking masks! This is like rollerblading! Everybody fucking rollerbladed, and then there was that one fucking homophobic joke, and then everybody acted like they never did it.

Rogan: *bursts out laughing*

Burr: And then a hundred million fucking rollerblades got thrown into the fucking ocean. [*Rogan manages to stop laughing, gulps a breath*] We all wore masks, and all of a sudden—

Rogan (deadpan): I never rollerbladed. [*Overlaps with "all of a sudden"*]

Burr: People are fucking sitting there—[*Burr registers Rogan's joke, quickly fires off a mocking yet friendly dismissal*]—Well you don't have the body type for it, dude.

Rogan: *bursts out with full bellied laughter*

Burr: Your fucking knuckles would scrape on the ground.

Rogan: *laughter intensifies*

Burr: *chuckles* Even with that extra two inches. [*Burr pauses to let Rogan finish laughing*] I just love how wearing a mask became like this fucking like soft thing that you were doing—

A lot happens here in terms of conversational and relatability rhetoric as well as sonic rhetoric, amounting to unscripted, voiced, and conversational arguments that audiences are unlikely to encounter in any other persuasive medium. Unlike technology, sonic rhetoric and conversational rhetoric are difficult to separate in this example because the sounds present are part of the conversation, rather than additional, such as ambient sounds from a non-studio recording environment or post-production additions like thematic music; therefore, I'll discuss both throughout.

Sonic and Conversational Rhetorics

Burr, with a few skillfully delivered and timely sonic observations, immediately dismisses any pretense to either interlocutor's credibility and reliability. This move could be a helpful reminder to listeners: neither Rogan nor Burr have any expertise on the topic, and Burr's acknowledgement of this lack of credibility may make him seem *more* reliable to some listeners. More than that, Burr's observational comedy is entertaining and memorable, a joke with great "rhetorical velocity," or ability to be relevant beyond its immediate context thanks to the technological conditions of its composition and delivery, that quickly went viral in mainstream media, as we'll later see (Ridolfo and DeVoss). While Burr's point about the two not having medical degrees and smoking cigars is entertaining in writing, affectively, Burr's words, delivered with the oratorial skill of a world-famous standup comedian in his most tried and true joke format, the observational rant, pack much more punch as audio in the context of their larger

back and forth conversation. While listening and translating the affective possibilities of sound is a subjective act of sonic interpretation—the tone and vocal delivery of Burr's jokes and Rogan's arguments may produce a reaction in me that a peer might not share—scholars such as Steph Ceraso and Gregg Goodale argue that practice and "common sense" related to embodied experience within culture and habitus can help us understand not only how we are affected by sound but also how such sound may affect others (*Sounding* 45-46; 141). Strategically—and vocally—sacrificing his own credibility, Burr effectively negates all Rogan has said up to this point and beyond. After Rogan tries to interrupt, Burr uses his already raised voice to joke that men who are concerned about wearing a mask are no different from men who stopped roller blading because they were insecure about how the activity made them look. The raised voice drowns Rogan's words to preserve Burr's ability to form and vocalize his response, calls attention to the Rogan's attempted interruption, and literally amplifies Burr's following retort. Rogan manages to get a quick joke in—"I never rollerbladed"—that Burr's skill as a comedian turns into an opportunity for heightened comedy. Using Rogan's retort as a springboard, Burr ridicules the host with an *ad hominin* insult that demonstrates the pair's high level of comfort with one another. Burr knows Rogan well enough not to be intimidated by him, a rarity for many guests who do not possess a rapport with Rogan honed by years of conversation. When Burr moves to continue attacking the idea that wearing a mask is "soft," however, Rogan cannot resist prodding him further. Throughout, we also witness how Burr's witty remarks affect Rogan by the latter's laughing, a host's sonic, affective blessing that effectually christens and sanctifies Burr's words to the audience, arguing that such remarks are acceptable and appreciated within the context of the pair's conversation. We might imagine that if Burr had not delivered these insults with a joking tone, Rogan may have received them much differently and the conversation

would be in a different state altogether. Ultimately, in the movement discussed, sound signals friendly ridicule and approval, adding energy to arguments beyond what words on a page can muster and maintaining a conversational dynamic that is pleasant and entertaining enough to keep host and guest talking and listeners listening. But being entertaining in a podcast is a double-edged sword: Burr's quick wit does not manage to dissuade Rogan from the topic; in fact, such jokes appear to only encourage the host.

The final moments of conversation I have selected effectively ends the discussion of the topic. It begins when Rogan interrupts Burr with a ridiculous statement about wearing masks:

Rogan (mischievously): Yeah, it's for bitches.

Burr: Like being courteous . . . being courteous . . . Why is it "for bitches"?

Rogan (joking, manner-of-fact delivery): It just is: you're wearing a mask.

Burr (irritated): That was so stupid—

Rogan: You're wearing a mask *exaggerates a weak, wimpy cough* First of all, it's not—

Burr: Oh god, [*overlaps "it's not"*] you're *so tough* with your fucking open nose and throat.

Rogan: *laughing hysterically*

Burr: Gee, Joe. And your five o'clock shadow. *begins mocking proclamation* This is a man right here—a man doesn't wear a mask.

Rogan's interruption, intended to be comedic but also to prod, prompts Burr to ask an honest question that, in a dialectic situation, might result in a greater understanding of Rogan's claim about wearing a mask. Asking points out the weakness of Rogan's argument—while the slur "bitch" may serve as an effective taunt for men insecure about their masculine identity and

behavior, it does not relate to Rogan's early assertions about freedom or earning money. Shifting to this reasoning opens Rogan up for a variety of rebuttals, not to mention that Rogan's later inability to explain what he means ("it just is") probably makes him appear foolish to reasonable audiences open to persuasion in this moment; at the same time, audiences who like Rogan and share the host's view of masculinity[13] may in turn feel that Rogan's explanation is sufficient. Denying Burr's dialectical "why" also provides a precedent for Burr to turn the tables on Rogan and use his own argument against him. Burr attacks Rogan's explanation by mocking the ridiculousness of what the latter's reasoning implies: not wearing a mask is tough, the opposite of being a "bitch." The rhetorical genius of Burr's mockery lies in how it disassembles the holistic image of the body upon which the conceit of toughness relies by directing attention to the "open nose and throat" not wearing a mask expose. How, Burr's mockery argues, does having an "open nose and throat" make someone "tough"? Burr ends by summing up Rogan's entire argument, "a man doesn't wear a mask," further highlighting its lack of substance. And yet, given what we've established about podcast persuasion, any "lack of substance" may be a moot point.

Because podcasts are a distinct sonic communication medium relying on unique technologies for delivery and playback opportunities, and some, like Rogan's, provide unprecedented conversational persuasion, focusing on aspects of argument like scientific evidence and logical construction limits how we might understand podcasting's impact on public opinion. It is easy to poke holes in Rogan's argument, or to praise Burr's speech, once the pair's

[13] Of course, one exchange cannot capture the complexity of Rogan's personal vision of masculinity. While he may view wearing masks as unmasculine, he is often sensitive and does not shy away from discussing his emotions, even crying on occasion during his podcast. For example, in an interview with actor and director Kevin Smith, Rogan chokes and tears up as he talks about how a veterinarian, who was later "killed by a drunk driver," cried with him as Rogan's pet, a rescue puppy with distemper that caused untreatable seizures, was medically euthanized (MMA Centre). It's a moving moment—the audio of Rogan struggling to speak and master his voice as he talks about both the loss of the puppy and of his friend is difficult to listen to without experiencing a similar reaction.

conversation became “a viral sensation” (Whalen). Reporting on Burr’s exchange with Rogan, *Newsweek* falls into this trap, noting all the misinformation Rogan shares while providing accurate statistics from multiple sources to correct Rogan’s claims (Whalen). And when Rogan announced production was temporarily ceasing on JRE because producer Jamie Vernon tested positive for coronavirus in mid-October 2021, *Forbes* contributor Dani Di Placido pointed out the irony by reminding readers of Burr’s “scolding,” which Placido called “one of the most memorable moments of the podcast [series].” But statistical evidence and comeuppance snark do not undo the words Rogan spoke in his podcast, and reporters, whose words readers see but cannot hear, lack Rogan’s influence and are unlikely to reach JRE audiences concerned with appearances of masculinity—remember podcasting’s status as an alternative medium for information—or convince them that wearing masks is masculine. In fact, highlighting the dangers of coronavirus may have the opposite effect, leading such audiences to believe that not wearing a mask is even more masculine and brave, possibly even heroic, *because* of the undeniable danger. Analyzing a vocal, conversational argument between friends narrowcasted to a large, interested public audience of Rogan *fans* is no simple task. Focusing on Burr’s news-making expert rebuttal to Rogan’s arguments is satisfying but sidesteps the larger issue: podcasting’s most famous voice used his platform to voice, extemporaneously and without being prompted, a dangerous and uninformed opinion about an issue of public health (Whalen; Placido). In addition, faced with *any* other guest, especially one without expertise in disease transmission, public policy, or another subject area related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Rogan might have proved *more* convincing by traditional measurements. Regardless, he may have proved convincing anyway, no matter how *effective* Burr appeared.

Theories of public rhetoric can help us understand how Rogan's podcast, and many others, can have an impact on public opinion, even when we might look down our noses at the arguments they make. Podcasts are a form of public argument in that they provide a platform for hosts and guests discuss matters of public importance or alternatively for highly produced episodes to argue a point that in turn may shape public opinion and later deliberative events. In this way, podcasts contribute to "civil society . . . . the locus of the vast network of associations between the family and the state" that "provide the ongoing sites and opportunities for citizens to encounter the diversity of fellow citizens[14] with whom they share bonds of mutual dependency, mutual concerns, and a mutual need to cooperate for the common good" (266). Resisting notions of "deliberative democracy" rooted in the "rational choice model" and critiques of its quality regarding "political choice," rhetoricians "do not assume that political choice is always rational nor that reason alone is the litmus test for the quality of public argument" and "use a broader palate of participatory discourse than that of political actors deliberating in official sites" (Hauser and Benoit-Barne 261-262). Just because an argument appears effective does not mean it will change anybody's mind; Burr earned a lot of mainstream public support for his arguments, but to *JRE* fans, his points, while entertaining, may not have resonated like Rogan's. Rather than being deliberative in the sense of formal political events and actions, podcasts inform "vernacular rhetoric . . . an everyday form of deliberation among ordinary citizens who engage in a polyphonous conversation on issues that intersect with their lives" (Hauser 336). If a person listened to Rogan's podcast and later used points from either Rogan or Burr in a discussion about masks and the COVID-19 pandemic, that would be an example of podcasts influencing

[14] I find the diction around deliberative democracy imprecise for using "citizens," a term associated with "legal," voting members of society in the U.S., which excludes many important stakeholders in the democratic process.

vernacular rhetoric and deliberation, with podcasted arguments contributing to the rhetorical process through the canon of invention.

Given the arguments podcasters and podcasts alike are making and their implications for public rhetoric, it's about time we stopped treating podcasts as if their sole value amounts to providing yet another new way to reinvent the essay in composition classrooms.

This project, this endeavor into podcast persuasion, is not about teaching, not about the classroom. It's about *learning*. As a field, we have applied basically *none* of our collective knowledge about rhetoric and persuasion to podcasting, treating podcasts if they were a-rhetorical outside of student influence, a composition *tabula rasa* rather than millions of arguments reaching tens of millions of listeners in the U.S. alone. Meanwhile, we have Rogan, the most popular and highly compensated podcaster in the world, using his platform to argue that wearing a mask during the coronavirus pandemic is "for bitches."

In the following section, I outline my approach for studying podcasts and addressing the lack of rhetorical understanding.

VII. PROJECT OVERVIEW

In addition to this first introductory chapter and a concluding chapter, which will lay out some areas for further studying podcast rhetoric, my dissertation contains three body chapters that aim to examine podcast rhetoric from three distinct angles. First, in "The Technological Horizons of Podcast Persuasion" (second chapter), I examine the technologies that define podcasting and account for the medium's rhetorical options, the technologically available means of persuasion podcasters can choose among to build their arguments. Second, in "The Sounds of Podcast Rhetoric" (third chapter), I build a case for sound's contributions to arguments in podcasting that accounts for vocality and spoken words as well as the affective: environment,

music, and the like. Third, in "Deliberation or Demagoguery? The Rhetoric of Podcast Conversations" (fourth chapter), I study how persuasive podcast conversation can support both demagoguery and deliberation.

To get a better sense of my scholarly goals, please refer to the detailed descriptions of each chapter appearing below.

Chapter 2: The Technological Horizons of Podcast Persuasion. For a rhetoric of podcasting to be truly robust, it must recognize the combination of conditions and the means of persuasion uniquely available to podcasters and their audiences. Composition and rhetoric scholars have been quick to define podcasts as sound-based, subscribable, and downloadable audio (and sometimes video) files that allow for offline listening, but few take more than a paragraph or so to discuss the implications of podcasting technologies beyond basic comprehension and practical considerations for using podcasts in the classroom (Bowie "Podcasting" and "Rhetorical"; Cushman and Kelly; Dangler et al.; Faris et al.; French and Bloom; Green; Jones; Krause; Tremmel and Jesson). "Computer-*using* teachers, Cynthia Selfe once admonished, "enthusiastically endorse computers in their classrooms, but all too often they do not teach students how to pay critical attention to the issues generated by technology use" (23, emphasis in original). Nor, it seems, do most scholars excited by using podcasting appear to pay *any* critical attention whatsoever to the issues generated by podcasting technologies. My dissertation is not about teaching podcasts as a classroom composing technology; nevertheless, the dearth of "critical attention" paid to podcasting's technological politics signals an even larger lack: an investigation into how podcasting technologies—central to podcasting's identity as a composing medium—are themselves persuasive, at the level of initial invention and throughout a podcast's rhetorical lifespan. Rejecting intuitive, audio-centric approaches to podcast analysis,

Chapter 2 instead proposes we begin building our understanding of podcast rhetoric by analyzing the medium's foundational technologies and the arguments they both make *and* make possible.

Asking, *How do the technologies of podcasting shape podcasting as a platform for public-facing discourse, and in what ways do commercial and other contextual forces influence podcasting's most influential rhetors and their arguments*, I take a three-pronged approach to analyzing podcasting's technological rhetoric.

First, I ground my study with key theoretical insights from philosophy of technology (a subfield of philosophy that theorizes how technology impacts society), including insights from Martin Heidegger, Langdon Winner, Andrew Feenberg, and the New London Group. In doing so, I follow in the footsteps of Selfe, Anne Frances Wysocki, William Kurlinkus, and other composition and rhetoric scholars who have demonstrated the critical relevance philosophy of technology brings to the analysis of digital communication and composing platforms. As I discuss these insights, I also relate them directly to podcasting, laying the groundwork for the examples I introduce.

In the next section, I analyze the technologies supporting the recording, production, editing, organizing, delivery, promotion, and playback of podcasting, as well as several relevant contexts, including FCC and other federal regulations, copyright, and the long tail market of the internet that makes podcasting commercially viable. Rather than one main example, I use many different examples of such technologies to support my analysis. Overall, these technologies and contexts, I argue, provide the conditions and determine the available means of podcast persuasion.

Finally, I theorize my findings and introduce two new key terms for the rhetorical analysis of podcasting: *technological context* and *technological action*. *Technological context*

accounts for the larger technological rhetorical situation of podcasting. It's passive technological persuasion, the conditions of creating, sharing, promoting, receiving, playing, and discussing podcasts, but not those actions themselves. . . . In short it's the technological means of persuasion, the horizon of possibilities that generates the choices comprising rhetorical acts. *Technological action*, on the other hand, is kinetic: it is the decision to use particular technologies and the realization of their rhetorical potential through use. As a concept, it prompts us to ask important questions about how technology mediates podcasts as arguments: What do technologies make rhetorically possible for an episode, series, and/or relevant supporting media, and what is the impact of those decisions, i.e., the technological actions they implement?

Ultimately, Chapter 2 determines the fundamental nature of podcast persuasion as it relates to the medium of podcasting as a digital platform for public communication.

Chapter 3: The Sounds of Podcast Rhetoric. While technology sets the boundaries of podcast rhetoric, audio is still the primary persuasive podcasting mode. Audio, however, is not a monolith. In a podcast, audio can signal both human speech (and all of its semiotic riches of inflection and culturally significant vocal markers), music, environmental noise (the crashing of shore churning ocean surf, a honking car or goose, etc.), and even silence, the bare, quiet plains between ascending and descending sound waves, an audio file's negative space. Lands with such rich soil, however, can invite disputes regarding what sort of scholarly attention to plant. Given the variety of podcasting sounds, genres, and styles, how should we analyze podcast audio? What scholarship will offer the deepest insights into the often subtle persuasion taking place, both overt and unstated? And what artifact or artifacts would best showcase that analysis? Should we focus on music, on noise, on ambience, on juxtaposed associations, on affectation, on inflection, or on words and their arguments?

Yes.

As an information file-unified composition of sonic events, podcast episodes are a synthesis of symposium and symphony. They are music and voice, affective and transparent, subtle and unsubtle, existing moment to moment, and at the same time utterly reliant on past precedent and the gift of foresight. Analysis of podcasting, however, rarely reflects the multitudes of meaning podcasts contain. Sound studies scholars tend to focus on podcasts as just one more example among many of creative, affective compositions (Selfe "The Movement"). "Prima facie," explains Joshua Gunn, Greg Goodale, Mirko M. Hall, and Rosa A. Eberly, "the key difference between ‘‘rhetorical studies’’ and ‘‘sound studies’’ is that sound persists whether or not it has taken on meaning (i.e., whether or not the sonic has been delivered to, by, or with language). Those laboring under the aegis of sound studies do not presume the semiotic, only the affective" (476). In other words, language—the words being vocalized—are of secondary importance to sound studies. Rhetoricians, we've established, with a few exceptions (Cox et al., Klein; Lambke; Zdenek), hardly focus on podcasts at all, perhaps seeing them as among the latest offerings in a long line of disposable techno-fads hyped by particularly geeky writing program administrators. But there can, and should, be a reconciliation–analysis of podcast audio demands a holistic approach that accounts for sound's affective qualities as well as the "textual" content of speech, even when not obviously argumentative.

Chapter 3 begins that reconciliation, applying key theories regarding music (Stedman; Pattie; Rickert and Hawk), sound argument (Goodale), ambience (Rickert), multimodal listening (Ceraso), soundscapes (Rice; Ahern and Firth), embodiment (Cooper; Shipka; Ceraso; Rickert), materiality (Ratcliffe; Ceraso), resonance (Hawk "Sound" and *Resounding*), vocality (Anderson), and environment (Ceraso; Rickert) from rhetorical sound studies scholarship in the service of

discovering rhetorical insights in podcasting beyond what sound-as-only-text or sound-as-only-affect approaches can produce. Unlike Chapter 2, which considers many different examples to build a picture of podcasting's technological rhetoric, Chapter 3 offers an extensive and extended consideration of one particular, highly produced, professional and kairotic podcast as its artifact: "A City at the Peak of Crisis," an episode from *The New Yorker Radio Hour* (*NYRH*), produced by *The New Yorker* and WNYC Studios, that contends with the COVID-19 pandemic.

In many ways, "A City at the Peak of Crisis" provides the perfect opportunity to analyze how sound (broadly defined) functions rhetorically in podcasting. For one, "A City" is a highly complex "highly produced" podcast episode, featuring multiple correspondents, interviewees, recording technologies and locations, ambient sounds, and voice over narration. The complexity arises from the episode's premise: "Experts predicted that Wednesday, April 15th [2020] would be a peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York City, its epicenter. On that day, a crew of *New Yorker* writers talked with people all over the city, in every circumstance and walk of life, to form a portrait of a city in crisis." (Remnick). Not only does the episode audio travel through space by featuring many recognizable yet different locations in NYC, it also progresses linearly through time, beginning early in the morning and concluding late at night. As a "portrait" or slice of life, "A City" is not forwarding an obvious argument, which makes it an ideal candidate for examining sound without being overwhelmed by direct argument after direct argument. At the same time, "A City" contends with one of the most important and globally disruptive public crises in recent years from the perspective of podcasters, including *NYRH* host David Remnick (editor of *The New Yorker* since 1998), based in one of the hardest hit locations in the U.S. ("David Remnick"). With the podcasters and guests living in NYC and struggling with the pandemic, how could "A City" *not* be rhetorical?

Moreover, the holistic sound-based analytical approach we apply to “A City" can be generalized to many other highly-produced podcasts, even those taking place over seasons and entire series. While this approach is not the be-all, end-all of podcast analysis—instead, it’s part of a larger body of podcast rhetoric that includes technological rhetoric, sound studies, and conversational as well as episodic persuasion—as a method it provides a way to account for intentional sonic effects and affects as part of a show’s overall rhetoric, no matter how brief an episode or long a series. “A City" is one of the most complex “highly produced” podcasts I’ve come across in years of study, especially given the hour-long length of the show: the perfect length for a single chapter employing deep analysis. Any longer, and I’d be unable to demonstrate all of the analysis and rhetorical implications of sound and words, and if “A City" were any shorter, it might not have as much of the complexity that makes it so ripe for study. And because it’s a one-of, “A City" is a self-contained universe of sorts, unlike an episode of *Serial*, another highly produced podcast. Another advantage “A City” has is that it’s not speculative—it doesn’t deal with cold murder cases or unprovable events; instead, it’s firmly grounded in the directly observable, reportable, and recordable moments concerning a public crisis, one of the most significant of our time, a lodestone for rhetoric with *relevance*. In closely examining the sound rhetoric of “A City,” I demonstrate a new approach to the analysis of professional podcasting and produce new insights into the interaction between sound and argument in an exciting digital medium.

Chapter 4: Deliberation or Demagoguery? The Rhetoric of Podcast Conversations. Chapter four grapples with the final piece of podcast persuasion: conversation. Specifically, it examines unedited, long-form conversation taking on one of the most popular—and controversial—podcasts in the world, the *Joe Rogan Experience* (*JRE*). To examine such

conversation, I use recent rhetorical scholarship on demagoguery (Roberts-Miller; Skinnell; Skinnell and Murphy), ethos (Wilson; Ryan et al.), and circulation (Bradshaw; Porter; Ehrenfeld) to understand how the same rhetorical moves can support both deliberation and demagoguery in longform, unedited podcast conversation. Demagogic conversation—characterized by the reduction of policy to us versus them identity logics, pseudo-scientific evidence, unverifiable information, and certainty—serves as the counterpoint to academic and deliberative conversation, whose most telling features are references to vetted research, metacognition and a lack of finality.

In the chapter, I analyze two different episodes of *JRE* as my artifacts. The first episode I will analyze is "Episode #176 – Steven Rinella," featuring hunter and writer Steven Rinella's first appearance. Released in 2013, this episode was recorded early in Rogan's podcasting career (he began toward the end of December 2009) and marks the beginning of Rogan's long-standing friendship with Rinella and Rogan's involvement with hunting culture and wild game, a topic both he and his podcast are well known for. Rinella's status as a newcomer to the podcast and an expert in his topic area make #176 a good candidate for examining deliberative conversation. The second episode I analyze is "Episode #1555 – Alex Jones & Tim Dillon," featuring largely de-platformed conspiracy theorist Alex Jones and standup comic and conspiracy buff Tim Dillon. When it was released on October 27, 2020, "Episode #1555" caused a media firestorm because of Jones' anti-democratic conspiracy theories (Spangler).

I organized my analysis into three interrelated groups of rhetorical moves I observed in both podcast conversations: connecting (relating to conversational partners and audience), establishing (introducing and framing conversational topics), and complicating (responding to, complicating, expanding, or supporting pre-established topics). In both deliberative and

demagogic conversation, connecting sets expectations for the show's content and ethos. Establishing argues particular stances on a topic and set standards for conversational approach, i.e., whether it will veer toward deliberation or demagoguery. Complicating adds complexity and provides an opportunity for dialectic—the refining of opinion through rigorous discourse—and can, like other conversational moves, serve either deliberation or demagoguery.

I conclude the chapter with recommendations for making podcast conversation more ethical. My recommendations include prioritizing deliberation by slowing the conversation and/or delivery down; thinking aloud, including verbalizing limitations, personal perspectives, and opinion clearly; choosing guests selectively, favoring established experts over entertainers; and acknowledging errors.

* * *

As McGrath and Lydon hoped, podcasting has "erase[d] the limitations of radio." As a powerful—and powerfully unconstrained—form of public persuasion, professional podcasts merit RWS study that transcends composition pedagogy. Such analysis is long overdue. Fortunately, as podcasts continue to garner more and more public attention, there has never been a better time to study them. Ultimately, by examining podcast persuasion in technology, sound, and conversation in the next three body, I hope to illustrate the unique rhetorics the medium commands as a professional platform for public arguments. Now that I've established the project's bounds, exigence, and aims, let's proceed to Chapter 2, where we will learn the many arguments made by podcasting technologies and their influence on the available means of podcast persuasion.

Podcast Rhetorics

Insights into Podcasts as Public Persuasion

Chapter 2: The Technological Horizons of Podcast Persuasion

I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout this dissertation, I contend that podcasts contain arguments both obvious and hidden, vocalized and ambient, that inform public conversation, including public conversation regarding issues that matter to people: lifestyle, politics, health, finance, values, and more. If I focused my analysis only on podcast audio, I doubt anyone would raise an objection: audio is, after all, what podcasts deliver and what holds podcasting's power to persuade. What else might a rhetorician focus on? What else *should* a rhetorician focus on?

In this chapter, I propose that the arguments podcasts present are greatly influenced by the technologies making podcasting possible and commercially viable. In addition, I argue that we ought to investigate these influencing rhetorics of technology to more fully understand the persuasive platform podcasts provide. Thus, my research question for the chapter is as follows: *How do the technologies of podcasting shape podcasting as a platform for public-facing discourse, and in what ways do commercial and other contextual forces influence podcasting's most influential rhetors and their arguments?*

To begin to answer this question, we must first recognize how technology itself persuades. To arrive at such a recognition, we'll journey along a trail other rhetoricians who study digital communication technologies have already blazed to the philosophy of technology. There, we'll find crucial theoretical takeaways—ranging from the influence of the U.S. regulatory context all the way to the politics of transcript—relevant to the rhetoric of podcasting. We'll apply these takeaways to podcasting technologies, which we'll also map, define, and discuss to arrive at a fuller appreciation for the general technology of podcasting beyond just the audio file to which we listen. We'll conclude with a discussion of two new terms I introduce to study podcast rhetoric: *technological context* and *technological action*.

Like any other media, podcasts exist within an ecosystem of supportive and adjacent technologies, which make possible their creation, revision, publication, promotion, delivery, secondary circulation, archiving, merchandising, financing, funding, critique, fandom, and remixing. The specific features and possibilities of these technologies define podcasts as a new media distinct from radio, to which they are otherwise closely related. In addition to distinguishing podcasts from radio, these features and possibilities all together constitute the *technological rhetoric* of podcasts—the often taken for granted values, politics, prejudices, and arguments unavoidably built into all technical tools by their human designers.

Podcast technologies generate their own rhetoric in the form of arguments about how people should create, share, and consume podcasts. In the U.S., these technologies also subject podcasts to certain rules and laws while exempting them from others. Altogether, the culturally marked technology of podcasts and their associated constraints and possibilities form what we might call the *horizon* of podcast rhetoric, a term I borrow and modify from philosophy. In philosophy, Andrew Feenberg explains, "[t]he term 'horizon' refers to culturally general assumptions that form the unquestioned background to every aspect of life"[15] (16). Just as the horizon encompasses the scope of what we, if able to, can physically see, the horizon of podcast technologies encompasses the scope of what persuasion can be worked through podcasts.

II. RHETORICAL THEORIES OF PHILOSOPHY OF TECHNOLOGY

There's much at stake. "[I]n America," Cynthia L. Selfe writes, even technology that we think might improve democracy like the internet often "supports social divisions along race, class, and gender," meaning, if we don't pay careful attention, technology—including podcasts—reproduces oppressive social conditions instead of ameliorating them (*Technology*

[15] Interestingly, a brief note Feenberg includes for the chapter suggests that "horizon" can also be referred to as "doxa" (227).

xxi). As Rhetorician Gerard A. Hauser reminds us, "[a]s a public sphere, the Internet is not always egalitarian: There may be exclusionary practices, privileged viewpoints, reckless claims based on flimsy evidence and supported by specious arguments, and so forth" (338). "Unless we become familiar with the rhetorical features of digital communication," Laura J. Gurak contends, "we will be led into cyberspace with only a limited understanding of both the power of and the problems with this technology" (180).

Critical philosophies of technology are theories that seek to understand these power dynamics of technology (Winner 4; Feenberg 68,163). Most of these critical theories of technology arrive to rhetoric and writing studies as transplants from philosophers of technology, such as Martin Heidegger, Langdon Winner, and Andrew Feenberg. We owe their presence in rhetoric and composition to ambassadors like Cynthia L. Selfe and Anne Frances Wysocki, whose work on computers and digital composition has been hugely influential. In this section, I examine the major concepts I'll use from the philosophy of technology to analyze podcasts in a rhetorical context that considers how technology and commercial forces, (e.g., advertising; monetization in the form of merchandise sales, subscription services, and live shows; and podcast series and network acquisition deals) affect the sorts of persuasion that takes place. The stakes are high—as a communication technology, podcasts exert influence over public discourse, meaning they directly affect democracy in the U.S., perpetuating or resisting dominant discourse or dominant ideology communicated by public discourse as well as providing a political platform, as podcast appearances by Democratic candidates and Republican pundits during the 2020 presidential election demonstrate. Philosophy of technology broadens our awareness of the available means of persuasion relating to podcasts, means of persuasion that, like invisible radiation from the sun, currently bombard us. And like the sun, it's easy to ignore such

persuasion—the commercials, the interfaces, the websites, etc., that make podcasting possible—until we get burned.

The central rhetorical concept from critical philosophies of technology, therefore, can be summed up in four words: *technology is not neutral.* "The crucial weakness of the conventional idea" that technologies possess a neutral moral standing, writes Langdon Winner, "is that it disregards the many ways in which technologies provide structure for human activity" (6). The arguments technology makes, that we should view the world in a certain way, are political, meaning that they deal with how society is organized and structured, as well as who should have access to resources. Sometimes these arguments are even more concrete (pun intended, you'll see) literally connecting and dividing us. "The issues that divide or unite people in society," Winner writes, "are settled not only in the institutions and practices of politics proper, but also, and less obviously, in tangible arrangements of steel and concrete, wires and semiconductors, nuts and bolts" (29). Make no mistake—such arrangements are arguments. To illustrate his point, Winner provides the example of "Robert Moses, the master builder of roads, parks bridges, and other public works of the 1920s to the 19702 in New York," who "built his overpasses according to specifications that would discourage the presence of buses on his parkways" (23). "One consequence" of Moses' purposeful engineering of overpasses, Winner notes, "was to limit access of racial minorities and low-income groups to Jones Beach, Moses's widely acclaimed public park" (23). Poor people using public transportation, Moses' overpasses argued with their restrictive height tolerances, are not welcome here.

Podcast technologies argue their own politics. While often heralded as a democratizing medium because they, like many other internet-based platforms, provide global, decentralized communication opportunities for masses of people with common technologies for many in the

U.S. like laptops and smartphones, podcasts also pose substantial barriers to access for the financially disadvantaged but perhaps most of all for people with hearing and auditory related disabilities. For certain disabled populations, the vast majority of podcasting content is utterly enigmatic and inaccessible (Zdeneck). Even if/when it is unintentional, this lack of access is political in the sense that it presents a value judgement about who is—and is not—valuable as a podcasting audience. Just as Moses's overpasses physically banned the sorts of public transportation that would have made Jones Beach accessible, podcasts that do not offer transcripts, let alone real-time closed captioning, effectively ban a portion of the population from participating (Zdeneck). Many podcasts and podcast networks, such as *On Being* (podcast), *The Daily* (podcast), and Gimlet (network) provide beautiful transcripts that are integrated into the show(s) website(s) (as opposed to separate download). But until podcasting directories like Spotify and Apple Podcasts require podcasts to have transcripts, access remains up to the podcast publisher.

We've seen how podcast politics affect disabled audiences, but to understand the ultimate rhetorical consequences of the non-neutrality of technology from a theoretical point of view, we turn to Heidegger, the philosopher who decades ago arrived at a theory explaining technology's essence. At its essence, Heidegger argues in his landmark essay "The Question Concerning Technology," "technology is a way of revealing" that frames our view of the world, establishing the horizons for what we consider possible (318). Technology reveals humanity's power over nature by "ordering" the world into potential resources, into what Heidegger terms "the standing-reserve" (322). Heidegger calls this ordering "enframing" (325). The essential danger of technology, according to Heidegger, is that it can frame a worldview where people are a standing-reserve, nothing more than resources waiting to be used up (332). For example, the

basic technologies of war—firearms and ammunition—transform people into foot soldiers; the general strategizing a campaign must view their soldiers under their command as a resource for achieving a goal that only technology combined with human resources affords. The same principle applies to big technology companies, such as Facebook and Google, who surveil their users, distilling their browsing habits, posts, and emails into advertising data that can be sold to third parties and/or used to expand the company's own platforms in the capitalist pursuit of endless growth. For Facebook and Google, people amount to a standing-reserve of potential data and market capitalization. Yet, no matter its non-neutrality, technology holds an equal ability save as to destroy (338). Through "enframing," technology in Heidegger's view works like language, or terms, work in Kenneth Burke's theory of the "terministic screen," which dictates that language directs perception (*Language* 47). "Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality," Burke argues, "by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality, and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality" (*Language* 47, emphasis in original). In other words, language, a hegemonic interface for human thought and communication, functions as a screen between some essential *us* and our relationship with reality. Technology's enframing performs an identical—and equally rhetorical—function.

Podcasts are not exempt from Heidegger's concerns about enframing; the clearest way podcasts perform enframing technologically is by reducing listeners to trackable numbers that can be used to sell advertisements or measure influence. This is Heidegger's standing reserve. Apps that track and measure such metrics effectively mobilize individuals into a semi-homogenous commercial force as well as the lowest divisible unit in an equation arguing cultural influence. That apps track and display such data, e.g., how many subscribers does X or Y podcast have on Spotify or Apple Podcasts, appear innocuous at first. But these numbers, the

human-turned-resource count, appear to the public because of intentional technological design, and argue which podcasts we should value or even believe. Popularity is persuasive, and technological algorithms can also influence what's popular. For podcasters, these numbers are proof of success, as much as part of their resume as lauded guest appearances or popular episodes. Shows with high listener numbers are promoted algorithmically on a platform's home page, driving more and more listeners to that podcast. Because such shows earn money and increase the hosting network's value, platforms are disincentivized to take action that would negatively impact podcasts. And yet, as a recent investigation of Facebook's artificial intelligence practices demonstrates, extreme viewpoints and outrage attract significantly more attention and engagement than less controversial material, making such content *more* likely to be promoted by algorithms—an unfortunate consequence of enframing (Hao). Worse, on-site promotion and high listener counts conveys reliability, which prompts further engagement and leads to a snowballing effect.

The consequences of technological podcast promotion rhetoric can be not only dangerous for democracy, but also deadly. Consider the following example, which we'll come back to a few times later in the chapter, involving former aide to President Donald Trump Steve Bannon, his podcast *War Room: Pandemic*, Apple Podcasts, and the January 6, 2021 storming of the United States Capitol by armed insurrectionists. Bannon's *War Room*, co-hosted by Raheem Kassam, is an alt-right conversational podcast that typically releases 1-3 episodes—initially streamed live—every weekday featuring a rouge's gallery of controversial guests offering deeply contrarian, conspiracy theory informed hot takes on public issues. While the show began as a response the coronavirus pandemic, positioning Trump as a nationalistic hero trying to save the U.S. from the virus as democrats thwarted him at every turn, as a timeline of the podcast published on the

show's website demonstrates—episodes tend to capitalize on whatever public issue achieves relevance in the news cycle ("CCP"). For example, one of the April 20, 2021 episodes of *War Room* was recorded live during the trial of former Minneapolis Police officer Derek Chauvin who murdered George Floyd, a Black[16] man, by kneeling on his neck, an event that was recorded on video and whose footage sparked waves of protests throughout the country (Levenson). For this episode, Bannon's guests included 1) Bernie Kerik, a former New York police commissioner pardoned by Trump years after pleading guilty to multiple felonies including "lying to White House officials"; 2) on-scene correspondent Tracey Anthony; 3) Boris Epshteyn, former strategic advisor for the Trump 2020 campaign; 4) Rudy Giuliani, Trump's former personal attorney; and 5) Sam Faddis, a Republican politician and former CIA officer (Silva; "Boris"). During the episode, co-host Kassam posed the leading question, "Does anybody believe that the merits of this case were considered by the jury, or were they [the jury] just frightened by the riots that would ensue and the doxing that they endured by the media last week?" Like much of War Room's content, the question is rhetorical and misleading: the supposed "doxing" (releasing personally identifiable information on social media for harassment and intimidation tactics) likely refers to a general description of the jury composition published by Minnesota's *Star Tribune* (Forliti). In calling it doxing, Kassam is forwarding a conspiracy theory that jury members have been identified and could be threatened if they did not convict Chauvin—a similar tactic to raising alarms of voter fraud. Such conspiracy theories and hot takes have made *War*

[16] My decision to capitalize "Black" is in keeping with recently revised (2020) stylistic guidelines maintained by *Associated Press*, *USA Today*, and *Columbia Journalism Review*, among others (Lanham). Writing for the *New York Times*, which has also recently updated its policies, Nancy Coleman, traces the rationale of such decisions to arguments by W.E.D. Du Bois, who in 1926 wrote to the publication and others to request similar capitalization for the word "Negro." As David Lanham, writing for the *Brookings Institute*, puts it: "The call to capitalize Black follows a longstanding struggle for Black respect and justice." I agree with these arguments and capitalize Black to signal my respect and recognition of the importance of such language and ideas. I thank Sandra Tarabochia for helpfully asking why I had not capitalized Black in earlier drafts of this project.

Room a hit among conspiracy theory devotees; according to a counter display on *War Room*'s host website, PodBean, the podcast has been downloaded over 47.5 million times ("Episode").

Before we get to the storming of the Capitol, however, we need to rewind further, to November 2020 and the turmoil of the U.S. Presidential election, which the Associated Press did not call for Joe Biden until November 7. Two days earlier, on November 5, 2020, Bannon, strategizing about Trump's potential second term, used his *War Room: Pandemic* podcast to suggest that both Anthony Fauci, the Director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at the National Institute of Health (NIH) and member of the Trump's Coronavirus Task force, and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Christopher Wray should be *beheaded* and have their detached heads displayed to the public (Mangan). "I'd actually like to go back to the old times of Tudor England," Bannon mused on his podcast. "I'd put the heads [of Facui and Wray] on pikes, right, I'd put them at the two corners of the White House . . ." (qtd. in Mangan). Shortly after Bannon made these anti-democratic remarks, "Twitter, YouTube, and Spotify all banned him and his podcast . . . cutting off access to their millions of users" (Carman). However, the most popular podcast app at the time, Apple Podcasts, continued to include Bannon's *War Room: Pandemic* in their directory. Bannon continued to release podcast episodes—typically several a day—and argued that the results of the 2020 Presidential election were fraudulent. In January, he "encouraged his listeners to converge on the Capitol to protest election results" (Carman). "It's all converging," Bannon argued in one of the four podcasts he released on January 5, 2021, "and now we're on the point of attack tomorrow" (qtd. in DePillis). *ProPublica* reports that for "the protestors massing in Washington, Bannon's message was clear: They could force the outcome by pressuring Vice President Mike Pence and Congress not to certify the electoral vote" (DePillis). Because of his podcast being indexed on

sites like Apple Podcasts, Bannon had access to a massive audience (Carman). Even as late as February 12, 2021, War Room "rank[ed] among Apple Podcast's top 20 *news* podcasts" (Carman, emphasis added). That's an argument made by a technological interface: Bannon's show is "news"—a category allowed and displayed by the directory screen—and, with its high rank—counted and likewise displayed by technology—is worth listening to.

Bannon's relative immunity is a consequence of the measure of control the network administrators, such as those at Apple Podcasts, exert over the technical networks that organize so much of our lives as members of a technocracy—a society where big tech companies are more influential than governments. "Networks and networking," James Paul Gee, literacy theorist and member of the New London Group, explains, ". . . are the master theme of our 'new times" ("New People" 43). According to Feenberg, "Technologically advanced societies enroll their members in a wide variety of technical networks that define careers, education, leisure, medical care, communication, and life environments" (58). We might also call these "lifeworlds" (Gee 66). "These networks," Feenberg contends, "are administered by experts and managers rather than democratically" (58). Technological administration is a form of rhetorical control. Podcasts are part of their audience's leisure, communication, and life networks, meaning that when podcast network administrators—as we saw with the Bannon and Apple Podcasts example—choose to regulate or not regulate content, they are arguing for such audiences to interact with those networks and lifeworlds in particular ways. In other words, they program the related terministic screen. We'll go into more technical detail about this control when discussing the rhetoric of podcast technologies, including podcast directories like Apple Podcasts, but what is important to understand now is that such control is a consequence of technocracy. A "technocracy" occurs when citizens are given limited say over the technology permeating their

lives (Feenberg 71). “Increasingly,” William C. Kurlinkus writes, “it’s obvious that we’re living in a technocracy. The big five tech companies (Facebook, Google, Amazon, Apple, and Microsoft) are more powerful and more effective at creating change than any government. But although citizens can vote for elected officials, they rarely get to vote on how these corporations shape their lives” (22). That is why this chapter is needed: living in a technocracy means that the work of technologies persuade and influence us more than an single act of spoken or written rhetoric ever could.

III. THE TECHNOLOGICAL RHETORIC OF PODCAST TECHNOLOGIES

While the medium is subject to larger concepts of technological rhetoric, we should not ignore the arguments made by the technologies that capacitate podcasting’s role as a platform for public argument. Like Apple’s failure to regulate Bannon’s statements, many technologies shape the horizon of podcasting’s persuasive possibilities in distinctive ways. This section examines what I consider the three most relevant categories of podcasting technologies: 1) those of production and post-production; 2) distribution and accessibility; and 3) promotion and marketing. We’ll also look at regulations that impact podcasting in the U.S., as these are technologically based. Through these regulated technologies, podcasts reach the public, already marked by the journey from conception to distribution. The arguments they make, often subtle and difficult to notice in a finished episode, are as important as those present in podcast audio.

A. The Rhetoric of Podcasting’s Regulatory Context in the U.S. and the Standing Reserve of Internet Audiences

Before we look at individual podcasting technologies, we need to understand the larger context of podcast distribution. Not only is such regulatory context and grasp of audience reach crucial for understanding how podcasting technology influences content creation, but such

context is also itself an argument about how rhetors can, and should, approach communication on the medium. In the U.S., the freedom podcasts (even insurrection encouraging ones like Bannon's) enjoy in terms of content is a direct result of how internet media is federally regulated. This content freedom is also supported by the vast audience potential of the internet, which allows for niche shows to reach wide audiences outside of the conventions of mass media. Without such regulatory freedom—one of podcasting's most unique features as sonic medium and the reason its early innovators developed the technologies to make subscribable, downloadable, internet talk shows possible—and a standing reserve of listeners waiting to be harnessed, many popular podcasts would be drastically different than their current form or absent from the platform. To demonstrate the rhetorical effects of this largely unobtrusive regulatory context, I compare podcasts to terrestrial radio, a far more heavily regulated medium. Afterward, I examine how audiences function as a Heideggerian standing reserve within the framework of the "long tail market" of the internet. Lastly, I conclude this section by applying these rhetorical insights to Bannon's anti-democratic *War Room* podcast.

One major difference between podcasts and radio is that the former does not require a federal license for legal distribution. In the U.S., all radio broadcasts, including non-commercial use with "a coverage radius" over "approximately 200 feet," fall under the purview of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and broadcasters are required to have an FCC license ("Licensing"; "How to Apply"). These licenses aren't free—costs and fees vary depending on the potential reach of the station. In 2018 alone, the FCC collected over $320 million "in overall regulatory fees from broadcasters and other regulated industries" ("FCC Approves"). In contrast, as an opt-in internet medium, podcasts are exempt from such fees, and don't need FCC approval to operate. That means just about anyone can, with a few widely

available devices and an internet connection, publish a podcast and participate in larger public conversation. While radio's costly licensing—in both money and time spent applying—argues against amateurism and all but requires marketable, mainstream programs, podcasts are far more democratic. Rhetorically speaking, podcasting is a wide-open platform that's exempt from radio's major referee. One can argue almost anything on a podcast.

In addition to requiring a costly license to operate, broadcast radio stations, unlike podcasts, must adhere to strict FCC content guidelines or face stiff fines. For example, on March 18, 2004—just a few days shy of a month after Ben Hammersley coined the term "podcast" —the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) levied a $27,500 fine against Viacom, Infinity Broadcasting, and WKRK for broadcasting audio where controversial radio personality Howard Stern discussed content they deemed offensive (Ahrens). In fact, Stern and his syndicates received 13 fines between October of 1992 and April of 2004 totaling $2,274,750—a significant percentage of which were paid in full (Ahrens). "Federal law," the FCC explains, "prohibits obscene, indecent, and profane content from being broadcast on the radio or TV" ("Obscene, Indecent"). The FCC's definitions of obscene, indecent, and profane are murky, highly subjective, and hinge on what might be considered "offensive" to the general public, giving the FCC loads of power to levy fines ("Obscene, Indecent"). As a result, you're unlikely to encounter curse words or frank discussions of sex on U.S. radio stations. If podcasts were subject to the same content restrictions as radio, Marc Maron's *WTF* podcast (short for *What the Fuck*), *The Joe Rogan Experience* (*JRE*), *My Favorite Murder*, and many other popular podcasts would likely be in perpetual litigation or fined out of commercial viability. At the very least, the medium might not possess its current "alternative" status that has proven so attractive to

podcasters and their audiences. So, rhetorically, the FCC determines what radio rhetors can and can't say. No such obvious regulatory force exists for podcasts.

However, while podcasts are exempt from FCC oversight, they are still subject to other federal regulations, including copyright law, which explains why the medium is rarely associated with music compared to radio. In addition to an FCC license, music-playing radio stations must possess yet another license—typically from the American Society of Composers, Authors, & Publishers (ASCAP) or other copyright holder collectives—to play copyrighted material, such as Beatles songs. Internet media are not exempt from copyright concerns, as The Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998 makes clear (U.S. Copyright Office). Such regulations argue against including copyright protected music in a podcast, particularly the recordings artist collectives license to streaming services and radio stations and sell to the public. There are music-based podcasts, but they are different from most music radio stations.[17] For example, NPR releases their highly regarded *Tiny Desk Concerts* in one form as an audio-only podcast; however, NPR only can because the podcast contains unique live recordings (typically around four songs in length, interspersed with chatter and crowd work) and NPR has permission from the artists ("Tiny Desk"). These technological administration barriers to featuring musical content help shape podcasting's horizons as a talk based medium.

Equally important for podcasting's horizons is the medium's ability to reach audiences via the internet, an option all but closed to broadcast radio, as radio programs must conform to broadcast standards of mass market appeal. Podcasts have the potential to reach far larger audiences than broadcast radio because they're internet-based, subscribable, downloadable, and, thanks to the absences of FCC oversight, virtually unlimited in terms of content. As internet-

[17] Disregarding rare exceptions like Seattle's KEXP, which regularly broadcasts live, synchronous recordings of indie musicians playing at their in-house studio.

based media, podcasts don't have to appeal to demographics and geographies that fit a standard radio time slot—and standard radio advertisers—to be viable. There's a reason Best Hits of the 40s and 50s music stations are a rarity, even though plenty of people enjoy Frank Sinatra. Instead, thanks to indexability, algorithmic recommendations, and search engines, a show can accumulate a sizeable audience of listeners spread out over the internet, no matter how niche its topic. Chris Anderson coined these features of the internet market "the long tail" in a 2004 article for *Wired*, where he argued it constituted "an entirely new economic model for the media and entertainment industries." Anderson offers Netflix, which in 2004 allowed customers to rent DVDs by mail, as an example of a distributer that effectively leverages this model: "It doesn't matter if the several thousand people who rent Doctor Who episodes each month are in one city or spread, one per town, across the country—the economics are the same to Netflix. It has, in short, broken the tyranny of physical space." With Internet facilitated distribution, Netflix was able to capitalize on a scattershot audience—this is the power of the long tail. Consider the following example of Amazon's book sales, captured in Figure 1:

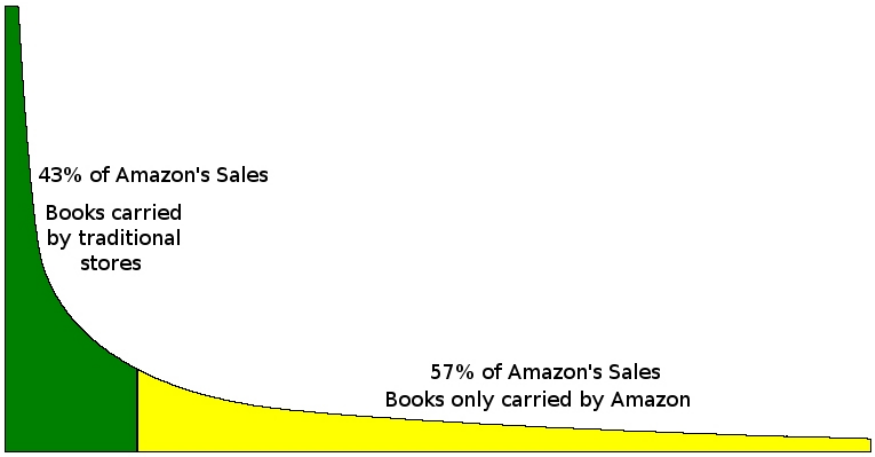


Figure 1. *While Amazon must compete against traditional book retailers for mass market space, it has almost no competition for niche books—such as academic monographs—that do not make*

financial sense for mass market retailers to carry, as they're not bestsellers. The "long tail" is the lower end of the descending curve of the figure that stretches far beyond traditional mass market space. Image taken from https://blogs.ubc.ca/kathzhang/2014/10/05/the-long-tail-theory-with-examples/.

"In the long tail," media scholar Kris Markman explains, "a small number of hits may still make up a substantial proportion of sales, but the unlimited shelf-space of the internet accommodates a wide variety of specialty products, targeting tastes that are under- (or un-) represented in traditional marketplaces" (546). Podcasts, Markman argues, are such "specialty products." For example, a niche category of podcasts that has enjoyed success because of the long tail are entertainment podcasts where hosts and guests play tabletop role playing games like Dungeons & Dragons as well as variants such as Pathfinder and others.[18] One of the best-known podcasts of this sort is *The Adventure Zone* (*AZ*), hosted by brothers Justin, Travis, and Griffin McElroy and their father Clint. For each episode, the hosts adopt the persona of a character (hence roleplaying) in a world of fantasy and adventure and play in a story co-created between them and whoever is serving as the game master; along with bonuses from stats and abilities detailed on each player's character sheet, 20 sided and other die determine if—and to what extent—a character succeeds or fails at a particular action, such as swinging a sword at a goblin or lying to an evil wizard. Started in 2014, *AZ* has released almost nearly 200 episodes and currently enjoys a 4.9/5 star rating on Apple podcasts with an impressive 32+ thousand reviews ("The Adventure"). Other examples include podcasts about hunting wild game with bows and arrows, indie video games, paranormal activity in local areas, and so on. With podcasts in particular, the

[18] If tabletop roleplaying games do not seem niche (welcome, friend), it's probably because the internet and the long tail have made such content widely accessible.

long tail explodes traditional ideas of audience into a new, digitally accessible standing reserve that, unlike previous mass audiences, owns almost no negotiating power. As such, the long tail audience expands our understanding of how audience works rhetorically. Instead of just Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford's conceptualization of "audience addressed/audience invoked"—which includes audiences that a rhetor strives to reach and mold with a rhetorical act into a variety of interrelated roles—podcast audiences are also *audience assumed* (165-167). Simply put, podcasters can assume, thanks to the long tail, that an audience for their content already exists.

Bannon's *War Room* serves as an extreme example of the consequences of the rhetoric of the U.S. regulatory context and the standing reserve of internet audience accessible by long tail delivery. Because podcasting presents low barriers to publication without FCC licensing and is largely limited to regulation by overburdened administrators of vast technical networks, Bannon was able to publish his show to many large networks, including the two largest: Apple Podcasts and Spotify. These networks, which are able to leverage listening numbers into higher stock evaluations and thus are disinclined to remove popular shows, provide a standing reserve numbering in the tens of millions of monthly listeners, about 28 million for each platform, or, assuming listeners only use one network, up to nearly 60 million people total. That's just Apple and Spotify—prior to several platforms banning his show, Bannon also published *War Room* on YouTube, Google Podcasts, and a host of smaller networks and apps. Such platforms support podcasting's long tail in that they 1) allow for users to search and seek out podcasts that correspond to their interests, 2) display rankings for show categories that introduce and promote podcasts like *War Room* to audiences looking for more content such as "news," and 3) they use recommendation algorithms, which promote shows liked by users who share interests. For example, if a large portion of Rogan's listeners liked *War Room*, a recommendation algorithm

might suggest War Room to Rogan listeners who had not already subscribed. In addition, Apple Podcasts also relies on other forms of user data, such as web browsing habits and "app usage," as seen in Figure 2:

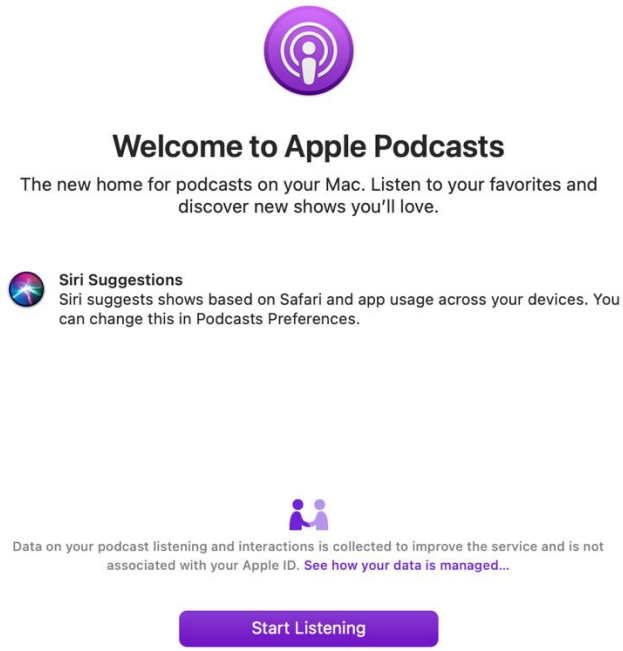


Figure 2. *Screen shot of Apple Podcast message that pops-up when application is opened on Mac OS. Apple Podcasts uses browsing data across devices associated with an Apple account, which Apple devices like MacBooks, iPads, and iMacs require to operate, to generate recommendations.*

The realities of long tail delivery mean that the audiences who found his podcast shared many of Bannon's radical views, making them particularly susceptible to his unfounded arguments about election fraud and falsified election results—the justification used for storming the U.S. Capitol building on January 6, 2021. Thanks to the long tail, Bannon could deliver potent messages

about supposed election fraud several times a day to a standing reserve of diehard audiences, mobilizing them, urging them to act.

The horizons supported by regulatory context and the audience potential of long tail distribution are vast, able even to encompass even dangerous, anti-democratic arguments. Few mediums with the potential for massive audience engagement allow arguments like those Bannon has made—and continues to make—on his podcast to continue for long. Television, broadcast radio, streaming video distributions, video hosting sites like YouTube, and social media sites come with rules and restrictions ranging from FCC oversight, executive approval, advertiser demands, reporting features, and terms and conditions. While administration and enforcement of such rules are often inconsistent, they nevertheless exist. But self-published professional podcasts, like their internet predecessor the blog, are almost impossible to manage. Unlike blogs, however, podcasts rely on various technologies to produce, publish, circulate, and promote audio arguments. These technologies all contribute their own arguments about podcasting's persuasive possibilities. In the following sections, we'll discuss the technologies that make podcasting so engaging, and answer the question, *what technological features makes it an attractive—and successful—medium for public engagement?*

B. The Rhetoric of Production and Post-Production Tech

At the most basic level, podcasting technology amounts to tools that allow a rhetor to "build" a podcast. Tools are inseparable from the techniques they afford. This relationship between tools and technique is conveyed by technology's Greek root word *techne,* which means, roughly, "art" or "craft." Previously, we've established that tools and their associated techniques—that which they allow us to do—function as a Burkean terministic screen that affects our relationship with the larger world. Many times, the technologies that have the largest

impact on a medium's horizons—or rather that make the strongest argument about how those using the medium to communicate should interact with the larger world—are the most fundamental. For podcasting, these are the technologies of production (recording spaces and recording equipment) and post-production (audio editing programs and graphic design software for a podcast's required multimodal elements).

What horizons of podcast persuasion do such technologies argue for? To answer this question, we will first examine the smaller arguments recording spaces and recording equipment make regarding the horizons of podcast persuasion. Then, we will shift to post-production, examining the rhetorical options audio editing programs and graphic design software afford as well as the effects those options have upon podcasting's technological horizons. Along the way, we'll analyze a variety of examples, including *War Room*, *Radiolab*, *Reply All*, and *JRE*. Finally, we will synthesize our insights to theorize the broader rhetoric of podcasting production and post-production technology on the medium's persuasive horizons.

The Rhetoric of Production: Recording Spaces

Recording spaces are the stage upon which podcasts are performed and can be either enclosed spaces that serve as podcasting "home bases" or temporary public and private spaces, such as auditoriums for live show events as well as coffee shops, parks, and out in nature, depending on the rhetorical goal of recording. Recording spaces often seem to disappear from podcast audio—for example, the gold standard of audio quality for interview podcasts is the *absence* of background noise that distracts from conversation. The benefit of clarity, pure and simple, is emphasis. Unlike a video, which must always remain rooted to physical location, audio absent of distracting aural artifacts of recording beyond a speaker's voice achieves an unparalleled level of directness. The rhetoric of sounding as if a voice from nowhere is powerful

authority—a disembodied voice is reminiscent of religious myths where divine beings address the chosen. When all else vanishes, the focus becomes voice. However, as either a technology (purposely built, acoustically engineered recording rooms as well as the stages and auditoriums used to record audio for ticketed live shows) or temporary technological settings (the various spaces selected for on-location, in the field recording) they are inevitably a part of audio capture, as are the arguments they make. Because of their physical presence, recording spaces can set the mood and tone of recording, shape the material of soundwaves, arrange hosts and guests for particular purposes, dictate the possible positioning of various recording technologies, prompt observations relevant to episode content, and even provide ambient noise, such as birdsong or crashing waves, that alters a podcast's soundscape.

First, let's consider recording spaces built specifically for podcasts.[19] More permanent recording spaces are often designed or retrofitted with acoustics—the way the physical material of a space enhances or diminishes sound—in mind. Ceiling heights, flooring, walls, sound deadening panels, and other features all impact how a space looks as well as sounds (Ceraso 74). Recording spaces for podcasting vary, but most setups involve a closed room (often modified to reduce outside and ambient noise), a table and chairs, microphones as well as other recording equipment, including one or more computers, and various decor providing ambiance. Some podcasts, including *My Favorite Murder* and *JRE*, have a producer (Steven Ray Morris and Jamie Vernon, respectively) physically present or connected via communication software such as Zoom to monitor audio and ensure the recording is of high quality. If a producer is present, they are often located at the periphery of a recording space where they will be less of a distraction for guests. For example, in Rogan's new recording studio in Texas, Vernon's command center of

[19] I say podcasts for simplicity's sake, but these spaces may have been designed for radio, voice-over work, or other forms of audio-capture.

recording and streaming equipment is positioned several feet away from the large table where Rogan sits opposite his guests. A permanent recording space conveys the show's ethos—a sloppily constructed studio might dissuade guests from appearing on the show, while a clean, professional studio might instill guests with a sense of confidence in a show's production values as well as provide the host of measure of confidence. Likewise, a comfortable chair and a cozy studio personalized with decorations and artwork might help relax guests and make them more open to prolonged conversation or more patient with the difficult, deep questions that make for engaging content. Unless podcasters describe such spaces, listeners aren't usually privy to such knowledge; however, some podcast spaces take on a life of their own as cultural icons themselves.

One of the most famous recording spaces in podcasting is Marc Maron's for his WTF podcast, an interview style podcast where Maron invites guests to talk about their lives and experiences, often in raw and vulnerable ways. In analyzing it we can gain a sense of how many popular podcast recording spaces straddle the line between amateur and professional, as well as how they might affectively prime guests (and hosts) before and during recording. Maron famously recorded his *WTF* podcast from his garage for years, a cluttered space with a "used-bookstore aesthetic" (Zinoman). Maron's garage—which once hosted acting President Barack Obama for an episode—was so iconic that when Maron was set to move to a new house and new podcast recording garage in 2018, the *New York Times* interviewed Maron about his soon to be former podcasting studio (Zinoman). The image-rich piece documents a small, converted garage crowded with bookshelves, framed photos and artwork, guitars, amplifiers, and walls and ceilings generously festooned with large, black rectangles of dense, sound absorbing foam whose

many prismatic ridges—designed to catch, absorb, and dissipate sound waves—make me think of what an alligator snapping turtle's shell must look like on a moonless night:



Figure 3*. Marc Maron's former podcast studio. At first glance, it seems busy, but the various décor conveys a distinctly Maron vibe. In conveying such information about the host—taste in music and art, the subjects of books, etc.—the rhetorical space of Maron's garage studio may help guests feel a deeper sense of connection with the host, leading to deeper conversation and more moments of persuasion. Screen capture of a photograph by Elizabeth Weinberg for* The New York Times *(Zinoman).*

There's a table (more of a desk, really) with foam covered mics on mechanical swinging arms set to face level for the two chairs opposite each other on either side of the desk, an audio mixer for setting mic volume levels while recording, a computer screen, and assorted other podcasting paraphernalia. There's a close-up of two examples of pre-interview research notes written on a

yellow legal pad page as well as a coffee-stained sheet of printer paper, which Maron likely laid flat on the table to reference during recording. Maron's space likely feels more intimate than a more "professional" radio (or podcast) recording studio but also poses technical problems: Maron still has to work around neighbors doing noisy yard work (Zinoman). The intimacy is rhetorical—Maron's studio and its haphazard seeming arrangement is no accident. It communicates his coffee shop poetry slam singer songwriter hipster personal aesthetic and his approach to podcasting: this is a grungy, artsy, low-key, space, not some corporate sellout room. Here, we can be, and should be, ourselves. It's disarming, putting audiences at ease, persuading them to forget, as much as possible, that they're recording a conversation that millions of people may listen to.

Whatever form a podcast studio (or garage) takes, its physical material is part of the "rhetorical space" of podcast rhetoric because it affects how podcast hosts and guests interact as embodied rhetors as well as the acoustics of recording, which the other technologies contained in its space make possible and inflect (Mountford "On Gender" 42). "Rhetorical space," Roxanne Mountford theorizes, "is the geography of a communicative event, and, like all landscapes, may include both the cultural and material arrangement, whether intended or fortuitous, of space" ("On Gender" 42). On a material level, Maron's garage provides certain dynamics (intimate face-to-face engagement, a casual at home feel that may comfort guests, and the ability for Maron to easily access notes), for podcasting interviews and for declaiming the monologues that he begins each episode with. Culturally, the space of the garage likely seems different to guests, as well as to Maron, after Obama in essence hallowed the ground with his appearance and interview. Like concert halls and hole in the wall local venues who attain

prestige and sometimes legendary status after famous bands perform or got their start there, podcast recording spaces are also granted cultural weight by their own history.

When then President Barack Obama visited Maron's previous studio in June of 2015 for "Episode 613," the space of the podcast studio featured prominently in the show, serving as both an icebreaker topic of discussion as well as a down-to-earth foil to the prestige of the guest. Maron opened the show with his typical monologic introduction, only this time, he talked about the Secret Service agents searching through every room of his house with a dog, and how he had to "hide my cats in the bedroom. They had to sweep that separately." Maron uses the space and the transformation for the President's visit to communicate the absurdity of the situation: he a podcaster, is about to interview the president—and audiences are invited to listen in. "I'm told there'll be a sniper on the roof," Maron says, serious. Then he pivots, using the observational comedy he's famous for to lighten the situation: "There's something in here that looks like an armed yoga mat." By discussing the space and its changes, security precautions that would likely not be discussed on television programs were a president to appear, Maron provides a unique level of access to the situation—a rare behind the scenes look that highlights that podcasts are not like mainstream media. The garage, as well as the larger Los Angeles area, helps the pair build a rapport early in the show. "This is pretty cool," Obama remarked about the garage. "This is the place where it happens," Maron replied, ". . . my whole life." When Obama says Maron is "a big cheese now," and Maron asks, "Should I move," Obama is quick to say "no":

Obama: Partly because of the, the knickknacks around here man.

Maron: Sure, it's the magic box. A lot of stuff going on in here.

Obama: You got the "Gimme Shelter" poster [from rock band The Rolling Stones].

Maron: Sure, man. I got, I got like, yeah, I got a weird collection of things . . .

The observations demonstrate that studio space does not go unnoticed. Guests and hosts alike pay attention to the location of recording. The interaction, which continues for a while, leads into a conversation where Marc asks Obama, as the latter talks about living nearby in his twenties, "How far away are you from you, are you from that guy?" As Marc asks, it's clear he's anxious to be asking such a personal question, but it is a signature interviewing strategy of his, tying deep, probing questions to concrete memories about particular moments and times in his guests' lives. During this episode, one of the most important, if not the most, culturally significant podcasting events, it is a discussion of the space of Marc's studio and its location that affords Maron the opportunity to ask the President about his formative years. In this way, the rhetorical space of Maron's studio serves as a conversational prompt and, in doing so, became a stage for, and partner in, presidential rhetoric.

The coronavirus pandemic currently afflicting the world is also changing the space and rhetoric of podcast recording. When not conducting interviews over Zoom—which often adds a tinny quality to the human voice when the service lags or connection becomes spotty—like his October 20, 2020 episode (#1167) one with writer, artist, and musician Patti Smith (her first-time using Zoom by herself), Maron relies on a rhetorically transformative plexiglass shield and other measures to divide him from guests, such as Flaming Lips front man Wayne Coyne (#1165, released October 12, 2020). Maron reflected on the changed circumstances on his pre-interview monologue before Episode 1168 of *WTF* (October 22, 2020), featuring guest Matthew McConaughey:

Maron: . . . back in the day, pre-plague, I . . . would require people to come over. I

> would require the engagement to be live and in person. But you can't require that much [now]. Every once in a while now, I can make a pretty safe situation out here. I've got a plexiglass . . . divider, I've got hand sanitizer, I've got masks. But I've done [interviewed in person] a few people, mostly comics and Wayne Coyne . . . live. But it's a lot to ask somebody, and I understand that, and it's slightly dangerous" (03:07).

The plexiglass shield serves a clear example of technology with politics—its presence in Maron's recording space conveys his deference to CDC guidelines, his evidence-based liberal ethos, and his concern over the pandemic, especially when compared to Rogan's studio, which offers no such *visible* protection.[20] The shield also changes the relationship between host and guest, calling attention to the pandemic's immediacy. It would be difficult for in-person guests to speak flippantly about the coronavirus when faced with a tangible, technological reminder of the danger. Both methods (Zoom and physical distancing) change the space of his recordings, but even if he were to speak to guests in person without masks, frequent coronavirus testing, and translucent plastic dividers, the pandemic would still likely end up as a topic for discussion and affect who agreed to interview. At the same time, the ability to conduct interviews over Zoom has benefits for Maron, who is able to interview guests living far away without them having to fly in from locations like Australia and Canada.

Of course, not all recording spaces have been designed for podcasting. In addition to studios, podcasters regularly record podcast material, such as interviews out in the field, live theater events like those often released by *My Favorite Murder* and *On Being*, and ambient sounds that provide a sense of place, in temporary locations. For example, not including the

[20] Rogan's studio has superb airflow and filtering—a necessary feature given the amount of cigar and pot smoke the studio must contend with.

host's voice-over, *The New Yorker Radio Hour* podcast episode "A City at the Peak of Crisis" features interviews and monologues from 13 writers, sometimes in person, sometimes over phone or Zoom, in various locations throughout New York City. The selection and inclusion of the sounds of these various locations—recorded by various microphones and "saved" as digital information capable of being transmitted, reproduced, edited, repackaged in various files, and circulated—in the final podcast episode audio is a rhetorical decision producers can make because of the spatial location of recording and the abilities of the recording technology. In fact, the episode is partly organized around such a diversity of recording spaces because they communicate the identity of New York City.

Ignoring the new reality of the pandemic, why might a podcaster elect to record a live show at an auditorium or interview a police officer while they patrol a city when the audio quality would be clearer at a studio? One answer is that temporary recording spaces change the sound of a segment or show. Most obviously, larger spaces allow for larger audiences, which turns the act of recording into an event. If a live audience laughs uproariously at a joke during such an event, the audio, when released later as a podcast, now argues that the joke was funny. The same holds for gasping, sighing, and other nonverbal sonic reactions signaling emotion. Recordings of live shows in spaces that amplify laughter or let words echo richly also convey a measure of a podcast's success and invite listeners to participate, presumably for a fee. Such spaces also communicate a connection between audience and speaker, a level of access translated from episode audio to auditorium. At the same time, public indoor and outdoor spaces, such as coffee shops and city parks, lend a sense of authenticity and immediacy to recording, an aspect of sonic rhetoric we'll explore in depth in chapter three. Rather than reporting secondhand on sounds, recording on-scene allows a podcaster to capture the action as

it unfolds. Sometimes, that action is the ambience of waves crashing against Brighton Beach, and sometimes it is the scuff of a police officer's boots as she runs up to a man whose coat has caught fire from a lit pipe he was trying to hide, to use two examples from "A City." Both create an authentic sense of sonic depth, drama, and presence that avoids the parody of adding in sound effects in post-production. There is an argument of truth in such audio—these sounds are the real deal, they suggest to the audience, so listen. Temporary spaces open the persuasive possibilities of podcasting to more than just conversation between a group of individuals seated in a closed off room. They enhance the affective potential of the medium, and support complex arguments tied to physical spaces and location-based sound.

The Rhetoric of Production: Microphones

The technologies used to record a podcast can be as simple as a single smartphone or as complex as an interconnected array of microphones, audio recorders, mixers, preamplifiers, headphones, computers, and other equipment. These technologies determine what recording locations can be utilized, the ceiling of sound quality for a given episode, and, perhaps most importantly, who is able to record a podcast. For this section, we'll focus on microphones, as they impact a podcast's rhetorical possibilities in arguably the most direct way. First, we'll look at the rhetoric of wired studio mics, and then we will turn to the rhetoric of wired and wireless portable mics.

Wired mics offer podcasters one path to making convincing, attractive audio, which is vital for maintaining listeners. Rhetorician Bump Halbritter explains that good audio—that which is clear from distractions—is "authoritative sound—sound that demonstrates that the author(s) have paid attention carefully enough to enable their audience to pay attention to the relevant aural data" (161). In reference to speakers, we might call such "authoritative" audio

"the radio voice," a term German philosopher of radio and sound Theodor Adorno used (Goodale 1, 151; Mariotti 427). Such audio is powerful: Adorno argued listeners "may be inclined to believe that anything offered by the radio voice . . . has testimonial value: radio, itself, said it" (qtd. in Mariotti 427). In other words, clean audio possesses its own authority. Conversely, audio that is not authoritative is "bad" and can drive audiences away (Halbritter 161). But how do contemporary podcast mics achieve such power, and in what forms? Wired mics can be stationary (plugged into a more permanent setup at a studio)[21] or portable (plugged into battery powered recorders and mobile power supplies), with different rhetorical results. Podcasters recording in studio, such as Rogan, Maron, and *99% Invisible* host Roman Mars, use stationary dynamic mics—meaning it must be connected to a power source to work, rather than just plugging into a device like a computer or recorder—with cardioid pickup patterns. Cardioid mics like the popular Shure SM7B detect sound from the front and sides of the mic, but not from directly behind ("9 Best"). Effectively, this limits the recording to the voice of the speaker, and two speakers seated opposite one another can each talk into their own cardioid mic to create discrete audio channels that can later be balanced for a smooth, high quality, echo-free recording. In other words, these mics prevent feedback that can render audio unlistenable.[22] Along with dynamic cardioid mics, such podcasters often employ "suspension mounts," adjustable mechanical arms that position mic in front of the speaker and that "often feature a shock mount . . . that allows the microphone to 'float' between two rings separated by elastic bands"; and covers and windscreens like the Shure A7WS that "preven[t] 'plosive' sounds (especially the heavily aspirated plosive 'p') from making a popping sound due to the closeness

[21] "Stationary" is a convenient term, but even stationary mics are adjustable and meant to be moved—a necessary feature, given that human bodies are not uniform.

[22] If you've ever been on a Zoom call with someone whose volume is loud enough that their mic picks up your own voice, you've probably heard the grating, screechy noise this audio overlap makes. Maybe you've even begged them to plug in headphones to eliminate it.

of the strong puff of air that characterizes the sounds" (Halbritter 125, 136-137; "9 Best"). Occasionally, podcasters may use two mics plugged into a recorder or camera to record audio in tandem from different spatial locations simultaneous to make "true stereo" audio possible (Halbritter 140-141). Podcasters may also use a wireless headset with a built-in mic to conduct digital calls, but the quality is not as reliable as that of wired microphones. Ultimately, studio mics argue for a particular podcasting set up—while such mics support voice over work, the stronger argument is for face-to-face conversation. Sitting opposite across a table (so the mics don't record other speakers) near a dedicated personal microphone (for separate audio tracks to make volume adjustments easier production and post-production) that does not block views of other hosts and guests makes for an intimate and intense form of communications. This setup is not unique to podcasting, but when combined with the freedom of expression afforded by the technologically defined alternative style of the medium, it can result in powerfully rhetorical audio.

Although stationary wired mics result in clearer "authoritative" audio that argues a podcast's professionalism and thus its credibility, they also limit a podcaster's options in terms of accessible recording space. As a rule, the highest quality recording setups are the least mobile—when recording audio, most rhetors seek to control as many factors as possible: room noise in the form of fans as well as the minimalization of outside noise leaking in, surfaces (remember that soft surfaces soak up soundwaves), distance of speakers from mics (too close and sound distorts, too far and sound levels among multiple speakers using multiple mics become uneven), and so on. While stationary wired mics offer numerous benefits, podcasters such as Rogan have, albeit infrequently, used smartphones without aftermarket mics for wireless recording when traveling, proving that even the lowest budget setups can work for professional

podcasting. The smartphone approach means that a podcast can be recorded from virtually anywhere, so long as a device has enough of a charge.

Rather than smartphones, journalists tend to rely on portable directional "shotgun" microphones like the RØDE NTG2 that are externally powered and wired to a battery powered recorder to record audio away from a professional studio; such microphones equip podcasters with different rhetorical options, such as incorporating ambient noise ("9 Best"). Shotgun mics get their name from their long cylindrical shape, which looks like the barrel of a gun. Podcasters aim them in the direction where they want to pick up noise.[23] Often, journalists and journalism-style podcasters will pair their portable setup with an outdoor windscreen, typically a "windjammer" consisting of a fuzzy, fluffy cover of fibers 1" or more in length that encapsulates the receiving area of the microphone (Lott). When wind hits the cover, the fibers "disperse air movement around the microphone capsule," greatly reducing wind noise (Lott). Reducing wind noise is a rhetorical choice—it helps create authoritative sound. Ambient noise such as wind can be reduced, but it is hard to eliminate completely. Strong gusts still register, as well as ambient noise within the mic's frequency response, which "defines the range of sound that a microphone can reproduce and how its output varies within that range" (Rochman). Recording such gusts, and choosing not to edit them out in post-production, is rhetorical: these sounds convey rough conditions that contribute to a show's soundscape and also demonstrate the podcast host in action, heroizing them to a degree by highlighting their efforts to record a podcast, which boosts their credibility. There are many other technologies and specs for podcasters to consider; picking from among these options means making rhetorical choices. Consider the following information about microphone specs. All sound that passes through a medium possesses frequency, also

[23] Shotgun mics technically pick up audio from all directions, but they are most sensitive *by far* to sound in front of the barrel. For further reading, see Halbritter 126-132.

known as pitch, which "is the number of times per second that a sound pressure wave repeats itself" and represented by the measurement hertz (Hz) (NPS).[24] Most microphones, and the RØDE NTG2 is no exception, have frequency responses of 20-20,000Hz, which corelates to normative human hearing ranges (NPS). In other words, a shotgun mic will pick up any sound a human can hear in a particular direction. As we covered in our discussion of temporary recording spaces, recording ambient noise is often a welcome outcome. There's a presence to such audio—while isolated audio of the human voice[25] results in high legibility, it is not natural, almost as if voice were surgically removed from the environment. On the other hand, ambient noise makes for dynamic soundscapes (we'll cover this concept in far more detail in chapter three) where human voice coexists with the sounds of the surrounding environment. In other words, portable microphones allow for the voice to work ecologically, be it in a crowded city street or a quiet meadow on a breezeless morning. As such, these mics make any number of affective rhetorical effects possible, including locating a podcaster in a particular space to stir up fear or anger. For example, Episode 868 of *War Room* includes audio of correspondent Tracey Anthony recording live from outside the courthouse after Chauvin's guilty verdict was announced. The loud noises of the chanting crowd celebrating the judgement play into Bannon and his guests' rhetoric about dangerous and violent liberals overturning law and order if they do not get their way. At the same time, other news podcasts might frame the very same sounds recorded at the same space and time as celebratory and reconciliatory. Aided by such framing—or rather manipulated by it—audiences attribute arguments to sound as an act of interpretation, for sound itself makes no

[24] A low-pitched sound, such as a bass rumble, has a soundwave that repeats itself infrequently. On the other hand, the soundwave of a high-pitched noise like a sharp whistle repeats itself more frequently.

[25] Voice can also mark or suggest race, gender, age, location (through accent), and able-bodiedness—information that can influence audience interpretation. We will discuss this concept in greater detail in the third chapter, which theorizes sound and listening.

argument irrespective of listeners (Goodale 140). Sonic rhetoric of affect and ambience is a major component of the third chapter, so we'll return to it there.

In addition, these mics and portable mics with other pickup patterns allow for podcasters to actively seek out and capture ambient noise, in some cases providing indisputable sonic evidence to support a claim. For example, consider "Wild Talk," a 2010 episode of the *Radiolab* podcast that explores the work scientists are doing to decipher wildlife communication from sonically rich environments like the jungle. "Wild Talk" incorporates many recordings of various habitats and animal noises, such as the audio of the Taï rainforest "in the Ivory Coast in Africa" that precedes (and then) underscores Professor Klaus Zuberbuler's description—and argument—of the jungle as a place where "[a]ll of these insects and birds and bats and mammals . . . . compete for acoustic space." Such audio transforms "Wild Talk" from an interesting conversation about animal communication into a highly immersive audio experience. More than that, it's *convincing*. When podcast hosts Jad Abumrad and Robert Krulwich, along with reporter Ari Daniel Shapiro, make the conversational argument that animals have language, even words, that they use to communicate, they are responding in large part to audio that researchers Klaus Zuberbuler and Con Slobodchikoff collected using portable microphone setups. Listeners have heard the similar yet subtly distinct alarm calls the Diana monkeys make in response to boom box audio of two different predators: "leopard[s]" and "Crowned Eagle[s]." About the slightly different alarm calls, Krulwich observes, "It's really kind of like, a word." Because listeners have heard the different ambient noises of the Diana monkey alarm calls, they're probably more likely to share Krulwich's conclusion, as well as its implications for public conversation about environmental sustainability, eating choices, public health, and more.

The Rhetoric of Post-Production: Audio Editing Programs

Depending on the vision of the podcaster, post-production—the work done after the initial recording stage—varies from unobtrusive to highly intensive. For podcasts, most post-production activity takes place within the confines of audio editing programs like Audacity and Adobe Audition. These programs allow podcasts to cut, arrange, insert, remove, layer, and modify audio to suit an episode's rhetorical and expressive goals. Such programs and their features are an essential tool for podcasters, allowing producers to stitch together multiple interviews, sound clips, music, and other disparate sorts of audio, often recorded asynchronously. These programs offer podcasters clear choices for how they want to arrange and deliver their podcasts to achieve certain effects and affective resonances, as well as to provide narrative structure. They also can enhance the perceived quality and production value of a podcast by reducing unwanted audio artifacts and balancing sound levels. One of the most impactful arguments audio editing programs make is that podcasts need not unfold linearly; like radio shows, recordings for podcasts can be modified and rearranged to build a narrative flow, regardless of the order in which audio was recorded. They also argue podcasting's legitimacy while maintaining technological access—through such programs, just about anyone can make a podcast sound polished and professional. Audio editing programs allow podcasters to utilize post-production techniques formerly reserved for sound design specialists like audio engineers and radio producers, who worked with an array of expensive equipment that modified audio recorded on strips of magnetic tape (Wolpin). Since audio editing programs have always been associated with podcasting, they—and their many editing possibilities—form an indispensable part of the medium's technological terministic screen.

For highly produced podcasts, audio editing programs are key for the podcast's delivery and arrangement. Abigail Lambke argues that for podcasting, these rhetorical canons "overlap . .

. in two ways" ("Arranging"). "First," Lambke contends, delivery and arrangement overlap "in the composition of podcasts and how their delivery is dependent on arrangement, how arrangement often follows chronologically after delivery and in a sense becomes delivery though the editing process." In other words, in highly edited podcasts that arrange various different sound samples and voice over into a unified composition, delivery is arranged by the podcaster, who in post-production picks the moment when delivery in the form of audio occurs. Secondly, delivery and arrangement "overlap . . . in specific choices regarding narration, how much narration is used (or arranged) in the piece, and the vocal tone of delivery. While narration isn't always used in podcasts—plenty of podcasts consist of linear audio that hasn't been rearranged—when it occurs, it is delivery that serves to highlight and contextualize the logic dictating the arrangement, and the vocals provide some information to readers about how to feel, or how the narrator feels, about what just happened, or what is going to happen next, in the podcast.

We can see the overlap of delivery and arrangement in the *Radiolab* episode "Wild Talk." Within a little under 22 minutes, "Wild Talk" weaves together two parallel stories: Ari Daniel Shapiro's reporting on Zuberbuler's audio experiments with Diana monkeys in the rainforest of the Ivory Coast, and Slobodchikoff's study of the language of prairie dog chirps. Hosts Krulwich and Abumrad arrange portions of both stories into a narrative seeking to understand both professors' insights into animal communication. This inductive narrative, which uses audio recorded at many different times and at different parts of the world, is a rhetorical construction relating to arrangement—at the time of the episode's publication, both hosts have already formed opinions about the topic and the related evidence. Yet this engaging approach leads the listener along a path of discovery as they progress linearly through the audio, a form of

narrative construction would not be possible without audio editing software. Audio editing software allows Krulwich and Abumrad to order the narrative through juxtaposition of audio segments, e.g., Zuberbuler discussing the alarm calls of Diana monkeys (one segment) followed by audio of such calls (another segment), and with the pair's delivery of voiceover narration, which takes several forms. In "Wild Talk," the hosts recap previous segments (Abumrad: "So in other words, this sound [prairie dog chirps] is filled with little ghost notes that we can't hear"), summarize information to keep the narrative's fast pace (Krulwich: "Con's computer noticed that the noise they [prairie dogs] made when a human walked through their village was different in tone from the noise they made when a coyote walked through their village"), signpost switches between segments (Krulwich: "And that brings us back to Klaus. You remember Klaus?" Abumrad: "The monkey guy?"), ask leading questions (Abumrad: "So what happened?"), and more. Powerfully, Krulwich and Abumrad arrange the show to conclude shortly after the delivery of a moving story segment in which Shapiro reports Klaus recounting the time when understanding the Diana monkey alarm calls alerted him to the presence of a stalking leopard:

> **Zuberbuler:** Suddenly I shifted from being the objective observer to being a sort of part of that whole crowd in there. Even though we're separated by 20, 30 million years of evolutionary history, these humble creatures were able to teach me something about what was going on in the forest. And of course it wasn't intentional. They weren't trying to inform me or anything like that, but it was a very emotional experience.

"Wild Talk" could have ended anywhere, but the rhetorical choice to save that story for last means that audiences finish the episode thinking about the connection between themselves, other animals, and their environs. Hearing Zuberbuler's own accented words as he reflected on the experience, underscored with somber thematic music made possible by the layering of

Zuberbuler's voice track with that of the music through audio editing software, is simultaneously affective and thought-provoking. However, natural the storytelling choice may seem, it is only one ending among the many that such software makes possible. We touched on some of the sound editing choices here, but see chapter three for a much deeper looking into those, where they relate more closely to the topic of the podcast that serves as the chapter's artifact.

Audio editing programs also allow podcasters to use their own voices to frame either entire recordings (as in the linear recording of a guest interview) or moments/segments in a podcast. With introductions and conclusions recorded after the event of an interview recording, Maron and Rogan (in audio-only versions of his *JRE* podcast) can provide their thoughts on how the interview went, which, if the audience respects the hosts' opinions, likely colors their reception of the audio that followed (or, in the case of the conclusion, preceded). In some cases, this rhetorically powerful technique can be used to lower the audience's resistance to a controversial guest, as was the case when Rogan interviewed controversial alt-right conspiracy theorist Alex Jones for the episode #1255 of *JRE*, published February 27, 2019.[26] Here's how Rogan introduced Jones for the edited (not live-streamed) version of the podcast, following host ad reads of advertising messages:

> **Rogan:** My guest today is one of the most controversial people in the United States of America. I've been friends with this gentleman on and off [chuckles]—we're back on again—for at least 20 years, I've known him. Uh, and this was a fun podcast. If you're

[26] Both the YouTube video from the initial livestream and the Spotify episode do not include Rogan's opening monologue, which is largely a vehicle for advertisements intended to monetize podcast downloads. Since YouTube inserts ads automatically into the episode and Rogan receives a share of that ad revenue, there's no need for Rogan to provide the monologue there, nor would it make sense, since he begins streaming with his guest(s) present. And since Spotify pays Rogan for his content, he does not need to sell ads on Spotify and may not even be permitted to. To find audio of this episode that contained Rogan's monologue, I had to find an old version of it on the internet that was not hosted by a dedicated podcast network, as Rogan disabled those indexes per the Spotify exclusive deal. I was able to find such a version at the following link: <www.mixcloud.com/TheJoeRoganExperience/1255-alex-jones-returns/>.

> like goddamn it, I'm not listening to this guy, give it a chance. If you're drunk or stoned, definitely give it a chance. You're gonna love it—I hope. If not, there's a lot of other podcasts to listen to [laughs]. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Alex Jones.

With this brief introduction, Rogan appeals to the audience's desire for entertainment, saying the podcast is "fun" while urging listeners to "give it a chance" despite their preconceptions of Jones—a man banned from YouTube and many other social media sites—as an outrageous liar who once claimed that the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting was a ploy to tighten gun control and helped promote a conspiracy theory that "included the baseless claims that Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and her top associates were running a demonic sex-trafficking ring inside [a] pizza shop" (Higgins). But audiences who wish to be entertained and who trust Rogan's opinion may find the host's preamble a convincing reason to continue listening, which opens them up to Jones's arguments during the nearly five-hour long episode. And if they take up Rogan's suggestion of being intoxicated while listening, audiences may be more likely to listen to the episode, which might make them even more susceptible to Jones's conversational persuasion.

The Rhetoric of Post-Production: Graphic Design Software

Not all post-production podcast technologies deal exclusively with audio editing. In fact, as we'll see in our upcoming analysis of circulation technology, a podcast cannot be published on many networks without an accompanying logo, and many series provide unique artwork for each individual episode that communicates a show's content and often that make its own argument related to the episode with which it is paired. Because episodic artwork relates to a finished audio file, I consider graphic design software such as Procreate (application), Adobe Photoshop (downloadable program), and Canva (web-based program) to be a post-production

technology. Simply put, these programs allow artists and designers to create and manipulate images and text. While the execution is complicated, involving multiple layers, brushes, filters, a choice between pixels and vectors, and so on, we do not need any deep understanding of how a particular result is achieved to appreciate an image's rhetoric. There's certainly an argument to be made that graphic design software is *also* a production technology—whether a logo is created before the episode of a podcast is recorded or after is a matter of podcaster personal preference. However, the post-production designation makes the most sense for my analysis since I include analysis of episodic artwork.

Graphic design software allows podcasters to brand their podcasts with relevant artwork, images, and logos that, like colorful album covers, attract potential listener attention and promote the podcast's ethos while communicating (and co-constructing) some of the show's identity. For example, Bannon's *War Room* logo is rife with evocative, alarmist imagery that argues urgent action to prevent disaster:



Figure 4. *A screen capture of the* War Room *logo taken from Apple Podcasts, where the show has a rating of 4.6 out of 5 based on nearly seven thousand reviews.*

A yellow and black triangular biohazard warning sign, blemished and scraped to denote age and use, dominates the center of the image. Behind the biohazard sign, a badge displays the colors and symbols of the National Flag of the People's Republic of China, and behind the badge, a biohazard symbol wrought of red flames with white-hot cores blazes. The podcast's title, *War Room*, appears just below the center of the foreground in white, all caps font transposed against a crimson sign that's slightly darker than that of the flag. Beneath the logo, the podcast's subtitle, "Pandemic," is displayed with black font inside a yellow sign with black accents. In associating a representation of China with the biohazard of a pandemic, the logo makes a racist, nationalistic, and white supremacist argument that China is culpable for the coronavirus and a threat. It is China and their pandemic, the logo posits, that we must be wary of. With just one image, Bannon's War Room tells audiences what they're in for, and it appeals to the standing reserve made accessible by long tail distribution and network administrators who permit the show to remain available on their platform for tens of millions of potential users. The technologically afforded potential for logos to make strong, brand-cohering arguments is a part of the persuasive horizon for podcasts.

While logos remain relatively static and recognizable, some podcasts, including *JRE* and conservative commentator Ben Shapiro's *The Ben Shapiro Show* (*BSS*), supply new thumbnail images for every episode dependent upon guests and topics. While Rogan's episode thumbnails usually involve a benign image of him talking to the featured guest, Shapiro's episode thumbnails are provocative and quite rhetorical. Looking at one of the *BSS* thumbnail images

shows how the productions of design programs add multimodal flair to podcasts as well as enticing visual arguments for target audiences. Consider the thumbnail for episode 1136—also provocative titled "Who Really Rigged the Election?"—of *BSS*, taken from *The Daily Wire* website and seen in Figure 5:

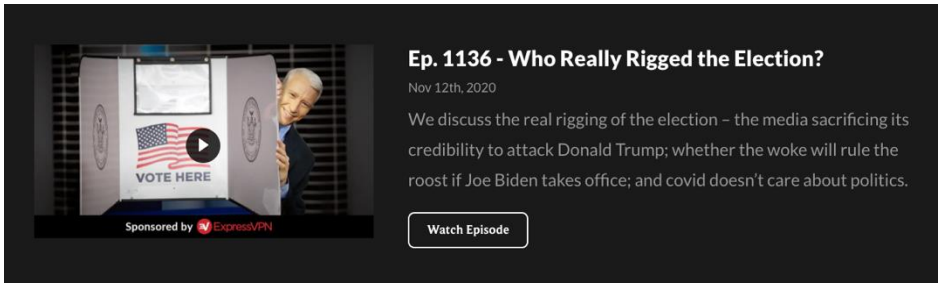


Figure 5*. A screencap (taken 11.12.2020) from* The Daily Wire *'s page for* The Ben Shapiro Show *featuring thumbnail art for an episode of the* BSS *podcast that depicts a Photoshopped scene where a smiling Anderson Cooper hides behind a ballot privacy screen above a sponsorship message for ExpressVPN.*

The answer to the episode title's rhetorical question—which makes an interesting, if baseless assumption that the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election *was* rigged—one assumes, is Anderson Cooper, noted CNN commentator whose symmetrical facial features and silver hair renders him instantly recognizable to much of the public. By showing him hiding and grinning behind the ballot box, the episode art argues that Cooper, and the liberal media by extension, rigged the election. Design software allows the creation of this image that effectively, even if we heartily disagree, visually communicates the central argument of the podcast. The image is objectively a solid production of photo manipulation, on par in terms of quality with the images that accompany humor site *The Onion*'s satirical articles. And we can see from even this

brief screen grab how sharp the design of *The Daily Wire* can be, which communicates a stylish, savvy ethos that lends weight and an ethos of professionality to the rightwing publication's podcasts and other arguments—it takes resources (money and skilled labor) to create such images, and the display of those resources for each episode's art communicates high production values typically associated with more established media brands. That criticisms of media coverage might be overstated or ignore other circumstances in the episode is not really the point: for interested audiences, the episode's thumbnail image design is presumably an exciting invitation to listen. More than the series logo, which as we saw with *War Room* can communicate a show's central identity, individual episode art can offer a more immediate form of rhetoric relating to a particular issue of public importance, such as the 2020 election and the legitimacy of the ballot results. The series logo screams "pay attention," but the episode art, when present and customized, screams "pay attention *now* because—" and supplies the reason to listen.

C. The Rhetoric of Distribution and "Listening" Tech

Just as the tools and techniques of production and post-production argue how podcasters should approach composing in the medium, the technologies of distribution and "listening" (both abled hearing and disabled access via transcripts) frame persuasive possibilities. In the following section, we'll analyze the rhetorics of RSS, networks (directories and applications), listening media (smartphones, vehicle media consoles, etc.), and transcripts. These are the technologies responsible for delivering podcast audio files to directories, for curating shows for subscription, for granting audiences the ability to listen, and for *either* restricting access to only those able to listen *or* for making content accessible for disabled audiences. Distribution technologies, which we'll consider first, support individual self-publishing on a personal website. However,

technocratically managed directories, e.g., Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and other services, open RSS subscription to series up to exponentially larger portions of the standing reserve of long tail audiences. At the same time, their interfaces and algorithms serve as a literal technological terministic screen, allowing these directories, which already wield considerable power over users and content, to influence what podcasts succeed and fail. After considering the rhetoric of distribution, we turn to the rhetoric of listening technology. Much like the devices and locations used to record podcasts, listening technologies operate within the rhetoric of space. In establishing where, and how, subscribers can listen, such technologies ultimately determine what rhetorical spaces are possible for audiences to receive podcasted arguments.

The Rhetoric of Distribution Tech

As we saw earlier in our discussion of the U.S. regulatory context, podcasting's technological identity separates it from similar audio mediums like broadcast radio. In fact, internet distribution and subscription technology—namely Really Simple Syndication (RSS) and the applications that index RSS feeds—afford the medium its rhetorical leeway and grant it bona fide alternative status no matter how large an audience it reaches. In addition to defining the medium from a regulatory and content perspective, RSS and its associated technologies also help account for podcasting's massive growth in public awareness, raising the medium from a little known, geeky curiosity in 2004 to an industry projected to reach $1 billion in annual revenue in the U.S. alone in 2021 (Reyes). In this section, we'll discuss the rhetoric of RSS and the podcast directories that rely on RSS feeds to connect users to content.

First, the basics. Really Simple Syndication (RSS), originally a technology for fans to keep current with their favorite blog site's latest posts, allows users, typically through podcasting directories and podcatching apps like Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify, etc., to

automatically gather, organize, and archive podcasts as new episodes are released. Podcasters can easily create their own RSS feed, too, meaning that such feeds don't pose any substantial barrier to entry. Apple Podcasts requires relatively few pieces of information from podcasters to apply for their program to be added to the Apple Podcasts directory: title; description; show artwork that includes the show's title; primary language for the show; category to which the show belongs, e.g., "history"; and an indication of whether or not the show contains explicit language. Podcasters can use either their own website to host their podcast's audio files and "use a plugin like the PowerPress plugin for Wordpress to create [their] podcast's RSS feed," or use a paid podcast hosting platform like Buzzsprout to store audio and create the feed ("How to Create"). As Apple explains in the company's guide for podcasters using RSS, "[a]n RSS feed contains all the metadata of a podcast. This information governs what listeners will see about your podcast on Apple's services: from the . . . show art, to whether a podcast shows up in relevant searches, to episode titles and descriptions" ("A Podcaster's Guide"). In this way, the overall RSS feed for a podcast when displayed on a podcasting app or directory is similar to a storefront or webpage, communicating important information about the podcast in order to entice users to subscribe to the feed and thus receive the episodes. This ability to subscribe to podcasts simplifies the process of listening—once a user subscribes to a podcast RSS feed, they will receive that podcast's episodes as soon as those episodes are published, rather than having to return to a site to check for new episodes. The most important feature RSS feeds offer is streamlining how podcasters distribute their podcasts and how consumers receive episodes. Without RSS, users would have to manually seek out new episodes, relying on social media posts or checking the website themselves. In other words, users would have to do a lot more work, which would presumably make podcasting less accessible (in terms of listening) and

popular, which would also make them less marketable. Equally important, in the same way RSS makes podcasts accessible for audience, it also makes audiences accessible for podcasters and their arguments. Because content is delivered automatically, it stands to reason that audiences are more likely to listen if they enjoy the show, even if the podcast features Alex Jones.

From a rhetorical standpoint, RSS argues that podcasts should be created and released on a regular schedule so that they remain near the top of the downloading queue on a given app. Because RSS *typically* organizes content in reverse chronological order, users see the latest episodes first, meaning they stay current with material (rather than having to endure a long running podcasts earlier episodes, which may be less consistent). In addition, after a new episode is listened to, the next most recent episode often plays automatically, creating a listening binge opportunity. All of this has rhetorical power: podcasters aware of the realities of RSS organization know not to assume that their audience has a deep understanding of the back catalogue of shows. *Serial*, for example, makes clear that audiences should begin with the first episode. Such an organization scheme argues that users should listen to the most recent podcasts, and podcasts with frequent releases (two or more new episodes a week, in my view) attract more attention on podcasting apps. For example, *JRE* and *My Favorite Murder*, two of the most popular podcasts of 2019 and 2020, usually release two or more episodes a week in some form, ensuring their continued relevance. (An important potential exception to the latest episodes first rule applies to serialized podcasts meant to be consumed in a particular order. Apple Podcasts, for example, provides a different organizational system to series that a podcaster designates as "serial," putting "the oldest episodes first," although newer seasons still appear before older ones ("A Podcaster's Guide").) Shrewd podcast rhetoricians can take advantage of this reality of RSS organization to monopolize an audience's RSS feed, as Bannon does with *War Room* by

releasing several episodes a day (DePillis). Similar to the 24-hour news cycle or a YouTube binge into conspiracy theories, Bannon is able to flood his audience with a unified message, his voice drowning out other perspectives, which makes his calls to action all the more urgent. While such audiences have decided to listen to Bannon in the first place and likely share his views, they might have had more time to think over his messages or consume other media had he not maintained such an aggressive publishing schedule. (There's a difference between someone arguing an idea once and arguing it multiple times a day, a sort of argument saturation that might be highly effective on an agreeable audience.) In this way, RSS and automatic subscription empowered Bannon's anti-democratic rhetoric through podcasting.

Podcasting directories/applications, such as Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and others control the podcast listening experience for users far more than many other technologies, functioning as a terministic screen whose interface and ratings system argue what is, and isn't, worth listening to. Directories and applications receive podcast RSS feeds and allow users to subscribe, stream, download, and play podcasts on a device such as a smartphone, laptop, desktop computer, or tablet, and they offer a variety of features for users and are the primary interface for playing podcasts. They display episode and series art, episode and series descriptions, listening times, track episodes listened to, and automatically bookmark a user's place in a podcast episode if they pause or shut the app, making it easy for a listener to pick back up where they left off, even if they decide to switch episodes. Other common features include podcast search and discover functions (by name, genre, and algorithmic suggestions based on series a user has listened or subscribed to), playback options (play, pause, skip backward X seconds, skip forward X seconds, increase or decrease play speed, and adding an episode to your listening queue). While directories have a lot of control in theory as well as practice, they are

subject to practical demands as well as the demands of capitalism—the two largest directories, Apple Podcasts and Spotify, are publicly traded companies—and political arguments about equity and fairness from a variety of angles. Because directories organize large numbers of podcasts—for example, as of April 2020, Spotify's directory included over one million different podcast programs—it is impractical for directories to pay close attention to what's being said in individual episodes and series, even if they cared to (Perez). Stockholders expect companies to continue to increase in evaluation and per share price, which means that directories are unlikely to exercise their ability to ban shows unless a show is either too small to affect their userbase or so abhorrent that leaving it up damages their reputation. And these companies have a built-in excuse: "in the case of podcasts, Apple usually explains that they are just cataloging the show and not actually distributing it" (DePillis). Technically, distributors are the platforms hosting the show files online, such as Podbean, the service that *War Room* uses (DePillis). Yet, without directories, such shows would have a drastically limited audience, in the same way that websites would without indexing services like Google's search engine. By contrast, YouTube is an actual hosting service—take it down, and the videos posted on the site disappear from the internet altogether unless they have other online homes. Further, were shows like *War Room* delisted, "that might fuel the argument—which Bannon has already exploited after being booted by Twitter and YouTube—that Big Tech has it out for conservatives" (DePillis). Wary of increased government regulation, tech companies tend to do what they can to avoid arguments that open them up to political initiatives that might curb their autonomy. That *War Room* remains indexed by Apple is a testament to the efficacy of the effectiveness of such arguments.

The Rhetoric of "Listening" Tech

Let's turn to "listening" technologies. Broadly conceived, listening is a rhetorical act because it gives audience to persuasion.[27] But listening means more than just picking out words. "Though listening is often thought of as a practice that involves paying attention to audible information," rhetorician Steph Ceraso argues, "sonic experiences engage much more than our ears and brains; they also affect our physical and emotional states" (2). For podcasts, listening—whether by playing audio or reading an episode transcript—is also technologically mediated. As Ceraso observes, "many technologies enable us to design personalized sonic experiences" that change the nature of listening (2). Listening technologies determine the rhetorical space of reception as well as the method. Will a user decide to take a podcast on the go with a smartphone, or listen in a home office using a laptop? Will a user listen privately via headphones, or broadcast podcast audio to all passengers in their car or in their living room? (Transcripts offer their own options, but these options are largely decided by their composer and publisher.) Each of these technologically facilitated listening options is rhetorical: broadcasting an argument to a larger group, such as students in a classroom, a partner, a family, or a small gathering of like-minded peers guarantees more numerous audiences than just oneself. However, because broadcasting removes opt-in, long tail delivery, it also means a higher chance of audience resistance to ideas and arguments. Private listening offers similar tradeoffs: audiences can listen to an episode without fear of peer judgement or outing their specific niche interests, values, or beliefs. Yet, compared to a television show or movie intended for mass audiences, it might be hard to find like-minded audiences to discuss a niche podcast, and, as we established earlier, audio files are difficult to clip and navigate, making sharing a part of an episode difficult. For example, not all passengers on a road trip may want to listen to an episode of NPR's *Code*

[27] For more on this idea, see chapter three, where I analyze rhetorical theories of listening—including those from Steph Ceraso, Krista Ratcliffe, and Greg Goodale—to generate an approach for sonic-based podcast analysis.

Switch, a series that explores "overlapping themes of race, ethnicity and culture" ("About"). This means private listening is a potentially isolating—and, depending on the show's arguments, potentially radicalizing—experience.

Smartphones, by far the most popular listening option, allow users to listen anywhere, transforming any space into a stage for podcast rhetoric. Smartphones lead other podcast playing devices, with about 70% of users listening to shows on their phones versus the roughly 30% of users who listen on a computer (Winn). Smartphones are the premiere playback platform for podcasts because they are ultra-portable, usually accompany us throughout the day, automatically connect to our preferred Wi-Fi networks, boast lengthy battery life, support multiple podcast listening applications, and provide playback via built-in speakers as well as through peripherals like wired headphones and Bluetooth-connected speakers, earbuds, headsets, and so on. Podcasts allow users to take their entertainment—and the arguments their entertainment makes—virtually anywhere. This portable availability—a major motivation for early podcast users, according to a 2009 study by Steven McClung and Kristine Johnson published in the *Journal of Radio and Audio Media*—could produce, with fewer numbers but greater intensity, the "pseudo-democracy" Theodor Adorno worried about with radio (Mariotti 427). Adorno argued, "as paradoxical as it sounds, the authority of radio becomes greater the more it addresses the listener in his privacy" because there's no one else to around to help resist the message (qtd. in Mariotti 427). Portability means more time for audio to speak to a listener privately, to convince them, to organize them. Rhetorician Greg Goodale discusses Tea Party members being emboldened by right-wing radio hosts like Glenn Beck in 2009 as a "less violent" example of radio's potential for anti-democratic action because of continuous messaging that "envenlop[s]"; however, we have seen with Bannon and *War Room* that podcasts might be

even more effective for inspiring violent anti-government action because they are available to listeners at all times of the day in just about any location where a phone can travel (148-150). Now, audiences can take voices like Beck's with them wherever they go, only such voices are not collared by broadcasting restrictions. Since many apps, like Spotify and Apple Podcasts, allow listeners to set preferences for automatically newest episodes in the background while their phones are on, a podcast is often literally close at hand. With headphones, audiences can replace ambient noise with podcast audio, amplifying the isolating, echo chamber effects of the filter bubble, where "personalization creates more dissonance between users and perceptions about others because" recommendation algorithms "filte[r] out content" created by those "who may have dissimilar views or perspectives" (Beck). Compared to searching for related perspectives and ignoring differing opinions, algorithms make filtering easy—it happens by technological design and beneath the notice of most users. The effect is a snowball: a user finds content that aligns to their views and begins to listen to more and more content of a similar nature, thanks to algorithmic suggestion based on the user's own preferences and history. Podcasts like Bannon's actively appeal to people who feel disenfranchised, which makes them even more susceptible to being swept along by such content, which again, is more intimate and present because of headphone listening and portable media devices. ProPublica reports that Bannon and his co-hosts take pride in persuading and grooming such people:

> On the eve of the Capitol riot, one of [Bannon's] co-hosts interviewed a young man at a pregame rally in downtown Washington who said his whole family had been dejected after the election. After discovering "War Room," they were increasingly encouraged and listened to every episode, resulting in his presence at Freedom Plaza that night. The "War Room" crew celebrated this exchange as evidence of its impact. (DePillis)

That's a quick turnover from November dejection to January insurrection—about two months. While that example involves a group, it shows how powerful such filtering is, as Adorno considered groups more resistant to such messaging. What's more, Bannon counts on the perspective-altering nature of his rhetoric to act as a terministic screen for listeners as they go about their lives: "As soon as you're able to create the structure of the context, and let them come to their own conclusions, they're going to be able to have their own mental map, they can then start making their own decisions, and then become disciples or force multipliers . . . . We've helped provide the information to people who are jacked up" (qtd. in DePillis). In other words, Bannon's example suggests there are two screens at work, those of the algorithm as a filter bubble and that of the rhetorician on the podcast—both train the audience to view the world in certain ways. On a phone screen and with podcast audio, the filter is physical, but like Bannon's "structure," those filters operate psychologically as well. In addition to smartphones, laptops, desktops, and tablets are other popular playback devices for podcasts. While not as portable (even tablets are bulkier and tend to have shorter battery life), these devices are still podcast listening staples for home offices and even travel. These devices offer nearly identical playback options as smartphones; however, the main difference, portability, restricts their utility for podcast playback. Yet, for researching podcasts, searching for hard-to-find episodes, browsing podcast-related merchandise, purchasing tickets to live shows, posting on fan sites, and discussing podcasts on digital communication platforms, computers, with their larger screens and keyboards, are likely more usable for most audiences extending themselves beyond the realm of the dedicated podcast app. They also make it possible to stealthily listen to podcasts while working an office job where headphones are permitted, which serves to increase listening opportunities in white collar professional settings.

As we touched upon earlier, listening can be either private (individual) or broadcasted (communal), and each approach offers their own rhetorical opportunities and pitfalls. Wired and wireless headphones, earbuds, and ear pods are not the only ways to receive podcast audio from a playback device (a phone, for example, typically has a built-in speaker, as do most laptops and tablets), but they offer a uniquely immersive and *personal* audio experience (Ceraso, *Sounding Composition* 2). Some headphones actively cancel out noise from the surrounding environment, a technology that, for podcast listeners who use it, elevates the sounds of podcasts above all else. With headphones and the like, listeners are, at the level of audible perception via the ear, encased within a physical barrier of soundwaves. They are safe to listen to content without those around them being able to scrutinize their listening habits. As we learned from Heidegger, this can be a positive and a negative: at the same time Black people might be able to listen via headphones to content produced by Black podcasters and find a measure of comfort "in predominantly white spaces where they work or live," it is conceivable that a coworker might, with near total privacy, be listening at the same time to an antisemitic, transphobic, misogynist, or white supremacist podcast espousing hate, or that even a podcast with a comforting, familiar voice might extoll sexism or worse (Flourini 210).

Vehicle media consoles and stereos offer a similar sonic bubble or enveloping audio experience to headphones and earbuds, but at a larger scale. While headphones isolate a listener, car audio can include additional passengers in a cultivated sonic environment for podcast listening. According to *The Infinite Dial 2020*, 28% of people ages 18 or older who own cars in the U.S. have listened to podcast audio in their car at least once—up 5% from 2018 (Edison Research). The same report identifies in-car listening as having "the most potential for digital audio growth. As Ceraso points out, cars are one of the most highly acoustically engineered

spaces with which we regularly engage (*Sounding Composition* 110-21). Car bodies and interiors are designed to filter out unpleasant road noise, generating a luxurious atmosphere for music and recorded audio to fill. Most contemporary consumer vehicles have built-in Bluetooth speakers, surround sound systems with bass, and even microphones in close proximity to the driver's seat for hands-free calls. The brains of these audio entertainment systems are media consoles, which dictate the audio that thumps through the speakers. In addition, the realities of modern living in the U.S.—dense urban cities housing desirable jobs but that are largely unaffordable for most workers to live in—means that many people commute in their cars. That's a lot of potential listening time for podcast arguments.

Transcripts, closed-captions, and transcription and closed-captioning software are technologies that increase access to podcasting to those with hearing disabilities; however, their infrequent availability and focus on voice-as-text translations effectively renders the majority of podcast content inaccessible to the hearing disabled. While automatic transcription and closed-captioning software offer a reasonable voice-to-text translation of podcast audio in terms of spoken words, such technology often struggles to identify multiple speakers, ambient noises, music, and other important components of a podcast's sonic composition. The best closed-captions and transcriptions account for more than just faithful reproduction of human speech, but also for tone and other sonic elements, as well as timestamps for document navigation and referencing. In addition to providing a more engaging account of a show, such transcripts also gesture to sound's affective qualities, which are integral to the medium's rhetorical powers. As a matter of civil rights for the disabled, podcasts published in the U.S. *should* include both transcriptions and closed captions. Few do. While Gimlet podcasts like *Reply All* as well as other podcasts like *On Being with Krista Tippett* provide transcripts, most, including *The New Yorker*

Radio Hour, do not. *The New York Times*'s *The Daily* podcast provides particularly good transcripts, with special attention paid to ambient noise and audio clip sourcing, as hinted at by Figure 6. Video versions of podcasts like *JRE* can be an exception, too, because of opportunities for lip reading and Spotify's video captioning capabilities.



Figure 6. *A screenshot of the beginning of the transcript to* The Daily *podcast episode titled "A Non-Transfer of Power," published Friday, November 13. Note the information provided to give context to the two archived recordings, one from George H.W. Bush and the other from John McCain, featuring speeches about conceding an election, as well as sound descriptions "(CROWD CHANTING)." While "[MUSIC]" isn't particular descriptive (What music—can the*

composition be identified? What instruments? Can it be attributed to a particular artist? What seconds/segment of a song is playing, if possible?), at least it acknowledges the presence of noise other than human vocalizations. Such transcripts argue podcasts are more than just spoken words—they are a rich, layered experience that are not solely for abled audiences.

As it currently stands, transcription technology, as well as the attitudes and approaches to transcription evidenced by its infrequent use, is not yet up to the task of making podcasts as accessible through text as they are through audio. Infrequent transcript use is, unfortunately, consistent with podcasting's overall technological approach. Any technology that poses an undue barrier to podcast publication, be it costs, time, or both, is destined to be ignored, no matter whom that leaves behind.

D. The Rhetoric of Promotion and Marketing Tech

Thus far, the technologies we have examined are essential to creating and listening to podcasts: mics record audio, RSS enables subscription and indexing on directories for convenient downloading and storage on smartphones and other computers, and speakers, headphones, and transcripts translate files into audible and legible communication. Of these technologies, only one, the transcript, typically requires end users—the podcast audience—to venture beyond their favorite podcasting devices; even so, as transcription technology improves, it is possible, perhaps likely, that soon transcripts will be packaged with episode downloads via apps like Spotify and Apple Podcasts. Yet, promotion and marketing technologies in the form of websites and social media accounts fall within, and contribute to, podcasting's rhetorical horizons. In this section, we'll discuss the arguments podcast websites, including discrete show sites like the *On Being Project* as well as those of parent media companies, including NPR, make

regarding the medium as a platform for public communication. Afterward, we will analyze how host accounts on social media sites like Twitter and Instagram afford and affect podcast promotion, both as a vehicle for public relations and marketing.

Personal websites serve as the internet headquarters and digital storefronts for many podcast series; like brick-and-mortar store fronts, gathering halls, and other spaces, these websites serve important rhetorical functions, including selling products and ideas as well as establishing a series' ethos (much the same as a logo). While not all series have websites, those that do, such as *On Being* (*OB*) <onbeing.org>, *My Favorite Murder* (*MFM*) <myfavoritemurder.com>, and *WTF* <wtfpod.com> often turn them into an entire digital experience for fans, offering behind the scenes news, scheduled episode releases, extensive show notes, tickets for live events (pandemic times excluded), and merchandise for sale featuring podcast sayings, artwork, and other related products. *MFM* even has a premium, pay to join forum for fans to discuss the show and plan meet-ups ("Fan Cult"). Personal podcast websites also serve as historical archives for their parent shows. Maron's *WTF* sitelinks to an entire gallery of images chronicling the host's historic interview with sitting president Barack Obama, to-date one of the most important moments for podcasting in terms of legitimizing the medium in the eyes of a still very much largely unfamiliar public ("Marc Meets Obama"). One suite of promotional sites and technologies that has been studied belong to the Maximum Fun network, which includes the tabletop role-playing game podcast *Adventure Zone* as well as several others. Kyle Wrather, the media scholar who conducted the analyses, found that such sites—first the those hosted by Maximum Fun and then later the social media sites the network used, including Reddit and Twitter—fit a "'premium model' of podcasting where producers integrate engagement, fan service and interactions as a way to build and maintain listenership and brand

loyalty" (58). Wrather argues that for "podcasts, the intimacy of the medium and fan familiarity with the hosts build community and camaraderie. By interacting across digital spaces, these relationships are deepened" (58). With smaller podcasts like those on the Maximum Fun network, there's more opportunity for engaging with hosts, which is rare for larger podcasts like *WTF* or *MFM*. However, the wider pool of show fans means more opportunity for bonding with peers who enjoy the show. Sites become even more crucial as rhetorical avenues for persuading (and making money off of) fans for shows like *War Room* that are removed from social media platforms. As a site, *War Room* bombards users with argument after argument for becoming more connected with the show, which the following figures demonstrate. The site's main page greets visitors with a popup (Figure 7) imploring them to sign up for the show's newsletter:

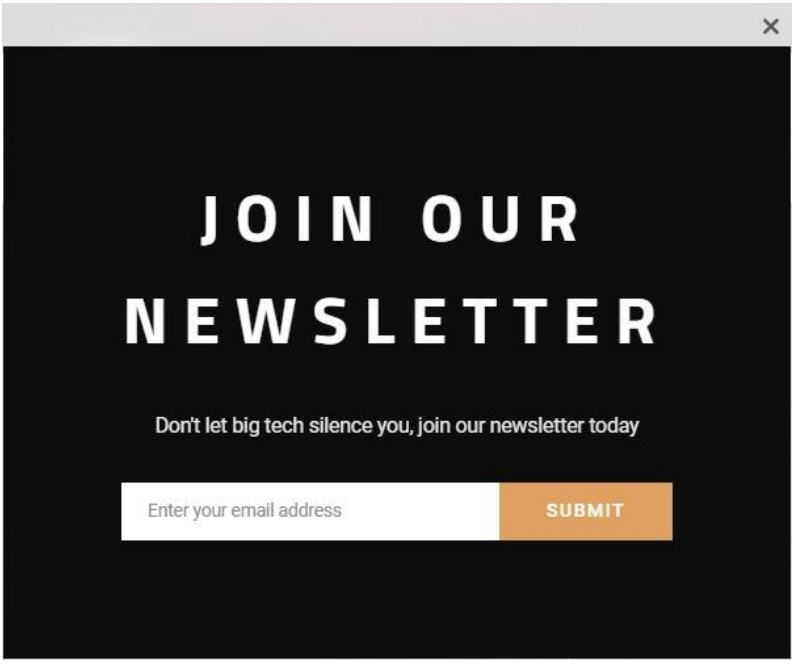


Figure 7. *Pop-up advertisement from the War Room: Pandemic podcast website urging listeners to sign up for email newsletters. "Don't let big tech silence you" argues that the listener—and not the show—will be "silenced" by not subscribing.*

Beyond the initial popup, the main page provides a link for making War Room your home site on your web browser, as seen in Figure 8:



Figure 8. *The clickable link reads "Make Your New Homepage BannonsWarRoom.com For All the Latest News." This description suggests that Bannon is a trusted source for information, even while Bannon is currently trying to control and filter sources of information from the moment a user connects to a web browser. Below the link, Bannon, an usual model for a health product, hawks vitamins and supplements from a related site.*

Furthermore, as Figure 9 demonstrates, the site devotes a full page, complete with a billowing U.S. flag, to attempt to persuade users to sign up for the newsletter:

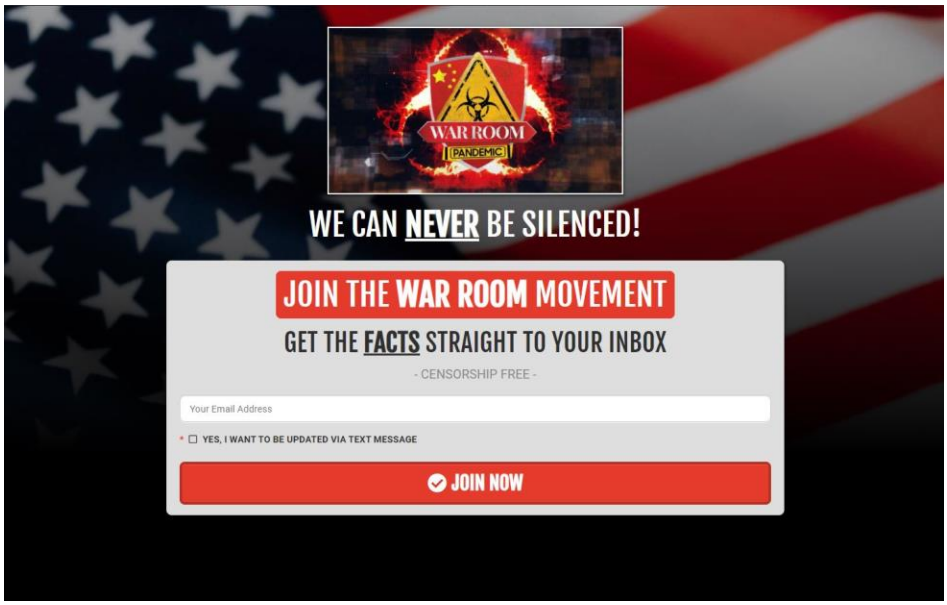


Figure 9. *This page also asks for listeners to subscribe to the War Room newsletter, as well as to receive text message notifications. The all-caps messages, backed by a billowing U.S. flag and positioned beneath War Room's evocative, racist logo, vow "We can never be silenced," call the show a "movement," and the information it presents as "facts."*

The *War Room* site attempts to cohere its audience into a marketing list—recall the standing reserve—to whom it can sell supplements and insurrection.

But podcast sites aren't only about hawking merchandise and selling fans annual memberships; some sites rhetorically situate the podcast within larger public conversation. *OB*'s site offers an example of how a podcast can serve as a core part of a social mission—the podcast is actually a pillar of The On Being Project (TOBP), "a nonprofit media and public life initiative" that "explore[s] the intersection of spiritual inquiry, science, social healing, community, poetry, and the arts" ("On Being"). As the quoted selection from the TOBP description suggests, a podcast's personal website offers much more than just a list of episodes, episode descriptions, and possibly transcripts. TOBP site has six main web pages:

- *Radio & Podcasts,* which includes *OB* as well as later audio projects;
- *Starting Points & Care Packages*, "thoughtfully curated collections of audio, essays, and poetry from [TOBP]'s deep archive";
- *Experience Poetry*, a space devoted to poetry as "a necessary art" that includes "interviews with poets, recording readings with poets, episodes of *Poetry Unbound*, and discussions about poetry's contribution to the common good";
- *Libraries,* which organizes audio and writing from OB around important topics such as "Civil Rights Elders," "Dying and Death," "Restorative Justice," and "Words Make Worlds";
- *Civil Conversations & Social Healing,* a project aimed at cultivating critical thinking and empathy with the goal of producing equitable social transformation; and
- *Our Story,* which explains the origins of OB and all the podcast (originally and currently also a radio program), initially "a controversial idea for a public radio conversation . . . . that would treat the religious and spiritual aspects of life as serious as we treat politics and economics" that now asks "What does it mean to be human, how do we want to live, and who will we be to each other?"

As *OB*'s site demonstrates, a podcast's site also offers opportunities for argument and persuasion that aligns with and supports the rhetoric of a podcast series' audio. *OB* envisions a world where audio—and podcasts—changes the nature of societal fabric, social relationships, spirituality, and human interaction. Make no mistake, *OB*'s aims are radical entry into public discourse in how they privilege human interiority and wellness. And it has an impact: the OB podcast "has been downloaded and played over 200 million times" ("Our Story"). Ultimately, the *OB* site concretizes the aims of *OB* podcast and offers a sort of curriculum that goes with it; in

organizing past episodes around themes, offering commentary, and putting episodes into conversation with other related media, the site honors the conversations that take place on *OB* between Krista Tippett and her guests, extending the life and impact of these moments and interweaving them into the fabric of a radical social project for human good.

Parent media company websites, like *NPR*, *The Daily*, *Fox News*, and the *New York Times*', often dedicate space to their in-house podcasts and related programs, a form of promotion by association. However, because in-house podcasts must fit the overall image and ethos of the parent media company, these spaces are far more limiting for podcasts than a separate site without such oversight. The pages of individual programs, like *NPR*'s *How I Built This with Guy Raz*, a popular business focused, interview podcast where host "Guy Raz dives into the stories behind some of the world's best known companies," are similar to personal podcast websites ("How I Built This"). *The How I Built This* page—typical of many podcast pages within parent media company websites—features a brief description of the show accompanied by its logo and clickable buttons to follow the show on various apps, including NPR One (an audio app that features NPR podcasts and radio), Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Pocket Casts, Spotify, and even the RSS Link. The page also features several recent episodes, displaying their release date, title, custom art featuring the guest, a description of the show, an option to stream the program, and the episode's runtime. Yet, while podcasts can benefit from sharing space on the well-trafficked sites of parent media companies, the uniformity expected among different podcast pages housed on a larger site smacks of overt corporatism and deters bold ideas, profanity, and controversy that many podcasters and audiences find exciting about the medium.

Social media sites on sites like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and others, including official podcast show accounts as well as the personal accounts of hosts both promote the show as well as argue/further the show's politics and worldview. In this way, social media sites for podcasts are like a site's homepage or presence on a network or parent media company's site, but social media also allows for kairotic engagement with current events, potentially with a larger audience than the show's fanbase because of how social media designs interactions and content spread. At the same time, social media's privileging of larger accounts can turn podcast announcements and events into viral social media happenings. In this way, host, podcast, and former show guest account posts can become news. Consider the media frenzy that ensued after Bernie Sanders' January 23, 2020 tweet promoting an (unofficial) endorsement from Rogan after the then presidential hopeful's guest appearance on *JRE* episode #1330 (13+ million views on YouTube) several months earlier on August 6, 2019:

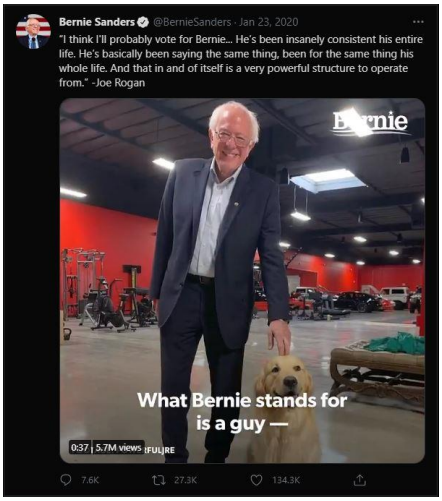


Figure 10. *Screen capture of a tweet from Sanders' verified account posted on January 23, 2020 promoting Rogan's endorsement. The video still captured here shows Bernie hanging out with Rogan's dog at the podcaster's studio gym and garage.*

A host of media companies covered and/or weighed in on Sander's tweet in either editorials or reports with a mix of approval, ridicule, and scorn. "Bernie Sanders," CNN reported, "is facing a backlash from some Democrats after his campaign trumpeted an endorsement from comedian Joe Rogan, a popular podcast and YouTube talk show host with a history of making racist, homophobic and transphobic comments" (Krieg). BBC analyst Anthony Zurcher argued that "blowback risk to Sanders is real" because of criticism he had faced from politicians, including Hillary Clinton, accusing him of being "too tolerant of misogyny among his followers" and that "his celebration of the Rogan endorsement could amplify those concerns." NBC News stated that "[f]ormer Vice President Joe Biden appeared to take a veiled shot at Sanders . . . saying in a tweet Saturday, 'There's no room for compromise when it comes to basic human rights'" (Seitz-Wald). Sanders' promotion of Rogan's endorsement was so divisive that it reportedly led to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, one of the most popular and social media savvy Democrats in office, to back away from fully supporting Sanders' presidential campaigns, according to conservative news outlet *National Review* (Hoonhout). The firestorm was also covered by Twitter, which featured the controversy as an official Twitter Event ("Joe Rogan Says"). That is an incredible level of media coverage for a tweet by a former *JRE* guest that grew out of a clip from a podcast, all of which goes to show how social media sites help connect public argument in podcasts to an even larger public.

In some ways, host accounts are more important than show accounts in terms of influence and public relations. Rogan uses his personal social media platforms to, among other non-podcast related posts, promote shows, update fans, and, in rare cases, even issue apologies. On October 19, 2020, Rogan posted a 1:46-long video to his Instagram account announcing to his

over 11 million followers that podcasts were cancelled for the week because producer Jamie Vernon "tested positive for COVID-19" (@JoeRogan "All Podcasts"). Rogan's choice to break the news that Vernon tested positive for COVID-19 on his Instagram account, and to share it in a way that simultaneously reassures fans about the host's own health, demonstrates how vital social media accounts are for shows, since it may not always be possible to make announcements on an episode, not to mention that links to ticket sales and merchandise have more staying power and are easier to access when posted on social media.

Social media also offers a space for clarifying and correcting information contained in his podcasts. After Rogan learned that he had repeated a fictitious statement and already proven false conspiracy theory that liberals had started wildfires in the Pacific Northwest during an interview with Douglas Murray, a "conservative British political commentator," Rogan "issued an apology over his social media accounts the next day, explaining that he had been misled by an article that he had read" (Quah "Joe Rogan"). As podcasts continue to grow in popularity and become entangled with larger commercial interests, the speak your mind attitude of many popular podcasts, *JRE* included, could potentially rock the stakeholder yacht. No matter what, with their many public functions, it is clear that social media accounts form a valuable part of the podcasting technological rhetoric ecology.

IV. INTRODUCING TECHNOLOGICAL CONTEXT AND TECHNOLOGICAL ACTION

By now, we've seen how technology is inherently rhetorical and understand that many different technologies—including those of production, post-production, distribution, "listening," promotion, and marketing—shape podcasting's rhetorical horizons. Looking at the rhetoric of technology in the way we have works well for this chapter, which aims to explore how such

podcasting technologies argue on their own. Yet, for the purpose conducting a rhetorical analysis of individual episodes or series, it is impractical to run down a list of technologies and mark off how each one impacts a particular podcast. So how are we supposed to account for the persuasion—and available means of persuasion—the ecology of podcasting technologies affords? In the remainder of this chapter, I propose separating the technological rhetoric of podcasting into two related categories to be considered when analyzing podcast rhetoric: *technological context* and *technological action*.

Technological Context

Technological context accounts for passive technological persuasion, the conditions of creating, sharing, promoting, receiving, playing, and discussing podcasts, but not those actions themselves. In short, *technological context* is the available technological means of persuasion, the horizon of possibilities that generates the choices comprising rhetorical acts. As a constraining factor in communication, *technological context* is part of the overall rhetorical situation, the context for a rhetorical act consisting of "exigence [whatever prompts the argument being made or studied], rhetors, audiences, and constraints" (Grant-Davie 266).[28] Considering technological context for podcast analysis allows rhetoricians to ask productive questions about how the ecology of associated technologies *informs* the act of using a podcast to argue, not the least of which is "Why a podcast?" Instead of *War Room*, Bannon could have blogged, relied on TV appearances, applied for a satellite radio station, livestreamed or uploaded videos on YouTube, made a newsletter, written a book, or turned to avant-garde theatre to argue his views about the results of the 2020 U.S. Presidential election. If you say, "but he could not rely on

[28] Technology has largely been left out of scholarship on the rhetorical situation, which often treat rhetoric as if communication were not technologically mediated. Lloyd F. Bitzer and Richard E. Vatz treat technology as merely a means of distribution that does not shape persuasion in presidential addresses (6, 8-9; 159); Scott Consigny leaves out technology when discussing rhetorical invention (181); and Keith Grant-Davie omits any mention of technology impacting audience reception of a text (272).

internet videos because YouTube banned him," then ah—now we are getting somewhere with *technological context*. As this example illustrates, *technological context* as a rhetorical constraint can be general, as in the rhetorical conditions of podcasting technologies, as well as specific, as in an individual's options to pursue a particular technologically rhetorical mediated act of communication. Beginning every podcast rhetorical analysis with the question "Why a podcast?" is a sound strategy that prevents us from ignoring the arguments podcasting technologies make about communication.

Technological Action

Whereas *technological context* is passive and in background, *technological action* is kinetic: it *is* the decision to use technologies and their supported features as well as the realization of their rhetorical potential through use. How and where was the podcast recorded, and how do such rhetorical spaces effect its persuasiveness? What decisions about arrangement were made in post-production, and what are the rhetorical consequences of those decisions? Does the podcast proceed linearly as the episode audio plays from start to finish, or does it move back and forth through time and conversation—how does that affect the episode's rhetoric? What content is being highlighted, discussed, or explored, and how do production and post-production technologies allow the podcasters to address such material rhetorically? How do production and post-production decisions support an episode's ethos? Recognizing that the technologically supported rhetoricity of podcasting goes well beyond just podcast audio, too, how do podcasts and podcasters use websites and social media to shape their brand and message? What arguments does a show's logo and website make? What do technologies make rhetorically possible for an episode, series, and/or relevant supporting media, and what is the impact of those decisions, i.e., the *technological actions* they implement?

Coupled with a consideration of a podcast's technological context, asking these and other questions about technological actions helps facilitate analysis of the multidimensional of podcasting; when considered, they push the study of podcast rhetoric beyond seemingly static audio files into a larger ecosystem of persuasive possibilities and intentional rhetorical choices for podcast compositions. Used properly, they help us build toward a more holistic conceptualization of podcast rhetoric. The goal here is not to have impassioned arguments about the importance of one microphone versus another—individual technological products change over time, and one cardioid microphone versus another shouldn't make a whole lot of difference to a podcast or series. But armed with an appreciation for the significant role various technologies as well as the overall technological contexts play in podcasts as a public communication platform explodes analytical possibilities, the same as it would for the study of cinema, radio, television, streaming video, and other exceedingly influential media.

* * *

In shaping how podcasts are recorded, produced, regulated, delivered, received, organized, promoted, played, discussed, and monetized, technology may be unmatched in its influence as a prevailing rhetorical force on the medium, which itself arose as a technological intervention to a democratic dilemma arising in no small part from broadcast radio that favors mass markets. Whatever podcasts promised initially in terms of political conversation, social engagement, and education, their technologies and larger contexts promote alternative possibilities made all the more appealing by lucrative commercial realities. When analyzing podcast content, we must remain aware of the forces influencing and shaping that content's

fashioning, always keeping in mind that, above all else, technology determines the podcaster's imagination and podcasting's horizons.

Podcast Rhetorics

Insights into Podcasts as Public Persuasion

Chapter 3: The Sounds of Podcast Rhetoric

I. INTRODUCTION

> We think in terms of universals, but we feel particulars.
>
> —Boethius, translated by Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement* (47)

> Coolness—
>
> the sound of the bell
>
> as it leaves the bell.
>
> —Yosa Buson, translated by Robert Hass, *The Essential Haiku: Versions of Bashō, Buson, and Issa* (81)

Three seconds of silence grow into the sound of water, of heavy, wind-driven rain pelting a coat. Grunting, a reporter clears his throat, heralding a voice, it turns out, that is not his own.

"Welcome to *The New Yorker Radio Hour*," says David Remnick, chief editor of *The New Yorker* and host of the *NYRH* podcast, his words clear layered over a backdrop of rain recorded at a different time and place. Thunder booms after his announcement.

"I don't even know if this thing is working," another voice says, the one who grunted before. "Oh, I guess it is. Seems to be showing my voice there. Um, yeah, so it's really quiet, and it is 5:38 a.m." As he speaks, the background noises lessen—perhaps the rain has stopped or the mic is better sheltered—although a bird's chirp can be heard above the wind's dull rumble. "Uh, a guy rides his bicycle down here," the reporter says, speaking in subdued tones as he describes someone nearby, which emphasizes their presence, "and is at a bench and is doing some kind of

leg exercises. And he's the only human around on the boardwalk besides me." A swirling surf can be heard, ebbing and flowing to a slow, pronounced rhythm.

"Ian Frazier was out before dawn recently on Brighton Beach," Remnick says, his voice set against a solemn, contemplative backdrop of surf. "He watched the sun rise over the Atlantic Ocean. It was April 15, 2020. As of that morning, the New York City Health Department reported more than 110,000 people diagnosed with COVID-19 and nearly 7000 dead. The actual number may be much higher."

"We're in an epicenter of a disease," Frazier says. "The reason that this is an epicenter is that nature made this as a perfect place for things to come together." Sounds from Brighton Beach—seagull caws, wind, and waves—underscore his words. "I mean, the way the salt water and the freshwater combine, the way, you know the sound and New York Harbor and the Hudson River coming in, and then these islands, this archipelago, and it's just such a perfect combination."

So proceed the first minute and thirty seconds of "A City at the Peak of Crisis": an aural tapestry of ambient noise, voice, observation, and statistics—the opening notes of an argument about a public health crisis that draws its rhetorical strength from not only its elegant, kairotic positioning in an arrangement conscious of, and conspicuous with, place and time, but also from the moving, affective, resonant power of recorded sound.

Such a complex, persuasive composition demands attention. Yet it also raises a question. For rhetoricians intent on analysis, what are the best ways to listen to such podcasts and their arguments?

In this chapter, "The Sounds of Podcast Rhetoric," I propose—and model—a novel method of podcast listening and analysis that accounts for not only the textual content of speech,

but also the rhetorical impact of affective sound, two aspects of audio that are typically separated. The artificial separation of speech and sound, with one or the other being ignored, leads to treatments of sonic rhetoric that are incomplete. To consider both speech and sound as a unified whole in podcast rhetoric, I draw upon RWS theories of listening, namely Krista Ratcliffe's "rhetorical listening" and Steph Ceraso's multimodal listening, and sound studies to trace the relationship between sound and rhetoric in an extensive and extended consideration of one particular, highly produced, professional and kairotic podcast, "A City at the Peak of Crisis," an episode from *The New Yorker Radio Hour* (*NYRH*) that contends with the COVID-19 pandemic. My research questions for the chapter are simple:

- How should we structure the practice of listening as an approach to podcast analysis?
- When analyzing podcasts, what should we listen for?
- How do vocality, ambient noise, and produced music contribute to podcast rhetoric?

The chapter plays out as follows. First, in "Theorizing Sound and Listening," I investigate theories of sound and listening in RWS, ranging from classical conceptions to current works, drawing out takeaways for listening to podcast audio that account for sound studies insights. After describing "A City" in "Artifact Selection and Description," comes "Methods Part 1: Writing to Listen," where I detail the first part of my reproducible methods for listening to, and analyzing, highly produced podcast audio, including the creation of a sonically rich transcript that identifies sounds and distinguishes different vocal modalities. After, in "Methods Part 2: Analyzing 'A City' of Rhetorical Sound" I provide the second part of my reproducible methods, modeled by my sound-based analysis of "A City at the Peak of Crisis," which

comprises the bulk of my chapter and focuses on the relationship between sound and spoken language demonstrated by several key moments. Penultimately, in "Discussion: The Sounds of Podcast Rhetoric," I describe my findings about both how sound functions rhetorically in podcasts as well as the role listening plays in arriving at such conclusions. Finally, in my "Conclusion," I offer some thoughts on the future of studying sound when analyzing podcast rhetoric.

II. THEORIZING LISTENING AND SOUND

> *Sans a definitive method, sound studies enjoins us to* listen.
>
> *—Joshua Gunn, Greg Goodale, Mirko M. Hall, & Rosa A Eberly "Auscultating Again: Rhetoric and Sound Studies" (477, emphasis in original)*

In the previous chapter, I argued that the recording, production, and promotion technology of podcasting determine the range of rhetorical choices podcasters can make and thus the range of experience listeners can have. Drawing on Martin Heidegger, who theorized that technology acts as an unavoidable lens that mediates our interactions with the world, I reasoned that podcast technologies like internet distribution, microphones, recording spaces, directory sites like Apple Podcasts, and so on, behaved similarly, with identifiable rhetorical results. For example, Apple Podcast's function as a directory that merely indexes shows technologically absolved Apple of the company's responsibility for monitoring content, with the result being that Steven Bannon's insurrectionist podcast *War Room* continued to have access to the directory's listener base, an audience that numbers in the tens of millions. While I pivot my focus from technology to sound in this chapter, in many ways what follows is an extension of those

arguments. Microphones, production and post-production software, and many other technologies make the rhetoric I analyze in "A City" possible. The episode's rhetorical sounds are a result of the affordances of podcast technologies, technologies that create the available means of sonic persuasion utilized by show's various segments (recorded in numerous different locations, both in person and over various communication software), thematic music, voice overs, editing choices, and more. Of course, to analyze a podcast as sonic rhetoric, one must first listen. But listening is no simple matter: how are we supposed to listen? What should we be listening for? How will we understand what we listen to?

To ensure our analysis is comprehensive and not superficial, we must draw upon rhetorical theories of both listening and sound. These theories can teach us how to listen, and what to listen for, in a podcast, even if they have rarely been applied to podcasts and have yet to be used to analyze podcasts as a form of public rhetoric—until now. In this section, I build a foundation for my analysis of "A City at the Peak of Crisis" by mining rhetorical theories of listening and sound for key takeaways that will guide my own practice of listening.

An Overview of Listening

Rhetoricians have long understood the importance of listening as a necessary ingredient in persuading an audience. As the flipped side of the coin to speaking in the Greek and Roman tradition of classical rhetoric, listening serves as a precondition for persuasion in oratory, where speakers delivered public addresses to sway members of a listening audience in attendance. Aristotle's definition of rhetoric and his descriptions of the "artistic" means of persuasion (ethos, logos, and pathos) relies on speakers and listeners, with no mention given to writing (37-40). "All the force and art of speaking," Cicero asserts, "must be employed in allaying or exciting the feelings of those who *listen*" (10, emphasis added). Listening is especially important for Plato.

Not only do his dialogues mimic spoken conversation, one of them, *Phaedrus*, also argues that listening is a requirement for improving "the soul of the *hearer*" engaged in dialectic (97, emphasis added). Famously, Plato awards reading no such credit.

While the dialectic modeled in Plato's dialogues suggests listeners possess at least *some* agency, that viewpoint is not always present in ancient treatments of listening, which tend to regard listeners as merely the objects of persuasion. Gorgias, in the Sophist's famous speech defending Helen of Troy, argues that speech can render listeners powerless to resist (*The Older* 52-53). "The effect of speech upon the condition of the soul," Gorgias proclaims, "is comparable to the power of drugs over the nature of bodies" (53). Like taking drugs, which can save and kill, listening to a speech can induce all manner of effects, "and some [speeches] drug and bewitch the soul with a kind of evil persuasion" (53). In the case of such persuasion, Gorgias contends, the speaker—not the listener—is to blame (52-53). Gorgias may have hit near to the mark, at least as far as podcasts are concerned. Media and communication scholars assert that radio and radiogenic audio media such as podcasts evoke great empathy and involvement from listeners, more so perhaps than reading print or digital texts, which as Gorgias illustrates is both wonderful and potentially deeply troubling (Berry 12; Lindgren 27; Wrather 45-46; Florini 213).

However important listening was for classical rhetoric, its practitioners took listening for granted (Ratcliffe 20). As a result, classical works provide almost no insight into listening as either a civic responsibility or form of analysis. Unlike oratory, listening, it seems, was not regarded as a *techne* worthy of theorizing. The idea that listening is a natural, passive activity, rather than a skill that requires training—or, for that matter, is *worth* training—is one that contemporary scholars in rhetoric and writing studies (RWS) resist. One way RWS scholars challenge assumptions about listening is by theorizing sound itself.

Key Theories of Sound

Earlier in this chapter, I posed the question "what should we be listening for?" That's a broad question, but we can focus it further by asking a few related sub-questions that break it into more manageable chunks: *What sonic affordances do RWS scholars argue makes sound uniquely rhetorical? How do these features complicate what it means to listen, particularly to a podcast? What implications might such features have for podcast rhetoric?* As we'll soon discover, rhetorical sound studies scholars theorize sound as physical and cultural material whose persuasive (both semiotic and affective) capacity is realized by embodied listeners who interpret sound subjectively based on their presence in the environment, their belonging to society, and their life experiences and positionality. The primacy of the listener raises interesting questions, too, about intentionality regarding sonic rhetoric.

In rhetorical sound studies, embodiment signals that listeners are shaped by lived experience, including culture but also their own physical form that is inextricable from the mind that interprets and makes meaning from sound. "By embodied," Steph Ceraso explains, "I am not only referring to the representational categories that have become staples of discussions of embodiment in the humanities and social sciences—categories such as a race, gender, class, disability, sexual orientation—but to the fact that an embodied audience comprises sensing, nerve-filled, responsive bodies" (*Sounding* 43). Our bodies do not exist as discrete, separated senses—we listen with our entire bodies. Ceraso explains, "sonic experience is also physical and multisensory—it can be heard, seen, and felt" (Ceraso *Sounding* 30). One interesting affordance of sound is that a person does not need to have a functioning "auditory system" in order to experience sound (Ceraso *Sounding* 31). "Our ability to sense sound in multiple ways has to do with vibration" (Ceraso *Sounding* 30). In fact, even when we're not listening, we're still

constantly *experiencing* sound (31). To illustrate embodied experience of sound, Ceraso points to Dame Evelyn Glennie, "a deaf solo percussionist" and "a renowned musician who performs more than one hundred concerts a year worldwide" (29). Glennie listening practices rely on her bodily sense of touch, and "she has characterized her interactions with powerful sounds as physical encounters" (33). For example, Glennie trained herself "to attend to how various sonic vibrations affected her body in different ways": "I would stand with my hands against the classroom wall . . . I managed to distinguish the rough pitch of notes by associating where on my body I felt the sound" (33). Ceraso includes Glennie not because she is "a specialized case," but because Glennie's embodied multimodal listening practices "can be reproduced in any individual regardless of where they fall on the hearing continuum" (29-30). That's embodiment—when we listen to podcasts, we literally *feel* sound.

But why does knowing that we physically experience sound matter for podcasts? The answer has to do with how we make meaning out of sound, which is grounded in our literal presence in the world as beings inseparable from society and culture. In the first chapter, I included a footnote about Joe Rogan's complicated, often contradictory views on masculinity that are not obvious from his arguments about mask-wearing during the pandemic. In fact, he often gets choked up and cries on his podcast when conversations turn emotional. For example, he wept openly when talking about the tenderness and compassion a veterinarian—a friend of Rogan's who passed away in a tragic accident—displayed when euthanizing a terminally ill dog the podcaster had rescued. Hearing that story and the emotion in Rogan's telling of it, I noted, made *me* cry. In other words, my body had a physical reaction to audio that deepened my connection to pathos in a podcast, a reaction far beyond what I experience from the story's content alone. I teared up because I was moved by emotions I *heard*, and because I could

empathize with Rogan's grief over the loss of a friend, the veterinarian. And that is because embodiment connects physical responses to sound to life experiences that were, and are, also physical. Not only did I remember grief—an emotion shaped by my awareness of mortality as a sentient being and capacity for abstract thought, i.e., the recognition of loss—my body recreated, in a smaller but still impactful way, the physical expression of that grief, all because of sound that lasted for only a few moments. While I've experienced similar moments through reading or watching a movie, I've found that it takes me hours—or at least tens of minutes—of investment before I feel connected enough to be so moved.) In other words, podcast audio interacts with our body, which can result in powerful visceral experiences. If a podcast can make a person cry, might it not also stir them to rage or despair? And what might such strong, physically transformative emotional experiences mean for podcasts as public persuasion?

When we listen to a podcast, our embodied experience of those sounds is shaped by our worldview, which is formed by our being in the world. The power of embodiment on listening is that our "situatedness"—what Heidegger calls "*Befindlichkeit*"—shapes our perception in ways that are simultaneously conscious and subconscious, logical and affective (Rickert 14). As Greg Goodale puts it, "all sounds are interpreted through a culturally imposed framework and in a specific context" (152). For example, an observer enjoying a city-organized Fourth of July celebration in the U.S. will likely be thrilled to hear the concussive boom of exploding fireworks. Yet elsewhere in the city, those same explosive sounds might trigger flashbacks and anxiety for a combat veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. "[T]here is," Katie Fargo Ahern explains, "a co-constitutive relationship between listener and object. When I listen I am listening as myself and within a society and culture, rather than gathering some objective data and then adding it to my cultural, social, and idiosyncratic contexts" (81). While the two listeners in our

Fourth of July example may belong to the same larger society and culture, their varying personal experiences result in drastically different visceral reactions to the same sound. Even if the veteran wants to celebrate the Fourth of July and, regardless of such desire, fully understands the cultural significance of the fireworks, they cannot choose to have one reaction over the other, at least not without extensive treatment. That's sound's affective power. "Affect," Thomas Rickert muses, "is a modality of the entanglement of world and body" (14). Do the impossible and take away either the world or the body, and affect—in this case whether the listener enjoys the sound of fireworks or dreads the bodily response they might induce—vanishes. For podcasts, then, we should remain mindful that while the *possible* affect of selected audio may be grounded within culture and society, how such audio affects listeners cannot be stated with certainty. At the same time, affect communicated by the human voice—podcasting's main rhetorical sonic content—is more generalizable than ambience noise like fireworks because abled audiences possess a lifetime of communicative vocal experience. Emotions like anger, sadness, joy, and others—what J. Logan Smilges calls "affective intensities bound up with language"—are relatively stable and discernible in speech, as my earlier example with Rogan's moving story about the loss of his friend demonstrates. Podcast audio may not have the accompanying body language to signal particular emotion, but "tone of voice, volume, and cadence of speech" provide plenty of affect even while the act of listening is not universal (Smilges).

Erin Anderson's 2014 article "Toward a Resonant Material Vocality for Digital Composition" uses embodiment to complicate our understanding of voice, whose origins unfailingly reside in the human body and whose meaning is always more than words. "While the rise of writing has," Anderson asserts, "over the centuries, made language increasingly silent, to simply map voice back onto language is ultimately to disregard voice as something more than

language, as that which language cannot say." Voice, then, is not just the sounds of words, but also affect: *how* we speak matters at least as much as *what* we say. Here's an example we'll discuss more deeply in later sections: David Remnick's narration. When discussing the statistics of the COVID pandemic in New York, Remnick's calm, soothing vocal delivery argues that listeners should not despair over numbers. Instead, audiences should resolve to weather the pandemic, being a source of strength for one another and the city as a whole. Rhetorically, the tone argues how we should interpret Remnick's words. We don't get that if we merely look at a transcript, but it's immediately apparent when listening. Anderson calls on rhetoric and writing studies to "embrace voice's fundamental paradox—as an embodiment not opposed to language but always in excess of it" in the hopes of "bridg[ing] some of the deep Cartesian fissures . . . between mind and body, word and skin, cognition and affect . . . which have abstracted our practice . . . from the fleshy immediacy and visceral substance of primary lived experience." Voice is "always in excess of" language because vocality offers metacommentary on—and in doing so argues—how spoken words and other noises should be received. (Language is, after all, essentially sound combinations with socially agreed upon meanings and written notation.) The matter of human voice as rich sonic material, best encapsulated by the term vocality, which pushes past the (voice = speech = language = text) math we often perform in our heads and accounts for voice's affective potential. Like most sound, voice, and thus vocality, may be impossible to fully capture in writing (Anderson; Goodale 152). Components of vocality, such as "accent, intonation, timbre" and "visceral, often-unintentional vocal emissions," as well as "the voice's potential for deliberate performance and play," not to mention "the voice's capacity to imitate both human and nonhuman sounds" may have any number of rhetorical implications irrespective of the vocalist's conscious awareness, shaping, or even ownership (Anderson). For

example, a mechanic may be persuaded that a client's car has a particular issue if the client imitates the noise their engine makes as it fails to start. Duck hunters use tools and breath to imitate particular calls to persuade passing waterfowl to land in a lake filled with wooden decoys for a clean shot. A teenager's exasperated "UGH" effectively communicates their frustration before the door to their room slams shut. While voice originates in the body and is marked by the body, it also leaves the body of the speaker behind as an "event" that may be captured and manipulated by technology in many ways (Anderson). "All sound recordings, after all," Rickert reminds us, "are live" (138). In analyzing vocality in podcasts, we should attend to voice as both meaning-making and affective, rather than separating the two (Anderson). In this way, voice's rhetorical and affective intermingling stands as a microcosm for this chapter as a whole, which considers podcasts not as either semiotic or affective, but as an inseparable synthesis of both.

The understanding of sound as embodied presumes the understanding of sound as material. We covered some of sound's material qualities in the previous chapter when discussing the technologies of microphones, whose pickup patterns and frequency ranges are based on the physics of sound waves. Indeed, much of the chapter engaged with the material rhetoric of podcast technologies, such as the physical spaces where recording takes place and which, through the use of acoustic material like sound absorbing (or rather soundwave *dispersing*) panels and microphone guards, take advantage of the physics of sound to achieve particular results, e.g., the reduction of distracting ambient noise.

When I say sound is material, I signal two related qualities of sound in keeping with theories of new materialism, an update to previous theories of materialism initiated by scholars Diana Coole and Samantha Frost in their edited collection *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Coole and Frost's new materialism differs from prior theories of materialism 1) in

viewing matter as dynamic in accordance with current scientific understanding, 2) in engaging with "a raft of biopolitical and bioethical issues concerning the status of life and of the human," and 3) in exploring anew "the nature of, and relationship between, the material details of everyday life and broader geopolitical and socioeconomic structures" (7).

First, sound is, as we discussed above, a physical force that impacts the world through vibrational waves. Sound's ability to move through and impact three-dimensional space within the sphere defined by Earth's atmosphere[29] is why we're able to experience sound with our bodies as it vibrates our ear drums, resonates in our teeth, and thumps in our chest. We produce it in abundance, as do most objects and forces that move through occupied space, whether such space is a concert hall, the ocean's depths, or the turbulent clouds that shake commercial airliners. In this sense, as the word "vibration" suggests, sound as material is not static, but rather in a state of constant change. As Coole and Frost put it, "[m]atter is no longer imagined here [in new materialism] as a massive, opaque plenitude but is recognized instead as indeterminate, constantly forming and reforming in unexpected ways. One could conclude, accordingly, that 'matter becomes' rather than that 'matter is.'" (10). In other words, the material of sound is dynamic, ever shifting, always mediated by other material—including our bodies and environments—that is also in a permanent state of change. For example, the sounds we hear in a podcast are not the same material as the sound that was recorded, and the material realities of reception differ across audiences, places, and times. We cannot experience the same sonic material twice. That fact alone should challenge our assumptions about listening and its persuasive actions, as my discussion of playback technologies in the previous chapter argues, albeit without explicitly referencing new materialism. Listeners using headphones are more attuned to the sonic arguments of a podcast than audiences playing an episode on their phone

[29] Does sound exist elsewhere? Yes. Does it matter for my discussion of podcast rhetoric? For the moment, no.

speaker located halfway across the room as they fold laundry or mince garlic. While that's a simplification, the implications are the same: listening is probably far more subject-oriented than most of us suppose or theorize. Notice once more that sound as material relates to listeners as embodied. Because of our bodies and the realities of materiality, we don't just "receive" sound when we listen—we collide with it, and as the principles of physics dictate, change both ourselves and the soundwaves in the process.

The second aspect of sound as material complicates embodied interactions further and relates to what we might broadly refer to as culture, or, in the Heideggerian sense, "situatedness" in the world. All material we as humans encounter possesses meaning that we and other humans construct according to personal experience as embodied beings, collective experience, the socioeconomic and political conditions of society, tradition, and other social factors. For example, the material of sound and its meaning (inseparable from sound as material since our interactions with sound are always as embodied beings existing in a world loaded with constantly constructed and fluctuating meaning) are shaped by the technocracy we discussed in the previous chapter, which holds that tech companies wield some of their power by administering technical networks, including podcast networks. Audio from Bannon's *War Room* appears—and sounds—more legitimate to audiences when it is validated by a high-ranking listing on Apple Podcasts that categorizes the show as "news" and packages it with a user-compiled rating that also displays the number of users who've rated it—another metric of podcast influence. In this case, the contextual, associated material conditions of sound argue that sound's legitimacy to listeners, with varying degrees of efficacy depending on the individual listening. Vocality carries similar materiality—how often are the voices of Black women accused of being "aggressive" when making a point, while the voices of straight white men are lauded as being "commanding"? How

quickly do audiences assume a speaker to be queer because of cultural stereotypes associated with pronunciation? Why, when listening to a podcast, do we often subconsciously attempt to categorize a speaker's gender, ethnicity, location or country of origin, natively spoken language, level of education, and more based on a few moments of dialogue? When we regard such pieces of information as important, and when audiences privilege certain speakers over others, those too are consequences of sound's materiality. (Indeed, such connections are one of the areas new materialism seeks to explore.) Importantly for rhetoric—audiences cannot avoid interpreting sound through such lenses. While I'll focus mostly on the first aspect of materialism—the dynamic presence of sound in, and its relationship with, our physical world—it's important to remember that both aspects of sound as material are inseparable. When sound travels, it always carries the capacity for meaning, a potential that listening manifests.

Sound's materiality also allows it to be manipulated within environments, where it is often purposefully reduced. "For example," Ceraso notes, "reverberation—a sonic quality that calls attention to space—has been largely eliminated since the widespread development of the acoustical technologies industry in the 1930s" (81). Material technologies like "Guastavino acoustical tiles . . . made with sound-absorbing materials like mineral fiber pulp and fiberglass . . . reduce noise and prevent excess reverberation" (69). So while sound is a material constant in our environment, its also being constantly manipulated, often outside our familiarized, desensitized capacity to notice. Using materials to manipulate sound in purposeful ways is a rhetorical choice. Take a car, for example. When we sit down inside an automobile and close the door, sealing ourselves off from the outside world and outside noises, we're entering a highly engineered sonic experience. Everything, from the way the door shuts, to the soundproofing of the car's frame and interior, to the purr of the car's engine, to the stereo system, to the noise the

blinker makes, is intentionally designed to make us feel secure or argue the car's luxuriousness and to persuade us to, if we're at a showroom, make the purchase (Ceraso *Sounding* 110-111). At the same time, my used Honda Fit hatchback, with its underwhelming stereo and subdued engine argues something different: practicality and economy. Beyond selling points, however, such soundproofing makes an argument about our relationship between our bodies and the outside world. Namely, in the car we are no longer part of that world—this leads to dangerous relationships between cars (we feel safe, so we feel secure enough to take risks when driving) as well as between cars and cyclists and pedestrians, whom we cannot hear, and therefore whom we might assume do not exist if we are not mindful and alert. Of course, if we are the driver or passenger of a car with audible problems—a weird grinding noise or whine, for example—we might be persuaded to drive more cautiously, as was the case one summer early into my doctoral studies in Oklahoma with a much older, noisy car. When smoke started pouring from the hood on a particularly warm day, it was almost a relief to pull to the side of the road—a release of tension that had built over weeks of alarming sounds. All because of the rhetoric of sound.

By extension, then, sound permeates and affects (and even effects, or creates) our local environments. The concepts of the "soundscape"—"any acoustic environment (e.g., city, forest, building, auditorium)" (or the composition of a podcast, for that matter)—intersects with the work of "[s]cholars of spatial rhetorics, such as Roxanne Mountford" (Ceraso *Sounding* 70, 21). Given our discussion of the rhetorical space of podcast recording studies in chapter two, the relationship between sound and physical space should not be surprising. As Joshua Gunn, Greg Goodale, Mirko M. Hall, and Rosa A. Eberly put it, "Soundscape scholars argue that humans not only make sense of individual sounds, but make sense of those sounds in a context that both gives meaning to the environment and informs the construction of our identities"; for example,

"nineteenth-century church bells in rural areas created communities. Those who can hear the ring of a particular bell are members of that bell's community" (482). Designed for such a purpose, church bells, like college campus bells announcing the start of the hour when classes usually begin, remind those within earshot of the church's presence and depending on the day and time can literally call members to gather. While location-based sound and defined physical spaces are inextricable, the example Gunn et al. relate demonstrates that sound and listening coheres a community. Whether podcast audio *intentionally* builds community or not, such soundscapes are nevertheless rhetorical, invoking audiences as a community of listeners in much the same way the narrowcast elements of podcast technology discussed in the second chapter. When David Remnick welcomes listeners to *The New Yorker Radio Hour*, his greeting labels and defines the sonic experience in which his audience participates. While commonplace to the point of invisibility, such greetings rhetorically establish expectations and prepare audiences for the sounds they will encounter. Within a podcast soundscape, all sonic elements, such as music, are rhetorical, both individually and as part of a larger argumentative whole. When present in a podcast episode, music, such as the thematic music that evokes particular moods in various segments of "A City," is also part of a soundscape. For example, the humming, chiming instrumental music that closes the third segment of "A City" where Burkhart Bilger speaks to Jack Benton, a New York Harbor tugboat captain, sets a mood of contemplation that softens Benton's remarks about medical workers who "know" they're "walking into hell" and prepares listeners for the following segment, where Robert Baird speaks to one such worker, Julie Eason, the Director of Respiratory Therapy at SUNY Downstate Medical Center. Mournful piano notes or screeching violins would have had a different rhetorical effect, affecting sorrow or fear. This purposeful decision relating to tone and mood serves the larger argument of the podcast—New

Yorkers should not give in to despair but instead brave this public health crisis as they have weathered other adversity.

When analyzing music, we should keep in mind that by itself, stripped of context, culture, and audience, music possesses no inherent persuasive properties (Rickert and Hawk). (In fact, such a cultural denaturing probably is not even possible.) Yet, music can be both "personally" meaningful via "associate[ion]" with events in an individual's history and "collectively meaningful" to social groups (Stedman). For example, the song "Nitrous Gas" by Scottish indie band Frightened Rabbit will now always, at least in some small way, remind me of my friend who died by suicide during the pandemic because they showed me the song in college, and I spent a lot of time during my master's program sitting with them in their living room listening to it. If the song comes up on my Spotify shuffle, it's as if my body experiences those moments again, layered over the new ones I'm having as I listen, like a dark stain of thick black acrylic paint showing up many thin, lighter washes. And my reaction to that song, and others I associate with my friend, is often visceral: a tightening of the throat, a momentary throbbing sensation behind my eyes, sometimes tears. Listening to that song literally hits a nerve. Collectively, audiences might associate the song with the similar tragic death of lead singer Scott Hutchison. But even if they are unaware of the history, the song's mournful choral tones and sad lyrics might communicate as much to general audiences: "Shut down the gospel singers and / Turn up the old heart-breakers / I'm dying to tell you that I'm dying here." In essence, embodiment and the materiality of music color, often without us being aware, our interpretation of music's in terms of its affect. Whether an original composition or a repurposed one, music can also possess rhetorical and affective exigence (Stedman; Rickert and Hawk; Goodale 141). Thus, when rhetors *choose* to include music in a podcast, we should not take such choices lightly—in

podcasts, music is rhetorical. At the same time, because audiences *always* interpret sound through context and culture, sound is *always* rhetorical regardless of intention.

Like music, ambient noise that signals environment is also highly rhetorical in podcasts. The concept of ambient rhetoric subverts the de facto hierarchy where conscious attempts at persuasion, such as those celebrated by the concept of the rhetorical situation of speaker, medium, message, audience, and context, receive an undue share of theoretical attention. Rickert, in his book *Ambient Rhetoric: The Attunements of Rhetorical Being*, "calls us to understand rhetoric as ambient" (3). Our surrounding environment, including sounds and technologies, he asserts, are part of an ecology of "rhetorical practices" (3). Rickert's "ambient approach" is premised on the idea that rhetoric is "ontological," always foregrounded in our acts of being, of existing, a subject we discussed earlier in relation to embodiment (xiv-xv). "In terms of materiality," Rickert argues, "ambience grants not just a greater but an interactive role to what we typically see as setting or context, foregrounding what is customarily background to rhetorical work and thereby making it material, complex, vital, and, in its own way, active (xv). In other words, the sounds that listeners often pay no mind, such as the background sounds of traffic or the chirping of birds in "A City," are persuasive. If we ignore such sounds, like the pounding surf that locates Ian Frasier in a particular location as the podcast opens, we miss out on the larger rhetorical picture—the gestalt of words and affective sounds, the whole sonic argument—that embodiment and materiality tell us exists. Such sounds are rhetorical in person, too, because we make sense of them and assign varying levels of significance, but the act of curation provides additional meaning. Writing about sound and listening, Michael J. Faris describes "'*Untitled*,'" an art "installation that simply involved a pile of candy" by Félix González-Torres. "Designed so that museum curators could reproduce his art, "'*Untitled*'" had a

simple rule: the pile of candy had to weigh exactly 175 pounds—the weight of Félix González-Torres's partner Ross Laycock at the height of his health before he died of AIDS in 1991" (Faris). Art museum patrons were even encouraged to eat the candy, to sift through the wrappers with their fingers and experience the exhibit as an act of sensory participation connecting them to Laycock and other museum goers. Candy exists outside of "Untitled" just as sound exists outside of podcasts, but the process of selection and display grants it additional significance, and the same applies to ambient noise curated for an episode.

In addition, not only are podcast soundscapes evocative *of* place, it is, Rickert argues, *a* place (44). Because our minds are embodied yet participating in technological systems, Rickert asserts, "we should begin to consider media not simply the *medium* by which we interact and communicate with others but more literally as a *place*" (44, emphasis in original). When we listen to a podcast, we are, in some sense, arriving in a new space that exists as a combination of immersive sound and our own being. Consider the 12th segment of the podcast (36:08-39:09), where Sarah Larson joins her neighbors in Manhattan's East Village as the daily 7 P.M. cheering, clapping, and noisemaking celebrating "the hospital staff and all the city's essential workers" commences. During the segment, we experience the cheers from the balcony of Larson's neighbors as if we ourselves are in East Village, standing on our own balcony, surrounded by the "joyful cacophony" that Remnick argues "seems to bring the whole city together in a kind of primal scream." The reason for such immersion is simple: sound contains information about distance and surfaces that communicates three-dimensional space to listeners. Thanks to the portable microphones I discussed in the second chapter, whose pickup patterns result in such 3D audio, the noises we hear in the podcast segment recreate the scene in East Village. And yet, such relocating is unconscious because our bodies are conditioned to

continually process sound as a form of three-dimensional information. (If a child screams "help," we have a rough idea of their location from the way their cry reaches us, even if they are behind us or hidden from view.) The unconscious aspect of this relocating results in highly rhetorical immediacy. In the case of East Village, the effect is that listeners feel as though they are part of the cheering crowd celebrating workers, part of the ritualized sound praising their efforts. In a pandemic that often demands social distancing, this can be a rare feeling. Such visceral noise is more powerful than merely being told something like "New Yorkers respect medical professionals." By listening to the ambient noise of a podcast's soundscape, we can look beyond our preoccupation with obvious forms of rhetoric, i.e., the words rhetors use to argue.

Key Approaches to Listening

Rhetorical sound scholars have plenty to say about the persuasive dimensions of sound. But what do they have to say about listening? "[C]ommon sense," Goodale argues, is a good starting place for "learning how to read sound," and he uses "reading sound" to mean listening as well as other methods of sonic interpretation, such as analyzing visualizations of sonic data, that result in critical understanding (140). Goodale turns to the classic example of a tree falling in the woods to explain: "A tree that creaks in a long glissando threatens to fall and warns us to get out of the way. Significantly, this warning does not come from the tree, as the tree has no consciousness and cannot exercise agency. Rather, it is the listener, who interprets the sound and, thus, creates the argument" (140). According to Goodale, listeners turn consciously produced *affective sound*, and consciously or unconsciously *affected sound* into arguments as well, such "screeching violins" being ominous (affective sound) and confident tones in voice-overs lending credibility to a message (affected sound) (141). Cultural associations also guide listener interpretations of "sound through *habitus*, which is habituation to the connection between a

specific sound and a specific act," such as how drivers are conditioned to pull over when they hear ambulance sirens (140, emphasis in original). In a global pandemic, listeners might also interpret ambulance sirens as arguing that COVID-19 is still a very real threat to society, even if the ambulance carries a passenger with an unrelated condition.

For analyzing sonically rich podcasts—those produced with many different voices and sounds, including music and other ambience—I propose using a combination of rhetorical and multimodal listening. Each offers important theoretical guidance for listening to a podcast ecologically, which will allow us to consider how language, vocality, music, ambience might generate persuasion in a podcast's soundscape, given sound as material and listening as an embodied act. I'll start with Ratcliffe's concept of rhetorical listening, which pertains to spoken language but whose attention to cultural logics also applies to sound. I will then round out the section by mining Ceraso's multimodal listening approach for takeaways on how to attend to sounds more affective qualities, followed by a brief conclusion regarding my unified listening approach, which the following Methods section will discuss in greater detail.

Rhetorical Listening

Rhetorical listening offers an approach for analysis and invention that sheds the self-centeredness (that our perspective is correct and most important) that undermines attempts to understand people, cultures, and the arguments the two produce; such an open approach is useful for analyzing podcasts because it helps us challenge our own assumption about what persuasion sounds like. According to Ratcliffe, rhetorical listening is "a trope for interpretive invention and . . . a code of cross-cultural conduct" (1). Listening rhetorically, we can choose to be open to understanding others' stances while simultaneously cultivating awareness of our own positionality (1). Ratcliffe treats rhetorical listening as both a sense and a mode of analysis for

texts in all forms. In other words, one can listen rhetorically to writing as well as speech or sound, although, we shall see, comprehensible words, spoken or written, are the primary focus. Ratcliffe boils rhetorical listening down to four analytical moves:

1. Promoting an *understanding* of self and other ["*understanding* means listening to discourses not *for* intent but *with* intent—the intent to understand" that claims are rooted in perspectives shaped by a rhetor's "fluid" worldview (28, emphasis in original)]
2. Proceeding with an *accountability* logic ["A logic of accountability invites us to consider how all of us are, at present, culturally implicated in effects of the past (via our resulting privileges and/or their lack) and, thus, accountable for what we do about situations now, even if we are not responsible for their origins" (32)]
3. Locating identifications across *commonalities* and *differences* [when considering both, "dialogue emerges as a dialectical conversation that questions the process of dialectic, a conversation that 'seeks not the clarification and rigidification of differences [or commonalities] but rather than the murky margins between, those margins of overlap which inaugurate and which limit the very functioning of dialectic'" (32-33)]
4. Analyzing *claims* as well as their *cultural logics* within which these claims function ["if a claim is an assertion of a person's thinking, then a cultural logic is a belief system or shared way of reasoning within which a claim may function" (33)] (26)

Rhetorical listening thwarts efforts to dismiss arguments and their motivations offhand (even if the opt-in nature of podcast's technological delivery might make such encounters rare). For podcasts, it provides three main potential uses as a mode of analysis. For example, it could help

rhetoricians "read between the lines" of spoken conversation and words to figure out what larger cultural logics are prompting the claims being made, particularly if the claims are baffling or off-putting to those conducting the analysis. Rhetoricians might also look for evidence, or lack thereof, of rhetorical listening—or at least some of the moves—happening in a podcast conversation. Podcasts are a particularly good medium for such conversations because they often feature a single guest selected by a host who admires them, compared to adversarial talking head or brief promotional interviews on news and other TV shows. In addition, rhetoricians might also use rhetorical listening to locate potential points of persuasion in a podcast related to moments of openness about podcasters and guests' identities, cultural logics, and so on. If a moment proves powerful for a guest or host, it stands to reason it might also prove moving for an audience. Rhetorical listening is useful for podcast persuasion related to conversation and spoken argument; indeed, it may be useful for subtle arguments, too, such as moments we discuss in "A City at the Peak of Crisis," because it provides methods for understanding the cultural logics motivating the rhetorical choices of the podcaster. Further, rhetorical listening can help us to ask, how do podcasts reinforce our cultural logics? Why do we immediately accept an argument, or reject it? What makes it resonate or sound off-key? Yet because it focuses on traditional forms of argument related to spoken and written words, rhetorical "listening" is limited for *actual* non-metaphoric listening, which must account for the affective qualities of sound.

But perhaps what I see as a lack of attention to affective sound (and thus listening as predominantly metaphoric) in rhetorical listening has to do in part with the implied listener. In Ratcliffe's theory, argues Timothy Oleksiak in "Queering Rhetorical Listening: An Introduction to a Cluster Conversation," "the categories of sexuality and gender are stabilized into normative notions of cisheterosexuality. In other words, rhetorical listening imagines someone similar to

me as the listener, a cis, heterosexual man who, while identifying as disabled and neurodivergent,[30] does not suffer from sensory processing or other issues related to hearing, at least as far as podcast audio is concerned. Oleksiak's arguments set up several pieces aiming to "queer rhetorical listening" that appear in a 2019 special issue of *Peitho,* the journal of the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the history of rhetoric & composition. Oleksiak identifies two approaches taken by "*queer rhetorical listening*"; the first "grounds the lived, learned, and studied experiences of queer people in order to demonstrate the reciprocal transformation that comes from placing queer theories alongside rhetorical listening." While I am not positioned to produce such scholarship myself, I can use the work of queer rhetoricians like those in the *Peitho* special issue in service of the second approach: "think[ing] through the theoretical concerns that rhetorical listening advances but without its heteronormative . . . normative . . . and/or cisnormative . . . assumptions."

Normative assumptions are ones I would think I would be able to avoid in theorizing listening, given my own disability, but queer rhetorical listening demonstrates how conditioned we can be to our own experiences as listeners. Listening, For example, J. Logan Smilges investigates through his own embodied listening experiences what it means to be "a bad listener." "As a neurodivergent person," Smilges writes, "I have sensory limits that are different than those of my nondisabled peers. During those times and in those places and for those reasons that I cannot listen, it is often because I am too exhausted, overstimulated, or overwhelmed to think clearly." Smilges discloses how listening can also "trigge[r] memories of previous violence or trauma"—a consideration that's relevant to discussing listening in the context of podcasts dealing with issues of public importance that might prove distressing. Before reading Smilges'

[30] I have been living with severe Crohn's disease for at least a decade, an autoimmune condition that while often invisible to others unless I bring it up, greatly impacts how I move about and interact with the world. In addition, my recently diagnosed AD/HD classifies me as neurodivergent.

complication of the term bad listener, I had considered the idea that the pandemic might be distressing to some readers.[31] However, I did not consider how that might affect podcast *listeners*. In this respect, my conception of listening was too tied to my own subjective experiences as a listener. As Smilges puts it, "While the risk of failing to accommodate everyone is real and pressing . . . might there not be ways of understanding access as an inherently imperfect solution?" Listening, then, is "instead, an ongoing praxis" (Smilges).

Attuning to queer rhetorical listening invites us to see past ourselves as sole-interpreter in the process of listening. While we cannot experience what others experience in terms of affect, we can acknowledge the limits of our own subjective acts of interpretation, even if, as Goodale puts it, "common sense" is a good starting place. By acknowledging other perspectives, we can complicate the listening audience and comprehend additional means of persuasion.

Multimodal Listening

Ceraso's concept of multimodal listening, presented in her 2014 *College English* article "(Re)Educating the Senses: Multimodal Listening, Bodily Learning, and the Composition of Sonic Experiences" and further developed in her 2018 book *Sounding Composition: Multimodal*

[31] I find this oversight especially frustrating because I made a conscious decision to not study disability for my Ph.D. because I knew I would find the material distressing on a visceral level. I am reminded of because Margaret Price's *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life* is mentioned throughout the special issue of *Peitho* because of it "challenges the concept of rhetorical listening for how it privileges a rational, able-bodied subject" and "argu[es] that a pedagogy based on rhetorical listening may inadvertently marginalize students with mental disabilities who don't 'make sense' (42) or 'speak well' (44) in conventional, recognizably rational ways" (Faris).

In August 2020, Price reached out to me on Twitter after a satirical tweet of mine making fun of academic brag posts ("I'm pleased to announce," etc.) went viral. Aside from her kindness, I forget the specifics of our conversation, but during it she said she wished I were in disability studies and that my sense of humor would be welcome there. Once I recovered from the compliment, I admitted that I had considered that trajectory, but ultimately decided against it for the reason I mentioned above: I worried that path might stir up or exacerbate trauma relating to my experiences with Crohn's disease.

I would likely feel overwhelmed if I had to listen to a podcast about Crohn's; yet, I did not anticipate a listener experiencing similar in my artifact, which deals with a pandemic that ravages most of the world to this day. I envisioned only one listener, me, and thought of everyone else as readers of my dissertation. That oversight shows how difficult listening can be as a practice and makes me appreciate Smilges' idea of bad listening as a productive type of failure. And so, I share my own bad listening here.

Pedagogies for Embodied Listening, goes beyond paying attention to "audible information," a type of listening she calls "*ear-ing*" (*Sounding* 6, emphasis in original). Ceraso defines "multimodal listening as the practice of attending to the sensory, contextual, and material aspects of a sonic event," a practice that the earlier example of Glennie's embodied listening demonstrates (*Sounding* 6). Like rhetorical listening, multimodal listening requires openness and self-awareness from the listener; however, it also recognizes that listening works in tandem with other modes, such as the visual, "ecologically" (*Sounding* 7). For example, if a motorcycle roars past us, we, if able, experience it as a "multisensory" event: the noise of the motorcycle rumbles in our ear drums and the rest of our body as the sight of it crosses our vision, and we might also smell the burning fuel or receive simultaneous information from other human senses (*Sounding* 29). Because "[l]istening is "multisensory," Ceraso contends that an understanding of "how sound *works* and *affects*" is a core part of its theorizing (*Sounding* 29, emphasis in original). The best way to understand affective possibilities is self-conscious exposure to different sorts of sounds in "a wider variety of listening experiences," an important component of multimodal listening as "an inquiry-based practice" (*Sounding* 46).

Developed for pedagogy, multimodal listening is not intended as a form of rhetorical analysis; yet, from it, we can glean several sound principles for sonic analysis and listening regarding podcasts.

First, we should appreciate sound for more than "its ability to *enhance* narrative meaning and content," a trap most analysis falls into (41, emphasis added). Treating sound as enhancement, rather than as a rhetorical choice to include an affective element at a particular moment or moments, diminishes its impact on a composition, podcasts included. Sound does enhance words, but if we flip our deep-seated expectation that sound is secondary to "audible

information" like spoken language, the reverse is also true: words enhance sound. For example, when Frazier remarks "it's really quiet and it is 5:38 am," his words are analyzing and contextualizing the sound listeners hear in the podcast audio. The sense of calm and quiet is present—and arguably most effectively communicated—in the rhythms of the wind, rain, and tides. The audio, more than Frazier's observations of Brighton Beach or Remnick's voice over explanations, transports the listeners to a particular place and moment in New York, an affective strategy upon which the show relies and which would not be as salient without ambient sound, and later, vocal markers and accents signaling different boroughs.

Second, we need to recognize that listening is an act of interpretation, particularly concerning affect. Because we inhabit different bodies and are marked by different life experiences, including our current location in time and place, our reactions to sounds and our associations with sounds may differ. At best, we can use our own experience, cultural knowledge, and contextualizing content to speculate on affective contributions to persuasion in podcasts. We can explain what sound accomplishes using ourselves as a compass, but we should be careful to frame our insights as non-universal. For example, my personal history impacts how I listen to the sounds of "A City at the Peak of Crisis." I was born in Staten Island, one of New York City's five boroughs, and lived there until I was eight. My father is from Staten Island, and my mother was born in Queens and spent much of her child and young adulthood in Brooklyn. Manhattan was a thirty-minute ferry ride across the Hudson River from Staten Island, and I went there often as a kid, where I played in Central Park, looked at Christmas lights in Rockefeller Center, and marveled at dinosaur bones at the Museum of National History. Staten Island and NYC's diversity forever shaped how I thought about race and diversity, too. I remember walking around a mall in Staten Island, trying to understand what "minority" meant. When my mom

explained the term referred to the least populous groups in the U.S., I said, “Oh, like us and other white people?” My question prompted another explanation from my mom, who told me that just because we were the only white people (I might have said “Italians”) at the mall in that moment did not mean the entire country had similar demographics. And since then, I’ve learned to be aware of the difference in privilege that accompanies growing up a block *from* the Projects, as was the case with my childhood home, and growing up in an apartment *within* the Projects. My parents still speak of NYC as insiders, naming streets, parks, districts, landmarks, and cultural events in their stories of the city spanning nearly five decades, the early fifties through the late nineties. Of course, my 94-year-old paternal grandfather, who grew up in the Brooklyn slums during the Great Depression, still speaks of the days when Staten Island was mostly farmland for cattle raising, a beautiful pastoral landscape far different from the Mafia patrolled streets that excited my father during his early twenties. I no longer feel much of a claim to being an insider—the last time I went to Staten Island, I was a teenager. After years living in an upper middle class gated community in South Florida with a home owner’s association located across the street from the neighborhood where Dan Marino’s house was, I was shocked by what I saw: broken asphalt, cars twice my age with duct-tape and saranwrap windows (sometimes resting on cinderblocks instead of wheels), abandoned lots, and hard looking people that wouldn’t make eye contact. Gone were the days when I thought it was normal for moms to keep an aluminum bat handy in the passenger seat or a brick in their purse. (But I would have feared taking a hook out of a shark’s mouth while ocean kayak fishing back then, too.) And yet to this day, New York accents—some discernable to me, others more mysterious—carry no small amount of nostalgia for me, as do symphonies of gridlocked traffic. Another listener, however, might view a NYC accent with disgust, fear, or outsider fascination, leading to a different affective experience. (In

fact, in “A City,” writer Ian Frazier addresses these outsider viewpoints of New York early in the podcast, specifically concerns from others in the small town he left NYC for who worried the city was dangerous.)

Finally, using multimodal listening, we should also keep in mind that how sound functions as material and its ecological association with other senses are indispensable components of its persuasive capacity in podcasts. When listening to a podcast, we don’t cease to exist—we continue to occupy space in a physical world, and that physicality and our sensory perception become part of our listening experience. At the same time we listen to a podcast, we might be driving, cooking, cleaning, walking, resting, working, painting, or any number of other activities. We might be experiencing audio through noise-canceling headphones, car speakers, a phone lying on a nearby table, or another form of playback that restricts or invites sound exogenous to the podcast we are listening to, literally shaping the sounds we experience. And we could be anywhere, at any time of day, in any season, meaning listeners are subject to limitless combinations of sensory information as they engage with podcast audio. Embodiment means that other factors also affect our sense perception and associations, far too many to list here. Ceraso’s treatment of embodiment and materiality meshes with Rickert’s concept of *ambient rhetoric*, which theorizes that rhetoric is a part of our embodied experience of our material environs; as opposed to persuasion that is “discursive” and intentional,” ambient rhetoric “impacts the senses” and “circulates in waves of affect” (x). By extension, ambient noise in podcasts can form an underlying rhetorical base that shapes our relationship with the audio we experience throughout a highly produced podcast episode. These properties of sound and their rhetorical impacts may be difficult to track in podcast analysis (it would be time-consuming and probably

unnecessary to separate and parse out every gust of wind, bird chirp, and other ambient noise), but their overall potential for persuasion is worth acknowledging.

Together, rhetorical listening and multimodal listening account for the many persuasive dimensions of sound. Coupled with an understanding of the key theories of sound, we can use them to build an analytical approach to podcasting. Like all critical and generative forms of listening, podcast listening for the purposes of analysis is not a straightforward, linear process. As the idea of a soundscape communicates, a podcast comprises an ecology of material (cultural and physical) sound entangled with the larger world of the embodied listener. When planning a methodology for analytical podcast listening, what's important is designing a framework that keeps key concepts related to sound and listening foregrounded and obvious. As we will see in the following section, I offer no catchy title for my holistic sound-based analytical approach. I provide no overall theory of listening beyond podcasts, either. Instead, referencing and distinguishing between rhetorical and multimodal listening helps clarify the moves I make, as does relating rhetorical sonic effects to materiality, embodiment, soundscapes, vocality, and ambience. It is my belief, and my hope, that such an approach—a meta-analysis—will serve as a model for how rhetoricians can listen to podcasts as public persuasion. That is, after all, the larger goal of this chapter.

III. ARTIFACT SELECTION AND DESCRIPTION

The artifact I selected to analyze sound and argument in podcasts is "A City at the Peak of Crisis," a special episode of *The New Yorker Radio Hour* (*NYRH*) published on April 24, 2020 (Remnick). Debuting on October 23, 2015, as both a public radio program and a downloadable podcast, *NYRH* is a weekly series produced by NPR affiliate New York Public Radio (WNYC) in collaboration with *The New Yorker*, whose editor, David Remnick serves as host. Roughly 50

minutes long, "[e]ach episode features a diverse mix of interviews, profiles, storytelling, and an occasional burst of humor inspired by the magazine, and shaped by its writers, artists, and editors." As we might expect from *The New Yorker*, a leading nonfiction and fiction publication of the North's East Coast frequently associated with high culture and liberal elitism, *NYRH* episodes tend to lean to the left in terms of politics. However, this left-leaning point of view typically manifests in areas like topic selection and assumptions shared by hosts and writers, rather than overt arguments of policy.

What makes "A City" special is its conception and execution. Apart from the show's voice over narration and thematic music, all audio present in the episode was recorded on Wednesday, April 15, 2020, a day projected to be the apotheosis "of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York City," which was, at the time of recording, the "epicenter" of the crisis in the U.S. (Remnick). For the show, "a crew of *New Yorker* writers talked with people all over the city, in many circumstances and walks of life, to form a portrait of a city in crisis" (Remnick, emphasis in original). That "crew" consists of 13 writers: Ian Frazier, William Finnegan, Burkhard Bilger, Robert Baird, Helen Rosner, Kelefa Sanneh, Michael Schulman, Adam Gopnik, Sarah Larson, Paige Williams, Zach Helfand, Rachel Aviv, and Jia Tolentino. There's also David Remnick, the show's host, who did not conduct on-site interviews or observations but whose voice over narration contextualizes and coheres the various segments comprising the episode. While interviews—roughly 11 in total[32]—account for a lot of the show's audio, there are also solo recordings of writers voicing their observations and thoughts, and audio samples from TV shows and a graduation ceremony, as well as Remnick's narration. When I downloaded the show on April 30, 2020, the runtime was 51 minutes and 41 seconds, including commercials. While

[32] I did not count Sarah Larson meeting her neighbors as an interview because the segment focuses on the noise New Yorkers make for essential workers, rather than her neighbors' experiences working in the pandemic.

composed of many discrete segments, Remnick's narration, the use of music to transition between segments, and adherence to show's larger premise unify the episode's audio.

I selected the artifact because of its rich sonic complexity, its relevance to an ongoing, timely issue of public importance, and its framing as sampling of experiences rather than a formal, direct argument about COVID-19 in the U.S. In a chapter about sound and podcasts, sonic complexity is necessary. While it's unlikely, and probably impossible, that any one podcast could represent all sonic expression, "A City" contains as wide a variety of sound as I've encountered in a non-fiction, mainstream, talk-based podcast. Present in the audio are a wide, *purposeful* variety of voices, noises, thematic music, sampling, much of it marked by, and signaling, varying locations as well as recording devices. In a podcast episode about a distinct location, such rich sonic complexity makes New York City come alive. Most of these sounds, such as the howling wind on Brighton Beach, or the chirps of birds at Central Park, are native to the moment of recording, as opposed to exogenous sound effects added in with editing software. In other words, not only are the sounds varied, they are also curated and pervasive by design, making "A City" an ideal candidate for the study of the sounds of podcast persuasion as public rhetoric.

IV. METHODS PART 1: WRITING TO LISTEN

In this section, I detail the first stage of my analysis, structuring my later rhetorical analysis of "A City at the Peak of Crisis" using a mix of listening techniques and approaches that include transcribing the episode's spoken words, mapping the episode's many segments, and describing each segment's sound in terms of vocality, ambient noise, and produced sounds/music. Similar to how professional audio-video editing software separates audio from video into two separate yet parallel, synchronous tracks, I treat language and sound as two

separate yet parallel and synchronous entities. This two-track approach to structing listening sets up later analysis of how sound behaves in relation to language, how language behaves in relation to sound, and how both operate on their own discretely in "A City." While I present my methods in a linear order in the hopes that such structure will aid scholars conducting similar podcast audio analysis in the future, my process was recursive, a blend of hypothesizing, discovery, and eventual refinement. It was surprisingly difficult, I found out, to teach myself how to listen. This two stage, two-track approach worked best for me, but there's no one right way to listen. Part of listening is being open to adaptation and improvisation; listening analytically to podcasts responding to issues of public importance is no exception.

However, before I detail these methods, I want to explain why they're necessary. In the first chapter, I included Sean Zdenek's criticisms of the podcasting industry and podcasting pedagogy for its lack of accessibility—e.g., lack of transcripts and close captioning—arguments he lays out in a *Computers & Composition Online* article titled "Accessible Podcasting: College Students on the Margins in the New Media Classroom." Even the RWS journal *Kairos*, which requires transcripts for audio-based scholarship like the podcast scholarship by Jennifer Bowie and Abigail Lambke, does not actually provide guidelines for *how* to make transcripts, which suggests that RWS places little value on them as a rhetorical tool beyond access. The same ableist oversights that render podcasts inaccessible to disabled students and other audiences also makes them inscrutable to scholars. Except for Radiolab, *none* of the podcasts I've discussed thus far in the dissertation have released an episode transcript, meaning the most obvious approach to studying them is to write notes while listening. Scholarly articles and published conference presentations that focus on professional podcasts are rare, and those that exist sidestep the issue of transcription entirely.

That's not to say that scholars have not studied podcasts carefully—Lambke used software to visually map the presence of podcast hosts' voices throughout episodes and took notes on the podcasts and each host's vocal performance. I find Lambke's work rigorous and interesting, and her research methods make perfect sense to me in the context of her focus: vocal engagement and arrangement in podcasts. Lambke's methods lead to a successful analysis of different vocal deliveries and approaches in the podcasts found on a small but significant podcast network. In many ways, as the first rhetorical consideration of professional podcasting, it is groundbreaking. At the same time, her methods are not appropriate ones for my research questions about the rhetorical interaction of language and sound. My work, which applies critical theories of listening to podcasts to understand how language and sound work rhetorically, requires full transcripts to ground such analysis.

Language Transcription

The first step to my overall analysis, transcription, is the most foundational for analyzing audio. I used transcription to create a "track" of just language that I could use later to contextualize my observations about sound. Because audio is an event that can only be physically experienced in the moment of listening, the study of audio requires a structure that translates those moments into a legible, cohesive, time-stamped, textual narrative. (Even if one were to produce audio-based scholarship on podcasts, some form of transcript would still be critical for notetaking and planning.) Transcripts, as I have previously discussed, are limited when they focus only on words-as-text. However, there's a reason words-as-text are the most essential component of all transcripts—they convey loads of information in terms of content as well as time. Even stripped of voice and rendered as text, words are a podcast's bones. Other elements—ambient sound, music, the many different aspects of vocality, and the identities of the

people speaking—are vitally important, but words provide orientation in a transcription. Once the words are captured in a transcript, other information can be added on, or so I theorized.

For serious study beyond locating and isolating examples across many different podcasts, episodes should be transcribed as fully as possible. While selecting and transcribing moments can be useful—as the example in the first chapter demonstrates by supporting my argument that arguments of public importance occur on podcasts—as an "approach," reasons Irving Seidman, ". . . it is not desirable because it imposes the researcher's frame of reference on the interview data one step too early in the winnowing process. In working with the material, it is important that the researcher start with the whole" (115). While Seidman is talking about transcribing interviews, those same insights apply to podcasting. Starting with pieces may yield juicy, high impact moments, but those moments are also the most obvious. "Once the decision is made not to transcribe a portion of the tape, that portion of the interview is usually lost to the researcher. So although labor is saved in this alternative approach, the cost may be high" (115). The goal of transcripts is to enable repeated study of the artifact—the whole audio artifact or artifact. Would an archeologist look at fragments of pottery if they had an opportunity to see whole jug being used three thousand years ago to pour wine at a ceremonial dinner? Who would not want to read Sappho's completed works? My comparison is far from perfect, but I hope it evokes that essential difference between fragment and whole.

Transcription is a time-consuming process, but the labor builds a level of familiarity with a program that would be difficult to achieve otherwise. To transcribe, I downloaded the episode[33]

[33] This was not possible for one of my artifacts in the fourth chapter, a podcast episode available only on Spotify, whose audio encryption has yet to be decoded, meaning audio from Spotify can't be downloaded and played outside of the Spotify app or website (sites that claim to do this merely match songs with other, non-encoded versions). For that artifact, I plugged in a Blue Yeti USB microphone to my MacBook pro, played the episode on Spotify, and used the mic to transfer the sound to Otter.AI in real time, a process that took the length of the episode, a little over three hours. Even this method is far, far less time consuming that transcribing an episode manually, which in the past has,

as an audio file on my computer and uploaded it to Otter.ai, a transcription-facilitating service that automatically transcribes audio, formats text into readable paragraphs, separates as well as tags different speakers, and provides timestamps. While this automatic service does the bulk of the work of transcription, the devil is in the details, or in this case, naming speakers and correcting word selection errors. Otter allows users to play the audio file and make adjustments while listening, which is supported with playback features that enable users to do, among other functions, quick back-skips of a few seconds to make changes and double and triple check the fidelity of the transcription:

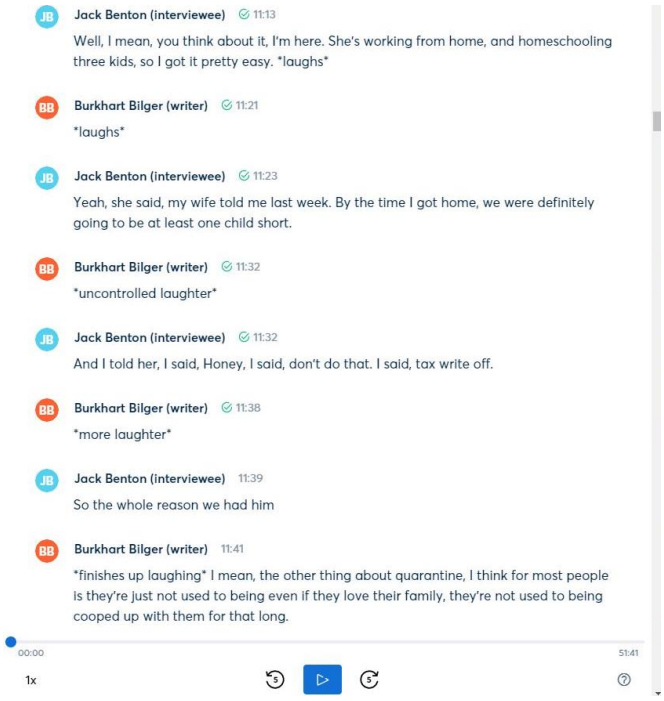


Figure 2. *Screen capture of the Otter.AI interface showing a segment of the overall transcription. I noted moments where speakers laughed to help capture the effect of the joke that NY Harbor tugboat captain and essential worker Jack Benton makes about how hard quarantine*

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even using professional transcription software, taken me as long as four or five times the running length of an episode to do (meaning the same podcast would take 12-15 hours for just the initial transcript).

has been on his wife while he's forced to remain aboard his boat due to social distancing and quarantine measures.

Once I was satisfied my transcription on Otter was accurate in terms of the words being spoken—spoken words are often misrepresented with automatic transcription and closed captioning software, which serves to still, in part, bar access for the disabled as well as confused scholarly analysis—I exported it to a Microsoft Word document and formatted it to my liking in terms of font, spacing, and punctuation. Such decisions are subjective but not arbitrary. Seidman explains, "decisions about where to punctuate . . . are significant. [People] do not speak in paragraphs or always clearly indicate the end of a sentence by voice inflection. Punctuation is one of the beginning points of the process of analyzing and interpreting material . . . and must be done thoughtfully" (116). Attempting to transcribe podcasts and wrestle with Otter.AI's punctuation decisions, I am reminded of my previous life as a literature master's student learning about Old English poetry and its wonderful lack of consistent punctuation and spacing. Exploring the question of whether punctuation structures language or language structures punctuation is beyond the scope of this paper, but after listening to podcast conversations, I marvel at how punctuation renders writing accessible to the reader and yet how unnecessary it feels for conversation. The larger point is that applying punctuation to spoken language is an act of interpretation and that transcription overall is an act of translation. Once I completed this task, the result was a textual representation of the spoken language in the podcast that I could build further analysis upon. Here is an example of my formatting approach for the Microsoft Word document:

Ian Frasier 01:25

A guy rides his bicycle down here and is that a bench and is doing some kind of leg exercises. And he's only human around on the boardwalk besides me.

David Remnick 01:40

Ian Frasier was out before dawn recently on Brighton Beach. He watched the sun rise over the Atlantic Ocean. It was April 15, 2020. As of that morning, the New York City Health Department reported more than 110,000 people diagnosed with COVID-19 and nearly 7000 dead. The actual number may be much higher.

I used bold to distinguish names of speakers, which I had already tagged to the appropriate audio segments using Otter; Otter also supplied the time stamps. I put parentheses describing roles next to speakers, using these roles to distinguish between reporters—*The New Yorker* writers—and their interviewees. Exporting to Word and reformatting makes it easier to add in notes and copy paste text for writing and analysis. Completing the language transcription is crucial for the later language and sound analysis to come.

Episode Segment Mapping

After completing the language transcript, I broke the podcast into manageable segments, consisting of interviews and voice overs, on a separate document. Segments vary podcast to podcast, but I like to use topics, speakers, recording times, and/or locations to chunk audio. There's no perfect way to approach deconstructing a podcast, but any approach that lets you map out the flow of an episode should work. For "A City," I considered a segment to be any time a writer spoke to a new interviewee or when a new audio sample was introduced. Typically, voice

overs by host David Remnick bookend each segment, but not always. Often, Remnick would wait to name speakers until after a conversation was already underway—a rhetorical move we'll discuss later that I may not have noticed had I not broken down the episode into segments. As part of the episode mapping process, I wrote brief descriptions of the overall subject matter of each segment, as well as the location where the recording took place, if applicable. For this podcast episode in particular, location is important because the audio travels throughout NYC's five boroughs. Locations may not be important for other podcast analysis—scholars should use their best judgment to add or omit relevant categories to account for their particular artifact(s).

Using the approach described above, I chunked "A City" into 16 discrete segments based on distinct monologues, sound samples, and interviews, which I labeled and summarized each to map the episode. My inspiration for dividing the episode in this way comes from radio, audio-video production, and from screen and fiction writing— "segments" communicates a focus on radio, but "scenes" is another way of describing such breaks. Segments and scenes signal units of cohesive content within a larger structure. In a film, a continuous setting, similar time, conflict, or characters might define a scene. In radio, different guests, speakers, or organizing structure (such as answering telephone calls from fans, discussing local news, or updating listeners on traffic) define segments. As such, my division of "A City" into segments is an act of reverse engineering the podcast's structure rather than qualitative analysis of language-based data. I see applying such organization functioning in much the same way as adding punctuation to a transcript—both make structure more apparent. It is easier to analyze a book with chapters than an essay with no subheadings that is the length of the book. With this stage in podcast analysis, I reveal structure that already exists and make it transparent to myself as well as the reader.[34]

[34] Analyzing conversational podcasts that are unedited like the *Joe Rogan Experience* is a different beast—I view those as one continuous segment, as topics reappear, and speakers tend to remain. The segments in "A City" are a

For the sake of simplicity, my map does not describe every Remnick voice over, but his voice overs typically announce and/or conclude segments; provide contextual information such as names of speakers (sometimes before we hear their voices and sometimes after they've been speaking for several moments), locations, and time of day; discuss facts relevant to the pandemic; and/or remind listeners of the show's premise. The time stamps I use end segments just before Remnick concludes and/or introduces a new segment, or just before a speaker from a new segment begins speaking. (Because of this, ambient noise or thematic music might begin prior to what I identify as a segment's start time.) Here are the segments comprising the episode:

Segment 1: David Remnick provides a brief opening welcome. Ian Frazier, located in Brighton Beach (Brooklyn), records on-site observations and talks about New York as a setting for the pandemic. Remnick explains the episode's premise (0:00-4:48).

Segment 2: William Finnegan interviews Jermaine Jackson,[35] "a group station manager for the subway system" who is "responsible for 13 stations in Midtown, SoHo, and the Lower East Side [Manhattan]" (4:49-9:05).

Segment 3: Burkhard Bilger interviews Jack Benton, a New York Harbor tugboat captain (9:06-13:54).

Segment 4: Robert Baird interviews Julie Eason, "Director of Respiratory Therapy at SUNY Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn" (13:55-17:31).

Segment 5: David Remnick discusses New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's televised daily updates on the pandemic from Albany, the state's capital (17:32-20:52).

Segment 6: Helen Rosner video calls Josh Russ Tupper, co-owner of Russ & Daughters,

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result of post-production editing, which provides more obvious transitions because of different speakers, locations, and so on.

[35] Because there is no episode transcript, names of interviewees may not reflect actual spelling.

a famous deli on Houston Street (Lower East Side of Manhattan), as he speaks with several customers (20:53-23:21).

Segment 7: Helen Rosner interviews Nikki Russ Fetterman, Josh Russ Tupper's cousin and other co-owner of Russ & Daughters, about her delivery of "200 donated meals to the Brooklyn Hospital Center" (23:22-25:02).

Segment 8: Kelefa Sanneh interviews 22Gz, a "hip-hop artist" currently residing "in Flatbush in Brooklyn" (25:03-27:11).

Segment 9: Michael Schulman interviews television host Seth Myers about recording *Late Night with Seth Meyers* from his home's attic (27:12-31:48).

Segment 10: Adam Gopnik, located in Manhattan's Central Park, records on-site observations and contemplates social behavior during the pandemic (31:49-34:15).

Segment 11: Audio samples from medical doctors graduating from "Columbia University Medical School on April 15 [2020] on a very big Zoom call" (34:16-36:07).

Segment 12: Sarah Larson joins her neighbors John Frederick and Karla Growen "in the East Village [Manhattan]" as the daily 7 P.M. cheering, clapping, and noisemaking celebrating "the hospital staff and all the city's essential workers" commences (36:08-39:09).

Segment 13: Paige Williams, with a mix of recorded reflections and on-location audio, details her experiences "near Union Square" with the New York Police Department (NYPD)'s "mobile crisis outreach team," including Inspector Phyllis Burn (39:10-41:12).

Segment 14: Zack Helfan speaks with Cathy Anne Mackenzie, "the taxi dispatcher at Kennedy Airport [Queens]" (41:13-42:19).

Segment 15: Rachel Aviv speaks with Dr. Laura Colby, an internist at an undisclosed hospital who often must bear witness as terminally ill COVID-19 patients die (42:20-45:22).

Segment 16: Jia Tolentino interviews Lisa Cintron about the birth of her son, Christopher Citron Jr., who was born at 9:18 PM on April 15, 2020. Remnick concludes the show and closing speakers provide the show credits and acknowledgements (45:23-50:23).

I kept descriptions brief, focusing on naming speakers and their jobs/titles. Locations and times, when available, are also included. While one could add far more detail to these segment descriptions, I find doing so unnecessary at this stage: the goal here is to have a reference document that 1) displays helpful information for referencing—e.g., when in the episode Adam Gopnik observes Central Park—at a glance, and 2) can be copy and pasted into a new document to add sound descriptions and, later, analysis of each segment.

Describing Sound

After describing spoken words and providing other traditional transcription elements like time stamps and speakers, I moved on to describing sounds. I recorded my sound descriptions on a new document where I had pasted the segment descriptions, which made it easy to see how sound and words relate rhetorically later on. Under each segment description, I recorded notes on sound relating to three general categories: *vocals*, *ambient noise*, and *produced sound/music*. For *vocals*, I recorded observations about how speakers talked and vocalized. I noted the presence of emotions like excitement, sorrow, determination, and others as best as I could determine, as well

as what I thought indicated such emotion: a more rapid speaking pace, a sigh, a long pause followed by a cracked voice talking about loss, and so on. I noted non-language sounds, such as grunts, coughs, and the like, as well as pauses that seemed meaningful in some way. For *ambient noise,* I took note of sounds that appeared to emanate from the environment of recording, such as the crash of surf upon shore, wind blowing against the microphone, birdsong, car honks, and other noises that provide sonic information about location. Finally, for *produced sound,* I noted how production had influenced the sound of the segment, from added in music, layering of ambient noise with voice over, fade-ins and fade-outs, etc. Rather than take notes on each category separately, I used the abbreviations for each—*speaker initials* for *vocals*, *AN* for *ambient noise,* and *PS/M* for *produced sound/music*—to indicate what classification of sound I was describing.

As an example, let's review my sound notes for a section. Here is what I wrote about sound for ***Segment 13****: Paige Williams, with a mix of recorded reflections and on-location audio, details her experiences "near Union Square" with the New York Police Department (NYPD)'s "mobile crisis outreach team, including Inspector Phyllis Burn" (39:10-41:12)*:

> **Sounds**: Begins with just PW [Paige Williams] audio explaining the segment. As she's about done explaining/reflecting on what happened, AN comes in, cars, chattering, wind, sounds of people running. AN intensifies. You hear PB [Phyllis Burn] interviewing G[arris], a homeless man. She sounds compassionate, even though she's harassing a guy who's probably terrified that he's going to be arrested. Birds still chirping, cars still rumble by. As PW resumes her reflection, the AN quiets a lot, then resumes. There's a crinkle of paper or wrapping as PB gives G masks and hand sanitizer. PM comes in around 40:48 as G reassures PB that he's good. It intensifies as AN reduces, then ceases

(41:12).

We can see how these notes "map" the sounds for this roughly two-minute section of the podcast. We have ambient noise in the form of vehicles, undecipherable chatter, wind, and, probably most interesting, "sounds of people running." Other notable noise includes the "crinkle" as Burns, who sounds "compassionate," gives out sanitation supplies. Garris sounds nervous, as anyone with drug paraphernalia that set their own coat on fire would probably be. There's also thematic music, which I included a time stamp for: 40:48. Of course, there are more sounds than these notes account for, but the idea is to capture the general auditory areas of interest within the segment. At this stage, the audio notes for each section amount to a linear description that accounts for the vocals, ambient noise, and produced sound/music. The result is a concise description that serves the purpose of a sonic transcript—a counterpart, and companion, to the language transcript. Altogether, these notes provide an impression of the podcast's sonic elements—the audio track, in terms of my audio-video editing software comparison—in relation to the words being spoken.

Overall, the language transcript, episode segmentation, and sound notes represent a first level of listening: information capture and interpretive description. The goal for these documents is to aid later analysis by mapping audio and language in relation to one another. In other words, they structure and make possible the more analytical listening, i.e., rhetorical criticism, to come. With them, scholars are prompted to include sonic elements beyond language-as-text and can identify key points of interest in the audio. These collective notes mitigate some of audio's slipperiness as non-alphabetic text that cannot be easily searched or reviewed. And, as we shall see in the next section, the process of structing listening also generates initial impressions of the arguments present in the audio, ensuring we don't have to start our analysis from scratch.

V. METHODS PART 2: ANALYZING "A CITY" OF RHETORICAL SOUND

For the second part of my methods, I offer commentary about several key moments from the podcast that demonstrate how, paired with language, sound contributes to semiotic and affective persuasion. Presented in linear order and contextualized by the segment descriptions, these moments also provide a sense of the larger narrative and sonic flow of the episode. I've divided each key moment into two tracks. The first track, "Words," contains a selection of language from each section, and the second, "Sounds," contains my description for the sounds of the *entire* section, including the vocals, ambient noise, and produced sounds/music I mentioned earlier. Beneath these tracks—the first level of listening—I provide my second level of listening, where I use theories of sound, including embodiment, materiality, and vocality, and a combination of rhetorical and multimodal listening to analyze how language and sound works persuasively.

Key Moment #1: David Remnick and Ian Frasier (from Segment 1)

Our first key moment comes from Segment 1 (0:00-4:48) of "A City," where narrator David Remnick introduces the episode's premise and writer Ian Frazier, located in Brighton Beach (Brooklyn), voices on-site observations and talks about New York as a setting for the pandemic.

Key Moment #1: Ian Frasier Brighton Beach Monologue with Remnick Voice Over	
Words	*Sounds*
David Remnick *01:40* Ian Frasier was out before dawn recently on Brighton Beach. He watched the sun rise over the Atlantic Ocean. It was April 15, 2020. As of that morning, the New York City Health Department reported more than 110,000 people diagnosed with COVID-19 and nearly	Ambient wind noise, Frazier clearing throat, long pause before 5:38 am, Frazier sounds a little groggy. When Remnick speaks, ocean surf in the background. Gulls caw occasionally.

7000 dead. The actual number may be much higher. **Ian Frasier (reporter)** *02:03* We're in an epicenter of a disease. The reason that this is an epicenter is that nature made this as a perfect place for things to come together. I mean, the way the salt water and the freshwater combined the way, you know the sound and New York Harbor and the Hudson River coming in, and then these islands, this archipelago and it's just such a perfect combination. **Ian Frasier (reporter)** *02:29* I really feel like you just see God here because you see massive things happen. That's ah, I think, Rockaway point. And that is Sandy Hook. And those two points, funneled the surge during the hurricane during Sandy, and it just sent water like just blasting over to Staten Island. **Ian Frasier (reporter)** *02:55* I mean, it just, it's, it's like God just saying hey, *pay attention* and you know, like, here's a revelation of what the future is going to be like you're gonna get slapped upside the head by nature like you never seen. **David Remnick (host)** *03:13* The day that was dawning April 15 was a day that experts had predicted the pandemic would be at its height in New York, where I guess you could say its worst. The refrigerated trucks parked near hospitals to handle the bodies. And yet the city persevered with a particular kind of resolve that it's always had.	Strong gusts as Frazier is talking about NY's landscape and talk of Hurricane Sandy. Frazier says "pay attention!" in a subdued shout, the most energetic moment, since he and DR speak so levelly otherwise. IF emphasizes "reasonably" twice around 3:33. There's produced music before DR's VO at 4:13, very contemplative, like a drawn out, low-pitched wind chime, as he explains the show concept. This music, which mingles with the ambient noises, also underscores IF's closing remarks about the sunrise, and leads into next VO and segment. IF and DR don't have strong accents. (Regional accents I can place or guess at as listener.)

Ian Frasier (reporter) *03:33*

I came from a small town and I would have friends visit me. And they would say, you know, Oh, God, I was so scared on the subway and I thought everybody was gonna mug me. And I say to them, if you're in a reasonably full subway car, you can be reasonably sure that there are a couple people in that car who could save your life. If you fell down with a heart attack, there are people that could do CPR. There's probably doctors there's you know, there's some versus the resources of the people, you know?

Ian Frasier (reporter) *04:04*

It just makes us all in New York City patriots.

David Remnick (host) *04:13*

So today on *The New Yorker Radio Hour*, our entire program tells the story of one day in the city, the epicenter of the pandemic, at its apex.

There's a lot happening in this key moment, ranging from Ian Frasier's argument about New York as a community to ambient noise of Brighton Beach, so let's focus on Remnick's rhetorically important voice overs first, which serve to argue, in words and sounds, not only the scope of the pandemic, its impact on New York City (NYC), and how the city's inhabitants have reacted, but also how we as listeners should *feel* about the realities Remnick interprets and communicates. While Remnick's words convey some of the argued affect, listening multimodally to *how* Remnick narrates reveals the affective arguments summoned by vocality.

Remnick speaks in a calm, level, all but overtly soothing voice that, by way of example, urges listeners not to panic *despite* COVID's alarming toll ("110,000 people diagnosed . . . nearly 7000" or more "dead" in NYC). Keeping in mind what multimodal listening tells us about how embodiment works, where listeners can have visceral responses to sound stimuli, including experiencing physical reactions if they experience emotions like panic or fear, Remnick's tone argues we should maintain our own composure. Even as he quantifies the disaster, Remnick's displays calm in the face of crisis. Speaking about expert predictions of "the pandemic" being "at its height in New York," he softens the blow of these words with a casually uttered, "I guess you could say its worst." That's some subtle rhetoric: instead of the omnipresent, authoritative narrator proclaiming the pandemic is at its worst, Remnick dilutes that prediction—the premise for the *entire* special episode—with an act of second person pronoun ventriloquism that instead places those words in the mouths of the audience: "you could say." His delivery, in both words and sounds, coaches our reception—Remnick's calmness is our calmness. His tone reminds me of the words from the morale boosting slogan "keep calm and carry on" the British government used to reassure and hearten its understandably nervous citizens prior to the outbreak of World War II. Remnick's narration confronts the worst of the pandemic, including "[t]he refrigerated trucks parked near hospitals to handle the body," but in doing so heroizes the ordinary actions of New Yorkers that comprise "the city" that he says, confidently, "persevered with a particular kind of resolve that it's always had."

Rhetorical listening, which asks us to consider *why* (typically relating to cultural logic) a rhetor maintains a particular stance, helps us realize that Remnick's interpretation of such circumstances—that the city "persevered with a particular kind of resolve that it's always had—*is* an argument, *is* rhetoric. Faced with the same set of facts and observations, another rhetor with

a different attitude toward NYC might arrive at a different conclusion: the city is desperate, society is in tatters, social order is crumbling, hospitals must pile the dead in trucks so corpses don't spill out onto NYC's grimy streets. But Remnick, we must in our stance of openness remember, is not just *informed* by NYC culture—in many ways, in serving as the managing editor of *New Yorker* for decades, he in fact *shapes* that culture. After six years as a staff writer for the magazine, he began his tenure as editor in 1998—several years before hijacked commercial aircraft brought down the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. While it's beyond the scope of this chapter to investigate, I wouldn't be surprised if Remnick hasn't been arguing for a particular sensibility on the part of New Yorkers in most of the pieces his fingertips and voice have brushed. New York, Remnick's words and vocal delivery argue in "A City," is a place that has already proven it can withstand the unthinkable. All that's left for New Yorkers, his un-sensationalized delivery communicates, is merely to steadfastly maintain that pre-established, ingrained tradition of stalwartness. Whether such a stance represents unconscious conditioning or conscious effort matters little in terms of the result: Remnick's voice overs argue this determined stance throughout the entire episode.

In addition to framing the episode audio with Remnick's voice overs, this selection contains several verbal arguments about the pandemic and NYC's relationship with the reality of coronavirus. Remnick provides statistics ("110,000 people diagnosed . . . nearly 7,000 dead") that he supports with details that drive the impact of the numbers home: "refrigerated trucks parked near hospitals to handle the bodies." Yet, Frasier and Remnick argue that New Yorkers, with their diverse talents and experiences—"the resources of the people"—possess "a particular kind of resolve" that will let them weather "get[ting] slapped upside the head by nature like you never seen." That's one of the major verbalized arguments of the show, and where the audio

draws much of its dramatic power: the pandemic is extraordinarily bad in NYC, yet the people—the "New York City patriots"—will persevere. There are layers to this argument as well as other related arguments, all of which we'll get to in other key segments; however, this argument frames most of the audio, spoken and otherwise.

While episode audio is not *subservient* to the arguments made by language, such language provides context that becomes impossible to separate from reception—that is, after all, the purpose of voice over narration and monologue. If NYC is "a perfect place" to be a disease "epicenter" because of geography, then the ambient noise of pounding surf, gusting wind, and atmospheric gull caws argues NYC does possess such characteristics. These sounds, as Rickert's theory of ambient rhetoric tells us, *creates* such a place for listeners. In the soundscape's iteration of Brighton Beach, we feel connected to NYC because material sound hits our nerves and impacts our senses as if we were there—audio virtual reality, in a sense. In that moment, we are in New York, which makes us consubstantial with New Yorkers in the Burkean sense, which in turn makes us more invested in the city and its people as they face this crisis. Such sound enables us to imagine what New York is and/or to connect it to our own associations with such sound as an act of identification. This doesn't mean erasing differences—as Burke writes in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, consubstantiality is a form of "'identification' that does not deny . . . distinctness" (21). To be consubstantial is to be both together and separate at once. We can identify, but to identify is not to transform into that identity. As people can share emotions, they can also share sounds, which fits under Burke's label of "common sensations"—to listen to the same sound, then, is to be consubstantial (21). The place a gull's caw reminds us of is the place, or perhaps places, where we have heard such a caw before. If I hear a gull's caw, I am reminded of both Staten Island and Fort Lauderdale, and many other places besides. I may identify a new

place with a place I have previously been based on that sound. And I connected to others who have listened to gulls call because we share that experience. Because sound, as Gunn et al. put it, "informs the construction of our identities," it is possible for us to become heavily invested in NYC through such audio and to feel part of that community Remnick and Frasier discuss (482). Frasier's monologue even provides an example of such a path to becoming a New Yorker that makes the city seem welcoming to all, since he "came from a small town" and argued to his friends about how safe the city was: "if you're in a reasonably full subway car, you can be reasonably sure that there are a couple people in that car who could save your life." But that's not all the audio does—it builds a soundscape of NYC as a place where humanity contends with a natural geography of impressive ambivalence. New York Harbor, Hudson River, and NYC's many peninsulas and islands have concentrated humanity into a national shipping and cultural hub, but that population density is what makes NYC vulnerable to disease and other natural events, such as "hurricane[s]." For listeners outside of New York, the idea of NYC as an impressive land of epic geography may be new and thus need to be established and reinforced. Even if not, the immersive sounds of NYC envelop listeners. Pauses between the words Frasier and Remnick speak are filled by a living, breathing land. As a physical space, the landscape is unaffected by the pandemic. Rock, sand, ocean, wind, rain, and tides cannot be harmed by a virus. Such ambient audio reminds us—viscerally—of this fact, reframing a human-built, human inhabited city into an indomitable, unconquerable geographic features. The thematic music, often serving to signal an end to one segment and the start of another, does not overpower the ambient noise. Instead, it blends with it, an audio gradient carrying the affect from one segment to the next.

Key Moment #2: Robert Baird and Julie Eason (from Segment 4)

For the next key moment, we fast forward past two sections: Segment 2, where writer William Finnegan speaks with Jermaine Jackson, "a group station manager for the subway system" who is "responsible for 13 stations in Midtown, SoHo, and the Lower East Side [Manhattan]" (4:49-9:05), and Segment 3, which contains writer Burkhart Bilger's interview with Jack Benton, a New York Harbor tugboat captain (9:06-13:54). Our second key moment comes from Segment 4 (13:55-17:31) of "A City," where writer Robert Baird interviews Julie Eason, who, as "Director of Respiratory Therapy at SUNY Downstate . . . . oversees the technicians who run those absolutely crucial ventilators."

Key Moment #2: Julie Eason Interview (loss of coworkers, voice cracking, phone ringing to end section (unfinished work)	
Words	*Sounds*
Julie Eason (interviewee) *16:08* You know, we're kind of in this trench together. You know, when people are talking about the lack of toilet paper and the fact that they're bored in their house and those things. You know, I spent 15 minutes this morning just sitting on the edge of my bed. God, I would give anything to be quarantined today. You know, I'm tired. We're all tired. **Robert Baird (reporter)** *16:32* Yeah, yeah. **Julie Eason (interviewee)** *16:37* None of us are going to be the same.	PM cuts out soon after DR VO. Lots of background noise, hard to tell what it is, because voice audio is very clear. Interesting accent for JE, kind of similar to my childhood friend Robert's mom, Monica Clifford. There are some coughs as JE clears her voice. JE's voice quivers with emotion when she talks about all the deaths. A LOT. This is a very emotional interview. JE's voice is almost a plea when she says "God, I would give anything to be quarantined today." RB is saying a lot of yes and yeahs, but they change how they sound

Robert Baird (reporter) *16:41* In what ways there? **Julie Eason (interviewee)** *16:44* Hopefully some good ways. You know, maybe there'll be some things we'll take less for granted. You know, that that people that you see in the hallway are going to be there tomorrow. You know, A lot of people we lost at Downstate are people that I was super close to but I would see on a regular basis. **Robert Baird (reporter)** *17:06* Yeah. **Julie Eason (interviewee)** *17:08* You know Hello Hi How you doing in the hallway and you just kind of expect that everyday you're gonna see that person comes and kind of have your routines. You know, we can't take for granted that they're all gonna be there tomorrow. **Robert Baird (reporter)** *17:19* Yeah. **Julie Eason (interviewee)** *17:20* We talk a little bit hit (?) hard. **Robert Baird (reporter)** *17:22* Yeah,	depending on what JE is saying. JE sounds very melancholic when she says "None of us are going to be the same." PM comes in around 17:08 when JE is talking about coworkers dying and how she thought she could always count on them being there—a different and new reality from pre-COVID. Sound of an office phone ringing at 7:22, emphasizing busy-ness. After ring, and "Yeah," drumbeats pick up (that's new), leading into a DR VO that concludes the segment and introduces a commercial break.

Julie Eason (interviewee) *17:22*

a lot of people who work here from [*sound of an office phone ringing?*]

Robert Baird (reporter) *17:25*

Yeah.

Robert Baird's interview with Julie Eason is one of the heaviest of the podcast. But it's proceeded by one of the lightest. Remnick places it after Burkhart's interview with Benton, which, until the final few moments, is very lighthearted—full of laughter and jokes that make light of social distancing and assert the value (and necessity) of being an optimist. But before the music announces the transition to Segment 4, Benton grows serious, arguing that there's a difference between essential workers like himself who are "perfectly safe"—so long as they follow the appropriate social distancing and quarantining protocols—and those who are "walking into hell. These nurses, doctors and stuff. Those people know, everyday they're going into a building that people are positive with" COVID. Benton's concern, which he communicates both in language and affective vocality, makes two points accessible by listening rhetorically for his worldview. One, science-based guidelines are effective at preventing the spread of COVID in non-medical, COVID saturated settings, so we should continue to follow them, Further, we should do so *without* complaining or whining, which would get someone kicked off of Benton's boat. Two, medical workers are experiencing—and enduring—the pandemic's worst. And they do so bravely—"walking into hell," not being "dragged" or "forced." Medical professionals who "know" they're going to "come into contact" with COVID are the real pillars of society, the real essential workers. Benton's words, which shift the mood from light-hearted to serious,

contextualize Eason's situation. At the same time, the earlier laughter, which is cathartic because our multimodal, embodied experience as empathetic listeners of such sonic material means we share in those emotions to some degree, gives us affective, emotional fuel we can use to endure the troubling realities that Eason discusses. In addition, the juxtaposition between laughter and exhaustion emphasizes that exhaustion by virtue of contrast.

Throughout the Eason segment, including our key moment, which is the concluding section, Eason's vocality argues her exhaustion. She takes frequent pauses between short sentence clauses, and exasperated breaths precede or follow many of her words. In this way, her voice argues her physical and emotional state, which, because of Benton's contextualization about "nurses" and "doctors," contribute to a larger argument about the state of the medical profession in NYC and beyond. Because "[a]ll sound recordings . . . are live," there's an immediacy to the sense that Eason is overwhelmed, regardless of when the audience listens (Rickert 138). The soundscape creates a moment we experience as the present where Eason is struggling to cope with the grief and depression of her position. She's at work—taking, we assume because of the ambient noise, a break to talk to Baird over a phone or computer—surrounded by the reality of her job and its mental toll. Compare the near instantaneousness (I say "near" because she's not discussing her work into a lapel mic while seeing a patient or talking to a technician) of Eason's thoughts about her job to what it would be like if she were appearing on a talk show during a day off or even sitting down at a podcast studio blocks from SUNY Downstate a few hours after work. Her vocality carries more rhetorical weight in the form of affect while at her place of work because her embodiment within that rhetorical space marks those vocals and ideas with emotions she's processing on the spot, not recreating from memory or reading from a script. When she says, "God, I would give anything to be quarantined today,"

she draws out the last syllable as a plea. And before she says, “None of us are going to be the same,” she pauses for several seconds—a long silence within a conversation in a podcast. The ringing phone at the end suggests Eason only has so much time to sit with her exhaustion and grief because her work is not yet done. The segment is poignant, yet brief. To have it continue for much longer than its roughly three minutes running time might be overwhelming—affecting grief, stress, and exhaustion, the segment is pandemic concentrate in audio form.

If “A City” opened with Baird and Eason, we’d be listening to a very different podcast episode, perhaps an overwhelming, thoroughly depressing one. That we don’t start off with such heaviness but rather with the sonic space of the fringes of NYC’s geography is a rhetorical choice, a tactical delay that lets us acclimate to the audio. Listeners need time to adjust—when this episode was released, the pandemic did not have an end in sight. The topics Eason discusses—how she and other medical workers are coping with the physical and mental exhaustion that the pandemic has caused them, including burnout, depression, anxiety about work, and an inescapable aura of grief—might translate to shock value instead of appealing to listener empathy. At the very least, the podcast would strike a different tone (pun intended). Regardless, the segment makes it clear that these workers are at their limits mentally and physically, which should deepen listener appreciation and maybe urge them to behave in ways that could lessen the risk for nurses, such as wearing masks and social distancing.

Finally, as an example of how our subjective embodied experience of sound can translate to affect, I want to take a moment to discuss my reaction to Eason’s voice, which stirred particular memories from my childhood in Staten Island, New York. From the moment she started talking, Eason reminded me of my friend’s mother, Monica, a retired New York City police officer, who was one of my mother’s best friends for much of my early life. Right away,

because of that connection through vocal accent, I was extra engaged with what Eason was saying. I wanted to like her immediately—and I did. That's a rhetorical effect that would be all but impossible for Remnick to predict or seek intentionally; nevertheless, the sound of Eason's voice resonated with me because of my material association of it—and therefore, with Eason herself—with an individual I remember fondly and respect. While such affect may not be intentional, what is intentional is the variety of voices (dozens in total, and most, but not all middle aged) we hear in "A City" representing speakers from many different backgrounds. Together, these voices, which many listeners may find representative of someone they might know or of themselves, also argue the multiculturalism of NYC in ways the listener can experience physically through embodiment and the lens of their own "situatedness." In arguing, by way of vocal evidence, the variety of people in NYC, "A City" also argues for the value of all inhabitants. If listeners can relate closely to one voice, like I did to Eason's, they might also be more likely to recognize that other voices belong to people who are also worth caring about.

Key Moment #3: Helen Rosner and Nikki Russ Fetterman (from Segment 7)

For the next key moment, we again fast forward past two sections: Segment 5, during which David Remnick discusses New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's televised daily updates on the pandemic from Albany, the state's capital (17:32-20:52), and Segment 6, where writer Helen Rosner video calls Josh Russ Tupper, co-owner of Russ & Daughters, a famous deli on Houston Street (Lower East Side of Manhattan), as he speaks with several customers (20:53-23:21). Our third key moment comes from Segment 7 (23:22-25:02), where writer Helen Rosner interviews Nikki Russ Fetterman, Josh Russ Tupper's cousin and other co-owner of Russ & Daughters, about her delivery of "200 donated meals to the Brooklyn Hospital Center."

Key Moment #3: Helen Rosner speaks to Nikki Russ Fetterman

Words	*Sounds*
David Remnick (host) *23:22* Josh's cousin, the co-owner of Russ & daughters is Nikki Russ Fetterman. That day she had delivered 200 donated meals to the Brooklyn Hospital Center. **Helen Rosner (reporter)** *23:33* So how did the delivery go? **Nikki Russ Fetterman (interviewee)** *23:35* It went great. We were met by this guy Mohammed who's usually like involved in business affairs for the hospital, but there's no business, you know. So he's one of their people for receiving donations like ours, so he was really nice and they were very grateful. **Nikki Russ Fetterman (interviewee)** *24:00* It's a weird contrast because it's such a beautiful day out crystal, like, skies there. The hospital had like all these beautiful like cherry blossoms and bloom and tulips and for a moment you could be like what's the big deal and then all you need to do is like look to your left and you would see two 18-Wheeler tractor trailer refrigerated trucks that you know makeshift morgues on the street. The first time I saw it was, was pretty shocking but **Helen Rosner (reporter)** *24:33* What was the first time you saw it?	Ambient noise continues through DR VO, the AN is of a person placing an order. NF is very positive and cheerful, which is new for the episode. Bit of vocal fry, some ambient noise, maybe from the shifting of the phone and noise from call quality. PM comes in when NF begins describing the refrigerated trucks serving as “makeshift morgues” around 24:00. PM ratchets up in intensity, a little discordant, when HR asks NF more about them. Vocality: NF saying “Yeah. Yeah. Um, yeah” when HR asks if she knew what the trucks were when she saw them. That pretty much knocked the wind out of NF’s cheerful sails. The PM intensifies, with chimes and sounds as the segment concludes.

Nikki Russ Fetterman (interviewee) *24:35*

I think popped up like it's probably been like four days now.

Helen Rosner (reporter) *24:40*

Did you know what they were when you saw them?

Nikki Russ Fetterman (interviewee) *24:43*

Yeah. Yeah. Um, yeah.

Following the segment about "Russ & Daughters" delicatessen, one of the episode's lightest because it—filled with ambient audio of customers placing food orders and negotiating the store's pandemic protocols—shows, and therefore argues, that daily life, while changed, continues for people beyond the city's essential workers, Helen Rosner's interview with Russ & Daughter's co-owner Nikki Russ Fetterman, ostensibly a feel good piece about a her "deliver[ing] 200 donated meals to the Brooklyn Hospital Center," takes an unexpected turn toward the bleak. Initially, Fetterman sounds cheerful and upbeat. She says "it went great" with enthusiasm, setting up what *most* would expect to be a fluff piece for Russ & Daughters, which Remnick earlier described as "one of those stores that people call an institution. You go there for lox, whitefish, sturgeon, everything smoked and delicious." (In other words, a quintessential New York deli.) Listening rhetorically, we can make educated guesses at some of the reasons for Fetterman's cheerfulness. Knowing that her fellow New Yorkers are suffering, Fetterman might want to bring some levity to the situation. She probably expects that to be the purpose of the interview—discussing donated goods both makes her business look good and shows that the pandemic is not wholly negative as well as that New Yorkers want to do what they can to

support hospital workers and patients. Those are reasonable expectations. Her vocality, upbeat and positive in affect, argues such an interpretation. But as she talks more about the hospital, Fetterman's tone begins to change. Even as she appreciated the "beautiful day" with "crystal, like, skies" and "beautiful . . . cherry blossoms and bloom and tulips," she cannot ignore the realities of the pandemic. This change in tone argues a change in affect, forecasting the turn in conversation as surely as the words "it's a weird contrast" that began her description.

Her example of "two 18-wheeler tractor trailer refrigerated trucks" serving as "makeshift morgues on the street" coexisting with the city's manicured beauty—"a weird contrast"—is, in my view, one of the show's most iconic sonic moments, capturing the inescapable presence of death and grief transforming the cityscape and its inhabitants with embodied vocality and ambient noise. Multimodal listening allows us to trace the sound dynamics of this moment and appreciate its rhetorical power. First, there's the call audio. While understandable, it is grainy and has a bit of echo as ambience, suggesting Fetterman is alone in an empty room when speaking, an intimate setting for a call whose isolation communicates Fetterman views the call as important and does not want to be interrupted. There's a low humming, maybe a fan, maybe the noise of some equipment, that escaped my notice for several listening sessions until I finally played the audio over noise-cancelling headphones; such background noise suggests a web call rather than phone audio, as phone mics seldom pick up such tones. Rhetorically, the relatable murkiness both invites us to apply more concentration toward listening and makes it sound as if Fetterman is speaking directly to us over the phone or a video-muted web call. Instead of a sanitized interview, audiences hear a woman candidly processing the day's events. That's what the best podcast audio does—cut past traditional media conventions and deliver visceral, authentic human experience we can feel as embodied listeners. There's no video textbox beneath

Fetterman's name to remind us that she's co-owner of a fancy, lauded NYC restaurant, no glossy, professionally staged photograph of her wearing the latest fashion broken down by designer and price to separate her from an audience that may not even be able to afford or justify a print subscription to *The New Yorker*. The conversation is mediated, but in ways that are largely invisible: selection of audio, pre-interview discussions. The noticeable mediation, the slightly grainy audio, makes Fetterman more relatable. There's also Fetterman's vocality, which communicates the difficulty of grappling with the "contrast" she mentions. While describing the beauty of the scene, there's a smile in her voice and words that's hard to capture in writing. She sounds like she could be talking about a puppy, or describing an adorable baby. The effect isn't over the top—more of a particular intonation as she pronounces certain words like "beautiful," "skies," "bloom," and "tulips." After she says "you would see," Fetterman takes a deep breath—a long pause. When Fetterman resumes and describes the trailers, her pacing and pronunciation slow down, as if the words she voices are physically harder to lift from her throat and speak. "Trucks" sounds especially heavy—her voices makes them seem immovable, as if they are permanent structures rather than portable, wheeled vehicles.

As Fetterman's desire to remain cheerful all but collapses in the context of her acknowledgement of the unmistakable reminders of the pandemic's human toll, yet still remains in the "but" that attempts to move on, a dim yet audible flicker of positivity struggling to reignite and blaze, and in doing so make the world right again, we get a vivid, raw, captivating, compelling, and convincing sonic moment. We're listening to a friend tell us, in confidence, about a difficult experience. Such audio transforms the experiences of a stranger who may be thousands of miles away into a meaningful account of the pandemic. That podcasts can present evidence and arguments in this intimate sonic way is a big deal for public rhetoric because it

makes us, as Frasier whisper-shouts in the episode's first segment, "*pay attention!*" Her reaction could belong to anyone walking down a city block near a hospital. As she speaks, slowly voicing the description of the refrigerated truck in response to the gravity of the situation, instrumental music, mournful and chiming, ringing softly like ears beginning to regain hearing after a bomb blast begins to play, underscoring her words.

Rosner's question, "Did you know what they were when you saw them," posed conversationally in a tone one might expect from a really good therapist encouraging a client to continue, lands like a bowling ball on a pane of glass. Spoken over produced music that continues to rise in volume, Fetterman's response, "Yeah. Yeah. Um, yeah," holds a universe of affect. The words affirm that yes, Fetterman did know the purpose of the trucks. But the sound of her voice, repeating that affirmation three times, tells a story. Each "yeah" arrives after a pause—I get the sense that she's re-running a mental check and arriving, again and again, at the same conclusion: at first sight, she knew those trucks held the dead that the overburdened hospital no longer could. As the music intensifies and carries us into the next segment, a humorous palette cleanser featuring hip hop artist 22Gz, the audience is allowed time to reflect on the significance and affect of what Fetterman just said. There was never any doubt about the trucks being used as morgues. That we don't know for certain—NYRH never follows up to confirm the story in the episode—hardly matters. When people run into an unmarked refrigerated cargo truck parked near a hospital, they now assume it is a morgue on wheels. Hearing the way it impacted Fetterman communicated through her vocal tone affects more than a matter of fact statement about the trucks being used. We hear an eyewitness account, voiced during an intimate conversation, rather than a newscaster speaking with projected, generic confidence about an occurrence.

Key Moment #4: Adam Gopnik (Segment 10)

Skipping two segments that feature celebrity interviews (hip-hop artist 22Gz in Segment 8 and late-night television host Seth Meyers in Segment 9) about the realities of work and entertainment during the pandemic, we arrive at next key moment. This key moment spans all of Segment 10 and features writer Adam Gopnik on-scene at Manhattan's Central Park, where he records observations and contemplates social behavior during the pandemic (31:49-34:15).

Key Moment #4: Adam Gopnik Central Park monologue	
Words	*Sounds*
David Remnick (host) *31:49* Seth Meyers talking with Michael Shulman. Throughout this hour, we've heard the New Yorkers writers documenting life in the city on April 15, a day at roughly the peak of the Coronavirus pandemic. And that day, Adam gopnik went outside and headed toward Central Park. Appropriately protected, of course. **Adam Gopnik** *32:09* All right, I'm just in Central Park on 89th and Fifth Avenue. watching all the runners go around the reservoir and speaking to you through a mask, of course, and I am somewhat indignant that not all of my fellow New Yorkers are masked as Governor Cuomo and common sense have asked them to be it's the strangest thing, especially on the part of runners. They just don't feel they want to or they need to, or something of that kind. It reflects a certain kind of what looks like arrogance. on the part of a lot of people going around the reservoir. There is better social distancing going on now than there was say, a week ago when I would come out, but not adequate. Now a lady just pulled her bandana	After VO, PM ceases and is replaced by AN of cars etc. AG is quite loud and adamant as he pretty much publicly shames everyone within earshot who doesn't have a mask on. There's wind noise and background chatter. He coughs and calls it "an innocent cough"—addressing the elephant in the room. Close to 34:00 a bell starts to chime in the background and then PM comes in as he starts talking about "One never knows … whether to applaud…" birds chirping. PM gets more insistent, louder, and Explosions! In the Sky-like as AG wraps up and talks about the mystery of the pandemic.

up. When she saw me looking at her reproachfully. My children accused me regularly of being unduly coercive about these things. But back in the days when you could travel, we would go to Rome. And there was a tiny police corps right at the Trevi Fountain, whose only job was to keep Americans from putting their feet in the water. And I loved their efficiency and they're officiousness and like my children will always claim that my ideal job would be to be a member of the fountain police. So I feel like lecturing all of these non-participant non—*coughs* excuse me, this is an innocent cough caused by the presence of this mask. But people are running around the reservoir but are not too much on top of one another. And one never knows looking at these scenes these days whether to applaud the human insistence on continuing with some version of normal life or look aghast at the human insistence on continuing with some form of normal life.

Adam Gopnik *34:05*

That's the mystery of a pandemic.

Wrapped in ambient audio of cars passing over pavement and the pleasant chirping of birds, Adam Gopnik looks around Central Park and sees only disorder. Despite the tranquil noises (the car fades but the birds keep chirping), there's no mention of the nature, of the boulders, greenery, winding paths, abundant trees, and mallard filled ponds that make Central Park stand out as one of New York's most unique spaces. Instead, Gopnik speaks of being "indignant" of his "fellow New Yorkers" who go against "common sense" by not wearing masks outside. Benefitting from hindsight, we know that social distanced outdoor activities are safe to

do without masks, which makes Gopnik's ire over runners seem cartoonish. We all have met an Adam Gopnik—we might even be one. He is C3PO to the world's R2D2s: educated—his words are carefully pronounced and delivered as if he is giving a lecture—and yet flustered and a bit alien as he attempts to verbally comprehend why people do not follow sensible guidelines. He does not suppose that running with a mask is difficult and NYC can be appallingly hot in the spring and summer, or that Central Park makes people feel safe in ways that walking around city streets do not. If I had recorded this segment, I might have said something along the lines of, "Oh, here we go, more people not wearing masks again," followed by excoriating judgements. Even Remnick introduces the segment with something of a wink to Gopnik's sense of conviction: "Adequately protected, of course." Speaking these lines, Remnick's delivery can only be described as dry. But the unnecessary presence of the disclaimer communicates the joke, which is too subtle to notice through audio of the line alone. The dryness is so complete I almost find myself wondering if it is, in fact, Remnick being humorous on purpose. But the expectation it creates about Gopnik's carefulness and convictions makes it funny regardless. And, if not for humor, the line is unnecessary—Gopnik sets up his segment by noting that he is "speaking to you through a mask, of course." So there's the extra layer to Remnick's humor, mimicking Gopnik's "of course." By acknowledging that Gopnik is preoccupied with masking, the joke takes some sting out of his remarks, adding another facet of interest to a segment that could very easily have just been a rant about how foolish people are—really the only audio in the show that criticizes other New Yorkers.

It's important to remember that when Gopnik recorded his monologue, people still wiped down mail and groceries. At the time, his concerns were reasonable. (Refrigerated 18-wheelers turned morgues were parked next to hospitals, after all.) Even if we can't relate to judging mask-

less joggers or have been told by children that we are uniquely suited to being "a member of the fountain police," Gopnik's exasperation with people not following science-based guidelines and thus extending the duration of the pandemic and its death toll is one of the great moods of 2020. I have spent many trips to the grocery store glaring at people with masks below their noses, and I have seen others do the same. Sometimes, the beglared would fix the mask, as did the "lady" who "pulled her bandana up. When she saw" Gopnik "looking at her reproachfully," but often their behavior did not change under such social pressure. In that sense, we can cheer for Gopnik's success (while also acknowledging that he enjoys a level of privilege to feel so confident criticizing strangers without fear of repercussion). Likewise, Gopnik's need to explain the reason for his audible cough ("this is an innocent cough caused by the presence of this mask") reflects, if we listen rhetorically, a near universal anxiety of the times—*someone may think I am sick! I may be singled out as a* problem. It is interesting that he confidently and problematically identifies the mask as the source of the cough, rather than allergies anyone might experience while walking outside in Central Park in mid-spring. Blaming the mask gives those runners a reason not to wear one—it is difficult to run while coughing—as well as relate personal protective equipment with an ailment. The rash pronouncement is likely a consequence of the overall atmosphere of anxiety. Yet, the visceral, embodied audio of the cough and its argument about danger comes too fast to be rendered inert by Gopnik's rash explanation. Hearing his cough in my headphones is uncomfortable—I catch myself flinching *away* from the sound (which I cannot escape, thanks to my headphones), squinting my eyes to stop airborne particles from slamming into my tear ducts. So even if Gopnik sounds just a little over the top, the physical response to the audio of the cough reminds us of the real and present danger of the disease. It's too bad he doesn't point out that coughing into a mask is different than coughing

into the open—that's a missed opportunity for both him and Remnick, who could have added such an explanation in post-production with a voice over. The focus remains on protecting oneself, rather than protecting others from ourselves. But, the synchronous audio keeps the episode fresh, real, and entertaining—which means it can continue to persuade.

There are several arguments here—people should wear masks, people should follow protocol, we should hold each other accountable, we are in this together—but perhaps the most interesting is the one Gopnik makes toward the end. "And one never knows," Gopnik reflects, "looking at these scenes these days whether to applaud the human insistence on continuing with some version of normal life or look aghast at the human insistence on continuing with some form of normal life. That's the mystery of the pandemic." The ambivalence is the argument—events can be interpreted either way, and there is not one clear answer for how to interpret each other's behavior during the pandemic. The arrangement of the podcast suggests the importance of the words. Segments tend to end on poignant moments that offer reflection. Here, Remnick offers no immediate voice over. Instead, we get speakers for the next section—in fact, *all* of the speakers and *all* of their audio—before Remnick speaks once more. While Gopnik utters his reflection, a bell, probably a church bell from a nearby cathedral, can be heard chiming decorously in the background, itself a reminder of the routines that order our lives, of the continuing of life, of the ordinary that accompanies the extraordinary. Before the bell stops ringing, instrumental music—contemplative, slightly upbeat tones—comes in, signaling the next segment while also arguing that we should think about what Gopnik has said. In that way, the music adds to the implied rhetorical question: *should we* applaud the human insistence on continuing with some version of normal life, or *should we* look aghast at it? That's for the listener to decide, but the next segment

argues, with its graduation speeches that conventionally require applause, that perhaps the former is the answer—so long as we acknowledge that life has, in fact, changed.

Key Moment #5: Audio Samples of New M.D.s Graduating from Columbia University's School of Medicine (Segment 11)

After Gopnik's monologic observations, we transition directly into our next key moment, the entirety of Segment 11. This key moment features audio samples from medical doctors graduating from "Columbia University Medical School on April 15 [2020] on a very big Zoom call" (34:16-36:07).

Key Moment #5 Graduating Medical Doctor Montage from Columbia University	
Words	*Sounds*
Graduating doctor #1 *34:16* I am coming to you from my kitchen and a frock with a nice top on and my sweatpants on the bottom. I'm really sad that we're not together in person. But either way, I feel so grateful and humbled to be graduating with all of you guys, our classes really full of the type of people that I would want to be my doctor or to be the doctor of my mom or my dad. **Graduating doctor #2** *34:43* We're celebrating and circumstances that were beyond our imagining a few weeks ago, and still we've held ourselves with grace, compassion and courage to uplift and serve our communities. I will miss our class. Please remember that we will always be a family. **Graduating doctor #3** *35:01* A very brilliant attending once told me that tough times don't build	PM from last segment leads into this one, underscoring the CUMS graduates who speak. As the individual graduates speak less and less, the music ramps up ands complexity—quite up-beat and UPLIFTING, continues after the final graduate speaks and DR gives his VO. PM ceases as DR says "on a very big zoom call" to lead into a non-utilized commercial break.

character they reveal character.

Graduating doctor #4 *35:07*

The reason I wanted to study medicine is I think not different from many of you. I wanted to be a protector, someone whose job it was to shield others from harm. It's . . .

Graduating doctor #5 *35:17*

Some of us may be moving across the country. There is some little sense of sadness to this but overall a great sense of pride in what we have.

Graduating doctor #6 *35:23*

Congratulations. Today is our day.

Graduating doctor #7 *35:25*

We're graduating in our pajamas!

Graduating doctor #8 *35:27*

so glad to be here with all of you guys

Graduating doctor #9 *35:29*

Congratulations, first generation doctors. ¡Salud!

Graduating doctor #10 *35:31*

Congrats.

Graduating doctor #11 *35:32*

Heck yeah, we did it. Woot!

Graduating doctor #12 *35:34*

Go get em lions!

Graduating doctor #13 *35:35*

Congrats, y'all. Do good work.

Graduating doctor #14 *35:37*

Congratulations . . .

Graduating doctor #15 *35:37*

We're coming for you Coronavirus.

Graduating doctor #16 *35:40*

I love you guys!

Graduating doctor #17 *35:41*

I love you guys, I wish I could . . .

Graduating doctor #18 *35:42*

Take care, be well . . .

David Remnick (host) *35:50*

That's the graduating class of the Columbia University Medical School on April 15 on a very big Zoom call. This is the New Yorker Radio Hour. More to come.

Audio samples in “A City” import not just voice but also the affect that is inseparable from vocality. In addition to the graduating doctor montage that we’ll look at here from Segment 11, there’s also the show’s fifth segment, which consists of Remnick discussing New York Governor Andrew Cuomo’s televised daily updates on the pandemic from Albany, the state’s capital. Either sampling montages would have made for a good key moment, but I selected the graduating doctor segment because with its wide variety of speakers and voices, it is more complex as well as subtle; rather than standard political rhetoric, Segment 11 captures how future doctors have dealt with the pandemic and how it has affected their outlook as the next generation of medical professionals. While the audio of Cuomo is a sonic snapshot of a pandemic figures and, Remnick observes, “often deeply depressing,” the doctor montage is uplifting. Cuomo is the authoritative voice of government in New York (“. . . that’s what we do in this presentation. Here are the facts, no opinion, no filter . . .”), the counter of the dead: “Lives lost yesterday, 752, which is the painful news of our reality . . .” With a detectable New York accent that I’m too distanced from the city to place, he is both colloquial and commanding, relatable, fatherly, and somber. His voice carries the appropriate tone for announcing the dead lost to the invisible specter of COVID, an unseen enemy that violence cannot solve and whose damage cannot be repaired with steel and concrete. But there is a distance to his voice that all stately addresses possess, a grand, anti-podcast formality, the sound of a speaker facing a television camera or large crowd that thwarts the relatability we get when listening to Fetterman talk about the beautiful day and the morgue trucks. Such formality, such decorum, also dilutes sonic affect when divorced from location and occasion. For example, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech remains powerful, helped in part by masterful oratory and the

energy captured by the ambience audio of a cheering (and hushing to listen) crowd. But as moving and relevant as it remains, how can it match the embodied experience of the listeners who were there in 1963, pressing among each other in a quarter-million strong crowd in the August heat and expansive, open skies of Washington, D.C., looking past a hopeful tide of humanity toward Dr. King, framed by the fluted white marble columns of the Lincoln Memorial and standing at the feet of a larger-than-life statue of the president whom "I Have a Dream" references. Cuomo's speech has no such grandness nor attempts it; his voice addresses a group of people, not an individual we can imagine ourselves to be. Vocally, his voice argues, "what I'm saying is news," and that brand of affect carries nothing of the pathos of a speaker whose loved one is in a hospital, or who watches day after day as coworkers and patients die, a participant and eyewitness like Eason whose exhaustion we can hear in her voice. Cuomo's presence in the podcast as an audio sample adds evidence for the stakes and seriousness of the pandemic, but hearing the hopes and dreams of some of the brightest up and coming doctors—audio from 18 different graduates, a mix of female and male voices, is included—in selections of their own words humanizes these very important essential workers.

While we don't get the same level of intimacy from the doctor audio samples as we do from some of the interview segments on the show, the affect present in their voices as they respond to the gravity of the moment and the magnitude of their accomplishment as well as the enormity of the work ahead of them in the coming decades as health professionals contributes to the segment's two larger arguments. The first argument is that these doctors are pursuing medicine for noble reasons. We get a sense of this argument listening rhetorically to the words they speak, words that Remnick purposefully curated and included, words that show the doctors' worldviews and values. The class is "really full of the type of people that I would want to be my

doctor or to be the doctor of my mom or my dad." Despite "circumstances that were beyond our imagining a few weeks ago," these doctors have "held themselves with grace, compassion, and courage to uplift and serve" their "communities." Such "tough times don't build character they reveal character." These doctors "wanted to be a protector, someone whose job it was to shield others from harm." From their remarks, we get a sense that these doctors want to be approachable, poised, capable, and beneficial to their patients and to society. They see their work as a mission and believe in the justness of their cause. Their voices, masculine and feminine, with a variety of different accents, convey and argue their enthusiasm and sense of purpose. Because the praise is framed as in service of graduating classmates, it does not come across as self-indulgent or arrogant. Their resolve is infectious—if doctors, those frontline essential workers who "walk into hell" daily can be optimistic and determined, than so can we, the listeners of the podcast, persevere. The other main argument is that these doctors, and perhaps all doctors, deserve our accolades, respect, and praise. In serving New York through residences and preserving with difficult work in harsh conditions, they have earned "a great sense of pride." The messages of "congratulations" and "love," repeated over and over again in many different voices (including "salud," which is Spanish for "health") becomes the podcast's message for these professionals, a montage of appreciation similar to the clapping for essential workers present in segment 12, the next portion of podcast audio. Hearing the doctors congratulate each other, especially after listening to them expressing their convictions, makes me want to praise them as well, far more than if I read a non-vocalized, far less affective sentence stating that new doctors deserved congratulations for their medical school rotations during the pandemic.

Tying all of these different audio together are instrumental tones, loud in volume, about equal with the voices of the doctors. At first, the tones are contemplative and lower in energy and

frequency of beats, but around the 35:17 mark, as graduating doctor #5 speaks the last complex, multi-sentence, longer audio sample, the music picks up pace and intensifies with a much faster beat. A thumping bass comes in at 35:32, ramping up the energy even more. The tones and beats make me think of the soundtrack for an inspiring commercial or movie clip where someone overcomes a great obstacle, such as running up a mountain, or picking themselves up after falling time and time again. While the doctors don't discuss their hardships in detail, or at least the samples do not, the music affects a fuller understanding. These doctors have been through so much, and are prepared to keep striving, to help all of us survive this pandemic, and maybe even find joy among all the difficulties and loss. In other words, the music is rhetorical because it, like vocality, argues how we should interpret spoken content. In addition, it carries its own energy that also argues we should continue listening. Without such dynamic audio, we might lose interest or weary of this special episode and its extended focus on the coronavirus pandemic.

Key Moment #6: Rachel Aviv and Dr. Laura Colby (from Segment 15)

After our last key moment, there are three more segments before we arrive at our next. First, in Segment 12, Sarah Larson joins her neighbors John Frederick and Karla Growen "in the East Village [Manhattan]" as the daily 7 P.M. cheering, clapping, and noisemaking celebrating "the hospital staff and all the city's essential workers" commences (36:08-39:09). Second, in Segment 13, writer Paige Williams, with a mix of recorded reflections and on-location audio, details her experiences "near Union Square" with the New York Police Department (NYPD)'s "mobile crisis outreach team," including Inspector Phyllis Burn (39:10-41:12). And third, in Segment 14, Zack Helfan speaks with Cathy Anne Mackenzie, "the taxi dispatcher at Kennedy Airport [Queens]" (41:13-42:19). Our final key moment comes from Segment 15, where writer

Rachel Aviv speaks with Dr. Laura Colby, an internist at an undisclosed hospital who often must bear witness as terminally ill COVID-19 patients die (42:20-45:22).

Key Moment #6: Rachel Aviv and Laura Colby	
Words	*Sounds*
Dr. Laura Colby *43:38* . . . for patients and their families and just trying to get them to see each other speak with each other as much as they possibly could. One thing that's really tough about profound respiratory diseases is that there is this communication imbalance between the sick and the well, and so you can have loved ones on the other side of the camera, kind of desperate to, to speak but also to listen to their loved ones that hear that, you know, wisdom or love or whatever the last words of their, their loved one might be. And I think that's kind of one of the things that's lost often for patients who are hypoxic and out of breath. **Rachael Aviv (journalist)** *44:21* Yeah. **Dr. Laura Colby** *44:21* And can subject a coughing fit. **Rachael Aviv (journalist)** *44:24* I feel, one of my closest friends is actually a palliative care doctor. And she uses the phrase all the time like "bearing witness," when we talk about bearing witness like it, what does it do for the receiver? **Dr. Laura Colby** *44:38*	New PM, with strings plucked, a piano key or two maybe. There's a long pause in DR's VO separating his summary of the previous segment with his introduction of the current one that is beginning. PM keeps playing. DR's voice gets real passionate when he says "save" in the phrase "to save their lives"—a rare bit of dynamic vocality from him. PM ceases shortly after, before he finishes his VO. Just call audio for beginning of conversation between RA ad LC. Audio is pretty clear. The way RA says "yeah" is almost musical, it's so soft. Really beautiful points. As LC wraps up, cool music starts happening.

I think at the most basic level, the most basic selfish level, it is comforting in the sense of a golden rule that we will all at some point, be dying, we will all at some point, lose the use of our senses and our ability to speak and so I think it is incumbent on all of us to bear witness to each other's dying. Then the same grace will be extended to us when we're in our last moments.

David Remnick *45:23*
On April 15 in New York according to the city's health department, 335 lives were lost from the Coronavirus. And some lives, of course, began among them. Christopher John Cintron Jr. Born at 9:18 pm.

The segment, with its grainy, unadorned audio and Colby's understated manner of speaking juxtaposed with Aviv's dynamically vocalized acknowledgements of listening and attention to those words, serves to humanize the people who are dying, or have died, from COVID, and in doing so argues their importance. In considering death and dying from the perspective of a doctor who provides end-of-life care for NY COVID patients, the segment audio addresses some of the most relevant fears people have during the pandemic: "dying alone." Colby's manner of speaking differs from most of the other speakers in the podcast, a difference in vocal approach that might be explained by her subject matter and her role as expert. Her voice *is* dynamic—it's not a monotone we might associate with a role voiced by actor Ben Stein—but its highs and lows are less far apart than some other speakers' tones. There's a carefulness to what she says; that carefulness is apparent in the pace of her speaking (slow enough to allow for her to think through and construct her sentences complexly as she talks) and her delivery of

them. Colby speaks as if she is teaching Aviv about this delicate subject of death and end-of-life care. She doesn't lecture, but she does *explain*:

> One thing that's really tough about profound respiratory diseases is that there is this communication imbalance between the sick and the well, and so you can have loved ones on the other side of the camera, kind of desperate to, to speak but also to *listen* to their loved ones that hear that, you know, wisdom or love or whatever the last words of their, their loved one might be. And I think that's kind of one of the things that's lost often for patients who are hypoxic and out of breath.

The grainy call audio, slightly lower in quality than that of Fetterman's interview, enhances the properties of attention and personalization we discussed previously and sonically mirrors (even if likely not on purpose) the difficulties—what Colby terms, with great precision, "communication imbalance"—Colby takes pains to detail verbally. The sounds of words, too, make their own arguments that contribute to a larger whole. While Colby's use of "hypoxic," so different in sound than the other words she speaks because of its Greek roots, argues Colby's clinical credentials, the emphasis she places on the word "listen" communicates that Colby cares about not only the patients but their loved ones as well. Aviv's listening acknowledgements—her softly, encouragingly voiced *uhum*'s and *yeah*'s—likewise mirror the listening that loved ones of COVID patients perform when struggling to understand the words of the dying; listening, Aviv's vocals communicate, is a holy practice. COVID, the segment reminds us, can take away a patient's voice, leading to a frustrating dying experience. But such an experience, the segment also communicates, is a human experience. "I think," Colby argues, "it is incumbent on all of us to bear witness to each other's dying. Then the same grace will be extended to us when we're in our last moments." Colby's voice and words reinforces the reality of how dangerous COVID is,

but her calmness, like Remnick's at the start and throughout the podcast, is reassuring in its affect: people die, and it is sad, but dying is a human act, the shared fate connecting us all. We need to remember, her calmness conveys, that people, not numbers, are dying; such an argument in turn argues the importance of all that has been discussed in the podcast so far, the praise for doctors, the respect for our community, the resolve people have, and so on.

As personal and moving as that segment is, it maintains a level of distance from the dying, as is the case with every segment in "A City," whose dealings with death are always secondhand and removed from particular events. For example, we do not hear audio of grieving families, of labored breathing, of the rhythmic hum of ventilators, of the extended beep of a flatline signal on a heart monitor. We do not hear the weight of bodies placed onto shelves in refrigerated trucks, the creak of an eighteen-wheeler as it shifts from park to drive to move to a new location. Instead, the grim realities of the pandemic are diluted in affect by voice, which filters them from the raw sound of any one moment. When Colby speaks of witnessing, she does not speak of a particular patient or event. So, while affect resides in voice, it is important to acknowledge that voice can, in communicating that affect, also dilute it. In "A City," the sonic distance from death and dying is rhetorical. The podcast is meant to fortify its listeners, not cast them into despair. The arrangement and topic of the final segment of the podcast supports my theory of the type of affect Remnick wants audience to take with them after they finish listening to "A City." Segment 16, which follows the one we just discussed and concludes the podcast, has birth and life as its topic. In it, Jia Tolentino interviews Lisa Cintron about the birth of her son, Christopher Citron Jr., who was born at 9:18 PM on April 15, 2020. Life in a pandemic, not death from COVID, is, from start to finish, the podcast's subject

VI. DISCUSSION: THE SOUNDS OF PODCAST RHETORIC

In the opening to his first chapter in *Sonic Persuasion*, Greg Goodale cites "[t]he educator John Erskine," who argued radio has "only two points" worth "attend[ing] to": "first, how to persuade our audience to come in; second, how to prevent it from walking out" (1). Because audiences might encounter audio for any number of different reasons, the latter consideration was most important. An audience, Erskine reasoned, "will stay only because the performance seems worth while [sic.], or because we have locked the door" (2). Whatever else it does, "A City" offers audio whose varied texture, subjects, and sounds compel us to listen and immerse ourselves in a day in the life of peak pandemic NYC. It contains many subtle arguments about public health and safety, but that does not mean it exists solely *to* argue. First and foremost, professional podcasts, we must remember, are popular *because* they entertain, even if entertainment sounds different in a *New Yorker Radio Hour* podcast than an episode of a comedy podcast. They contain arguments because human beings are persuasive creatures "situated" in a persuasive world, but that does not mean Remnick consciously set out to argue people should act in a particular way. Regardless, arguments emerge through sound, and it is these arguments we will discuss below.

Now that we've discussed some key moments involving words and sounds in the podcast episode, let's spend some time unpacking rhetorical trends. In this section, I briefly discuss the arguments made by the words in the podcasts. I spend more time, however, examining the arguments of sound. I separate the two in order to highlight the difference between words and vocality, which, I think, there's a tendency to combine. In separating them, we can see just how important vocality is to podcast rhetoric. But vocality is not my sole subject related to sound; I also look at ambient noise and produced music. Ultimately, I argue that words and sounds in "A

City" serve—and make—the same argument. Yet, it is the synthesis of the two that gives the episode its subtle rhetorical power.

Arguments in Words

Curated and framed by host David Remnick, the *words* spoken in "A City" by writers, interviewees, passersby, the voices in sound samples, and Remnick himself, at their essence, construct an argument about how to approach the pandemic mentally, how we should behave, and whom we should praise (and thus emulate). They argue we—New Yorkers and listeners worldwide—as a community of people should keep going, keep moving forward, always seeking the strength to continue our daily lives even when faced with ubiquitous grief and the possibility of despair that comes with the coronavirus pandemic. That the pandemic is difficult hardly needs addressing, and yet, describing the extent to which it affects NYC and the state as a whole, as Remnick does in voice overs throughout the episode, serves to contextualize the many small acts of persistence and perseverance "A City" contains. Even the difficult segments—an aspect we touched on when analyzing a key moment between Rachael Aviv and Laura Colby about end-of-life care for COVID patients—avoid venturing into truly depressing moments by normative standards. However, such moments may, as Smilges' concept of "bad listening" points out, be overwhelming for listeners who have experienced trauma relating to the pandemic. A listener who has lost a loved one to the illness, experienced debilitating illness themselves, been laid off from work, or feel depressingly isolated because of social distancing may find the episode's audio unbearable to listen to. For other audiences, the podcast, rather than demoralizing listeners, might encourage solidarity. These people show us how to move forward. If medical workers in the most hard-pressed medical system in the pandemic U.S. can keep going, day after day, so can we. We should use the mindset and grit of these laudable workers as an example to live by. Such

an argument does not question the structures of society that enable a pandemic and leave people without networks of social and financial support or show how income and social class can lead to very different pandemic experiences. In other words, it is not a critical argument. Perhaps it should have been. In that respect, maybe "A City" fails to capture the nuances of pandemic life in NYC. Yet, even while managing it, the episode never waves from the seriousness of the pandemic.

Listeners receive these verbalized arguments through observations, conversational stories, and directly spoken arguments. For example, the show opens with Ian Frasier observing a man who bicycled to the boardwalk doing "some kind of leg exercises" as the morning dawns. "[T]he city," notes Remnick, "persevered with a particular kind of resolve that it's always had." "It just makes us all in New York City," Frasier reasons, "patriots." Jermaine Jackson speaks to William Finnegan about her cleansing ritual "to just kind of like clear away the outside world," which involves boiling water, throwing in "a lemon peel, garlic, and salt, and stuff like that and I just inhale and just kind of really work on the lungs and kind of clear out my system." She says, with determination and defiance, "I'm not gonna let COVID beat me." Jack Benton talks to Burkhart Bilger about the importance of "happier people" because "[m]isery seems to spread much faster than happiness." Although weary and confronted by the toll of the virus daily, Julie Eason talks about suffering and preserving as an act of community: "You know, we're kind of in this trench together." She sees silver lining the darkness—the loss of many coworkers has taught her to "take less for granted," which she calls "good." As upset as he is with non-mask wearers, Adam Gopnik still mentions "all the runners go around the reservoir" at Central Park—unstoppable people who, for better or worse, continue their daily lives and routines. During the graduation from Columbia University School of Medicine, a new M.D. announces, "We're

coming for you Coronavirus." The clap for essential workers at 7 PM "seems," Remnick states, "to bring the whole city together." About the difficulties of work during a pandemic, Cathy Anne Mackenzie says that she and her fellow taxi dispatchers "have been happy that we're here. We got a job still." And there's "hope that all of this is going to come to an end soon and civilization is gonna come back." Lisa Cintron views her newborn son as "a miracle in all of it . . . I mean, look, look at how much sadness and heartbreak people are going through losing their loved ones and I get to bring this little guy in the world . . . miracle."

What the words argue—a particular attitude toward the pandemic and our neighbors—relies heavily on the affective power of sound. The words are important—they contextualize, organize, and offer evidence. But most importantly, as we will soon see, they serve to communicate emotion.

Arguments in Sounds

In "A City," sound functions to direct our attention, signal how we should interpret words, and immerse us in a complex, cohesive sonic experience—what we might call a soundscape. Ambient noise, vocals, and produced music all contribute to this soundscape, the affective space for sonic persuasion. In "A City," sounds make argument both minor and major, small and large. The minor arguments sound makes have to do with providing evidence that events have occurred or that a particular place exists. For example, the sounds of the NYPD mobile crisis unit running over to Garris persuade us that Paige Williams *was* on the scene with Inspector Phyllis Burn. Seth Myers and his recognizable voice speaking with Michael Schulman supports Remnick's narration that such a conversation did indeed occur. The ambient noise of the automated taxi announcement help establish Kennedy Airport as a location. Chirping birds do the same for Central Park. The larger arguments sounds make in "A City" are ones of affect:

that we should feel and experience persuasive content in particular ways. In this regard, vocality and to a lesser extent produced music are most important. Whenever a person in a podcast speaks, they are arguing that they feel a certain way, and that listeners in turn should share their interpretation. When director of respiratory therapy at SUNY Downstate Julie Eason says, "God, I would give *anything* to be quarantined today. You know, I'm tired. We're all tired," we are inclined to believe in the truth of those emotions because of how she voices them as a plea, as a dogged lament. Then, once we can appreciate the perspective she voiced, we are well on our way to acknowledging the larger crisis faced by medical workers, the severity of the pandemic, and our ethical imperative to do what we can as individuals to help our larger communities survive, such as social distancing to protect ourselves and others. Vocality turns words, even sentence fragments and short phrases, into stories. "Yeah," Nikki Russ Fetterman answers Helen Rosner's question about the knowing what the refrigerated trucks being used as mobile morgues when Fetterman saw them. "Yeah. Um, yeah." The words say she did know what they were, but her voice conveys—and in doing so, argues—the emotions of that recognition. Produced music, such as the uplifting beat that underscores the graduating doctor's voices, is also moving, and can make for engaging audio. It is a marker of production quality and attention to detail and can persuade listeners to continue listening, which is of course vital to podcasts as a form of public argument. Below, we'll elaborate more on these rhetorical affordances of sound in "A City."

In addition to arguing that events occurred and that places exist, ambient noise, such as the pounding surf, chirping birds, and automated taxi announcements, build a sonic stage and set for the characters we listen to in the episode. While comparable to a video interview that, with a subtle blur, has as its backdrop a location suitable for its subject, e.g., a wine room pairs well with a sommelier, the ambient noise is, in many ways, more immersive, particularly for listeners

using headphones. Unlike background visuals in a video that cannot travel past the bezel of a screen, the sounds of place carry. If you've ever turned down a song or show to see if the sirens you hear are from the media you're listening to or from a police car, you understand how convincing and immersive ambient sounds can be. There is an immediacy to the sonic immersion ambient noise creates. While such sounds can serve as evidence for a speaker's point—the pounding surf supports Frasier's observations about the landscape of NYC as perfect for a pandemic—such sounds have their own power, particularly when recorded synchronously with a speaker, or speakers', voice(s). The guitar solo during the noisemaking for essential workers serves as evidence of the event, but also moves us with its inflection of patriotism, courtesy of Jimi Hendrix's Woodstock performance. The various customers of Russ & Daughters show us how a variety of people are handling the pandemic within a short space of time. Whatever form they take, ambient noises grab our attention and empower our imagination, making us more attentive listeners. Attuned to the ambience of a soundscape, listeners may feel as if they share the same space with a podcast's speakers, making the arguments such speakers vocalize more immediate and convincing.

While vocals argue feeling and emotion, the delivery of vocals differ, with host, writers, interviewees, and sound samples each offering a spectrum of emotion and feeling in varying ways. As a narrator, Remnick's voice imparts calmness and rationality. He rarely, if ever, sounds excited, defeated, angry, or upset. While his voice possesses the "authority" Adorno associates with radio narration by virtue of his position as the framer of the audio, Remnick's steady delivery emphasizes the emotions of the people being interviewed. The *New Yorker* writers who recorded these interviews behave similarly, encouraging their subjects to speak while remaining, for the most part, in the sonic background. Interviewees are the authorities of their respective

segments. Julie Eason, Nikki Russ Fetterman, Jack Benton, Jermaine Jackson, etc., are the experts of their own sonic worlds, and their testimony shapes how we think about their respective roles as essential workers. The emphasis shifts to writers, however, when they deliver observational monologues that transforms them into the authority of a segment. Ian Frasier and Adam Gopnik tell us how to think and feel about what they see and experience at Brighton Beach and Central Park. Finally, sound samples, including those of Governor Cuomo's televised address, Seth Myers' show audio, and the graduating doctors contain their own vocality and vary in delivery. Myers' audio samples contrast with his interview, the same way an actor's performance as a character differs from that same actor discussing their role in order to promote a film. In the case with Myers, the contrast argues a candidness on the part of the TV show host. His thoughts on the difficulties of working from home are not a TV bit, even if they become that for his show. Like ambient noise, the varying vocals make for a more interesting sonic experience, the same way varying sentence length and syntax creates pacing and drama in prose. Altogether, the vocals and the emotions they argue and convey generate a rhetoric of affect—that we should feel a certain way about the topics and subjects of discussion and speech in "A City." In other words, like ambient noise and the produced music we'll discuss next, vocals also contribute to what we might call the podcast's mood—the overall feeling or tone of the audio.

As well as emphasizing moments, creating more dynamic audio, and making "A City" sound more professional, produced music also serves as a bridge between segments, blending them together, unifying the podcast as a composition just as Remnick's words—and voice—do. Without produced music, listeners would probably require more narration from Remnick to make sense of the relation between different segments, which, in addition to making the podcast less interesting, takes away from the rhetorical power of letting the writers, interviewees, and

ambient locations speak for themselves. In addition, produced music also sets and reinforces the tone of delivery and shapes the podcast's overall mood. Rather than injecting affect where there is none, the produced music in "A City" amplifies already present emotions. One of the best examples of how produced music builds upon already present emotion is the music underscoring the sound samples of the graduating doctors. As the doctors speak of their hopes, dreams, and determination, the produced music intensifies, empowering the emotions of their words. The effects of such underscoring are subjective, but for me, they make the hopeful, determined messages stand out, making the hard work of public responsibility and accountability associated with the pandemic feel more bearable and noble.

Earlier, I mentioned soundscapes and mood relating to sound. When we listen to a podcast, we are entering a cultivated, rhetorically constructed version of reality that manifests in sound. The soundscape is this reality—audio overlaid upon our individual and collective experiences as listeners. As a form of public argument, the soundscape of "A City" argues a particular version of public life through the multifaceted audio it incorporates, audio of determination, perseverance, and a community-first approach to city life during a mentally, physically, and perhaps spiritually draining public health crisis. The episode's soundscape has a mood, and as with vocals, which argue a speaker's feeling to a listener, the mood—how we should react to content—is part of the show's argument. Despite the often-heavy audio, the soundscape of "A City" is not one of despair. That's a rhetorical choice. In profiling essential workers and others throughout NYC on what was supposed to be the apotheosis of the pandemic, its projected zenith for New York, and not as a soundscape succumbing to a mood of indulgent, unproductive existentialism on the anticipated worst day of a horrible event, "A City" argues resilience. In arguing resilience, "A City" aligns with evidence-based interventions in public

health. A 2014 analysis of studies on resilience published in *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness* by Kessel, MacDougall, and Gibbs finds that "resilience can potentially be used in a strength-based approach, within a public health framework, to increase the proportion of the population that experiences efficient recovery" (452). They use the following definition of resilience: "'the intrinsic capacity of a system, community or society predisposed to a shock or stress to adapt and survive by changing non-essential attributes and rebuilding itself'" (452). Kessel et al. focus mainly on natural disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes (a bombing is also included in their survey of existing studies) (457). However, a pandemic, while more widespread, could be considered a disaster and has been formally declared one by FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency). As I mentioned above, "A City" does not problematize the conditions that lead to the need for resilience in the first place, and Frasier's initial framing of the pandemic as a natural disaster based on New York's geography does not criticize the socio-economic conditions that contribute to the vulnerability of individuals and systems. To do so would be to change the podcast from a subtle argument to an overt one, which might also distract from the connection of sound and language in podcast persuasion. It is possible that "A City" and its message of resilience may serve to normalize the conditions that contributed to the pandemic. Whether the podcast should have taken a different approach is worthwhile question, but it is beyond the scope of this chapter.

VII. CONCLUSION

When I set out to conduct this research—to develop and utilize an approach to listen analytically to a sonically complex podcast—I expected there to be stark differences between the rhetorical contributions of words and sounds. Instead, I found the opposite: their arguments were, in my view, largely the same, two halves of a rhetorical whole. But while words evidenced and

argued situations and perspectives—the pandemic is dangerous, workers are struggling but preserving, we are in this crisis together—sound, in addition to contributing evidence, argued how to *feel* about what the words told us. Put another way, sound guided the listener's *relationship* to rhetorical content. In an essay, prose handles all of these functions simultaneously. Reading, we can gather how to feel based on moments of emphasis, framing, juxtaposition, etc. In a podcast, however, affect is immediate. Voice—a podcast's main content—signals emotion at the very moment of delivery. Music does the same. Ambient sounds provide their own immediacy, immersing listeners in a moment in time and space. (I'm not trying to argue one medium is better than another, just noting each has their own rhetorical affordances.) In terms of takeaways outside of my proposed listening approach, the most applicable to the majority of podcasts is the understanding that voice signals—and argues, because it is impossible to know if emotion is genuine or how strongly it is felt—how a speaker feels *and* how an audience should feel about the words being spoken. How might this feature of vocality work rhetorically in a more extended conversation regarding an issue of public importance?

As methodical as I've been, my analysis of the sounds of podcast rhetoric in "A City" are by no means complete or exhaustive. For example, I didn't discuss pauses and pacing, which are a part of the episode's persuasion. There's also the matter of editing and production: the shaping of sound through editing builds an overall affective and semiotic argument. Although I have not addressed such elements here, my approach could still work as a framework, particularly if combined with a method like Lambke's, which visualizes elements in a podcast through soundwaves. For example, it would be possible to reverse engineer highly produced podcasts into labeled segments, map pauses (total time, location), and note layers of sound by adjusting

the transcript “tracks” to add time stamps to sounds for greater precision. Such data could be quantified, and those measurements displayed as colored portions on a visualization of the episode’s soundwave. My method would help rhetoricians listen and analyze the overall argument, which could yield useful insights when paired with quantified data using a mixed methods approach. While I touched on some of these aspects in my meta-analysis, I only scratched the surface. I limited my focus to vocality, ambient noise, and produced music to account for as large a whole of the podcast’s soundscape. But, even my explorations into these areas are only the beginnings of such analysis. There’s much, much more to learn about sound and persuasion in podcasts as public rhetoric. I hope my listening approaches will making continuing such work both seem more doable and worth doing.

Podcast Rhetorics

Insights into Podcasts as Public Persuasion

Chapter 4: Deliberation or Demagoguery? The Rhetoric of Podcast Conversations

I. INTRODUCTION

So far, this project has 1) established that podcasts are a significant persuasive platform for arguments of public importance and thus are worthy of study, 2) examined the rhetorical dimensions of podcasting technologies and traced their impact upon podcast rhetoric, and 3) explored how sound and words work together to form semiotic and affective arguments in podcast audio. We've taken a ground up approach, beginning first with the need for study, then starting our analysis with the technological conditions of podcast rhetoric, and finally studying the often-subtle sonic persuasion podcasts contain. This chapter offers the final piece of that approach; in it, I examine the rhetorical moves podcast hosts use in overtly rhetorical conversations—conversations that contain claims relating to topics of public importance—with guests to persuade their listening audience. These are the controversial conversations that make podcasts newsworthy and attractive as an alternative form of communication. These are the conspiracy filled conversations that are the result of all the technologies and the regulatory conditions we discussed in the second chapter. These are the challenges of dominant views and standard views of ethos and credibility that are why podcasts make money and attract so much attention. These conversations shape larger public discourse.

Podcasting's technological context, which supports the creation of talk-based content almost wholly free from regulation or intervention by governments or administrators in technological networks who index shows in directories, e.g., Spotify and Apple Podcasts, all but begs for conversation—and controversial conversation—to take place. The popularity of shows like the *Joe Rogan Experience* (*JRE*), *Crime Junkie*, *This American Life*, *My Favorite Murder*, and *Stuff You Should Know*—all in the top 10 of the most popular podcasts of 2020 in the U.S. according to Edison Research—demonstrates that audiences crave conversation as content. But

of the five examples I named, only one publishes conversations unedited: *JRE*. By contrast, the others include only *moments* of conversation, much like "A City at the Peak of Crisis," the episode of *The New Yorker Radio Hour* we analyzed in the previous chapter. These brief chunks, such as banter between hosts before a new segment, and selections from a longer interview that audiences cannot access, possess the energy of a conversation, that affective bottled lightning of back-and-forth wit and discussion that perks us up, grabs our attention, and stirs our emotions because it seems so natural and real. However, by design and technological mediation in the form of post-production editing, such podcasts control and manage, i.e., edit, how conversation makes it way to audiences. In doing so, they select only the most interesting moments of conversation (such as Jack Benton talking about essential workers "walking into hell") to excite and persuade their listeners.

Or do they. Here's a hypothetical example to ponder: you're David Remnick, putting together audio for "A City," and one of your interviewers has just sent you the conversation they recorded. It's accompanied by an email that goes over points of interest, topics, and other information that might help you decide which moments to include in your episode. There's a note at the bottom: "You're not going to believe what they said about Governor Cuomo and the pandemic . . ." Intrigued, you play the recording, skipping ahead until you arrive at that moment. You listen, and are shocked to hear the interviewee assert, passionately and confidently, "Governor Cuomo and other liberals are exaggerating the dangers of the virus because they want to destroy Trump's chances at reelection and use the threat of the virus as a way to monitor and control the U.S. population to help bring about a centralized world government run by big tech companies whose ultimate goal is to make human beings obsolete." *Wow*, you think, *that is amazing, entertaining audio! I've never heard anything so ridiculous. That will get people*

talking about my show! And at the very same moment, simultaneously, you also think, *I can't run that—even if it is ridiculous, if the interviewee believes it so might other people. Including that audio might encourage people to think the virus is not only a hoax but also part of a grand conspiracy they might attempt to resist with violence. There's a chance that if I include this moment of conversation, doing so might encourage those people to engage in unsafe behavior that could endanger others. And if I didn't frame it carefully, people might think I believed it, which might cause my magazine to lose all respectability.*

The hypothetical example, faithful to conspiracies Alex Jones voiced throughout his appearance on JRE #1555, demonstrates several rhetorical points (PowerfulJRE). 1) Conversation can be interesting and entertaining, even when it's dangerous. Might the interest conversation generates pose a danger to democracy when applied to non-democratic ends? 2) Most of the conversations on popular professional podcasts are asynchronous (not recorded and published live) and edited, allowing rhetors the time to make decisions about what moments from conversation to present and which to exclude. What different rhetorical opportunities and pitfalls does publishing live, unedited conversation provide in comparison? 3) Conversation can be messy. If you've ever been engaged in what seemed like a reasonable dialogue with someone, only for them to say something absurd, unexpected, and/or problematic, you've experienced such messiness firsthand. Such messiness, however, is amplified by podcast distribution and circulation. Just as the long tail market of the internet allows for niche interests to flourish, it also allows for those absurd, unexpected, and/or problematic conversational moments to find sympathetic listeners.

Posing the research question "what about conversation makes hosts and guests sound reasonable to their audience when making arguments over long-form conversation," I investigate

professional podcasting's most popular and divisive conversationalist, Joe Rogan. As we have discussed in previous chapters, Rogan is arguably the medium's most influential rhetor, both in terms of largest consistent audience as well as how his style, like his radio-turned-satellite radio inspiration shock-jock Howard Stern, has shaped the popular podcasting landscape. Specifically, I will analyze two different episodes with a total of three different guests.

The first episode I will analyze is "Episode #176 – Steven Rinella," featuring hunter and writer Steven Rinella's first appearance. Released in 2013, this episode was recorded fairly early in Rogan's podcasting career (he began toward the end of December 2009) and marks the beginning of Rogan's long-standing friendship with Rinella and Rogan's involvement with hunting culture and wild game, a topic both he and his podcast are well known for. This podcast is old Rogan at his best—energetic, inquisitive, opinionated, thoughtful yet impulsive, passionate, often crass and crude yet capable of eloquent seriousness—forming a rapport with a skeptical and capable new guest as they discuss issues of public importance, i.e., diet, sustainability, health, ethics, and more. Episodes like "#176" and unconventional guests like Rinella, who is neither an elite celebrity nor standup comic, are a big reason why Rogan has the following he has today, a following that grants him the massive platform he uses to argue his opinions.

Importantly, and in contrast to guests appearing in the second episode we'll examine, Rinella is *actually* an expert when it comes to his conversational subject of choice: hunting and living off of wild game. Now, expert and expertise are two words that can seem subjective and meaningless in broader public discourse—conspiracy theorists might say Alex Jones is an expert, but an expert in what, exactly? How much does expertise count for? What is it? Tom Nichols, in his *Federalist* op-ed "The Death of Expertise," argues that "any acknowledgement of expertise

as anything that should alter our thoughts or change the way we live" appears to have "died." According to Nichol's, there exists, perhaps as a result of the abundance of information available on the internet, "the utterly illogical insistence that every opinion should have equal weight." While I think Nichols, in his usual insufferable way, misses quite a lot here—identity, power, positionality, privilege, consensus, commonplace, ideology, emotion, and all else constituting the exigence of that insistence we might broadly gesture to as important considerations of speaker and audience in rhetoric—his arguments show how expertise is a troubled term. Much like Nichols, I define expertise as knowledge relating to a particular subject or practice that results from "education" and "experience." Part of being an expert also entails acknowledging the existence of other experts outside of one's area. As such, it doesn't apply to conspiracy theorists, whose arguments recognize only experts—or people formerly regarded by their colleagues as experts—whose views align with their own. By all measurements, however, Rinella possesses expertise. One of hunting's most accomplished and well-regarded practitioners, Rinella, a native of Michigan, has hunted, fished, and trapped almost his entire life. Equipped with an MFA in creative writing from the University of Montana, Rinella has written several creative non-fiction articles and books on hunting and cooking wild game and hosted or starred in TV shows on the subject, including *Meateater*, an often aesthetic, documentary style show that first aired in 2012 about his wilderness hunting and cooking exploits that still releases new episodes on Netflix (Schweber). Before appearing on *JRE*, Rinella also hosted *The Wild Within* on Travel Channel, which was nominated for a prestigious James Beard Award—one of the highest honors in culinary circles—in 2012 (Forbes). Rinella walks the walk. When Rogan asks him how much meat he buys from the grocery store, Rinella answers he never does, a practice of eating only game meat that began during his college years. His family is involved in wildlife, too: his brother

Matt is “a U.S. Department of Agriculture scientist,” while brother Dan is “a freshwater ecologist at the University of Alaska” (Schweber). Rinella’s involvement in, and ability to shape public and insider conceptions of, hunting makes him an interesting subject for our study of conversation and argument. How does he establish and communicate his ethos through conversation? How does he appear credible or reasonable? In what ways might audiences and interlocutors identify with his arguments throughout a conversation on a podcast?

Another reason that #176 makes sense for us to analyze in terms of conversation and rhetoric is that it is Rinella’s first appearance on the show. He does not know Rogan, nor does Rogan know him. This dynamic allows us to explore how acquaintances rhetorically build rapport in conversation, and how such moments contribute to conversational argument. How do podcast rhetors navigate getting to know each other while also discussing complex topics? How do such negotiations contribute to the rhetoric taking place through conversation?

The second episode I will analyze is “Episode #1555 – Alex Jones & Tim Dillon,” featuring largely de-platformed conspiracy theorist Alex Jones and standup comic and conspiracy buff Tim Dillon. When it was released on October 27, 2020, “Episode #1555” caused a media firestorm. Todd Spangler’s write-up for *Variety* sums up what makes the episode particularly controversial—Jones, of course:

> . . . during the rambling three-hour-plus show, Jones spouted a variety of misinformation, including claiming that masks aren’t effective at preventing COVID infection; denying climate-change science; spreading false anti-vaccine theories; and baselessly asserting that democrats want to hamper the U.S. economy to get President Trump booted from office.

As a result of Jones' conspiracies, *JRE* #1555 remains one of the podcast's most infamous episodes. And yet, it is still available on Spotify as well as YouTube, where as of mid-June 2021 it has amassed over 19 million views (PowerfulJRE).

One of the aspects of #1555 that interests me from the standpoint of conversation is the reason why these platforms haven't pulled the episode, especially Spotify, which removed over 40 episodes from the *JRE* backlog as part of their exclusive deal, including previous episodes featuring Alex Jones (Asarch). What makes this conversation different from the ones that were removed? It turns out it's mostly about appearances. Experts report that both companies prohibit content featuring "specific types of speech—not individuals per se—and that context matters in such moderation decisions" (Spangler). "In this case," Spangler reports, "Rogan at several points challenged Jones' conspiracy theories and cited credible sources; as such, the content isn't considered in violation of the platforms' misinformation policies." This is a problematic justification: listening to the episode, we get the sense that Rogan only "challenges" Jones to make him appear credible. "I was happy," Rogan said, referring to a moment in the podcast when he was able to verify that AT&T paid Trump's lawyer Michael Cohen several hundred thousand dollars for information about the administration, "that we called you on it because then we found out it's correct. . . . Look, you've been correct about a lot of shit. This is my point." While Rogan, we shall see, does pushback against some of Jones' blanket statements, such as those about employees in tech companies, he's ultimately, I find, supportive of most of what the conspiracy theorist and his parrot Dillon say. The result is that Jones may appear more credible than he would have otherwise, even as he weaves grand, global conspiracies about secret societies and social control, not to mention pre-emptively undermining the election by, in a fit of high irony, accusing the democrats of planning to do exactly what Trump and his constituents

did: make baseless assertions of election fraud and contest the results of the election in an unsuccessful effort to maintain power.

We've seen a taste of such conversational rhetoric here, but there are other questions worth investigating. *How does conversation create a space for radical, even dangerous ideas? How does conversation contribute to an atmosphere of acceptance for such thought, and what does the rhetoric of such acceptance sound like? How does conversational timing impact interlocutor acceptance of arguments being voiced? How do rhetors bring up controversial arguments and opinions within the larger space of a conversation? How do challenges function rhetorically in conversation?*

In addition, Jones' status as a longtime guest and friend of Rogan's allows us to compare rhetoric in conversation between relative strangers and the rhetoric in conversation between friends. (Dillon is friends with Rogan as well, but can barely get a word in as Rogan and Jones talk.) That Jones was even invited to appear after all of his past controversies and headaches on the show is proof of such a bond—but it might also allow us to consider how Rogan's conversation with Jones boosts the podcaster's own ethos as an alternative media figure, one infamous for his often problematic, headline grabbing guests. CNN is unlikely to have an interview with Jones, but Rogan has had several, a choice of guest that, in addition to his conversational, no-subject is off limits style, cements his podcast's ethos as alternative media and more believable to a segment of the audience skeptical of big media companies and mainstream news.

Both conversations offer an abundance of research questions relating to rhetoric. But what is the best way to investigate them?

In this chapter, I argue that the same rhetorical moves of podcast conversation can support both deliberation and demagoguery. To form my argument, I review recent scholarship on demagoguery, ethos, and circulation, which I assert is well suited for analyzing the rhetoric afforded by conversation in the two *JRE* episodes that serve as my artifacts. While we'll examine conversational moves on each as rhetorically impactful, the larger aim is to understand how unedited, on-the-fly conversation serves as a particular kind of rhetorical space on podcasts. For this aim, new conceptions of demagoguery as a condition that encourages us-versus-them rhetoric and an absence of responsibility in discourse and rhetoric form the backbone of the analysis to take place in this chapter. For my analysis, I categorize and theorize the rhetoric of both episodes as three interrelated conversational moves—connecting, establishing, and complicating and show how these moves work for deliberative-style conversation as well as demagogic conversation in podcasts. Finally, I conclude by offering approaches podcasters may use to curb demagoguery in podcasted conversation.

II. THEORIZING LONGFORM PODCAST CONVERSATION

Democrats, Alex Jones calmly asserts during JRE #1555 in his trademark Texas accent, "want to kill the U.S. economy. China's been open for six months. They admit it's leaked out that they're doing this to kill the U.S. economy . . ." But when Joe Rogan asks Jones who "leaked" such information, Jones answers "Bill Maher."

"Bill Maher," Rogan counters, "is not part of the Democratic Party—he's a comic."

Switching gears with nary a pause, Jones launches into a rant claiming that New York City (NYC) mayor Bill de Blasio has police arrest "Jews" and "Baptists" who "try to have an event" in NYC," but that when "antifa or BLM [Black Lives Matter] . . . burns stuff down, the mayor says it's great. And the mayor said, de Blasio said, 'this is legitimate.' Antifa's legitimate,

your church isn't, your synagogue isn't." Before Rogan can slow him down—assuming he even wants to—Jones, after declaring that NYC is under "martial law" and that he has "the proof," claims "ABC News is reporting in blue cities and in Texas, that they're going to come to your house and demand a COVID test. And if you don't, they're gonna arrest you. Well, the federal and state courts—"

"Where's that being said," Rogan challenges.

"El Paso, Texas," Jones replies, side-stepping the attempt at fact-checking by naming a physical location instead of a source.

While Rogan immediately launches into an attempt to coach Jones on the proper use of sources, the damage has already been done. By voicing so many different conspiracies (democrats want to destroy the economy to ensure Trump's November 2020 election defeat; NYC is under martial law; de Blasio is anti-Semitic and hates Baptist Christians, personally controls police actions in NYC, and has said churches and synagogues are not legitimate as well as that it's "great" when antifa and BLM commits arson; antifa and BLM commit arson; cities with democratic leadership are going to knock doors and arrest people who do not consent to a COVID test), Jones all but ensures there's no way Rogan can, despite his best efforts, verify and or debunk all of his false claims and misinformation.

Wait just a moment.

While all the quotes are accurate, I've strategically framed this example to position Rogan as heroically intervening to staunch a tide of conspiracy theories but as being ultimately outmaneuvered by the superior rhetoric of Jones. In doing so, I've purposefully ignored two key pieces of information. First, Rogan is the one who invited Jones on his podcast, providing the conspiracy theorist *yet again* with a platform reaching tens of millions of potential listeners.

Second, and almost equally important, Rogan lacks the training and experience to serve as a factchecker, a role that ought to be performed by an unbiased party rather than a show's host or producer (Jamie Vernon).

So why frame the interaction in this misleading way?

The short answer is that I hope to prove a point crucial to the analysis of conversational rhetoric I conduct in this chapter.

The longer answer has to do with new theories of demagoguery as well as recent work on ethics and circulation that has implications for demagoguery and conversational rhetoric on podcasting. "[C]ritical focus on . . . individual rhetors," argues rhetorician Patricia Roberts-Miller, "has troubling consequences for examining persuasion" (235). The "individual rhetors" Roberts-Miller references are demagogues—politically eminent rhetors like Hitler whose arguments, which amount to demagoguery, "reduc[e] all policy questions to issues of identity (us vs. them) and motive (loyalty or disloyalty to the in-group)" (235).[36] By such a definition, Jones is hardly a demagog—he's not a politician, and outside of conspiracy circles, he's largely ridiculed by the general public as an outlandish con artist who exploits tragedies like the Sandy Hook school shooting—which he previously claimed was a hoax—for attention (Associated Press). (Neither is Rinella—whom I view to be measured, reasonable, and, in fact, openly resistant to arguments that attempt to categorize people into political groups or those groups into good or bad—or even Rogan.) But I digress. These "troubling consequences for examining persuasion" are, Roberts-Miller suggests, inevitable because demagogic rhetoric, outside of identity and motive, is dissimilar among different demagogs and varies in efficacy over the span of a single demagog's life. Demagogues, Roberts-Miller contends, do not rise to power because

[36] For an extended definition of demagoguery, see Roberts-Miller *Rhetoric* 173. For lists of other attributes, see *Rhetoric* 173-174.

they are unparalleled, unprecedented rhetoricians (236). Hitler, she observes, citing a small library's worth of scholarship, "was infamously 'unoriginal' in both content and rhetorical strategies" (236). Rather, what helps demagogues achieve power—and what we should be focusing on—are the *conditions* supporting the ascendance of demagoguery, which "an individual" can "rid[e] . . . to power" (237). Rhetors like Jones "who frequently rely on demagoguery," e.g., "Keith Olbermann, Rush Limbaugh, Michael Moore, and Anne Coulter . . . . model a stance on leadership they want their audiences to adopt . . . . If we limit our attention to demagogues trying to promote their own candidacy, we miss that more common kind" (237).

Roberts-Miller's groundbreaking work treats demagoguery as a rhetorical problem grounded in discourse, which makes sense: speeches, appearances, articles, and, dare I say, conversations on podcasts, provide an opportunity for demagoguery to express itself. Studying the expression of demagoguery makes rhetorical sense and leads to fascinating insights. Consider, for example, that demagoguery's embrace of certainty contrasts that of "scholarly" and "political deliberation," in which no matter is settled with finality (Roberts-Miller *Rhetoric* 132). With deliberation, Roberts-Miller asserts, the process of thinking is continually re-evaluated, making "metacognition" vital to such discourse. On the other hand, demagoguery absolves its rhetors of responsibility for their logic and thinking processes: errors, like saying Bill Maher is a credible source for a conspiracy, can be ignored because the rhetor can assert the out-group is involved in a coverup or that the name was incorrect but the information was nevertheless accurate (Roberts-Miller *Rhetoric* 133). Demagoguery is a rigged game: the demagogic rhetor cannot be wrong, and the non-demagogue cannot be right. In the fast flow of conversation on a podcast, matters are even more confused, and work in demagoguery's favor.

To appear credible, demagoguery relies upon "the performance of expertise" (Roberts-Miller *Rhetoric* 141). This performance often involves gestures to science—including, of course, its misrepresentation—as well as eyewitness accounts and "epistemological populism" that, Paul Saurette and Shane Gunster explain, "'valorize[s] the knowledge of 'the common people,' which they possess by virtue of their proximity to everyday life'" (qtd. in Roberts-Miller *Rhetoric* 141). The effect of such epistemological populism is that it makes attitudes and policies seem "natural" (Roberts-Miller *Rhetoric* 141). To be convincing to the right audience, however, demagoguery need only step over a very low rhetorical bar: "consensus" (qtd. in Roberts-Miller *Rhetoric* 155). In other words, demagoguery is effective when it preys upon pre-existing fears and insecurities, such as racist worries over sabotage from Japanese Americans living in California during World War II (Roberts-Miller *Rhetoric* 155). Even though there was no evidence of sabotage, "California media gave far more coverage to rumors of Japanese sabotage than to refutations of those rumors" (Roberts-Miller *Rhetoric* 155). Consensus doesn't require proof—it merely needs agreement.

We might expect that the internet, with its abundance of information—including that found on podcasts—and supposedly deliberative platforms to make demagoguery more difficult. Unfortunately, counterevidence holds little power to separate people from their deeply held beliefs, as Roberts-Miller's analysis of Hak-Shing William Tam's legal testimony shows. Tam, an anti-marriage equality figure in California, was brought in as a hostile witness in *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*, a lawsuit against Proposition 8, which overturned the California Supreme Court's May 2008 ruling that granted marriage equality to gay men and women (156). "Tam," Roberts-Miller explains, "was asked to testify in this trial because of his work" in two organizations: "the Traditional Family Coalition, of which . . . Tam was the executive director,

and . . . the American Return to God Prayer Movement, of which Tam was secretary" (156). The issue at stake was whether Tam's arguments—and by extension the rhetoric supporting Proposition 8—were solely religious, and thus unsuitable for court (156). Asked to provide "support for his claims" that gay men were dangerous and interested in legalizing pedophilia, Tam responds with some iteration of "It's on the internet" (*Rhetoric* 159). In fact, he considered information put out by non-experts more credible because their beliefs aligned with his own. "Expertise" in Tam's case, Roberts-Miller concludes, "is determined by his belief." By extension, podcast audiences are more likely to consider information credible if it aligns with previously held beliefs, even in light of counter-evidence. In other words, even if Rogan can "challenge" Jones' points by asking for him to verify them, Jones and listeners of the podcast who share Jones' beliefs and consider themselves part of the in-group are unlikely to be convinced by these obstructions or counterarguments because Rogan's ethos as challenger cannot overpower the ethos of Jones, who appeals to pre-established consensus. There's always more "information" to counter such counter-arguments.

By demonstrating how the internet, as a repository of knowledge filled with countless sources, some credible, others not, can serve to support demagoguery, Roberts-Miller suggests that digital media (she mentions several homophobic websites that Tam deems credible even though they contradict accepted scientific thought) can enable demagoguery. With my analysis of conversation on *JRE*, I'd like to extend her work into podcasts, where demagoguery, I contend, can flourish through conversation, which might also make demagoguery sound less obvious. In the same way that demagogues arise from demagoguery, I argue demagoguery also arises where and when demagogic rhetoric is structurally supported, such as unedited podcast conversations. In their introduction to a special 2019 issue of *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*

focusing on demagoguery, Ryan Skinnell and Jillian Murphy argue, "we must continuously learn and relearn how to engage in public deliberation that is not demagogic . . . and teach each other to value democratic deliberation in arguments about public policy" (229). One of the reasons we must be aware and mindful of such engagement is because, as Skinnell and Murphy put it, "we are all nascent demagogues. When a culture of demagoguery is ascendant, *any* person engaged in any way with political discourse and public policy arguments can—and often will—use demagogic rhetoric" (228, emphasis in original). No one group, they contend, "have solitary claim to demagoguery" (228). Podcasters of all stripes can—and should—see the reduction of demagoguery as an ethical responsibility. As a rhetorician, I contribute to this goal by providing a list to of recommendations for structuring podcast conversation to preemptively mitigate and reduce demagoguery later in the chapter.

Understanding demagoguery in the *JRE* podcast is especially crucial because its published conversations, in addition to being flawed, possess their own ethos as a digitally mediated "dwelling spac[e]" that listeners may "utilize to form [their] ethical and moral character" (Wilson 217). If audiences consume conversations like Rogan and Jones' on #1555, then they may also develop a flawed ethos. Such conversations are what I call "demagogic conversation" because they exhibit the major characteristics of demagoguery in a conversational format. But at the same time, conversations like Rogan's with Rinella may serve an opposite function, its ethos arguing that listeners should converse in more deliberative ways—hence my other term: deliberative conversation. While it may not constitute formal deliberation as a democratic policy debate, deliberative conversation has the characteristics that structure deliberation: a plurality of perspectives, meta-thinking, and a lack of utter certainty or finality regarding opinions and arguments. While ethos is often thought of, "in the Aristotelian sense" as

the argument of a speaker's character that a speaker constructs while performing rhetoric, summarizes Noah Wilson in "Algorithmic Dwelling: Ethos as Deformance in Online Spaces," it is also, various scholars reason, "an embodied process" (Arthur B. Miller), "'a complex set of characteristics constructed by" and recognizable to a "'group'" (Nedra Reynolds), and also "*how* rhetoric is used to create dwelling spaces for thinking and deliberation (Michael J. Hyde) (218-219, emphasis in original). Further, Kathleen J. Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones argue that ethos is also flexible and negotiable, which can help us understand why conversation dynamics change depending on interlocutors like Rinella and Jones (3). Ryan et al. promote a "[f]eminist ecological ethē [plural of ethos]" that "recognizes all elements of any rhetorical situation as shifting and morphing in response to others (persons, places, things), generating a variety and plurality of ethos, or ethē" (3). "When you have credibility or character within a community," Wilson explains, "it is because you have dwelled, contested, and shared with them; your ethos was informed by your dwelling" (220). While Wilson is speaking about social media, where users are directly involved in discourse, I argue that unedited conversations taking place in podcasts provide a vicarious dwelling that not only constructs and negotiates ethē but also argues that such ethē are to be valued and emulated. Because of the affordances of sound, which we discussed in the third chapter, including soundscapes, embodied listening, and materiality, podcasts function as a space where listeners dwell.

To understand how ethos and conversation relate to each other and to demagoguery, let's return to the brief exchange that began this section, where Jones mentioned several conspiracy theories and Rogan attempted to intervene. One the one hand, as rhetors, Rogan and Jones (Dillon, too, for that matter, although he did not speak during this exchange) possess their own ethos. Such ethos is based on what they argue, how they argue, what the other rhetors think of—

and more importantly, speak about—their character and credibility, and what larger groups (conspiracy theorists, conservatives, liberals, etc.) and subgroups think of them based on previous experiences. Such previous experiences may be news reports, clips, gossip, etc., and often framed in particular ways. If someone knows of Jones from Fox News, for example, they may award Jones a different ethos in their mind than an audience who knows of Jones from a CNN report about Sandy Hook. Such ethos changes in relation to audiences over time, including as they dwell in the podcast audio while the rhetors argue. There's also the matter of past appearances on *JRE* itself. Episode #176 is Rinella's first appearance on *JRE*. Compared to Jones, who's had multiple *JRE* appearances before #1555 and who is also well known as a conspiracy theorist within the general zeitgeist because of his many controversies, Rinella was, at the time, a relative unknown. Outside of hunting and culinary circles, it's unlikely audiences would have prior conceptions of Rinella. Even now, roughly eight years later, audiences new to *JRE*, unless they happened upon his Netflix or YouTube series, would likely only know of Rinella by Rogan's references to him during conversations about hunting and the outdoors. Either way, audiences unfamiliar with Rinella would have to rely on Rogan's introduction his interactions with Rinella through conversation to develop their opinion of the guest's ethos. In comparison, audiences could have as many as 175 or 1554 episodes of *JRE* to inform their understanding of Rogan's ethos because of his function as host. Finally, for diehard and/or less informed fans, Rogan's decision to invite Rinella and Jones on his podcast argues each guest's credibility; at the same time, appearances by past guests, including presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders, serve to build up the podcast's overall ethos. The higher the number of well-respected, expert guests appear on *JRE*, the more the podcast seems trustworthy—why else would someone like Bernie Sanders appear on it? (This is especially true when respected guests appear to far

outnumber conspiracy theorists, discredited academics, and so on.) While this is not problematic for Rinella, who is well-informed and deliberative in his manner of conversation, this packaged ethos is a huge issue in the case of Jones, even if it is mitigated to some extent by his poor public image. To recap, podcaster ethos of host and guest is formed by prior conceptions of credibility based on sources of information outside of the individual rhetor, e.g., news sources, gossip, praise, etc. that audiences are aware of; by the podcasters' previous relationships to audiences through prior episodes and other content, e.g., social media posts, TV shows, and other podcasts; and by the podcaster conduct in conversation as the audience experiences in the moment of listening, including introductions by the host and arguments by both host and guest(s). Thus, the ethos of podcast rhetors is constantly evolving based on new evidence provided by their behavior and arguments within an episode as well as through the wider world's interpretation and arguments about the ethos of those rhetors.

In addition, the technology of podcasting also argues ethos through the expression of a podcaster's ethics as realized through their use of technology to constrain and shape content, as discussed in our earlier hypothetical example of Remnick deciding whether to include entertaining yet problematic audio. Yet in digital publics that put a premium on virality, circulation metrics like "speech" and "reach" are indispensable to a show's ethos (Bradshaw 480). Speed refers to how quickly content is released and circulated—recall that Bannon was releasing up to four *War Room* episodes a day leading up to the January 6, 2020, attempted coup—while reach refers to audience numbers. The "defining elements" of virality, speed and reach, rhetorician Jonathan L. Bradshaw asserts, "affect audience perceptions, accuracy, and issue salience among publics" (480). We've talked previously about how technology and technical administrators legitimize shows like Bannon's *War Room* by listing them in their

directory and by displaying numbers that quantify a show's standing in comparison to others. (Recall, too, how in this chapter I argued #1555's importance by citing its 19+ million YouTube views.) A podcast like *JRE* that frequently reaches a large segment of the public will be viewed as more significant and impactful than one that does not, or one that does so less successfully. Because receptive audiences perceive virality as legitimacy, viral content can both out speed and out muscle criticism and correction, as was the case when President Trump's contention that photographs of small crowd sizes at his inauguration were "fake news" (Bradshaw 480). Trump's quick, demagogic response, no doubt aided by circulation of such claims across a spectrum of media, means that "fake news" became the news, rather than the crowd sizes.

Without question, an ethos supported by speed and reach brings ethical concerns for podcasts like *JRE* and the conversations they contain. Ethics, which derives from "ethikos . . . the plural of ethos" relates to "how individuals choose to interact with one another" (Bradshaw 482; "Ethics").[37] While the study of ethics spans several fields, at a fundamental level ethics relate to choice. James E. Porter argues that "from the [rhetor's] point of view, ethics has to do with determining (and perhaps even changing) the principles or codes that establish, maintain, and guide relations between writer and audience and with considering the political and ethical consequences of our" compositions and arguments (68-69). With its allowance for the possibility of improving communication, Porter's definition of "rhetorical ethics" aligns with what anthropologist Henrietta L. Moore describes as "ethical imagination," the symbolic (and persuasive) "capacity" to reimagine and demonstrate more ethical uses for anti-democratic

[37] Bradshaw cites Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collin's *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (University of Chicago Press, 2011) for this information. According to Cornell Law School's Legal Information Institute, ethics "is derived from the Greek word ethos (character), and from the Latin word mores (customs) . . . . they combine to define how individuals choose to interact with one another." By either accounting, ethics is related to ethos, which is the major point to take away. I leave it to classicists to discuss whether ethē or ethikos makes more linguistic sense as a plural of ethos.

spaces (68). Porter and Moore's conception of ethics are useful because they thwart what rhetorician Dan Ehrenfeld argues is a flaw of ecological models of rhetoric that attempt to account for interconnected, "hyper-circulatory" features "of the networked public sphere"; such models, Ehrenfeld asserts, limit a rhetor's agency to the ability to make choices that take advantage of the current system (305, 311). Consider the rhetorical concept of *kairos*, which Bradshaw points out prioritizes quickness (482). The demands of quickness—of *speed*—force a rhetor to adapt rather than weigh out and deeply consider the available means of persuasion and as well as the "*telos*, of what Aristotle would call the 'good' for which rhetors strive" (Bradshaw 483, emphasis in original). Rogan's conversational podcast achieves *kairos* because it responds to public issues in a timely, engaging manner; however, the good for which Rogan strives is conflicted—he wants to be entertaining, to be taken seriously (when convenient), to not be taken seriously (when convenient), to expose listeners to new ideas, to promote freedom of speech, to achieve raw authenticity in conversation (while simultaneously communicating to the public), to champion science (sometimes), and to champion conspiracy theories (sometimes). Rogan's goals are at cross-purposes with one another, which leads to a confused ethos and inconsistent ethics. If Rogan were to prioritize one telos, or at least be consistent with his goals, the conversations on his podcast might be less prone to demagoguery. They might also be less entertaining and profitable.

To understand such possibilities, we have to first analyze the conversation taking place on the podcast.

III. THE RHETORIC OF CONVERSATION IN *THE JOE ROGAN EXPERIENCE* PODCAST

In what follows, I describe both artifacts (episodes #176 and #1555 of *JRE*), providing contextualizing information as well as a summary of the discussion. After, I examine the rhetorical moves and patterns in each conversation that argue ethos to see how they vary in, as well as support, both deliberative versus demagogic discourse. Here, demagogic discourse—characterized by the reduction of policy to us versus them identity logics, pseudo-scientific evidence, unverifiable information, and certainty—serves as the counterpoint to academic and deliberative discourse, whose most telling features are references to vetted research, metacognition and a lack of finality.

Artifact Description: Episode #176 featuring Steven Rinella

Released on March 27, 2013 as a YouTube video[38] and later that same day as a downloadable podcast, *JRE* #176 spans roughly three hours. Like most long conversations I've participated in, their discussion wanders. Themes emerge, but Rogan is mostly content to listen to Rinella discuss his knowledge and life experience. The pair spend the first few minutes talking about coffee and vitamins—an ordinary conversation, in other words. The setup of mundanity belies persuasion, or at least shifts it to a more recognizable, more palatable, more natural seeming form: a discussion among friends. That's a major feature of the dwelling space, the ethos, of the larger conversation. After, the conversation moves towards topics where Rinella possesses more and more expertise. Rinella tells Rogan the story of how the hunter met his wife, whom he asked out by calling "her on a satellite phone from the North Slope of the Brooks Range" in Alaska while she was living "in New York." Rinella talks about how moving to New

[38] Because the video has been removed from YouTube as part of Rogan's exclusive deal with Spotify, it isn't possible to verify where the episode was originally live streamed. Unfortunately, my earlier notes can't settle the question. In my 2017 *Conference on College Composition and Communication* presentation in Portland, OR, I wrote that "the conversation was streamed live and unedited" and that "the live stream contains video of the conversation and was later uploaded to YouTube." Either way, the video is fluid and free of obvious post-production editing. Interested parties may currently view it on Spotify.

York—at the time of the podcast he lived in Brooklyn—made him feel a little more conservative compared to living in Montana, where his "natural contrary instinct" led him to "skew leftward." He said living in New York helped him understand why the US has the culture it has—rather than those big cities "being this, like weird otherness in a big way." They talk about Rinella's show *The Wild Within*, specifically an episode where Rinella, in Rogan's words, "tried to live like Lewis and Clark and shot a buffalo with a musket and shit." As such, there's a shift from everyday coffee, vitamins, and romance to areas where Rinella possesses extreme expertise, which opens up the conversation. They talk about history, of various types of arrow heads made by indigenous hunters, and North America as a setting for hunting. "I like to hunt," Rinella reflects, "through the lens of hunting." Rogan decries what he sees as the lack of connection people, including himself, have to their food. "You're living off living things, period," Rogan says, even if "you're a fucking vegetarian." Rinella talks about his "800 square foot garden in New York" and how city life makes him appreciate deforestation, but that he's "maybe too busy to feel." As such, Rinella doesn't fall easily on a political or cultural spectrum, which is key to his ethos. Rinella talks about experiences bow fishing with indigenous hunters, the far reach of U.S. capitalism, waterborne illness, and food. Rogan talks about his childhood and how he moved around a lot as a kid, so he doesn't have "a back home." Rogan talks about eating grass fed beef in Brazil, his current diet, and the poverty he saw.

Around the one hour 10-minute mark, the podcast gets a little more deliberative. Rogan says he's never been hunting, and mentions how Ted Nugent has a ranch with thousands of acres, all fenced in "with animals running around"; that, Rinella says, "is no different than if a farmer woke up, went out, and shot his cows, and acted like he's hunting them." Thus begins a discussion of hunting ethics and the essence of what it means to be a hunter. Rinella discusses

how he changed his lifestyle to consuming mostly wild game in college and the sense of purpose and fulfillment it gave, and still gives, him. Part of that discussion involves Rinella's early life as a fur trapper, so they talk about the ethics of that as well and other debatable activities dealing with hunting, trapping, and meat consumption. They talk about wild boar, and the likelihood of Bigfoot's existence (Rinella thinks such a thing is highly, highly unlikely). They talk about disease, murder, unjustified war, and wolves being reintroduced to Idaho, which leads to a long discussion about wolf ranges, habitat, and why some wolves are larger than others. Rinella talks about how he views the reintroduction of species that were removed from their range by human intervention as an "obligation," as well as how managing such species after their reintroduction is an "obligation." Using bears as an example, Rinella takes time to explain why Rogan's fears of oversized wolves being introduced is likely based on misinformation. It's the habitat and diet that determines size, he argues, when the animals are otherwise "genetically equal." Rinella talks about how he finds comfort in the existence of dangerous wild animals because of the "thrill" as well as that it deters other hunters from venturing into those areas. Then, after a tangent about dogs and a moderator on Rogan's forums dying, the show wraps up.

Artifact Description: Episode #1555 featuring Alex Jones and Tim Dillon

Released on October 27, 2020, as a YouTube livestream, "Episode #1555" also runs over three hours. The episode begins with participants acknowledging that Jamie Vernon, the show's producer, has just recovered from COVID. Although Vernon "still can't taste anything," Rogan declares "But you don't have any residual symptoms. Nothing wrong." This exchange, in which Rogan ignores what is obviously a COVID symptom, begins the show's conversational foray into many bizarre, reality-twisting topics and threads. Rogan introduces Jones and Dillon, with Jones expressing his thanks for being on the show while Dillon describes his t-shirt making fun

of the slogan “believe all women” featuring Ghislaine Maxwell—the former girlfriend of accused child sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein—who faces “US federal charges of sex trafficking conspiracy” (BBC “Ghislaine”). Jones launches into a conspiracy theory involving Maxwell’s father, which Dillon expands upon by adding Maxwell’s sisters and tech companies. Rogan and Jones discuss a prank comedian Sasha Baren Cohen pulled on former New York City mayor and lawyer for Trump Rudolph Giuliani involving a young girl and a hidden camera (they decide Giuliani is free of any wrongdoing). The trio then discuss censorship (it’s bad), Hunter Biden (they claim all news of his alleged criminal activities are being suppressed by the FBI, including that he’s being paid millions of dollars by Putin), and Trump, whom Jones asserts nobly cut off all lobbyists and yet is being manipulated by his friends and family.

At this point, we are around thirteen minutes into the three hour-long podcast and on page 10 of 113 of a transcript that surpasses 40 thousand words. There’s more to the show, but the conversation follows the same general pattern. Each new topic and/or person is brought up, it somehow leads to the disclosure of another conspiracy or facet of a conspiracy that’s already been mentioned. Rogan begins trying to verify Jones’ assertions around 15 minutes in, which we’ll get into with our analysis; however, as the chapter’s earlier example of Jones’ claims about de Blasio, antifa, and Black Lives Matter suggests, however, Rogan’s attempts are less than thorough.

Among the show’s other topics are conspiracies involving the demonization of coal, which Jones argues that science demonstrates is totally harmless; the secret society filled with influential politicians and wealthy individuals known as Bohemian Grove; censorship (“It’s all about normalizing centralized control,” Jones asserts, linking Twitter censorship to China’s concentration camps for Muslims); the Democratic Party’s supposed plan to steal the 2020 U.S.

presidential election; COVID death numbers being misreported so that hospitals get more money; holistic COVID prevention supposedly verified by the National Institutes of Health; and voting fraud related to mailed ballots.

The last thirty-five minutes of the show gets really out there (Jones has been drinking liquor for most of the conversation and trying unsuccessfully to get Rogan to smoke weed). Around the 2:35:24 mark, Jones asks Rogan, "So what . . . do you think runs the universe? What do you think the secret is? Who are the DMT [N,N-Dimethyltrptamine—a powerful hallucinogenic] elves? When's the last time you took DMT?" The trio talk about aliens, multiple dimensions, and "genetic memory" before Jones claims that mRNA vaccines make people sick (2:53:21). The show concludes with Rogan confronting Jones, who at one point mentions he feels like he has to stop "working" or he's "going to have a heart attack or [go] crazy," about the conspiracy theorist's unhealthy lifestyle and urges him to stop working so much and to get in shape.

Analysis: Rhetorics of Unedited Podcast Conversation

Topically, both episodes vary; the conversation on *JRE* #176 centers on the related topics of hunting, diet, and environmental stewardship, while *JRE* #1555 centers on conspiracy theories related to U.S. politicians, corporations, and the wealthy. The rhetorical moves and patterns (because they occur multiple times in each episode) within both conversations, however, are similar, and it is these moves we shall analyze through our lens of deliberative and demagogic discourse. Our examination also includes considerations of ethos and credibility, which the conventions of conversation, our analysis will show, require. Below, I describe the various rhetorical moves and patterns I discovered in conversation and their implications for credibility, ethos, and argument. I have organized the rhetorical moves I observed in both podcast

conversations into three interrelated groups: connecting (relating to conversational partners and audience), establishing (introducing and framing conversational topics), and complicating (responding to, complicating, expanding, or supporting pre-established topics). While the case can be made for other patterns and moves, such as clarifying or digressing, the three I analyze provide a solid foundation for theorizing conversational rhetoric on podcasts.

Connecting

As is the case with my other terms for conversational moves, I use "connecting"[39] broadly to signal moments where interlocutors, intentionally or unintentionally, provide and respond to opportunities to relate to each other as well as the listening audience. Such moments can include explaining motivation for inviting a guest (host) or for appearing on a show (guest), demonstrating interest in a rhetor and what they have to say, sharing personal narratives as an act of "opening up," and more. These moments are crucial for establishing the ethos of a show and of rhetors, for winning over audiences and making them more receptive to arguments and advertising, and for building a comfortable, conversational space that *seems* natural—i.e., less corporate and less obviously mediated by technologically—a simulation of private conversation that is perhaps *JRE*'s foremost appeal to audiences and which also makes either deliberative or demagogic rhetoric more convincing. In a highly produced podcast with conversational elements like *New Yorker Radio Hour*, much of the work of connecting happens off air. Such podcasts often work within less flexible constraints, including episode runtime and self-imposed content restrictions. Audio is edited to show only the most relevant, dynamic moments, such as Nikki

[39] While related, when I say "connecting" I do *not* mean "identification" as theorized by Kenneth Burke in *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Connecting *is* a part of identifying and achieving consubstantiality, but deploying identification as a theory here would overpower my analysis of podcasted conversation's rhetorical mechanics. Applying identification to analysis of podcast conversation as a whole would, however, make for interesting study in the future. Rhetorician Joel Overall's *Rhetoric Review* article "Kenneth Burke and the Problem of Sonic Identification" shows that there's opportunity to study how sound can productively highlight the division component of identification—Burke himself states "[i]dentification is compensatory to division"—that, Overall argues, is often overlooked (22).

Russ Fetterman's poignant confirmation that she recognized the purpose of the 18 wheelers parked outside the hospital. There's also no guarantee of a linear order because a producer can rearrange the timeline, selecting moments that fit the arrangement/delivery of the podcast episode irrespective of their position within the span of an interview. With *JRE*, such moments are, almost in their entirety, content. By experiencing them in the moment, audiences may feel that they themselves are connecting with host and guests. That level of connection amplifies the podcast's persuasive power.

When host and guest(s) are unfamiliar with each other, as is the case for *JRE* #176 with Rinella as guest, the first moments of connecting involve setting and responding to expectations. For example, Rogan begins his conversation with Rinella by asking two questions: "Do you take any supplements? Are you just out there fucking eating wild game every day?" Even though they're "closed" and can be answered with "yes" or "no," this pair of straightforward questions, and the multiple potential paths for response they offer, shows how moments of conversation are rhetorical and present rhetorical opportunities. Asking about supplements, the first question seeks to gain more information from Rinella—a way of connecting—but also steer conversation toward a topic area with which Rogan, the co-owner of supplement company Onnit, is comfortable and familiar. Arriving within the first 15 seconds of the episode, the strong language of the second question argues from the get-go the show's alternative media status while also establishing the lack of conversational boundaries relating to language. Freedom of speech is one of Rogan's evergreen topics on *JRE,* and the explicit language the host uses reflects this ethos in which the conversation *dwells*. Equally important, the second question signals the show's topical exigence: an opportunity to discuss hunting and wild game with an expert. In mentioning the topic, Rogan provides Rinella the space to discuss his unique lifestyle. The question also serves

as an attention-grabber for audiences, who may wonder how or why a person might, even if the question veers toward hyperbolic, eat enough wild game to warrant the question's asking. Asked provocatively, the question signals Rogan's respect for Rinella, the host's interest in his guest's expertise, and begins to establish Rinella's ethos within the space of the podcast episode. This demonstration of interest is a significant part of the rhetorics of podcast conversation because it both argues 1) the rhetor demonstrating interest *wants* to hear what the other rhetor has to say, which in turn *encourages* them to speak, and 2) that listeners, too, should be interested in what the other has to say.

Rinella, for his part, sets up his ethos as relatable by forgoing the low hanging fruit of immediately bragging about his mastery of the outdoors, opting to instead talk about coffee. Rinella's self-restraint establishes his ethos as humble and makes him seem more relatable, which connects him to audiences. Instead of attempting to shock and awe listeners or discuss a lifestyle that is likely unfamiliar, he spends his first moments of conversation talking about coffee. By positioning coffee as a supplement, Rinella also tries to direct the conversation away from the sort of supplements Rogan likely wants to talk about, which Rinella "tend[s] to be a skeptic about." Had he succeeded in this effort, Rinella would have elevated the ethos of the conversation to be more scientifically and academically grounded. However, Rogan, unsurprisingly, could not resist the chance to argue for the efficacy of supplements and the chance to voice a conspiracy about the government attempting to make supplements like "multivitamins" being available only by prescription. Yet, noting his own skepticism upfront allows Rinella to politely listen to Rogan's rant without becoming contentious early and disrupting the rapport the two have been building thus far. At the same time, Rinella's restraint shows that he's only willing to talk about topics that he has experience with. He could have said,

"Oh, I doubt that" to Rogan's points, but interjecting or responding with unbacked skepticism would have changed the mood of the conversation and perhaps made Rogan more resistant as a conversational partner. Doing so would have also placed Rinella at a disadvantage to Rogan, whose sense of conviction and ability to speak word after word on the topic makes him appear credible, especially in the dwelling space of a conversation that's too fast to allow for fact-checking, consultation with outside experts, or deep deliberation on the topic of supplement effectiveness—a feature of conversational podcast rhetoric we'll discuss in the subsection on "establishing."

The navigation of connecting in this example from the beginning of the episode is subtle in that, while present, the connecting is not commented upon by the rhetors as it unfolds; however, the rhetoric of connecting in podcast conversation also involves overt recognition and communication of a bond and the presence of respect. Similar to discussing learning outcomes at the end of a class, including such overt recognition demonstrates conversational progress and argues its transformative results. Rogan's comments to Rinella toward the end of #176 just before the three-hour mark demonstrate that a shift has occurred through conversation, which also serves to argue the episode's value and the value of the arguments it contains:

> **Rogan**: Dude you are a great spokesman for the idea of hunting, and . . . an intelligent and well-read person who appreciates it for what it really is. And I think your stance on it is admirable, your stance against you know the high fence, you know just the ethics that you have towards it, a lot of people can learn from it, I think, and a lot of people can learn, and it's one of the things that I took from your show, that uh it's not just being a sportsman, there's discipline to it and that you benefit from that discipline and what you were talking about when you were talking about how when you're in the state of hunting

> that you're not thinking about anything, you're just totally in the grove, that zen state is what everybody is looking for in martial arts, in anything, in playing pool, in doing standup comedy, that zen state of being completely in the moment, you know, and that's chasing that down and I've always been a big supporter of trying, you know, to be self-sustainable . . . I don't practice what I preach, and I fucking buy bottle water, I'd really, like to pull it off someday, I'd like to pull it off, and I think what you're doing is brilliant.

With this act of connecting, Rogan argues his assessment of Rinella as "a great spokesman for the idea of hunting" to the audience. Rogan's praise frames Rinella as a philosopher of hunting, whose positions on hunting-related issues such as "high fence" hunts demonstrate his "ethics." These words show that Rinella's deliberative style arguments—we'll analyze some of these later—during their conversation have moved Rogan to reconceptualize what hunting is. Originally, Rogan viewed high fence hunts, which take place where an area of "wilderness" is contained with fences that target species cannot cross, as a legitimate hunting practice, but Rinella has convinced him that shooting fenced animals—no matter how many acres those fences enclose—constitutes an entirely different activity. Rogan's articulation of his changed position, including his praise and references to specific conversational moments, argues that audiences should also change their views. Rogan is so moved he wants to take up Rinella's lifestyle, which involves hunting and preparing all meals (outside of occasional trips to restaurants) and essentially live off wild game. There's no higher endorsement of a guest than a podcaster can offer, and it is voiced in order to connect and express admiration. It shows the power of the conversational deliberation we'll later discuss.

Connecting sounds different when conversation occurs between rhetors who already know each other, who have dwelled together in a rhetorical space before and exchanged narratives and thoughts. In the case of JRE #1555, this includes producer "Young Jamie Vernon." Instead of introducing guests Dillon and Jones, Rogan begins the episode after checking in with his producer "Young" Jamie Vernon about the latter's recent bout with covid—referred to as "cooties" at one point later on in the episode:

Rogan: Young Jamie, back in the fucking saddle. How you feeling?

Vernon: Very well, thank you.

Rogan: COVID-free four days in a row now—

Vernon: I've kicked it.

Rogan: Yeah, and now, you still can't taste anything?

Vernon: Well, it's starting to come back today—

Rogan: You lick a battery?

Vernon: —but yeah, like 5% taste. It's gotta be, pickle juice doesn't even taste like anything.

Rogan: Really, it just tastes like water?

Vernon: Yeah.

Rogan: Very weird. But you don't have any residual symptoms. Nothing wrong?

Vernon: All good, can breathe and everything.

By asking how Vernon is doing as he recovers from a serious illness, Rogan puts his show's producer ahead of his guests. This rhetorical move sets up an ethos of concern and support for the episode, an argument that the health of Rogan's employee and friend is at least as important as the show's other content. It's also a powerful display of connecting to established fans who

know who Vernon is and who may be aware of the producer's COVID diagnosis. Rogan, of course, already knows how Vernon is—he would not have asked Vernon to work if the producer were physically unable because of illness—as should Dillon and Jones, who, being physically present in the studio as a literal dwelling space, can witness Vernon's well-being. Thus, Rogan raises the conversational topic in order to connect with fans. At the same time, Rogan's quick dismissal of Vernon's side effects, as well as Vernon's own "I've kicked it," are equally rhetorical and also contribute to the episode's ethos. People involved with *JRE* are too tough to get sick from COVID—the show cannot be stopped. As I noted in the episode summary, the casual way both Rogan and Vernon dismiss the symptom of being unable to taste food as unimportant—not a "residual symptom"—appears baffling. However, it makes sense in the context of the show and Rogan's persistent narrative that COVID is only dangerous to unhealthy people, as we saw in our example in the first chapter. The reinforcement of this narrative again in this episode shows how connection happens across episodes in a series, and how it can be demagogic (Vernon is fully healthy only if we ignore his symptoms, which offers demagogic finality on a debatable topic). Bringing up popular controversial takes—the unseriousness of COVID and how it takes away from "healthy" people's freedoms—argues the alternative ethos of the show and connects with audiences who share such beliefs. This devil-may-care attitude toward a public health crisis likely to send most serious listeners away but also reward those who remain with a claim to insider, diehard fan status that certain audiences may find appealing.

Compared to the introduction stage of *JRE* #176 where Rogan was connecting to a new guest, the less descriptive connective introductions Rogan performs for Jones and Dillon show how much Rogan expects his audience to already be aware of the pair from previous episodes; in other words, the show assumes a prior connection between guests and listeners. Rogan's

introductions occur directly after he asks Vernon how he is doing, and neither hints at what either guest does or what they do, as he does with Rinella. Instead, Rogan's introductions connect to guests and audiences by building a level of excitement for the show's content—and importance—to follow while at the same time reinforcing the ethos of its guests, as his introduction to Jones demonstrates:

> **Rogan**: Not worried about you—Alex Jones!
>
> **Jones**: This is the most anticipated thing I ever did. I probably had, no exaggeration, 2-3000 people in the last year and a half ask me, "When are you going back on Joe Rogan?" And I'm always saying, "I don't know, I don't know." And then I learned you're moving here [to Austin, TX, from Los Angeles, CA] like three, four months ago. And now we're here. And this is, this is exciting. I don't get butterflies anymore, but I actually have them here. And this is great. It's good to have butterflies after about 20 years. Didn't get it the last two times I was on, didn't get it when I interviewed Trump, didn't get it in a lot of things, but I've got butterflies here today.

While Rogan's "not worried about you" statement refers to his previous discussion with Vernon about COVID, they can also be taken as an endorsement of Jones and a signal of the podcaster's approval of the conspiracy theorist beyond what inviting Jones on the podcast already adds to his ethos. Consider that Rogan could have been hostile to Jones, or openly skeptical, which would have completely altered the show's overall ethos. Moments of connection—how podcasters and guests interact with one another—argues how audiences should react to guests, with the podcast host wielding more influence in most instances.[40] Jones goes to great lengths to both argue his

[40] An exception might be the Obama interview on *WTF*, where Maron was far less influential than his guest, probably even among most of the podcaster's own audience. We don't have the space to discuss the matter in this chapter, but an interesting area for expanding scholarship on conversation in podcasts would be to examine moments

excitement for the show as well as his own ethos. According to the conspiracy theorist, thousands of his fans have asked him about his next appearance on *JRE*, which suggests to audiences that Jones is well liked, that his guest spots on *JRE* are entertaining and important, and that the podcast itself is a vital alternative media platform (or else why would his fans be so eager for him to appear, since they can listen to Jones elsewhere already). Jones' reference to interviewing Trump—the current president of the U.S. at the time of the episode's release, is a powerful appeal to ethos among certain audiences as well. That Jones would use such a reference also shapes the episode's ethos as a dwelling space. In this conversation, the reference to Trump argues, we value a particular type of politics and attitude that's irreverent and outside the mainstream.

Connecting also provides a chance for hosts to express their own excitement about an episode, which argues for audiences to continue listening and which, in the case of *JRE* #1555, further validates Jones' ethos and his impact on the ethos of the show. We can observe this with how Rogan introduces Dillon, an established guest who has had multiple appearances on the show prior to JRE #1555, and how both build a connection off each other's excitement for Jones' appearance:

Rogan: And Tim motherfucking Dillon!

Dillon: Yeah, I'm just a kid in a candy store.

Rogan: Me too!

Dillon: Thank you for making this dream come true.

Rogan: *loud laughter*

Dillon: This is what I've always wanted to do and we've made it happen—this is my

---

like Maron's Obama interview, where hosts have to adapt to a surge in new audiences that an especially famous guest brings to the show.

Make a Wish and I can die happy.

Rogan: Well I'm happy you're here.

Rogan's enthusiastic, explicit introduction of Dillion and Dillon's irreverent reply are almost the opposite of Rogan's first interactions with Rinella on *JRE*. As a guest, Rinella sought to imbue the episode's ethos with a level of seriousness—it's not that he was above humor, but he was focused on using *JRE* as a platform to discuss his lifestyle and to educate people about his views on hunting. Humor was secondary. For Dillon, a standup comic, humor is most important. The funnier he is on this episode, the more he can drive traffic toward his own podcast, the *Tim Dillon Show*. In other words, humor is his ethos, and by making Rogan laugh with his jokes right away, he cements his status as humorous. Dillon's humor is not aimless as a connection either—the jokes he makes reinforce his excitement over what Jones has to say, a point that gets even more rhetorical weight when Rogan seconds that he is both excited for Jones and for Dillon. Rogan's support for Dillon boosts the comedian's credibility among audiences and reinforces the bond of friendship connecting host and guest.

Unlike Rinella, whose ethos as a guest for new listeners hinges on his expertise as a hunter and his life living off of mostly wild game, Dillon's ethos and Jones' ethos are unconnected to their wide-ranging arguments connected only by a web of conspiracies. By focusing connection instead on excitement and entertainment, Rogan's introductions for established guests sidesteps the issues of ethos based on expertise and replaces it with the promise of engaging content for audiences, a savvy tactic for conversation and persuasion centering on conspiracy theories rooted in demagoguery.

Moments of connecting can lead to moving audio as well, particularly when they are framed with concern and sympathy. Such connecting conversation humanizes the rhetors who

express and respond to concern, which, as is the case with *JRE* #1555, can unfortunately serve to legitimize demagogic rhetoric. Toward the end of the episode, Jones announces, “The last thing I want to say is this. I’d like to retire the next year . . . . because I’m gonna die of a heart attack or be going crazy. I do this 18 hours a day.” Following Jones’ proclamation, Rogan, Dillon, and Jones discuss the conspiracy theorist’s health and steps he may be able to take to reduce stress. It’s unlikely listeners with a negative view of Jones would make it far enough into the episode—or even play it in the first place—to give the rhetor the benefit of such sympathy, but these moments of connecting may boost Jones’ ethos and credibility among those who agree with Jones’ demagogic conspiracy beliefs. *This man,* they may think, *this hero, is killing himself to get us the truth. We owe it to him to listen to what he says.*

Predicated upon likeability and entertainment unrelated to expertise in a subject area relevant to conversational topic, demagogic connecting—exemplified by Rogan, Dillion, and Jones within the dwelling space of #1555—achieves a fast ethos that’s similar to viral circulation and for which persuasive power rests in emotional impact rather than intellectual substance. By contrast, deliberative connecting—the sort demonstrated by Rinella as a guest—is slower, building off steady demonstration of relevant, earned expertise (yet that does not claim to be universal or beyond challenge) throughout an episode.

Establishing

For the purposes of conversational rhetoric on an unedited podcast, I use “establishing” to distinguish moments where hosts and guests introduce and frame conversational topics. These moments provide the opportunity for later discussion; like other elements of conversational rhetoric in podcasts, they can either serve to invite deliberation or promote demagoguery depending on the wording of the rhetor. Examining how rhetors establish topics can equip us to

recognize which form of discussion a host or guest is likely to favor throughout the dwelling space of the episode.

Establishing topics can serve deliberative ends in podcast conversational rhetoric in several ways, such as providing evidence to support ethos, framing a topic to allow for alternative views, and delivering credible information with clear, traceable provenance. For example, in *JRE* #176, Rinella discusses, with plain, unromanticized language, how he began his wild meat-eating lifestyle:

> **Rinella**: . . . my father was a big hunter, and we grew up doing a lot of hunting and fishing. I started fishing when I was three or four, started hunting at seven or eight years old, killed my first deer when I was thirteen, starting hunting deer when I was eleven. We always ate a lot of deer meat, but we didn't have, we didn't live a conscientious, we hadn't made a conscientious decision to just eat game meat. . . . When I left . . . . to go to college in Sue St. Marie, Michigan . . . . my friends and I . . . were very skilled, pretty seasoned hunters by that point, and we . . . found that we could just . . . eat [deer]. And by, and we would eat . . . . our mantra was burgers for lunch, steaks for dinner. I mean we would . . . eat ground meat at lunch, and we'd fish a lot of salmon . . . . and I began to live that way just as, out of necessity, but the necessity dovetailed into, or like blended very quickly into a lifestyle choice . . . . like if God had come down and given me a million dollars, a lot of things would have changed, diet would have not have changed.

Rinella's establishment of his culinary exigence is, as the saying goes, plain and simple. He's a well-regarded writer, and having read some of his creative nonfiction, I hold the opinion that he's quite capable of spinning an impressive, poignant yarn, of adding rough, moss dusted bark to trees, of capturing the dawn's glitter over fast flowing, snowmelt fed streams in the northern

peaks of Alaska. He could have chosen to, using such literary details, glamourize his choices, drawing the listener in with a story about his forays into Michiganian wilderness, the visceral impact of taking an animal's life to survive, and the roasting of meat. Instead, Rinella establishes the origins for living on a diet of mostly wild game and fare with wording that reads as if he's giving testimony in a court room. The sound, however, is different: he's excited when he says, "burgers for lunch, steaks for dinner." (I'd be less excited talking about my college diet: microwaved chicken patties and tap water.) The words report what occurred, yet the sounds convey. There's no manufactured spirituality here—his lifestyle simply was, at its start, a lifestyle he didn't question but did appreciate. He's not claiming superiority over people who eat only vegetables or prepackaged ramen. In fact, not once does he advocate for people to emulate what he is doing during the episode. Rinella offers his experiences plainly, as testimony, listing off animals eaten and the typical daily diet he had in his college years. In offering up experience for Rogan and audiences to mull over, Rinella argues the normalcy of his actions. Because we know he continues this lifestyle, which is more strenuous and difficult (we can reasonably conclude) compared to grocery shopping, we understand Rinella's dedication. Such establishing is deliberative because it does not raise an in-group (hunters) over an out-group (non-hunters), provides insights into Rinella's positionality as a hunter, supports his status as an expert (he's done this since childhood) while at the same time not universalizing his experience to all hunters. That sets up the complicating we'll discuss later on.

On the other hand, with demagogic complicating in an unedited podcast conversation, establishing can take the form of fast delivery of a large volume of (mis)information; that volume, as Jones demonstrates when establishing his definition of "clean coal," supports an ethos of quantity over quality while also providing an impressionistic illusion of reliable

evidence, a term I use to signal verifiable and transparent information from vetted sources, such as competitive, non-predatory academic journals. With viral circulation relying on speech and reach, the amount—not necessarily quality—of information argues credibility. At the same time, providing an abundance of information also hides lapses in logic, gaps in evidence, and other issues that would likely be considered weaknesses in support or reasoning in slower, more deliberate (and deliberative) forms of communication. For example, in *JRE* #1555, when Rogan, who says he "roll[s]" his "eyes every time when Trump's like, 'clean coal,'" takes Jones' bait about "the engineering" being "so damn good" and asks "is it?" he cedes the floor of conversational space to Jones and allows the conspiracy theorist the opportunity to establish what he argues are the scientifically supported merits of coal. The following quote shows just how large a volume of information Jones is able to strategically deploy at a moment's notice to establish a foundation for discussion and conversation:

> **Jones**: They [China] had old fashioned coal plants. China doesn't have one scrubber or filter on their coal power plants, and China doesn't have clean burning coal. There's one place in the United States that has major deposits of coal that is such pure carbon, you don't even need scrubbers. Nothing comes out but carbon dioxide water. Well, they know we know water is not bad, so they list carbon dioxide—people think it's monoxide. It's like in studies if you say the scientific name of water most people in Penn and Teller skits on the street will say "ban dihydrogen monoxide." You go out on the street, Joe Rogan,[41] and ask 100 Austinites . . . [trails off] dihydrogen monoxide is everywhere. If you get too

[41] The way Jones inserts Rogan's name into this moment of conversation sounds like a professional wrestler calling out another professional wrestler during a promotional video before a scripted contest. We don't have the space in this chapter to discuss fully discuss sound as an important aspect of conversation (previous chapters reference their mutual importance), but we should not forget that sound is what makes conversation work on podcasts. The "Joe Rogan" full name reference mid-sentence is entertaining and engaging, and Jones' voice is and manner of delivery are energetic, confident, self-assured, and dynamic. Above all, Jones' voice is *commanding*, especially compared to how Rogan and Dillon speak. It's Theodor Adorno's "radio voice" in contemporary sound. But, as Adorno cautions, *commanding* does not equate to *credible*.

> much of it, you can die—drowned. And most people say, “I want to ban dihydrogen monoxide.” That's the scientific name of water. Same thing if we do the scientific name of salt—sounds scary. Well, so, so hydrogen monoxide is the bad one. Hydrogen dioxide is a good one. That's the life cycle. On Earth, there's, there's light, there's water, there's oxygen, and there's carbon dioxide. Those are the four things you've got to have for, for life. And so they've gotten people convinced to say “coal is dirty”—it puts out carbon dioxide and water vapor. And so until about the 70s, we were still burning dirty coal full of mercury, all of that. They found huge deposits of clean burning coal out west, enough in Utah to run the whole world for over 1000 years.

While we’ll soon dig into the conversational and demagogic rhetoric present in Jones’ establishment of “clean” coal, let’s first remember that audiences do not receive Jones’ misinformation overload in a convenient typed document that affords them the opportunity to stop playback and investigate the conspiracy theorists many, many claims. Instead, they receive this misinformation as sound, which not only affects how they interpret it (as we discussed in the third chapter, voice argues interpretation), but their ability to review, reference, or recall specifics. And there is a *lot* to review, both in terms of accuracy and demagoguery, with Jones’ establishing statement on clean coal. Without such review, which we’ve already shown to be impractical given the affordances of sound (third chapter) and the technology of playback (second chapter), listeners who are not openly resistant or hostile to Jones—i.e., they find his ethos suitable for trust—simply must take Jones’ (many) words at face value. To the untrained ear, Jones *sounds* knowledgeable by virtue of sheer brute force verbosity. His establishing statement sounds like facts because he references science, specific geographic locations, and history. In the context of fast delivery, these references sound convincing. However, like an

impressionistic painting that from a distance looks realistic but that viewed up close reveals the magic of its illusion, Jones' references, when slowed down for scrutiny, lose their coherence and connection to reality.

The claims Jones establishes surrounding coal are standard fare demagoguery consisting of in-groups, out-groups, absolute certainty, flawed logic, and misrepresentation (or total lack) of evidence, with nearly every claim being incorrect.[42] Posing China as the vile out group, Jones argues their inferiority in the energy sector, claiming their coal plants are "old fashioned" and that the entire country "doesn't have one scrubber or filter on their coal power plants." On the other hand, the noble in-group, the U.S., or rather the U.S. coal industry, has coal so miraculously pure it doesn't emit any pollutants. As a bonus, Jones designates a second out-

[42] Just about every claim Jones makes in this one moment of conversation is false or grossly misleading. First, China does have coal power plants with scrubbers (Niller). In fact, the country has been working to reduce negative impacts from coal production for the past 15 years (Niller). China still produces more C02 than the U.S. (~33% versus ~13% of global CO2 emissions in 2020), but that has to do with population size and greater reliance on coal (Reality Check team and BBC Monitoring). "Clean coal," it turns out, also does not exist. Carbon dioxide (CO2), the molecule Jones claims is harmless, is, David Grossman explains for Popular Mechanics, "the heat-trapping gas largely responsible for global warming." While coal can have varying levels of contaminates such as sulfur—which when burned produces sulfur dioxide—and mercury that lead to harmful air pollution and "acid rain," reducing CO2 emissions with "carbon capture and storage (CCS)" is what "clean coal" most often refers to in contemporary parlance (Chan and Yao; Grossman). The emphasis is on emissions because even burning coal that has literally been cleaned through "coal washing, which removes soil and rock from coal before it's sent to a factory" (which can bring up a whole host of water pollution issues before the coal is even burned) or cleaning the emissions by using "wet scrubbers, which remove sulfur dioxide from coal-generated gas" still produces CO2 (Grossman). Essentially, CCS, through a variety of methods and technological processes, prevents CO2 from being released into the atmosphere by either pumping CO2 "several kilometers below the earth and into rock" for storage for "millions of years" or by using oxygen to incinerate and destroy it (Grossman). Such technology works—"CCS can effectively capture around 90 percent of the C02 produced at power plants"—but it is astronomically expensive (developing such technology and infrastructure "could cost '100 billion annually'" and as a result is not often used (Grossman). As of 2020, there were "only 19" CCS plants "currently operating" globally (Grossman). To put that number into perspective, in 2019, the U.S. Energy Information Administration, an official federal agency, reports there were 308 coal power plants in the U.S. alone. That's hundreds fewer than the 593 plants in operation in 2009, but still hundreds more than the total number of all the operating CCS plants present on the planet in 2020. Jones claims that we stopped burning "dirty coal" forty or fifty years ago; however, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) annual emissions data, U.S. coal plants produced 65,984.5 tons of sulfur dioxide alone in 2020. While this isn't an impressively high number compared to more populous countries that derive more of their energy from coal, it's also not zero. Finally, because there is no such thing as clean coal and because CCS is cost-prohibitive, the existence of a coal supply vast enough to power the earth for a millennium in Utah is so irrelevant it makes no sense for me to even look up. For the record, in 2020 alone, Utah's four operational coal plants produced tens of millions of tons of CO2, according to the EPA. What Jones establishes here is an intricate foundation of misinformation that affects all future discussions of climate change in coal afterward in the podcast.

group, an unnamed “they” who have besmirched the good name of coal in the U.S. and elsewhere. In other words, his demagogic logic asserts that people who are disloyal to the idea of clean coal are part of the problem. When uncritical audiences opt-in to listening to an episode with Jones, they become part of this loyal in group; however, if they leave the dwelling space and ethos of the episode, they become the outgroup. Loyalty has to be proven time and time again, which also argues that audiences should keep listening.

Comparing the two examples, we can spot some of the key differences between deliberative establishing and demagogic establishing. Rinella’s establishing is deliberative because it provides a foundation for deliberative-style conversation. By noting his own experiences, Rinella demonstrates how his perspective shapes his subjectivity. He grew up hunting and fishing for food—to him, that is normal. Such establishing serves as a form of transparency: he is the primary source. It’s also slow in the sense that it represents decades of lived experience and thinking on the topic; while the information is delivered at the same speed of conversation, it was long in the making. Free of false claims, in-groups, and out-groups, the information Rinella establishes allows for later complications and moments of deliberative conversation. At the same time, Rinella doesn’t establish in such a way that gives him total authority over the larger topic or close off discussion. He is sure of the information he provides, but only positions it in relation to his own perspective; thus, he keeps the topic open for debate, a key characteristic of academic and political deliberation. On the other hand, Jones’ example constitutes demagogic establishing because its false claims and use of in-groups and out-groups all but sow salt into the soil where deliberation might take root. Established in such a skewed, unethical manner, the topic is knotted with demagoguery that would take several minutes and the presence of an expert or person with a high level of information literacy to untangle. Presenting

himself and his information as the supreme authority—the "performance of expertise" Roberts-Miller mentions—and all-encompassing by posing it as already accounting for objections, Jones both establishes a definition of clean coal and effectively shuts it off from further discussion.

Complicating

For the analysis of unedited podcast conversation, I use "complicating" to refer to moments of response to pre-established topics and discussion. While the following list is by no means exhaustive, complicating includes elaborating, challenging, seeking further information or clarification, acknowledging limitations (including those of identity, sources, and experience), and accounting for opposing views. Complicating adds complexity and provides an opportunity for dialectic—the refining of opinion through rigorous discourse—and can, like other conversational moves, serve either deliberation or demagoguery.

When performed deliberatively, complicating podcast conversation takes effort and commitment—it's a rhetorical labor. Complication combines listening with action, analysis and empathy with challenge, all in service of striving toward greater understanding of a topic. It's a risk, the opposite of "softball questions" and convenient, tidy answers. Egos may be bruised, and feelings may be unavoidably hurt because questioning our ideas, values, and convictions is humbling, and humbling can be painful. It requires vulnerability from all parties, but power dynamics may make such vulnerability seem one-sided. It's messy, and like the academic deliberation we discussed earlier, does not provide comforting finality. But its inclusion transforms the dwelling ethos of a podcast into a thought-provoking dialectical space.

Deliberative complicating can be powerfully persuasive, arguing for both the understanding of the topic that such deliberation delivers as well as for the importance of deliberation itself, especially if audiences find their ideas about a particular topic evolving

because of the conversation taking place. (To clarify, when I say "deliberative" here, I refer to the methods of conversation, not the circumstances or topics, e.g., politicians engaging in official policy discussion.) However, when performed demagogically, complicating generates the illusion of deliberation and the illusion of careful thinking. It claims the ethos of deliberative complexity but without the latter's ethical approach and process. It is Plato's dialogues, but instead of Socrates' final word, audiences receive rhetoric that valorizes untested opinion in ways that are ultimately harmful to democracy because it appears to legitimize demagogic thought. The danger is even worse when such seemingly logically sound and complex demagoguery directly undermines the government's own legitimacy, such as conspiracies about election fraud (Skinnell 260-261).

Rogan's conversation with Rinella in *JRE* #176 contains many moments of deliberative complication from both parties. The moment—or rather several moments—I'll focus on here, a discussion of what hunting is, centers on Rinella responding to Rogan equating hunting with shooting animals for food within a closed environment. Specifically, Rogan says that he wanted to try "hunting" and then offering the example of a show he saw about how Ted Nugent shoots game on his "I don't know how many 1000 acres or some shit all high fence" property "with animals roaming around." Rogan's initial conversational move establishes Rogan's idea of what hunting is, and Rinella challenges those ideas directly. "Yeah," Rinella says, "it'd be like if a farmer, it's no different than if a farmer woke up, went out, and shot his cows and acted like he's hunting them." Rogan agrees, but nevertheless attempts to clarify the contested point, by arguing that "it's way better than buying store-bought food." Rogan, in an effort to predict Rinella's objections, says he's "heard the argument that something's not cool about it" and guesses the reason is that it seems like "cheating." Rinella disagrees: "it becomes a semantics issue." These

initial moments of deliberative complicating lead both rhetors to a discussion of hunting's *definition*, the second level of rhetorical stasis (the others being *facts*, and then, after definition, the serious/goodness or badness of the issue: *quality*, and then what should be done about it: *policy*).

A distinguishing feature of deliberative complication is that rhetors do not rely solely on ethos to argue. At this point, Rinella could depend on his ethos as a hunter and expert to back up his message, and/or either Rinella or Rogan could have just dropped the subject. Instead, the pair spend several minutes discussing what it means to hunt and to be a hunter, both using personal experience, examples, and logic to argue and complicate their definition of the term. Rinella's ability to articulate precisely what he means and delivering evidence that supports his definition and remain on the appropriate level of stasis is both highly convincing as well as elevating to the discourse. (Recall how Rogan went from arguing a definition of hunting with his example of Nugent to arguing that the option was good because it was "way better" than buying meat at the store from animals who lived unhealthy lives before slaughter and processing.) Yet, Rinella doesn't shoulder the task of complicating the idea of hunting on his own; Rogan also asks questions that demonstrate he is listening and understanding as well as that prompt Rinella to confirm Rogan's literacy of the hunter's arguments:

> **Rinella**: My brother's a hunter, okay . . . . He also has land where he runs goats and sheep. Now, when he goes out and kills a goat or sheep, he doesn't say that he went out "hunting."
>
> **Rogan**: Right.

> **Rinella**: You know, because it just it like confuses because hunting is a word that—I mean the reason we have language is in order to be able to discuss complex ideas—

> **Rogan**: What is your issue? Is the issue the fact that the animals are contained and you know they are definitely going to be there?

Rinella's example of his brother Matt's choice to raise "goats and sheep" free range in a less industrialized livestock situation speaks to the aspects of Nugent's high fence meat harvesting Rogan finds laudable but reframes what Nugent does as something other than hunting: "farming." The hunter's adamancy about the power of language as a label and his call for complexity—"hunting is a word that—I mean the reason we have language is . . . to be able to discuss complex ideas"—argues the importance of the discussion and demonstrates an awareness of the conversation's reach through podcasts. Rogan's question about the issue—voiced curiously, not as an insult—shows Rogan's desire to participate in that complexity as well as his desire to understand Rinella's position on the matter. Rinella's response to Rogan's question introduces a new key term for the discussion, "fair chase," which attaches a particular ethic to hunting:

> **Rinella**: Yeah, it becomes like an issue of what I would say is, there's a term that we use in the hunting community like "fair chase," and it has a pretty, pretty solid definition of being that the animal has a reasonable chance of eluding capture. If you're hunting on a high wire fence thing, like hunting inside fenced animals, they're not regarded as "fair chase." And so various organizations that maybe like record books that would keep sight like keep track of sizes of animals, they might not recognize an animal killed that way . . .

Rogan: That makes sense.

Rinella: You might grow up a deer on a high wire fence, and Boone and Crockett, which is a scoring organization that promotes fair chase ethics, they might say like, we don't, we don't welcome an animal taken that way.

Rogan: Right, I understand.

Rinella: —into our books, and we don't even really appreciate you using our scoring system.

By tying fair chase—that an "animal has a reasonable chance of eluding capture"—to official organizations like Boone and Crockett, Rinella shows that his definition of hunting has support by some of hunting's publics. While bringing the discussion of "record books" into a conversation of ethics is messy because it might remind audiences of trophy seekers who kill exotic animals like lions and elephants for prestige and bragging rights, Rinella's ethos as a mindful practitioner who hunts to feed himself and his family mitigates this negative association to a large extent. His hypothetical reply from Boone and Crockett, "we don't even really appreciate you using our scoring system," reinforces his opinion that people who shoot animals inside of high fences are not, when they participate in that activity, hunters. Such people are not necessarily bad—his brother Matt does similar—but they are not engaging in hunting as the concept of "fair chase" requires. And to Rinella's credit, he does complicate the idea of fair chase by discussing topics hunters debate such as attracting animals with food, certain crops, or even automatic food dispensers that condition game to appear at predetermined spot according to

a particular schedule. That's a key aspect of deliberative complication versus demagogic: there is no 100% agreement on what is right even within the in-group—there are multiple in-groups. However, Rinella is careful not to blame those who use such methods, even though he does not see them as fair chase. "I would never advocate," Rinella announces, "that to be abolished" because harvesting animals is regulated and controlled to prevent "damaging a resource irreparably." Such tact is the opposite of demagoguery—it places faith in governmental regulations as well as the scientists who set such parameters based on proven methodologies, and it does not seek to exclude or shame individuals.

At the same time, Rinella's complicating articulates what he values about his lifestyle in terms of hunting as an uncertain, difficult act that pits person against not just animals but the land as well. In connecting hunting to unfenced wilderness, Rinella argues hunting should be challenging in very specific ways:

> **Rinella**: And I'll say this. And this may be what would help explain my perspective on this. I think that many aspects of what we do like we appreciate challenge, and we appreciate uncertainty. Okay. If I go out to hunt, on public land, or unfenced lands, or uncontrolled lands, if I go out to hunt, I'm going out knowing that I'm entering into a complicated relationship, a complicated arrangement with the land, and there's a very strong chance that I will not be successful. And to overcome that, I have to strive and try harder and concentrate more, and be better and challenge myself. So when I fulfill my goal, it's knowing that I did it against some kind of, like some kind of adversary, which would be the uncertainty of the landscape of the availability of animals. And that I overcame that through skill, and concentration, and effort. And so when I get that animal, and eat that animal, I'm reliving and enjoying that challenge and the fulfillment of that

challenge.

With this moment of conversation, Rinella lauds the qualities of fair chase that are anathema to what Rogan initially conceived as hunting with his Nugent example. The difficulty and experiences of hunting—which, Rinella explains in another moment of the conversation, demands mindfulness and absolute focus that removes all other unrelated concerns—are what make it rewarding. After, Rinella says such practices are not restricted to hunting. He compares the difference to eating Italian food at a local restaurant versus flying to Italy—the "set of experiences" that comes with the latter generate a higher level of fulfillment. Discussing the aspects of hunting Rinella's definition entail allow the conversation to transcend its topic—audiences might think about how they can strive for such meaning in other activities they pursue. The connections that Rogan later draws to the other activities he finds meaningful is ultimately what the host praises about his guest and the idea of hunting at the end of the episode. Rinella's appreciation for difficulty relating to hunting serves as an apt metaphor for the persuasive value of deliberative complicating in unedited podcast conversation. The more rigorous the conversation, the more complex, the more challenging, the more, I suspect, it may be able to persuade. The difference of working through an argument of public importance versus being told what to think can be transformative. That sort of unedited, uninterrupted, lengthy conversation is uniquely suited to podcasts, and is what makes *JRE*, the controversial, baffling, unparalleled phenomenon that it is. It shows that podcasts have great deliberative potential. Imagine what a three-hour podcast conversation with an epidemiologist might accomplish for issues like vaccine hesitancy. And yet, if an epidemiologist were to appear on *JRE*, that appearance would also lend ethos to the show as a vehicle for demagoguery.

Demagogic complicating mimics the rigorous ethos of deliberative complication to seem more credible but ultimately falls short of true deliberative complexity. There are many instances of such demagogic complicating in *JRE* #1555, as our earlier example of Rogan only partially challenging Jones' conspiracy theory of democrats planning to steal the election. In that example, Rogan at least challenges Jones to some degree. Here, I've purposefully selected a moment in the conversation where complicating only leads to more specific demagoguery. This moment occurs a little past midway through the three-hour episode, where Jones lays out his vision of what will happen if Trump wins and democrats seek to steal the election:

> **Jones**: 79 days of hell. That's how many days there are after November 3, the inauguration. And John Podesta in the New York Times they had a big war game with the New York Times sat in on a democrat high level war game with Hillary Clinton, and Joe Biden, and all of them. And they said, we're going to contest—we think we're going to win, but if we lose, we're still going to contest, *and* we're going to contest and we're gonna call for the UN [United Nations] to come and occupy the U.S.—

Let's pause here, because there's a lot to unpack. In this act of complicating, Jones is expanding and adding more detail to earlier claims about democrats undermining democracy by trying to rob Trump of the second term Jones confidently predicts. He provides a partial receipt for his evidence: a New York Times article about a Democratic Party strategy gaming session involving John Podesta, Hillary Clinton, and Joe Biden where Biden states he will refuse to concede and plans to call for the United Nations to intervene and occupy the country to ensure he wins no matter what. Citing such evidence gives Jones' claims an appearance of credibility—his fear, his outrage, is based on *facts*, not just hypotheticals. And he's right to be alarmed: the Democratic Party nominee for the 2020 election has admitted he has a plan to steal the election!

Demagogic complicating raises the stakes and doubles down on in-group, out-group rhetoric and appearances of certainty. Jones' claims are, of course, falsehoods. There's a level of truth to them, but there's also a level of truth to the novel where Abraham Lincoln hunts vampires with an axe. Let's review where Jones differs from reality. First, the "war game" was not hosted by the New York Times, as Jones claims. The article I presume to be in question, "How the Media Could Get the Election Story Wrong," by columnist Ben Smith, is largely concerned with the approaches various news organizations will take to cover results for an election that could take weeks to count. Toward the end of the article, Smith provocatively (and perhaps irresponsibly) throws in a reference to games by "a group of former top government officials called the Transition Integrity Project." The games have various scenarios for election outcomes, and in one of them, Biden wins the popular vote but loses the electoral vote by a small margin. In that game, Podesta, role-playing as Biden, "shocked the organizers by saying he felt his party wouldn't concede." Note the emphasis on "shocked"—Podesta's role-playing did not align with the predictions of other experts. Smith's piece, which only dedicates three paragraphs at the end to the games, links to a more in-depth article by Jess Bidgood, a staff writer for the *Boston Globe*, titled "A Bipartisan Group Secretly Gathered to Game Out a Contested Trump-Biden election. It Wasn't Pretty." However, Smith must have had permission to name Podesta, as Bidgood's piece does not identify the person playing the role of Biden. Smith's article could have been more exact—as the title to Bidgood's piece suggests, both Democrats and Republicans belong to the Transition Integrity Project, which, Bidgood reports, was co-organized by "Rosa Brooks, a Georgetown law professor and former Defense Department official," in response to concerns about election integrity. The more specific exigence for the group is that "norms," not laws, are what guide the transition from president to president (Bidgood). In other words, the

purpose of the games was to see how the *incumbent* president might abuse his position to challenge the election. That is exactly the opposite of how Jones represents the games' purpose. Smith likely included the one example of a Biden role-player undermining democracy in an effort to make his own reporting seem more balanced and complex, i.e., not demagogic. In theory, it's a smart more: not only one political group is capable of abusing power. But it was a sloppy move, too, given that the concerns about the incumbent's power advantage. Smith probably should have also made the bipartisan nature of the Transition Integrity Project more obvious, but criticizing his well-sourced reporting is not the point of this analysis. Regardless, what's clear in Smith's article that the "games" were not, as Jones falsely claims, an official Democratic Party planning session. There's no reason to think that Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden were involved. Nor is there any reference to the United Nations occupying the U.S. to ensure Biden's victory regardless of voting results.

Jones' comments cause various reactions from Dillon and Rogan. It's unclear if they take Jones' claims seriously, but Rogan has already vouched for Jones and Dillon. Even as they laugh at how Jones misnames a few members of Congress much maligned by the right and alt-right, their humor encourages Jones. These series of interactions demonstrate how complicating, even when responded to with jokes, can support a demagogic ethos in podcast conversations:

Dillon: the UN is going to occupy the U.S.?!

Jones: And then the New York Times came out and said we need the UN to intervene in the U.S. election. And now the four horsemen just called for that yesterday.

Dillon: Jesus.

Jones: And so they are planning to have—

Rogan: Who's the “four horsemen”?

Jones: AOC and the rest of the crew.

Rogan, *laughing*: Oh Jesus Christ.

Jones: And so those—

Rogan: I thought that's “The Tribe.”

Jones: Anyways, and so they’re planning—

Dillon, *in stitches from laughing*: The “four horsemen!”

When Dillon repeats, shocked, Jones’ claim, he reinforces the falsehood that Jones delivered a moment earlier. In the context of deliberative complication, asking a question provides an opportunity for the rhetor being questioned to complicate and add nuance to the conversational content that prompted the interjection. Such was the case earlier, when we analyzed how Rogan’s deliberative use of questions prompted Rinella to introduce the concept of “fair chase,” which complexified the latter’s definition of hunting. Here, Jones ignores the opportunity to provide more details (Neither Smith nor Bidgood’s articles, of course, mentioned the UN in any

capacity, let alone as an occupying force), which leaves the twice mentioned false claim echoing in the audio. Rather than address Dillon's question, Jones accuses the *New York Times* and "the four horsemen" of asking for UN intervention. This request for intervention sounds menacing and threatening in the context of his previous false claim, but if we remove that lie, Jones is merely claiming that some media and politicians feel the integrity of the election needs to be verified by a reputable international organization. However, since Jones also implied that the UN works for the Democratic Party, all that comes through is another threat to election integrity. The laughter in this exchange may signal that it is not to be taken seriously, but demagoguery as entertainment is nevertheless demagoguery.

Rogan, on the other hand, does get a measure of clarification when he asks Jones who "the four horsemen" are, which only leads to more specific demagoguery empowered by the perceived threat of UN intervention, in this case building a more specific bogeyman. The mentioning of such a threat allows the conspiracy theorist to heap further scorn on the four Congress women of color he associates with the apocalypse: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY), Ilhan Omar (MN), Ayanna Pressley (MA), and Rashida Tlaib (MI) (Silverstein). Associating politicians with the apocalypse and calling them names, of course, fits in the demagoguery playbook, especially when the targets, despite their well-earned privilege as members of Congress, are women of color and the rhetor is a white male. Neither Dillon nor Rogan question Jones' portrayal of events, and both Rogan and Dillon laugh at Jones' name calling. Rogan does attempt to offer clarification by correcting Jones—"I thought that's 'The Tribe'—but only succeeds in spreading more misinformation, albeit with the added twist of his misnaming potentially being racist and/or antisemitic. The popular term for Ocasio-Cortez, Omar, Pressley, and Tlaib is, in fact, "the Squad" (Silverstein). Of the four members, Ocasio-Cortez, often

referred to by her initials "AOC," is the most well-known, and she has publicly stated that she has Jewish ancestry; while Jewish people often use "the Tribe" to refer to those with Jewish roots, others may use it as an insult (Krupkin). Rogan could also be using the term to denigrate the group's diversity: Omar is a Somalia-American Muslim, Pressley is Black, and Tlaib is a Palestinian-American Muslim. In a culture of white supremacy and western elitism, associating these women with tribes centers their ethnic backgrounds—which de-emphasizes their status as Americans—and suggests that they are unqualified. Such racism may be unconscious or unintentional, but it is nevertheless problematic. Labeling the quartet "the four horsemen" and "the Tribe" attacks their credibility and elevates that of Jones, Dillon, and Rogan—all without evidence or support for the podcast host and guests' opinions.

As we've seen, complication in demagogic rhetoric eschews actual nuance and rigor. The final piece of this exchange regarding the "79 days" after the election shows how the trio of rhetors, using undeveloped and unrationalized "complexity," have a vision for the country that excludes certain groups of people:

> **Jones**: They're planning to have western states, western states [*Jones repeats himself so his point can be heard clearly over Dillon's continuing laughter*] secede. And they're saying they're gonna hold the election out. You already saw this, they already denied the last election—
>
> **Rogan**: Well they can take Portland.
>
> **Dillon**: Yeah, take it all, take a lot of the west.

Jones: This is the 79 days of hell.

Here, Jones asserts claims that it is Democratic Party strategy "to have western states secede." This falsehood stems from yet another misrepresentation of Smith and his writing on the roleplaying conducted by the bipartisan Transition Integrity Project. Here's what Smith actually wrote: "In that scenario [where Podesta-as-Biden refused to accept a narrow election loss], California, Oregon, and Washington then threated to secede from the United States if Mr. Trump took office as planned." Again, what Jones is representing as factual is, in fact, what Bidgood describes as "a Washington version of Dungeons and Dragons." (Yes, they even used dice to determine how successful moves were.) To put it more bluntly: Jones either can't distinguish reality from fiction or refuses to. As an added bonus, Jones claims that the Democratic Party "already denied the last election"—again, a nuanced take here could be powerful if it showed what aspects of the election democrats were unsatisfied with and why, such as voter suppression, gerrymandering, and the power of the Electoral College over the popular vote, but Jones throws out any credibility or true complexity by falsely claiming that democrats "denied the last election" rather than criticized its handling and were largely unhappy with the result. However, what's most illuminating in terms of worldview is that Rogan and Dillon joke that they would be happier if "Portland" and "a lot of the west" left the U.S., which shows their low opinion of Democrat-run cities and states like Portland and California.

Before I continue, however, I want to remind readers that theorists of demagoguery assert that demagogic rhetoric is something we are all capable of lapsing into, given the right (or wrong) opportunities: "we are all nascent demagogues." In terms of demagoguery as a set of conditions divorced from platform and public reach, Jones and Dillon's joke is no different than its opposite. A person who says that Texas should secede, or New York, or Oklahoma, or

Mississippi, or Florida also engages in demagogic rhetoric because they are labeling such states and *all* the people in them belonging to a lesser out-group. That's what makes demagoguery so insidious—its simplicity makes it attractive. Disregarding a state means applying one's criticisms of elected officials to every one of their constituents—aside from racism, misogyny, or other recognized forms of hate, it's hard to be less nuanced than that. Yet, at one point in our lives or another, many, if not all, of us have probably engaged in this particular form of demagoguery to express our frustration. Compared to the false claims that serve to undermine democracy and its processes, a bit of snark about political in-groups and out-groups is less serious. At the same time, such snark is still a form of demagoguery.

That demagogic complicating is framed here as jokes does not change this fact. Humor serves to establish appropriate cultural responses—even overtly, self-identifying, inappropriate humor (which is not the case here) can contribute to societal issues. While some famous male comedians—and politicians—may enjoy pushing boundaries and walking a fine line between humor and hate speech, claiming that something is "just a joke" does not erase the arguments those jokes make. Here, the laughter serves as encouragement and acceptance of demagoguery while also arguing that the content is entertaining and thus should continue being listened to by audiences. Even when Rogan offers a challenge to Jones' clean coal rant—he jokingly asks, "Are you a carbon dioxide salesman?"—the joking tone removes not just the sting from Rogan's challenge, but also its power. A joke, once laughed at, is dismissed. When Rogan makes public apologies, as he did after being criticized by Anthony Fauci, the White House chief medical advisor, and communications director Kate Bedingfield, the podcaster often protests that he should not be taken seriously: "I'm not a doctor, I'm a fucking moron, and I'm a cage fighting commentator … I'm not a respected source of information, even for me" (Weixel). But even

when supposedly humbling himself, Rogan still gets defensive. After saying he is not credible, Rogan still argues, "But at least I try to be honest about what I'm saying" (Weixel). That's a confusing blanket statement from Rogan—he's not accurate, but he's honest? Such statements preserve his status as an entertainer, resolve him of responsibility, but also argue that we should take him seriously because he's trying to be honest. In fact, the guise of entertainment (coupled with bare minimum attempts at fact-checking) is a major justification for YouTube and Spotify not removing the episode. Here, humor gives a free pass to demagoguery, but that doesn't mean such audio comes free of tolls.

The demagogic complicating we've discussed—just one of many such moments in the more than three-hour-long podcast conversation—flattens complex public issues into simplistic narratives of right and wrong, to the point where such arguments, in light of verifiable sources, read almost as satire. The issues, broadly speaking, are important, which generates the high stakes that compels non-skeptics to listen. Election security, the power of big tech companies, and vaccine protocol during a pandemic are all valid topics. Yet, the arguments about them that Jones, Rogan, and Dillon make rely on beliefs and suspicions rather than evidence. There are reasons to be concerned about election tampering: prior to the election, Bidgood reports, Trump "repeatedly warned, without offering evidence, of widespread fraud involving mail-in ballots—which voters are likely to use at unprecedented levels because the pandemic has made in-person voting a potential health risk—to cast doubt on the results of November's election." There are reasons, we already established in our study of technological podcast rhetoric and the power of network administrators, to be concerned about big tech companies, but not because they are censoring accounts like Jones' to hide their grand conspiracy to make human beings obsolete, as Jones repeatedly claimed without evidence during *JRE* #1555. And Jones is not always wrong—

at one point in the episode, he argued against Rogan's assertions of technological determination (the idea that all technology is part of an inevitable process of improvement) on the same grounds that Andrew Feenberg and Langdon Winner use in their philosophies of technology. Instead, what make Jones, Rogan, and Dillon problematic is their approach to discussion and complexity, which all but prevents deliberative conversation.

IV. CONCLUSION

Near the beginning of this chapter, I posed the question "what about conversation makes hosts and guests sound reasonable to their audience when making arguments over long-form conversation [in podcasts]?" The answer, it turns out, ranges from complex and transparent deliberation to merely giving voice to what people already believe without providing reliable support for claims. In short, as with most theories of rhetoric, everything, including setting the standards for what counts as reasonable, depends on the audience. "Reasonable," "credible," "ethos"—these terms, when used for analysis, privilege particular forms of argumentation in particular contexts. There is, of course, no universal standard for what's reasonable—logic, like any other tool, can both cause harm as well as protect; nor for what's credible, as audiences vary on what counts as truth (we need no other proof of this fact beyond the diversity of faiths, religions, spiritual systems, or their absence in which people believe); nor for what ethos is the most equitable, laudable, rigorous, or virtuous. What appears reasonable or credible to some will fail to impress others, and its in this ambiguous zone that opinions voiced in longform unedited podcast conversation like that of *JRE* can pose issues for democratic institutions. The lack of "false balance" that podcasting's founders praised the medium for can also lead to a lack of *all* balance when podcasters like Rogan and his guests present information as gospel rather than as perspectives and opinions subject to debate. The result can be demagoguery, and if it continues

to happen, reputable guests may no longer wish to appear (and perhaps shouldn't, as their ethos gets applied to all guests, even people like Jones).

At the same time, such conversation, with its ability to support extended, deliberative discussions by established experts on issues of public importance as compared to other forms of media can provide an engaging dialectic that persuades listeners to feel connected to a topic they might not otherwise have any interest in. There's more, I think, in podcasting's library for such shows. But conversation that is unmindful of a need for true complexity—the kind that challenges ideas, meta-analyzes thought, and acknowledges broader and marginalized perspectives—will always be in danger of lapsing into demagoguery.

Fortunately, there are steps podcasters can take to counter conversation's demagogic tendencies. Below, I provide a few ideas.

To prioritize deliberation, slow the conversation and/or delivery down. As Bradshaw points out, virality prioritizes fast arguments that reach as many people as possible as quickly as possible, but viral arguments make popularity their primary goal. Slowing down allows for more time to fully explore and complexify conversation topics, go over notes, and pursue nuance. Here, slow refers not only to the release of episodes but also the pace of conversation. Instead of treating shocking moments or flashy revelations as the major payoffs of discourse, podcasters can reorient to prioritize depth and complicatedness. For example, rather than attempting to wow audiences with the discussion of a scary sounding "war game," it would be interesting to learn why constitutional experts adapted this sort of role playing to theorize election transitions. What is good about such games? What are some potential downsides to this method? A complexity valuing approach also makes it more likely audiences will learn something new, rather than confirming what they already believe. When defining hunting, Rinella, with helpful questions

and challenges from Rogan, takes a slow approach, building a definition based on examples, personal experience, broader human history, and more over the course of nearly the entire conversation. The result is a multidimensional understanding of hunting as a lifestyle, a connection to the world, a meditation on existence, and an ethical way to provide food for oneself and one's family. On the other hand, Jones takes a fast approach, firing claim after claim about election fraud and other conspiracies, relying on the impact and "wow" factor of those shocking moments as a substitute for complexity. While Rinella's more ethical, methodical approach achieves complexity, Jones' shock value translates to virality—19 million views based on bold, stunning arguments, none of which is backed by clear evidence or validating of other perspectives.

Live-streaming conversation makes these moves more difficult, so recording sooner and releasing later makes more sense. As the success of shows like Marc Maron's *WTF* podcast demonstrate, conversations released asynchronously to the moment of recording still offer a high level of engagement. Besides, more people listen to Rogan's *JRE* after it is released, not during the live stream, for the simple fact that asynchronous, on demand listening is one of podcast's most user-friendly features. Yet, Rogan's conversation with Rinella shows that live streamed conversation can be deliberative. The key is for the podcast to do their homework and research the topic first, as Maron does with his guests and their lives and interests.

Think out loud (verbalize limitations and signal personal perspective and opinion clearly). No one can be expected to know everything with absolute certainty. Not can people be expected to possess opinions unshaped by life experience and embodiment as beings marked by culture and society. Podcast listeners should not expect hosts and guests to be neutral; they should, however, expect them to clearly signal their stances, acknowledge the limitations of their

expertise, as refrain from presenting personal experience as universal. Hosts and guests should be transparent about how they arrived at arguments and conclusions. In other words, podcasters should once again embrace complexity. Rinella does this well throughout *JRE* #176. For example, toward the middle of the episode, Rinella acknowledges how his own opinions and response to arguments about hunting have changed since his twenties, when his "blood would boil" if he heard "the word PETA." Back then, "when" Rinella "heard like, anyone who is against hunting or trapping or whatever, I would just . . . want . . . to tear into it. I was so full of anger about it." Here, using himself as an example, Rinella acknowledges that audiences may feel justified having a range of emotions about the topic, while also suggesting that such emotions are misplaced, and perhaps not even earned. "And in some way," he continues, "maybe I didn't understand, you know, my own arguments. . . . But now, there's nothing you could say against hunting that would piss me off. You could say a lot of things against hunting that I'd probably be like, well, you know, there's *this* way of looking at it, but there's nothing you could really bring up that would make me mad." By hypothesizing that some of his anger came from not understanding what he was trying to argue, Rinella argues that people need to put their own lived experience into conversation with others' perspectives. If an argument only makes sense to the speaker, it's going to lead to unbalanced, frustrating discussion. The reason, Rinella explains, that he doesn't get angry anymore is because he recognizes that his arguments offer just one way of looking at the intersection of humanity, hunting, animals, and diet. Rather than respond with rage, Rinella instead offers another viewpoint—"well, you know, there's *this* way of looking at it." He's not invalidating his own views or those he doesn't agree with, and thus he argues for conversation as a dwelling space that can support a plurality of views. Rinella doesn't proclaim his views on hunting and eating to be right for everyone, nor does he attempt to argue the

illegitimacy of vegetarians, vegans, and carnivores who buy their meat prepacked at a grocery store. He's clear that his stance on hunting is ultimately his own. Imagine how different *JRE* #1555 would be if Rogan, Jones, and Dillon emulated Rinella's level of transparency and self-awareness.

Be selective when choosing guests. The easiest way to mitigate misinformation and demagoguery is to prevent it in the first place. Selecting vetted, qualified guests demonstrates that a podcaster cares about the information and arguments they're putting out into the public. In short, it shows a level of responsibility. There are very few circumstances where Alex Jones makes for an appropriate podcast guest; inviting him on after his comments on Sandy Hook and other events is plainly irresponsible. While it makes for short term ratings, selecting guests who promote conspiracy theories or voice other forms of misinformation, including hate speech, damages the show's credibility among the larger public. Guests who attack—rather than critiquing—democracy should not be invited back for multiple appearances.

Acknowledge errors. Because of the nature of conversation, mistakes are bound to happen. What makes for a more deliberative and ethical podcast ethos, once that values complexity, is taking visibly—and audibly—taking ownership of such mistakes as soon as possible. While apologies and explanations on social media are standard, these corrections won't prevent the same misinformation or other mistakes from being argued to audiences downloading and listening to an erroneous episode for the first time. In this case, the best course of action is to re-release a corrected version of the episode that includes a disclaimer or voice over commentary. For example, Rogan could have included a voice over disclaimer before the start of #1555 that framed the episode as entertainment rife with misinformation. If he stated clearly, "I enjoyed talking to my friends during this episode. Unfortunately, most of their comments do not

reflect the sources they reference. I will be providing commentary about these moments as they arise during the episode to point out misinformation as well as moments where claims reflected verifiable events, such as AT&T paying a consulting fee to Michael Cohen, as the telecommunications company confirmed." While Rogan is unlikely to do this, there's nothing preventing other podcasters from utilizing this responsible approach.

There's more work to be done with the study of podcast conversations—this chapter is only the first step. More work should be done to incorporate vocality into the rhetoric of unedited podcast conversation, and analysis should be expanded to other popular podcasts with more diverse rhetors and approaches. Rogan's conversational style is the most well-known; however, analyzing other podcasts can add to our understanding of verbal deliberation and demagoguery, about ethos and podcasting ethics. I selected *JRE* for its popularity as a professional podcast, but a podcast does not have to be popular to be impactful. A popular podcast may connect to more individuals, but a conversation on a lesser-known show may be even more significant to an audience member—for better, or for worse.

Podcast Rhetorics

Insights into Podcasts as Public Persuasion

Chapter 5: Ending and Beginning

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2017, I stepped up to the podium in a medium-sized room at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in Portland, Oregon, and announced my presentation: "Podcast Pedagogy Reconsidered: How 'Unrevised' Podcasts and the 'Wild Meat Movement' Model Rhetorical Complexity and Conversational Persuasion." The exigence for my talk then is much the same as the motivation for this current project. I was, and remain, baffled by what I perceived to be a lack of critical attention paid to professional podcasts by scholars in RWS.

Well before 2017, the signs that podcasting was going to ascend to the vanguard of public consciousness were all around if one knew where, and how, to listen. President Barak Obama had appeared on Marc Maron's *WTF* podcast two years prior, after all, and U.S. presidents have been known to make an attention-grabbing argument or two about issues of public importance. What they're less known for, however, is sitting down across a small, cluttered table, and having a conversation with a middle-aged standup comedian in his converted garage recording studio. That's part of the charm of podcasts—they're at once both unassuming and devastatingly rhetorical. As an image, a garage and a president captures, tantalizingly, podcasting's ethos.

It is my hope that this document, this dissertation, conveys the multifaceted nature of the communication medium as well as serves as a resource for scholars interested in podcasts as more than just one among many options for multimodal pedagogy or professional outreach. The arguments voiced on podcasts are arguments that rhetoricians can and should study, especially as the medium continues to grow.

That's not to say pedagogy cannot serve to help us and our students investigate professional podcasting's persuasive potential and impact. In my junior and senior level

Technical Writing classes, I teach a unit on podcasting as a method of public argument relating to the translation of expertise to a general lay audience. Amy Cicchino, my former classmate from the literature master's program at Florida Gulf Coast University and now the Director of University Writing at Auburn, teaches an activity that has students investigate podcast rhetoric (Connor). Such practices are by no means novel or even recent, and we are just two among many teaching such materials. But if we are teaching our students to create podcasts, we must do so ethically by foregrounding the knowledge of podcast arguments that only extended, rigorous study can build.

I'm glad that I've devoted the past few years of study to professional podcasts as public persuasion. Back in at CCCCs in 2017, I had limited knowledge of the rhetoric of technology, sound, and demagoguery—elements that are crucial to the sorts of persuasion podcasts support. Now, in 2021, this project, likely my final one as an academic, completes the circle. I find comfort in such symmetry.

II. KEY FINDINGS FOR RWS

Here, I offer key takeaways from each chapter relating to podcast rhetoric.

Chapter 1: The Argument for Rhetorically Analyzing Podcasts

The first chapter sets up my overall arguments for the project. After establishing podcasts as a popular yet problematic medium for public communication, I analyze how scholars have defined the term in scholarship in rhetoric and writing studies (RWS). Some of the key features of podcasts include internet syndication and subscription; downloadability; asynchronous, on-demand listening; and niche-content. For the purposes of rhetorical analysis, I provide my own definition of podcasting as a low-cost, sound-based, subscribable, downloadable, internet native medium—a technology—whose primary content is the human voice. Podcasts, I assert, are

regarded as a sandbox for sonic play, but the medium's rhetorical impact as a unique, alternative public communication platform is ignored. The problem with that, I show, is that while podcasts are increasingly influential and accepted by mainstream audiences who trust them for everything from entertainment to daily news, there exist many issues with information accuracy and controversy on the platform. To address the under-theorization of podcasts as a rhetorical medium, I propose analyzing the three major features of public arguments on podcasts: technology, sound, and conversation.

Chapter 2: The Technological Horizons of Podcast Persuasion

Using philosophy of technology to analyze podcasting as a technical ecology of regulation, production, circulation, and promotion, the second chapter argues that the tools of podcasting argue a vision for the medium that constrains its rhetorical horizons. In other words, such technologies argue the essence of podcasting, and in doing so foreground a range of persuasive choices for the rhetors using and regulating them. I ground my analysis on many different shows throughout, but one that features most prominently is alt-right figure Steven Bannon's *War Room: Pandemic* podcast, which despite its anti-democratic rhetoric and direct ties to the January 6, 2020, uprising in Washington, D.C., was permitted to remain on major podcast directories on the grounds that such sites, including Google Podcasts and Apple Podcasts, only index—not host—its episodes.

In chapter two, I find that podcasting's status as an internet-based, internet-distributed medium grants its content creators far greater freedom than those of radio and makes available a potentially large audience for even niche topics. While radio must appeal to mass audiences to be commercially viable, podcasts need not. However, podcasts are bound by the same copyright

rules governing radio, which makes music licensing cost-prohibitive, thus ensuring that talk-based shows are the medium's essential content.

The equipment—particularly microphones—and spaces of production also afford various choices for podcast rhetors, with on-site recording and recording studios providing different contributions to a show's ethos and sonic rhetoric. Spaces like Maron's garage(s) communicate the host's sensibilities to guests before recording starts and ensure a minimum of background noise to highlight voice, while segments recorded at various locations, such as those we hear in the *New Yorker Radio Hour*'s "A City at the Peak of Crisis" special episode, provide a sense of three-dimensionality and place that heightens the listening experience with ambient sonic texture. Post-production software allows for rhetors to alter arrangement and delivery for rhetorical impact.

At the level of distribution, the administrators of technical networks, in this case podcast directories and listening applications, e.g., Spotify and Apple Podcasts, set standards for podcast content. By not requiring transcripts, such companies argue that podcasting's lack of access for disabled audiences is acceptable. At the same time, the technical interfaces of directories and their algorithms organize and, through quantification (ratings, rankings) and categorization (assigning genre, e.g., true crime), promote and legitimate the most popular shows, even problematic ones like Bannon's *War Room*, which Apple Podcasts classifies as "news."

The last aspect of podcast technology I examine are promotion and marketing. These technologies empower podcasting's multimodal rhetorics, including web sites and show art, such as series logos and episode specific images, which argue a show's ethos or stance. For example, Bannon's War Room logo stirs panic with bold imagery that connects the pandemic to China and suggests an upcoming apocalypse. These technologies allow podcasters and guests to extend

their arguments beyond podcasts with social media platforms, which can also serve as places to admit mistakes or generate excitement for upcoming episodes.

Finally, I introduce two key terms for analyzing and understand technological rhetoric in podcasts. The first, *technological context*, accounts for passive technological persuasion, the conditions of creating, sharing, promoting, receiving, playing, and discussing podcasts, but not those actions themselves. In short, technological context is the available technological means of persuasion, the horizon of possibilities that generates the choices comprising rhetorical acts. The second, *technological action*, is kinetic: it *is* the decision to use technologies and their supported features as well as the realization of their rhetorical potential through use.

In shaping how podcasts are recorded, produced, regulated, delivered, received, organized, promoted, played, discussed, and monetized, I conclude, technology may be unmatched in its influence as a prevailing rhetorical force on the medium, which itself arose as a technological intervention to a democratic dilemma arising in no small part from broadcast radio that favors mass markets.

Chapter 3: The Sounds of Podcast Rhetoric

In the third chapter, I argue that to understand how sound is persuasive in podcasts, we must analyze both the textual content of speech as well as the rhetorical impact of affective sound, two aspects of audio that are typically separated. Along with theories of sonic rhetoric that account for embodiment, materiality, ambience, and soundscapes, I draw upon Krista Ratcliffe's rhetorical listening and Steph Ceraso's multimodal listening to model my analytical methods with "A City at the Peak of Crisis," a special episode of *The New Yorker Radio Hour* podcast focusing on the COVID pandemic in New York City in 2020, serving as my artifact. Listening to key moments of audio from the episode, I find that textual content of speech and

audio were, contrary to what I expected (stark differences between their respective rhetorical contributions), largely the same, two halves of a rhetorical whole. But while words evidenced and argued situations and perspectives—the pandemic is dangerous, workers are struggling but preserving, we are in this crisis together—sound, in addition to contributing evidence, argued how to *feel* about what the words told us. Put another way, sound guided the listener's *relationship* to rhetorical content.

Chapter 4: Deliberation or Demagoguery? The Rhetoric of Podcast Conversations

In the fourth and final body chapter, I use the lens of demagoguery, ethos, and ethics to analyze two three-hour-long conversations from the *Joe Rogan Experience* (*JRE*) podcast: "Episode #176 – Steven Rinella," a deliberative conversation about hunting and the wild meat movement," and "Episode #1555 – Alex Jones and Tim Dillon," a demagogic conversation promoting several anti-democratic conspiracy theories. Deliberative conversation, I argue, has the characteristics that structure deliberation: a plurality of perspectives, meta-thinking, and a lack of utter certainty or finality regarding opinions and arguments. Demagogic conversation, on the other hand, is characterized by the reduction of policy to us versus them identity logics, pseudo-scientific evidence, unverifiable information, and certainty. For my analysis, I break podcast conversation into three categories of rhetorical movies, which both deliberative and demagogic conversation share: connecting (relating to conversational partners and audience), establishing (introducing and framing conversational topics), establishing (introducing and framing conversational topics), and complicating (responding to, expanding, challenging, or supporting pre-established topics).

In both deliberative and demagogic conversation, connecting sets expectations for the show's content and ethos. Predicated upon likeability and entertainment unrelated to expertise in

a subject area relevant to conversational topic, demagogic connecting—exemplified by Rogan, Dillion, and Jones within the dwelling space of #1555—achieves a fast ethos that's similar to viral circulation and for which persuasive power rests in emotional impact rather than intellectual substance. By contrast, deliberative connecting—the sort demonstrated by Rinella as a guest—is slower, building off steady demonstration of relevant, earned expertise (yet that does not claim to be universal or beyond challenge) throughout an episode.

Establishing argues particular stances on a topic and set standards for conversational approach, i.e., deliberative or demagogic. Deliberative establishing, as Rinella demonstrates when he explains the exigence for his lifestyle as just one perspective, leaves room for other stances and positions. While claims of expertise may be made or evidence bolstering expertise may be provided, deliberative establishing does not set the rhetor up as the sole authority on a subject that's closed for later discussion. Instead, it structures nuance and complexity that invites a slower, more careful and precise conversation later in the episode. Conversely, an analysis of Jones' clean coal rhetoric reveals that demagogic establishing performs expertise with sleight-of-hand. Because it is delivered quickly and in large volumes with misleading or outright false references to science and news, information established demagogically *sounds* credible. While claims do not hold up to scrutiny, the rapid-fire claims ensure there's no time for hosts and listeners to scrutinize. Even if there were such time, the manner in which information was established makes any challenge difficult.

While the following list is by no means exhaustive, complicating includes elaborating, challenging, seeking further information or clarification, acknowledging limitations (including those of identity, sources, and experience), and accounting for—or seeming to account for—opposing views. Complicating adds complexity and provides an opportunity for dialectic—the

refining of opinion through rigorous discourse—and can, like other conversational moves, serve either deliberation or demagoguery. When performed deliberatively, complicating podcast conversation takes effort and commitment—it's a slow rhetorical labor that relies on methodically obtained knowledge through experience and research. Deliberative complication combines listening with action, analysis and empathy with challenge, all in service of striving toward greater understanding of a topic. It's a risk, the opposite of "softball questions" and convenient, tidy answers. In contrast, demagogic complicating flattens complex public issues into simplistic narratives of right and wrong. The issues, broadly speaking, are important, which generates the high stakes that compel non-skeptics to listen. Yet, the arguments about them—made quickly and substituting passion for slow, rigorous study—rely on beliefs and suspicions rather than evidence.

I conclude the chapter with recommendations for making podcast conversation more ethical. My recommendations include prioritizing deliberation by slowing the conversation and/or delivery down; thinking aloud, including verbalizing limitations, personal perspectives, and opinion clearly; choosing guests selectively, favoring established experts over entertainers; and acknowledging errors.

III. THE FUTURE OF PODCAST SCHOLARSHIP

My project situates podcasts as a relevant, urgent area for analysis in RWS. Multiple rhetorics—those of technology, sound, and conversation—contribute to how podcasters discuss and argue issues of public importance. It is my hope that I have established the basic principles of an overall theory of podcasts as public persuasion. Yet, there is more work to be done.

First, I will discuss limitations. The broadness of my project means that many relevant rhetorical theories and concepts did not make it into the final version. If I had unlimited time, I

would have liked to formally apply the lenes of feminist rhetorical theory, queer theory, and intersectionality to my project. In focusing often on the most anti-democratic podcasts, my work largely centers on podcasts made by cishetero white men of middle or advanced age, e.g., Joe Rogan and Steve Bannon. Unfortunately, this focus backgrounds the persuasive work being done by people of color, women, and other intersectional members of marginalized groups. For example, a podcast like *Hear to Slay*, hosted by Roxanne Gay and Tressie McMillan Cottom, which describes itself as "the Black feminist podcast of your dreams" and features "compelling conversations curated in only the way Black women can," is one of many podcasts that I would have liked to include in my study of podcast rhetoric. We've already established that podcast listeners are as diverse in terms of ethnicity as the people comprising the U.S., yet as it currently stands, my project's artifacts do not do justice to podcast audiences in this respect. Perhaps in plucking the lowest hanging fruit to analyze first, I can prevent others from using my same excuse.

Another limitation pertains to the imperfect act of translating sound into words. My initial plan for this project was to release it as a web-text accompanied by podcast seasons in place of chapters and episodes in place of chapter sub-sections. While I would have enjoyed such work, I found after a few months of script writing that voice is less efficient for communicating complex scholarship than writing. To script, record, and edit enough podcast episodes to convey the arguments my project contains would have taken years and likely made it difficult for my committee members to provide timely feedback on drafts. Even then, such a project may have been less precise. However, if I had unlimited time, I would have liked to include audio evidence to support my claims, rather than written translations of such audio. I have considered writing a

series of blog posts based on my findings in the future, and such posts would lend themselves well to including audio evidence.

Given unlimited time, there are a few more changes I would have made or included. I would have liked to theorize emotion and affect beyond rhetorical sound studies scholarship, expand my discussion of deliberation, and devote more space to highlighting the connections of theories and insights between chapters. There's far more to be learned, too, from twentieth century theories of radio, such as those by Theodor Adorno, whose work the constraints of this project did not allow me to engage with very deeply. I would have liked the time to explore the affordances of extant transcription models, such as those of conversational analysis, to weigh the merits and disadvantages of such systems for podcast transcription. To demonstrate impact on audiences, I would have liked to analyze comments on podcast forums, YouTube posts, and podcast reviews. How do fans react to various forms of persuasion? One aspect that strikes me, and which I didn't have time to discuss in my fourth chapter, was just how many "likes" JRE #1555 with Alex Jones and Tim Dillon has on YouTube compared to dislikes (thumbs down): 436,000 likes to 22,000 dislikes—a ratio of almost 20:1. Combined with fan discussions, such evidence could deepen our understanding of the efficacy of podcast persuasion. Finally, I would have liked to include either a full pedagogy chapter or smaller pedagogy interstitial chapters and show my vision for translating insights on podcasts as public persuasion to RWS classrooms. Steph Ceraso's *Sounding Composition* models this approach for multimodal listening pedagogy and the work I would have liked to emulate in terms of pedagogy.

Ah, to be unconstrained by time.

In addition to addressing such the limitations I have already mentioned, I suggest the following areas and provide the following ideas for further development and future work on

podcast studies. More work needs to be done on how persuasion builds over episodes. Analysis of fan discourse across social media may offer one avenue to study such episodic persuasion. I see possibilities for tracking persuasion across an episode with social science approaches, including large scale, randomized surveys, to see what podcast arguments are most effective to particular audiences. I am especially interested in learning what results from combining the three rhetorical areas my project covers into an analysis of a single podcast episode.

Speaking of analysis, I'm going to take a moment to talk about my own process and its development, which relates to areas I see for future work. Whether studying technology, sound, conversation, or all three, analyzing podcasts is challenging work. The methods I present in *Podcast Rhetorics* represent the instincts and conscious approaches I've developed listening critically to podcasts for nearly a decade. I've shared them with readers to help make the medium more accessible for scholarship. Generally, I use a grounded theory approach that I interpret using rhetorical criticism rather than other forms of qualitative, quantitative, and/or mixed method research. Because embodiment and materiality make sonic interpretation so personal, I feel justified in my approach. However, efforts toward methodological robustness—including intercoder reliability, statistical sampling, and others—may also prove productive for the rhetorical study of podcasts.

For example, it would be interesting to conduct surveys that probe audience interpretation of podcast network interfaces or that attempt to map persuasion over time. Does listening to a podcast about a particular topic have a statistically valid and measurable impact on an audience member's stance on an issue of public importance? What emotions do audiences associate with particular sounds and noises in podcasts? How do audience's opinions about a podcast host

develop and change over time? These are just a few questions that could help build our understanding of podcasts as public rhetoric.

Concerning podcast episode analysis, I'm adamant that faithful word-for-word, time-stamped transcripts are an absolute necessity. As I argue in the third chapter, these form the basic "track" of a podcast—the scaffold upon which all other commentary and notes rest. I also recommend mapping episodes by content and/or segments—these are as important to navigating a transcript as chapters and section headings are to navigating an essay or book.

At the same time, it's important to keep in mind that transcription is an act of translation. In *Podcast Rhetorics*, I used standard punctuation to make speech more recognizable for readers. Using standard punctuation also argues the legitimacy of podcast vocality—readers are conditioned to expect written language to be presented according to particular conventions. However, conversation might better be represented as a series of run-on sentences and overlapping dialogue. There's also standard notation in conversation analysis that might communicate greater complexity with conversation as well. I avoided such notation because I would have had to explain it to the reader, but it could be useful for the note-taking process.

Regardless of transcription method, the sonic aspects of podcasts unrelated to vocality make them far more complicated to describe than traditional interviews. I encourage podcast scholars to embrace the messiness that comes with trailblazing, as it often proves intellectually rewarding.

Finally, one of the biggest areas I see for future work on podcasts as public persuasion is the adaptation, critique, and improvement of my theories through further studies. As it stands, to the best of my knowledge, this dissertation offers the only broad theory of podcasts as public persuasion available in academia.

* * *

If you've made it this far, I hope you find that your views on podcasts have changed in at least some small, significant way. Thank you, dear reader, for listening.

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