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Chasing Solidarity:

A Critical Engagement with the Hosts of American Spirituality Podcasts

Gregory Fromholz MA (Applied Spirituality)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Theology and Religious Studies

School of Critical Studies

College of the Arts

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December 2022



University of Glasgow
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Statement of Originality to Accompany Thesis Submission

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Abstract

The primary aim of my practice-based PhD is to examine the role that the hosts of American podcasts — particularly those that fall into the categories of Christianity or Spirituality, or both — imagine for themselves: what influence do they consider they have?; what resources are they seeking to provide?; what interests do they bring to their work?; what questions do they have about their work’s efficacy and reach and influence? This research incorporates evidence from interviews with thirteen podcast hosts — some in person and some on Zoom — alongside this critical engagement analysing the insights, content and narratives of those hosts and their podcasts. Though many of these hosts view Spirituality from a place influenced by Christianity, they are not defining it exclusively from a Christian perspective. Consequently, this study endeavours to answer the question: ‘Given the increase in USA-based podcasts that address Spirituality, how do the hosts of these podcasts understand the ways in which they resource or influence the spiritual landscape?’

With over 420 million podcast listeners projected in 2022, this research investigates how hosts of curated podcast conversations seek to influence a deeper understanding of spirituality. The research probes how the emerging “digital field” of spiritual formation is being populated with podcast opportunities. It asks questions of those who seek to influence spiritual formation through digital media and shows, through the voices of prominent hosts/practitioners, how the digital and spiritual co-exist and thrive because of one another.¹

Postman wrote that ‘The clearest way to see through a culture is to attend to its tools for conversation’ (2005). Every new movement finds a new way to communicate outside the institutions previously or even currently leading the way; this sociocultural phenomenon of podcasting is addressed in this written and filmed thesis, *Chasing Solidarity: A Critical Engagement with the Hosts of American Spirituality Podcasts*.

This paper accompanies an original 84-minute, feature-length research documentary film entitled *Chasing Solidarity*, in which conversations about what is emerging are put forward and analysed.

¹ A brief history of the origins can be found in Chapter 4, “Findings and Analysis”, which pertains to the interview section on “Spiritual Formation.”

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Chapter 1

Introduction

With over 420 million podcast listeners projected in 2022 worldwide (Insider Intelligence, 2021), this research investigates how curated podcast conversations can lead to a deeper understanding of spirituality.

This thesis, *Chasing Solidarity: A Critical Engagement with the Hosts of American Spirituality Podcasts*, emerged from a research and discovery process. It endeavours to answer the research question: ‘Given the increase in USA-based podcasts that address Spirituality, how do the hosts of these podcasts understand the ways in which they resource or influence the spiritual landscape?’

This research has collected, analysed, and distributed the findings through film and this accompanying critical commentary. Moreover, this work explores creative practice as research, the creative practice of filming, interviewing and listening to the hosts/practitioners of podcasts exploring spirituality.

The thesis consists of an original 84-minute, feature-length research documentary film entitled *Chasing Solidarity*. This research film was produced, directed and edited by myself and further explored in this written document.

Documentary Film Link: <https://vimeo.com/763905144>

Password: play

Subtitled Documentary Film Link: <https://vimeo.com/778519319>

Password: play

Within academia, there is a paucity of research in the area of spiritual formation in digital media, more acutely in the area of podcasting. The calibre and platform reach of those interviewed for this study constitute the leading voices within this genre, with millions of followers and accumulative downloads/plays approaching 400 million. (On Being 2022)

This study represents a unique gathering of information through documentary-making while utilising a more conventional interviewing tool. Therefore, this research works in concert within the context of creating a cohesive film that also explores and represents

findings. As I will examine and highlight later, I will look at what is emerging when researching how spirituality in podcasting is being explored. I will do this by engaging in filmmaking's emergent analysis and creative practice.

This research is intended as a documentary film of a journey of faith that is accentuated by our times, exploring whether spirituality grows and evolves while tradition atrophies and devolves.

Tools for Conversation

Media theorist and cultural critic Neil Postman writes in *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, 'The clearest way to see through a culture is to attend to its tools for conversation' (2005).

This research and documentary attend directly to the tools of digital culture to see through and into this cultural phenomenon of podcasting. The expression of digital media at times is also evolving or possibly devolving back into the more traditional and physical bricks-and-mortar gatherings, as podcasts hold open physical events. (See Chapter 2, Religious Landscape and The Podcast Ecosystem)

This documentary research explores the understanding of spirituality among prominent western Christian podcast hosts/practitioners – some of the new leading voices of the disenfranchised centennials and millennials who are self-describing as non-traditional, exiles and nones, #Exvangelicals. With many of these 'exiles' abandoning traditional Sunday mornings, this research looks at the platforms this diaspora uses to grow and gather and interviews the new digital spiritual and thought leaders. In short, this practice-based research continues to explore how patterns of Christian spirituality are changing through a critical engagement with selected prominent podcast hosts who are credited with influencing, resourcing and forming contemporary digital offerings of spirituality, Christianity, or both.

In my creative practice, as I encounter, experience and curate the stories of podcast hosts/practitioners, this phenomenological approach of being the participant yet observer and fluctuating between contrasting but symbiotic positions best suits my form of

gathering information in film and writing. ‘The feedback loop between reflection and action, between speculation and experimentation, is fundamental to research in many disciplines and it is an important feature of our work.’ (Smith & Dean 2009, p.164). Thus, qualitative research has been conducted, using thematic analysis of the interviews, as I looked to extract and pinpoint themes and consistent uses of certain types of language and expression in defining their practices. Moreover, I endeavoured to articulate and describe rather than justify or explain a position. There is a narrative methodological element as I looked at the hosts/practitioners’ shared experiences, and story, that created the foundation of this documentary film and the greater understanding moving forward in the practice of spirituality among centennials and millennials.

I illuminated the subject matter by gathering, through filming, the data in the form of qualitative research, which permitted the greatest freedom in the study. This allowed a broader frame of reference, especially when asking subjective questions of hosts/practitioners in the area of spirituality among centennials and millennials, which could be primarily personal in their approaches to spirituality.

This approach enabled me to combine within my creative practice a close phenomenological approach with a form of analysis that looks at the concepts, ideas and phrases as they were self-expressed by interviewed hosts/practitioners-

When selecting podcast hosts/practitioners for an interview, I used purposive sampling. ‘The purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling, is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses’ (Etikan 2016, p.1- 4).

The selected podcast hosts come from a variety of spiritual perspectives. They are from multiple nations, diverse in gender, race and sexuality, and have decades of theological and therapeutic experience. Their podcasts engage millions of podcast followers.

That the podcast hosts are representative of multiple identities and approaches to religion and spirituality was vital because, without this feature, I believe that the research would have been incomplete, being that ‘radical inclusion can speak beyond the interest that is assigned they hold.’ (P Ó Tuama 2023, personal communication, April 11).

Having considered many methodologies and their attributes, and as this is an interdisciplinary project, I decided to employ the synthesis of methodologies termed

collectively as the Cinematic Phenomenological Research Method. This practice-based research method combines the observational gathering practices of interviewing with the artistic and performative research practice of filmmaking. The Cinematic Phenomenological Research Method is explored more thoroughly in Chapter 3.

Conclusion

Chapter One briefly introduced the research, the film's synopsis, the selection criteria of the hosts/practitioners, the written commentary and the spiritual landscape that this film and accompanying written text occupy. Furthermore, this chapter introduced the primary question: 'Given the increase in USA-based podcasts that address Spirituality, how do the hosts of these podcasts understand the ways in which they resource or influence the spiritual landscape?' Alongside these formal questions, the first chapter described how I encountered, experienced and curated the stories of podcast hosts/practitioners through my creative filmmaking practice.

Chapter 2

Religious Landscape and The Podcast Ecosystem

This chapter will introduce the contemporary religious landscape focusing primarily upon the North American context and address the decline in formal religious adherence. The scope of podcasts featured have a primary or large distribution and influence in the United States bringing an American focus to this study.

Two non-American hosts/practitioners, Pádraig Ó Tuama and Jarrod McKenna, were interviewed for this study. Ó Tuama's podcast is US-based, with its parent company On Being out of Minnesota. Furthermore, McKenna's is co-hosted by American Drew Hart.

This chapter will also address the podcast as a digital primary tool for conversation and its ecosystem.

Religious Landscape

'The religious landscape of the United States continues to change at a rapid clip' (Pew Research 2017). This change is not exclusive to the American landscape. Globally the religious landscape has shifted and continues to shift. According to recent studies, Church attendance in the United States is dropping steadily, and there is a consistent decline in young Americans who 'are now less likely to become or remain Christian...' (Pew Research 2022b)

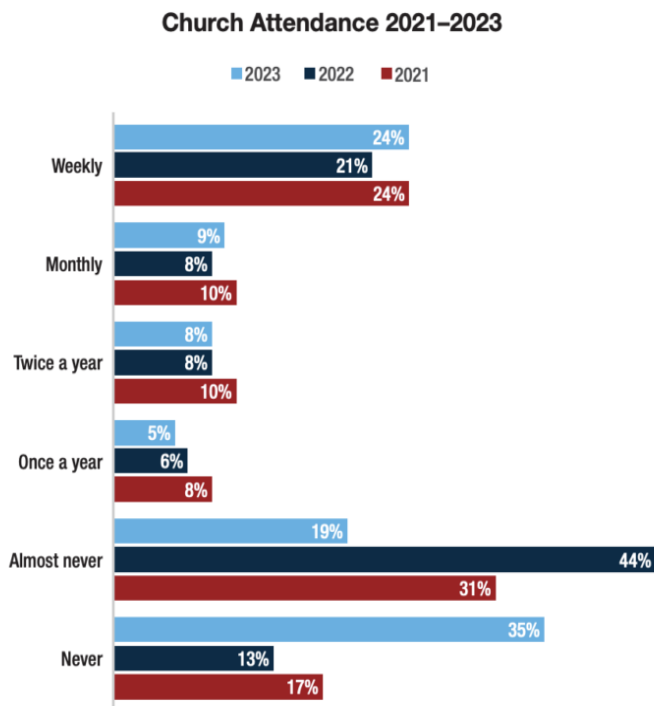
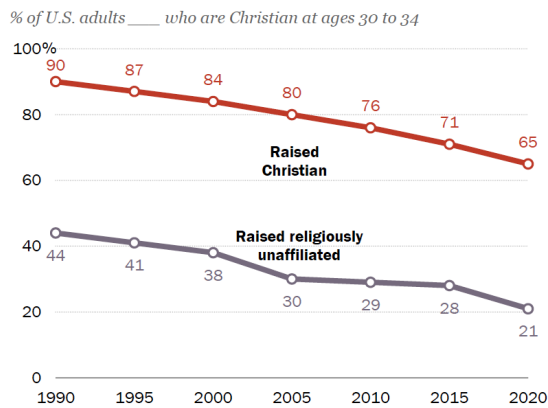


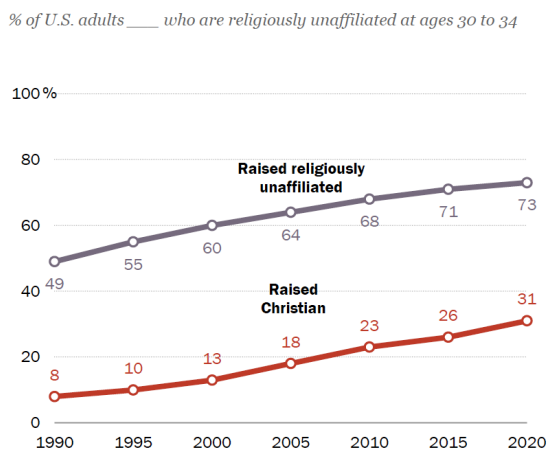
Figure 1: The American Bible Organization (2023)

The 2023 online Relevant magazine article ‘The Number of People Who ‘Never ’Go to Church Almost Doubled in One Year’ (Editor 2023a) states, ‘Church attendance this side of the pandemic has been on a big decline, and it looks like it’s only getting worse. Over the last few years, self-identifying Christians have taken some pretty major steps back from attending church services.’

Young Americans are now less likely to become or remain Christian ...



... and more likely to become or remain unaffiliated



Note: Estimates are based on aggregated and smoothed data from General Social Survey and Pew Research Center data.
 Sources: General Social Survey (1990-2018) and Pew Research Center survey (2019).
 "Modeling the Future of Religion in America"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 2: Young Americans are now less likely to become or remain Christian... (Pew Research 2022b)

Further, ‘The American Bible Organization found the number of Americans who “never attend” church rose almost doubled last year, growing from 19 percent to 35 percent.’ (Editor 2023a)

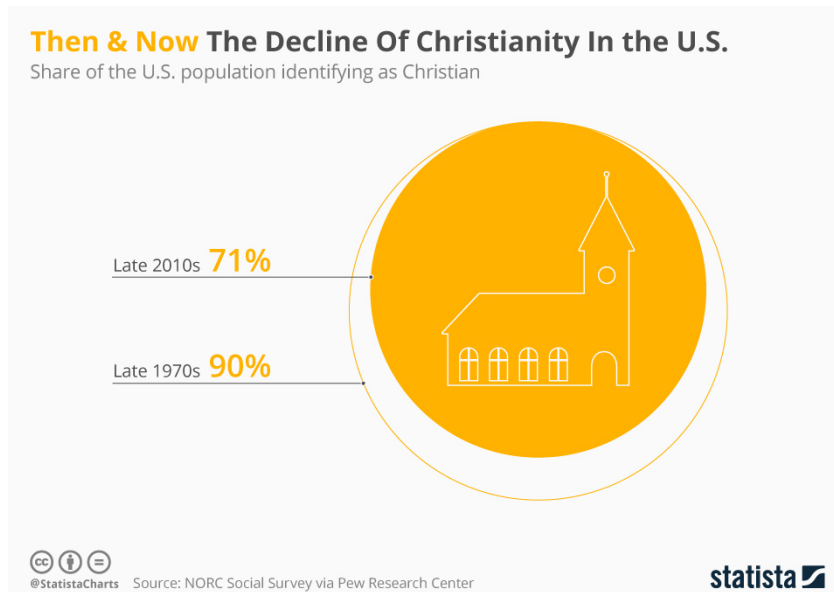


Figure 3: Statista - Then & Now The Decline Of Christianity In the U.S. (McCarthy 2019)

Studies from The Pew Research Study 'Modeling the Future of Religion in America' (2022a) have shown that 'In recent years, there has been a growing number of Americans who identify as non-religious. In 2020, a record 30 percent of Americans said they were not religiously affiliated.'

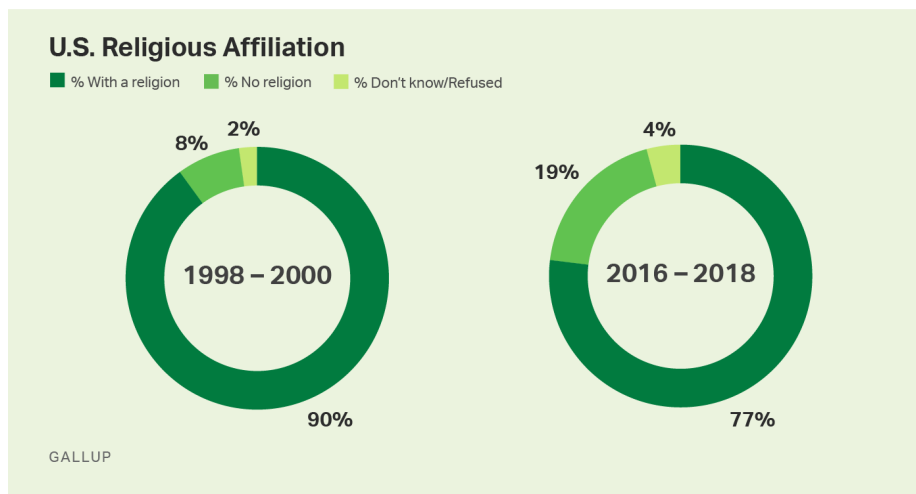
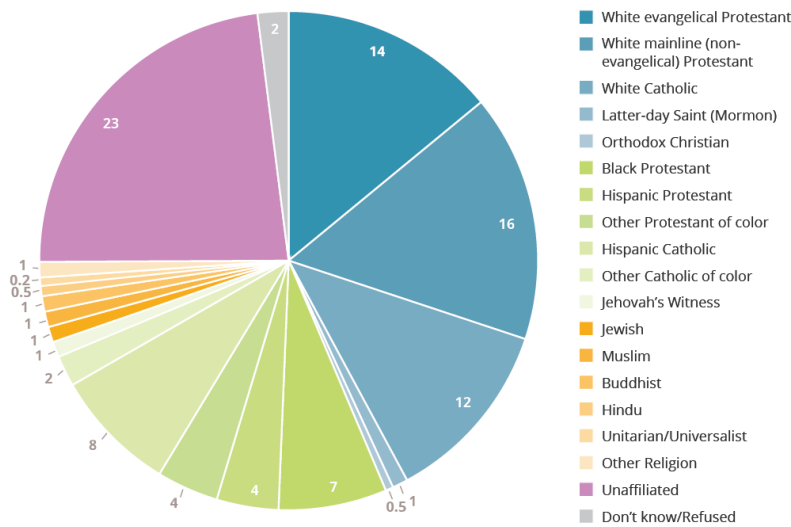


Figure 4: Gallup - U.S. Religious Affiliation (Jones 2019)

Pew continues describing the trend of those identifying as non-religious when looking at the affiliation switching taking place writing, ' Depending on whether religious switching continues at recent rates, speeds up or stops entirely, the projections show Christians of all ages shrinking from 64% to between a little more than half (54%) and just above one-third (35%) of all Americans by 2070. Over that same period, "nones" would rise from the current 30% to somewhere between 34% and 52% of the U.S. population. ' (Pew Research 2022)

FIGURE 1. The American Religious Landscape in 2020

Percent who identify as:



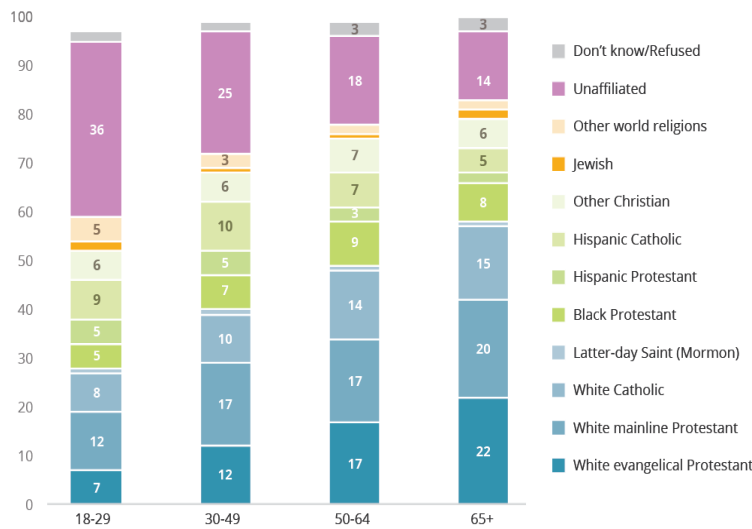
Source: PRRI 2020 American Values Atlas.

Figure 5: The American Religious Landscape (PRRI 2020)

Religious affiliations and the decline of church attendance have been tracked for many years, revealing a ‘generational sea change’ (PRRI 2020) with those from newer generations increasingly identifying as unaffiliated, or ‘nones’ (those who have left faith) and the ‘dones’ (those who are over church). However, rather than focusing predominately on these groups, I will focus my interest on an expanding group: ‘the exiles’. Diane Butler Bass begins to define this group, writing, ‘Exiles would be part of a faith community if they could. But something keeps compelling them to move on, to not settle.’ (Bass 2017) The characteristics of this group are more fully described in Chapter 2: Religious Landscape.

FIGURE 4. A Generational Sea Change in Religious Affiliation

Percent who identify as:



Source: PRRI 2020 American Values Atlas.

Figure 6: A Generational Sea Change in Religious Affiliation (PRRI 2020)

What is driving these movements and decline? When the prominent Instagram community The New Evangelicals asked their followers, "Why did you leave the evangelical church?" the reasons varied. According to The New Evangelicals, "We received over 1,000 responses to this question. None of them said they left for street cred, because it was sexy or because they hated Jesus" (Post done in collaboration with [@amulford](#) of [@the_cultivate_company](#)). It is important to quote their findings at length to understand why they leave. Notably, a consistent denominator is the need for more leadership.

What Prompted You To Leave The Evangelical Church?

‘Unwillingness to care for the vulnerable and demanding individual rights during COVID.’

‘The run-up to the 2016 election.’

‘The unreserved support for [Trump was the last straw.]’

‘LGBTQIA+ HATE’

‘Spiritual abuse from pastors who are accountable to no one outside of themselves.’

‘Oppression of marginalized’

‘Purity culture. Was sick of feeling shame every second of my life.’

‘The church was not honest about finances and would only help tithing members’

‘Christians' reactions to the BLM movement.’

‘The way child abuse and misogyny are protected in churches.’

‘I got pushed out.’

‘It's a large church where the appearance and ‘show’ is more important than the people.’

‘I actually read the Bible and saw a very different Jesus than the one I was taught about in church.’

‘Treatment of women.’

‘Rampant abuse.’

‘No genuine honesty about real brokenness in church and no real walking with people who were suffering.’

‘Escaping intimate partner violence. He still does worship there...’

‘I realized it was making my mental health worse.’

‘I wanted to love people with no strings attached.’

‘They loved political power more than people.’

‘The mandate to conform or else.’

‘Bullied & gaslit.’

‘The lack of introspection, the hypocrisy, the aversion to academic theology.’

‘Covertly controlling, gatekeeping pastors surrounded by yes men.’

‘The evangelical marriage w/ right-wing politics & realizing they don't believe their own teachings.’

‘I am gay and there was no place for me in the evangelical church.’

‘felt out of place as a single woman.’

‘Abusive Leadership’

‘I felt extremely judged because I am a recovering addict.’

‘Overworked volunteer, ultra-conservative pastor, senator preached messages. Yuck.’

‘Came out as trans. Even in a so-called ‘everyone is welcome church, I wasn't safe to be there.’

‘Hypocrisy and it becoming more about fame than helping others.’

‘The Church left Jesus. I can't follow both.’

‘Rejection & judgment.’

‘They covered up SA of children and wanted an NDA signed.’

‘The final straw was the legalism I saw my kids adopting. I was out at that point.’

‘They prioritized money over outreach & ministry, and weren't honest about that.’

‘Power + control dynamics’

‘Asked for help, then hung out to dry by the pastor during a dark season in our lives.’

‘Discourages questions.’

‘Fired from staff for being treated at a mental health facility.’

‘Hurt too many times by ‘Christians’ we thought were our friends.’

‘Worship of America.’

‘A show/pomp and circumstance. Manufactured and manipulated emotion.’

‘No room for differing beliefs.’

‘Anything that went against their ideologies were an ‘attack from Satan.’’

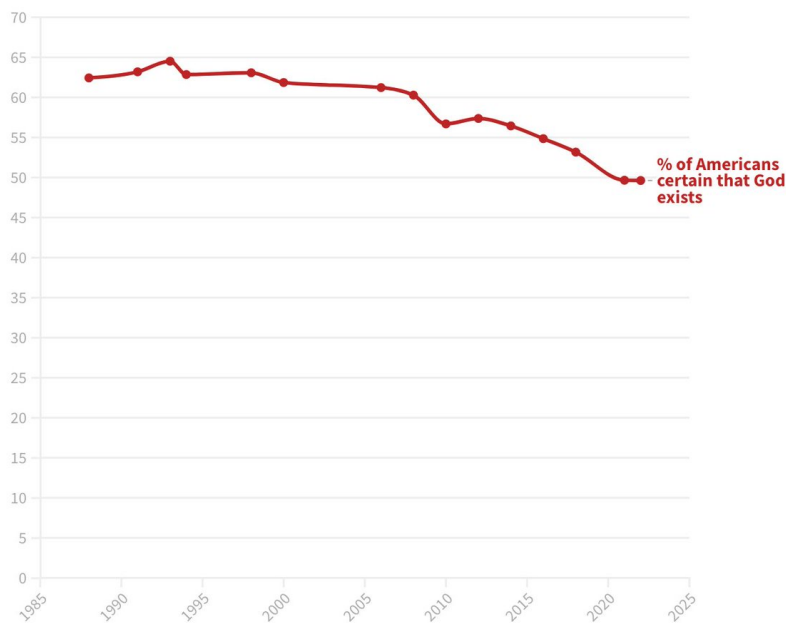
‘Was tired. Burnt out.’

(The New Evangelicals 2023)

As can be seen, the responses are numerous as they are varied. Many of these were directly addressed in the research interviews with those leading, through podcasting, this growing spiritual diaspora.

The growth of the religiously unaffiliated has seen a concurrent growth in those who are not confident in the existence of God, according to a recent University of Chicago Survey.

The decline of Americans' belief in God



Source: NORC at University of Chicago

Figure 7: The Decline of Americans' Belief in God (NORC 2022)

The 2023 online Relevant magazine article ‘Only Half of Americans Are Confident God Exists’ (Editor 2023b) states, ‘A recent survey found that only half of Americans now say they are sure God exists, down from 60 percent just a few years ago. And the number of people who say they never go to church has reached an all-time high.’

Relevant (Editor 2023b) goes on to write that;

The General Social Survey, conducted by the NORC at the University of Chicago, found that Americans' view of God has shifted significantly within the last decade. But it's not just a belief in God that's changed. Church attendance has plummeted since the pandemic. In the meantime, there has been a growing trend of Americans who identify as non-religious. In 2020, a record 30 percent of Americans said they were not religiously affiliated.

This doesn't mean that a majority of Americans are no longer spiritual. NORC found that atheists and agnostics each only account for 7 percent of the population. But it does show a major shift is happening in the American Church.

"The past three years were a period of great trial and change for the United States," said René Bautista, director of the GSS. "Understanding how these times affected Americans' thoughts, beliefs, and opinions is critical to understanding social change."



Figure 8: Barna - Rising Spiritual Openness in America (Kinnaman 2023)

In the midst of this social change, interest in spirituality continues to grow during church and religious-affiliated decline. 'Though religious affiliation and church attendance continue to decline, spiritual openness and curiosity are on the rise.' (Barna 2023)

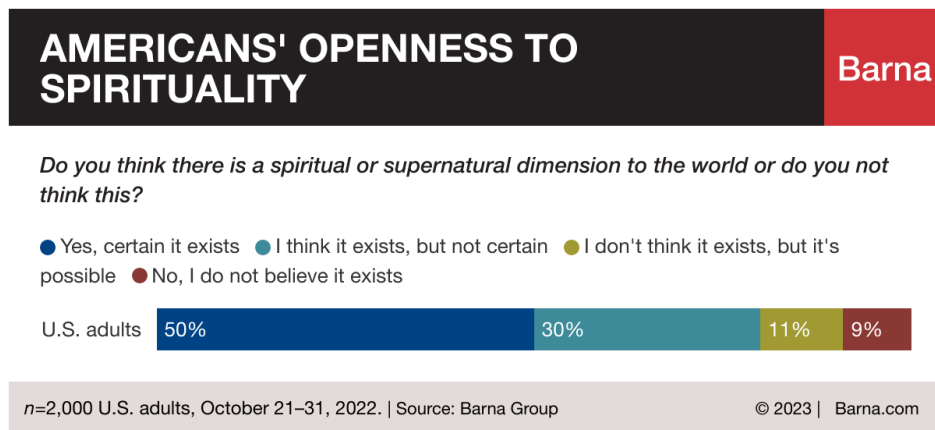


Figure 9: Barna – American’s Openness to Spirituality (Kinnaman 2023)

Barna continues by reporting, ‘Overall, 80 percent of Americans say they think there is a spiritual or supernatural dimension to the world. Eleven percent say they don’t think such a dimension exists, but it is possible. Meanwhile, only 9 percent say they do not believe it exists.’ (Barna 2023)

According to Pew, ‘The decline of Christianity and the rise of the “nones” may have complex causes and far-reaching consequences for politics, family life and civil society.’ (Pew Research 2022). Among the most basic of these changes is the emergence of new ways of accessing material that addresses the spiritual concerns of personhood. Through interviewing leaders of spiritual podcasts and studies conducted by multiple research organisations and institutions, this research shows how the decline of religious affiliation does not mean the decline of those interested in spiritual growth or formation. Indeed, research confirms it is the inverse. Coinciding with this is the growth of the digital platform of podcasting and the leaders it has spawned. The relevance of this cultural mix is significant.

The change in religious affiliation or lack of affiliation has also impacted how faith can be formed. Notably, the digital world has become the go-to for those seeking spirituality beyond the religious institutions of their grandparents, creating a gap in the market for spiritual formation beyond the bricks-and-mortar steeples that have signified Christian spiritual growth for centuries. This gap is being filled in myriad ways, and this research highlights the importance of the contribution made by the seemingly humble podcast, as this form seems to suit this new frontier of spiritual formation in a digital space.

It is notable that in this current climate of change surrounding religious affiliation, *Insider Intelligence* projects ^o424 million podcast listeners worldwide in 2022, accounting for 20.3%

of internet users' (Insider Intelligence 2021) Growth is forecast to continue increasing and surpass half a billion by 2024. Further Demandsage (Ruby 2022) states, 'As of June 2022, there are over 2.4 million podcasts with over 66 million episodes between them'.

In late 2017 one prominent North American commentator, Butler Bass (2017) — podcaster, author and American historian of Christianity, described the current state of spiritual affairs for centennials and millennials when tweeting a series of 23 tweets describing the current diaspora who are titled 'exiles'. I will quote Butler Bass in full, as it creates a framework for the culture in which podcasts have now flourished:

In religion, we talk about the "nones" (those who have left faith) and the "dones" (those who are over church). But I want to talk about another group: The Exiles. 1/

Exiles would be part of a faith community if they could. But something keeps compelling them to move on, to not settle. 2/

Some are forced into exile, others go into self-exile. 3/

But their spirituality is related to movement. Like nomads following streams through the desert. 4/

Nomadic spirituality is a rich tradition in biblical faiths -- Abraham and Sarah, of course. But the Exodus is also an exile story -- exile from a settled life of injustice toward a journey of justice. 5/

The prophets were typically exiles of some sort. 6/

The people of Israel lived in long periods of exile, often the most theologically and liturgically rich times in their history. 7/

The truth of the Hebrew scriptures is that people long to settle, to build a Temple, but they most often mess that up -- and they have to move on in order to find God. 8/

As a politically oppressed person, Jesus was an exile -- his religious tradition was marginalised, his people held no political power. 9/

His earliest followers were women and slaves and other oppressed people, all exiled from place, position, power. 10/

Islam is, of course, an entire religion built on the spiritual experience of exile and nomadic faith. 11/

And throughout the history of Christianity, its greatest spiritual movements have been made up of exiles -- like Celtic Christianity, mendicant monks and nuns, travelers and pilgrims of all sorts. 12/

So, here's my question: Why do contemporary church leaders want to "reach out" to exiles and bring them "home"? 13/

As if these nomads and wanderers need to be fixed? 14/

Shouldn't it be JUST THE OPPOSITE???? That Christians who want a more vibrant faith should be following the exiles??? 15/

That is, after all, the biblical and historical example: That new birth happens at the edges, where people are willing to wander, to let go of what is settled and comfortable and walk into the desert. 16/

I'm just so weary of hearing the desperate cry, "We have to bring people back to church!" 17/

What if we said instead, "Where are people going and finding life? Can we tag along on the journey?" 18/

Maybe we are supposed to be exiles right now. After all, we've been colonists for a while and it hasn't been so good. 19/

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, without knowing where he was going." Hebrews 11:8 q20/

Maybe the nones, dones, and exiles know more than we think. Are hearing the call more than we think. 21/

I'm wondering if wandering is a sort of settling for Christians, and that our settling must always be open to wandering. Not one or the other, but the beautifully intertwined spiritual experience of both. 22/

Listen to the stories of contemporary exile. Learn from them. Let questions rise. 23/

Butler Bass's analysis suggests that a common frustration within the last few decades of institutionalised religion has emerged among the Christian diaspora of centennials and millennials. This frustration can be encapsulated by musician and former evangelical David Bazan in the documentary *Strange Negotiations* when he says, 'I just hope Christianity stops shitting the bed' (2019). The rise of unfiltered, without centralised control, social media and podcasts has given an unprecedented opportunity to these voices.

From studies released by Pew Research (2015, 2019) we can see an increasing interest in what is identified as 'spirituality', even while there is a considerable decline in traditional forms of Christianity and attendance. Further, Bob Smietana (2021) of Religion News Service writes in *Word & Way*:

The decline in membership coincides with the rise of the so-called “Nones” — those who claim no religious affiliation. Gallup reports about one in five Americans (21%) is a None — making them as large a group as evangelicals or Catholics. Other polls put the number at closer to 30%.

I find it fascinating that faith continues to be found and grow on the fringes without the centralised institution. As Samantha Bahan concurs, ‘The decline of religion and the rise of spirituality is currently the topic of a lively debate among scholars....’ (2015, p.65) For further discussion see Chapter 2, Religious Landscape and The Podcast Ecosystem.

The Indian Jesuit priest and liberation theologian Sebastian Kappen describes spirituality as, ‘The manner in which humans transcend themselves and reach out to the ultimate possibilities of their existence. As such, spirituality entails both an understanding of the deepest meaning of human existence and a commitment to realising the same’ (1994, p.33). This study investigates this relatedness to the transcendent.

Defining Spirituality

To understand the changing spiritual landscape and formation within this, we must ask how spirituality is defined before being formed. This chapter will offer a broad cultural and academic understanding of spirituality to lay a preliminary foundation. (Chapter 4 will examine how podcast hosts define spirituality and its formation in their field of practice.)

The notion of spirituality is powerfully prevalent in Western culture. Spirituality in contemporary usage can refer to many things, from relations with plants to religion, sports participation to poetry, and personal passion to belief systems. It has become a catch-all term in Western culture for something we can believe in. It can refer to something, anything, in the ether that appears to transcend the self. Lucy Bregman (2014), in *The Ecology of Spirituality: Meanings, Virtues, and Practices in a Post-Religious Age*, states that ‘The word spirituality now has many definitions, an overwhelming number, in fact, all of which express that sense of yearning for wholeness that lies within so many of us.’ However, she later adds, ‘...what we cannot do is offer once and for all a clear, comprehensive, and authoritative definition of spirituality that will be relevant today’. Ten years before she noted that spirituality is difficult to define, in *Defining Spirituality: Multiple uses and murky meanings*

of an incredibly popular term, she was already side-stepping the question of definition in favour of the outcome of such a practice:

Spirituality now is in triumphant glowing vigor, and seemingly in full control over several niches at once. It is used as a vaguer synonym for "religion." It is used for the personal side of religion, by those who pit it against "institutional" or "public" or "organized" religion..." It works so well precisely because these different and separable meanings and uses flow into one another and carry with them connotations and implications as they travel from one of these niches to another. Spirituality does multiple jobs, and keeping its meanings vague and shifting helps to continue this handy situation. (2004, p.157-167)

Only some people agree with Bregman above that spirituality is undefinable. Many continue to seek to define this fluid mode of spiritual practice. In the 2014 article *Improving the Spiritual Dimension of Whole Person Care: Reaching National and International Consensus*, Christina Puchalski, MD, Director of the George Washington Institute for Spirituality and Health, wrote:

Spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred. (Puchalski et al. 2014, p. 642-656).

A more inclusive definition can be found from the author of *The Audacity of Spirit*, Jack Finnegan (2017) when contending that 'Spirituality = Human beings trying to relate to the transcendent'. A related approach is to identify spirituality as an orientation of life. Nelson writes that '[Spirituality] is simply our basic life orientation and the patterned ways in which we express them. It is the patterning of our thinking, feeling, experiencing and nurturing of whatever we take to be fundamentally important.' (McNichols & Feldman 2017, p.192).

Despite the many definitions, there remains a deep ambivalence in the defining of spirituality, as Samantha Bahan (2015) writes in *The Spirituality of Atheist and "No Religion" Individuals in the Millennial Generation: Developing New Research Approaches for a New Form of Spirituality*:

'Research investigating millennial spirituality has shown that many individuals of this generation are uncertain about how to describe and explain their "spirituality" and "spiritual" experiences.'

Some look at spirituality as a helpful term not despite its variability but because of it. Swinton and Pattison's (2010) paper exploring the 'diverse concept of spirituality suggests that, '...there is no such 'thing' (singular) as spirituality.' They argue further that, as a

heuristic device, the term provides a necessary focus for critical debate; 'the ongoing discussions around whether or not spirituality is 'real' or otherwise miss the practical point that spirituality may be necessary even if it is not 'real'.

When characterising post-Christian spirituality, the fluidity of meaning can lead some to question the validity of individual practice for approaching the sacred that strays beyond traditional or institutionalised practices and judge these as being eclectic and disjointed. Houtman and Aupers in *The spiritual turn and the decline of tradition: The spread of post-Christian spirituality in 14 Western countries, 1981–2000* comment that:

Most participants in the spiritual milieu, it is generally argued, draw upon multiple traditions, styles, and ideas simultaneously, combining them into idiosyncratic packages. Spirituality is thus referred to as 'do-it-yourself religion' (Baerveldt 1996), 'pick-and mix religion' (Hamilton 2000), a 'spiritual supermarket' (Lyon 2000), or 'religious consumption 'a la carte' (Possamai 2003). Possamai (2003:40) even states that we are dealing with an 'eclectic—if not kleptomaniac—process . . . with no clear reference to an external or 'deeper' reality.' (2007, p. 305-320).

However, not everyone looks at contemporary spirituality in this negative light. For example, Bahan (2015) writes:

One could interpret the lack of spiritual eclecticism as spiritual "laziness." However, it could also be that the form of "spirituality" many millennials are experiencing is quite different from that of past spiritual seekers, and therefore the methods through which they foster this "spirituality" or relate to the concept of "spirituality" would also be different.

Moreover, this research shows how these 'methods through which they foster' spirituality and the phenomena of engaging with its practice are particularly relevant in burgeoning digital landscapes, such as podcasting.

Tanya Marie Luhrmann, in *How God Becomes Real: Kindling the Presence of Invisible Others* (2020, p. 69), contributes to this conversation, 'That, after all, is the point of experiential evangelical spirituality: to experience God — an external invisible presence — interacting with one through phenomena one would ordinarily interpret as internal and self-generated.'

While looking at these definitions, I have learned that you cannot explicitly nail down what spirituality is. This is the strength of this terminology, as it is both flexible, self-defined and culturally impactful. Whether it is a pattern of behaviour, an orientation for life, an absolute or a necessity, sacred or profane to some, lazy or profound, transcendent or grounded or

both, spirituality is part of a cultural phenomenon of those searching beyond and within themselves for significant meaning.

In this study, I will also refer to spirituality in a more mystical, even classic understanding, which I hold personally, as a connection to my understanding of God and how that informs my living. My practice of spirituality is more aligned with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's belief that 'We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.' (Furey 1993, p.138) In this way, I see that much of contemporary spirituality is not new; indeed, the eclecticism so critiqued above is as old as the practice of prayer. What is new is the increased availability of information about and experience of such spirituality. As I see it, the spirituality celebrated in contemporary podcasts feeds into an old desire in humanity rather than subverting a desire that should be in a streamlined system defined by a particular religious tradition.

Movements and New Media Formats

Is the current religious diaspora looking for leadership? (Pew Research 2019) And if so, from where? How does a seemingly over-connected generation connect? I continue investigating this cultural shift in practice-based research through filming and interviewing, while developing language around filming/ interviewing.

This research addresses how trust in religious institutional leadership has degraded rapidly over the last few decades. In this landscape, this research asks Has the podcast host become, by fate or design, the accidental leader of a type of digital church? This is a role that some podcast hosts embrace while others attempt to distance themselves; some are surprised by this question, while others have seen this emerging for decades (Ganiel 2012). In this context there may be reluctance to call oneself a leader. However, those who host podcasts have followers, which by default causes the tag of leadership to be associated with the podcast hosts/practitioners, especially when influencing millions. This research raises questions about *followers*, a word used colloquially in the world of the religious, which has extended to being one of the first questions many are asked in personal. Is there a difference between fans and followers? Is this limited to commitment? Do podcast leaders have followers or

fans, or listeners? This research asks: Do these podcast hosts consider themselves leaders or is there a disconnect between what they say and the responsibility of those who listen?

This research looks into the area of accountability. Where does their responsibility begin and end for those who are following? Is there a disconnect between what they say in a digital space and the hosts responsibility for those who listen?

This research points to the common theme of how most hosts/practitioners interviewed see their leadership role as a reluctant necessity, with many describing the role of the podcast in forming spirituality as one of bringing solidarity to a new movement. Every movement needs solidarity, and every new movement finds a new way to communicate outside the institutions previously or even currently leading the way.

For this change to occur, a tipping point in culture must be gained, and solidarity surrounding it must collate. In Cass R. Sunstein's book, *How Change Happens*, he looks at how movements bring change:

The problem is that none of us can change a norm on our own. To be sure, we can defy a norm, but defiance comes at a cost, and it may end up entrenching rather than undermining existing norms. What is needed is some kind of movement, initiated by people who say that they disapprove of the norm, and succeeding when some kind of tipping point is reached, by which time it is socially costless, and may be beneficial, and maybe even mandatory, to say: Me Too.

That's a stylised version of what has happened with respect to sexual orientation in many nations. But the same dynamics help capture a host of social movements, including those that involve Catholicism, the French Revolution, the creation of Israel, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the collapse of the Soviet Union, disability discrimination, age discrimination, animal rights, the rise of Barack Obama and Donald Trump, Brexit, nationalism, white supremacy, and the abolition of slavery. These movements are, of course, different in important ways. Some of them are unambiguously good, while others are harder to evaluate, and still, others are deeply troubling. But in all of them, suppressed beliefs and values, including suppressed outrage, started to get some oxygen. Once they did, change was inevitable. (Sunstein)

New modes of communication have played highly significant roles as catalysts for change. The Gutenberg press in 1450 spawned a new age of printed propaganda when critiquing the established and prominent faith institution of the day 'The Reformation perfected the use of the small booklet or pamphlet as a tool of propaganda and agitation' (Edwards 1994, p.15). The role of new forms can also be seen in the music industry, as shown by the Hip Hop and

Rap music revolution which ‘became an underground form of communication, an outlet for disenfranchised blacks to express anger at society, and, through careers in music, a way out’ (Margolis 2020), and expressed through powerful song and performance the oppression that was being felt in communities that needed an articulate and powerful voice. Furthermore, according to Michael Eric Dyson, author of *Jay-Z: Made in America*, ‘Rap music forced the country to confront its ugly denial and see clearly the costs of its racist legacy’ (2019, p.52). The podcast has become a similar voice to that of the printing press and music industry in giving opportunity an outlet for the disenfranchised and in this research, specifically the spiritual nomads or those who view their spiritual life as a journey untethered but not mutually exclusive to traditional faith institutions.

Media theorist and philosopher Marshall McLuhan famously wrote:

In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium - that is, of any extension of ourselves - result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology (2001, p.1).

The revolutions of Iran, Tunisia, Egypt, Moldova, Ukraine and Syria, ranging from 2009-2013, all employed Twitter and social media as a valuable tool for social change (Deželan, & Vobič 2016, p.43). Though these processes, like other forms of communication, cannot claim to be the sole reason for national change, they have given voice to the oppressed, outraged and those in need of change. This also applied to the exposure of sexual abuse highlighted and uncovered in the #MeToo movement, the ripples of which continue to ‘...spread a message for survivors: You’re heard, you’re understood’ (North 2019). According to the National Domestic Workers Alliance Executive Director Ai-jen Poo, ‘#MeToo is a movement of survivors and their supporters, powered by courage, determined to end sexual violence and harassment’ (North 2019). Without social media, solidarity and change could have continued to be suppressed. Although this has not stemmed the tide of sexual abuse, it has created a movement of demanded transparency.

The Economist in its 2017 article *How the 16th century invented social media* wrote,

It is a familiar-sounding tale: after decades of simmering discontent a new form of media gives opponents of an authoritarian regime a way to express their views, register their solidarity and co-ordinate their actions. The protesters’ message spreads virally through social networks, making it impossible to suppress and highlighting the extent of public support for revolution. The combination of improved publishing

technology and social networks is a catalyst for social change where previous efforts had failed.

And further:

Modern digital networks may be able to do it more quickly, but even 500 years ago the sharing of media could play a supporting role in precipitating a revolution. Today's social-media systems do not just connect us to each other: they also link us to the past.

It is evident from these suggested movements that new forms of communication bring solidarity to the social and political (Wilde 2004) and religious spheres. I argue in the film and in this thesis that this kind of pattern can also be seen in the role podcasting plays in spiritual formation. As seen previously, movements and leaders leverage new forms of communication to harness and direct movements.

At their inception, these new movements and their communications style can be treated by the central governmental, social and religious institutions as laughable, ineffective and harmless at first. Still, new movements gain momentum in new communication methods. Every movement has a language. When the centre is no longer feeding society in its new frontiers, humanity wanders to the fringes to find new ways of freedom and nourishment. In the film and in this thesis, I trace how that plays out in relation to spirituality.

This research addressed how the growing diaspora is looking for and finding leaders, and that for these leaders, a primary form of communication is becoming the podcast, in addition to more common modes of websites and social media, which are consistently employed for connection. The spiritually disenfranchised have embraced the tools of today's communication.

The Podcasting Ecosystem

When looking at the podcast ecosystem is worthwhile noting how it was born and the spirit of its birth. Wired Magazine Online journalist Quah (2017) states:

Podcasting was born of a revolutionary spirit, the latest in a long line of technologies developed to democratise communication: blogging, social media, the internet itself. But all things worth a damn grow up, and all things worth a dime eventually get complicated. And things with podcasts could get very complicated indeed.

How can we account for the rise of the podcast? Was it technologically or socially determined? What are complicating podcasts today? Who is listening?

In this section, I describe and define the podcasting ecosystem, (Spinelli & Dann, 2019, p.292) one that can be broken down into multiple areas. For this brief look, I will be focusing on the following:

1. History
2. Listenership
3. Production
4. Monetisation

1. Podcasting: History

The emergence of podcasts as a digital broadcast form relates to the broad field of social media. In short, a podcast is ‘published audio for automated delivery’ (Cochrane 2005, p.9). It is commonly known as easily downloadable subscriptions on our devices, with the ability to take content wherever we go. This was not something taken for granted even in 2004.

The word *podcasting* was arguably first coined by Ben Hammersley in *The Guardian Online* article, ‘Audible Revolution’, published on February 12, 2004. The article focused on the creation of the first podcast by Christopher Lydon. According to the first print book on podcasting, published in 2005, *Podcasting The Do-It-Yourself Guide*, the author, Todd Cochrane, explains its origins in using early iPods. Thus, *podcasting* combined with *broadcasting* became *podcasting*. However, it is to be noted that this has never been exclusive to Apple due to an abundance of non-Apple devices in MP3 players.

Yet, it took a while for the term podcast to become part of the common vernacular. According to Statista (2020), a company that specialises in market and consumer data:

In 2006, only 22 percent of the adult population in the United States was aware of this term, but this figure rose to 70 percent in 2019, highlighting the increasing popularity of podcasting in the United States. In fact, as of 2019, there were an estimated 86 million podcast listeners in the U.S., a number which is forecast to grow to around 132 million by 2022.

I will be referring to these statistics more thoroughly in the sub-section of this document entitled Podcast Listenership.

Is this symptomatic of moves towards a more personalised consumption of what was once *mass* media? This is otherwise known as narrowcasting. According to Barasch and Berger, in their *Journal of Marketing Research* article, ‘Broadcasting and Narrowcasting: How Audience Size Affects What People Share’, narrowcasting ‘encourages people to share content that is useful to the message recipient’. Moreover, it influences how ‘the communication sender (vs receiver) plays a relatively larger role in what people share’ (Barasch & Jonah 2014).

In my research, there is a paucity of information around an agreed history of podcasting. Even those who have built what is considered a go-to history state that ‘the history of podcasting was piecemeal and far from definitive’ (Roff & Dellarocca. 2016).

Carolyn Marvin (1990, p.7), in her book, *When Old Technologies were New*, writes of these new interpretive activities found in media:

The temptation to derive social practice from media artifact has also supported another notion, common to media analysis, that separates media embrace distinct and self-contained codes, or spheres of interpretive activity. Concrete arenas of communication are always more complex than this.

When learning from the histories of related media, it is evident that as far back as early electricity and electricians, particularly those who applied their trade to truth-seeking, that modern media, like podcasts, are not alone in being viewed as those who may be claiming to have special knowledge, even considered by some as charlatans of their age. Like the ones written of in the March 19, 1887, issue of the *Electrical Review*;

The “finale” of an electrical lecture by Edison Company representatives in Boston in 1887 was a spiritualistic séance. “Bells rung, drums beat, noises natural and unnatural were heard, a cabinet revolved and flashed fire, and a row of departed skulls came into view, and varied colored lights flashed from their eyes”. (Marvin 1990, p.56)

In broadcasting, podcasting may not be seen in such dramatic ways, but it is considered young in its digital expression. According to most publications and online services, the podcast as we know it is cited to have begun in 2003. (Locke 2017) Its inception dates six

years earlier to 1999 when the RSS (Really Simple Syndication) (2021) feed was developed. An RSS feed ‘refers to files easily read by a computer’.

In 2001, software developer David Winer, radio host Adam Curry and Tristan Louis, who had proposed attaching audio to RSS feeds, began experimenting with audio on RSS feeds. This, in turn, would become the ubiquitous podcast. Winer, Curry and Louis are commonly cited as bringing about the inception of podcast experimentation. And these RSS feeds can be updated automatically, bringing access to downloadable web blogs, which were popular in the 2000s. (Roff & Dellarocca. 2016)

Yet, according to *Wired Magazine's* ‘The First Podcast: an Oral History’, the first released podcast began with ‘Christopher Lydon’s Open Source, an RSS feed of audio files released in Cambridge in 2003’ (Locke 2017). This first podcast was considered in 2004, by the Guardian author Ben Hammersley, as an ‘audible revolution’ in his article of the same name, in which the word *podcasting* was first used. Hammersley (2004) quotes Lydon:

“It’s an experiment, really”, says Christopher Lydon, the ex-*New York Times* and National Public Radio journalist and now a pioneer in the field. “Everything is inexpensive. The tools are available. Everyone has been saying anyone can be a publisher, anyone can be a broadcaster”, he says, “Let’s see if that works.”

Why was podcasting even a need? There was already had easy access to television, radio and print media; was more needed? Lydon’s idea that ‘anyone can be a broadcaster’ and the democratisation of communication appealed to many. Host of arguably the first podcast, Christopher Lydon, states, ‘In the months leading up to the war, every major news institution you could think of was gung-ho for it. The conventional stewards of public conversation were asleep, and the country was unbelievably uninformed. I was dying to say something’. (Locke 2017)

Hammersley (2004) further underlines the liberating importance of podcasting for listeners and podcasters both, writing, ‘Liberating the listeners from time and place, and allowing them to talk back to the programme-makers is one thing: liberating the programme-makers is even better’.

Originally called everything from audio blog posts and audio blogging to ‘walk-away content’ and ‘guerrilla media’ (Cochrane 2005, p.6) *Open Sources* producer Mary McGrath

echoed her host's sentiment when saying, 'We thought that the internet could erase the limitations of radio. The online format that we imagined could be honest and frank, and it did not have to have that kind of false balance that so much media had been encumbered by'. (Locke 2017)

The digital age of punk broadcasting had begun. A time when, where, and how you listened was not as limited. A time without a corporate muzzle and with untethered language. A place where raw emotion and opinion had a digital megaphone.

Again, Lyndon says:

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: It was a huge gift from the internet. We knew we were at a turning point. I would get into my car and listen to public radio, and I thought: God, this is like dark ages. The world is never going back. (Locke 2017).

Podcasting's history had reached a turning point. It had found a voice, a platform and a community of people looking for a new megaphone -- and they found a digital one. Producer of early podcasts Mary McGrath says, 'One of the reasons I think podcasting is having another moment right now, just like it was during the Iraq War, is because of the Trump campaign: people need help processing where we are in America, and where we're going'. (Locke 2017)

The first big wave of growth came in 2005 when Steve Jobs opened up the format to a broader audience when 'Apple offered more than 3,000 free podcasts on iTunes. Steve Jobs explained podcasting was like "TiVo for radio..." (Quah 2017). TiVo is a digital video recorder that allows you to stream, record, pause, stream and store live television.

According to Nicholas Quah (2017), the founder and publisher of *Hot Pod*, a newsletter about podcasts, 'The next turning point came in 2008, when the iPhone 3G, along with the Android-powered G1, hit the market and let listeners download audio files on the go'. This access greatly increased the ability to listen to podcasts. Within a few years, the 'number of people who listened to podcasts shot up (from 9 percent of Americans to 15 percent, by one estimate) ...' (Quah 2017).

This increased popularity brought a growing interest from many disciplines, including the tech industry, comedians, religious streams and political pundits.

Advertisers would soon follow. Nevertheless, the archaic nature of tracking the audience analytics was still in development, making it ‘... hard to attract big advertisers. According to some estimates, annual ad revenue topped out at seven figures, and most podcasts flew under the radar’ (Quah 2017).

This all began to change in 2014 when two distinct areas converged, namely access and content.

1. Apple’s stand-alone podcast app went native with iOS 8, elevating the medium to its highest level of public visibility.
2. A little show called *Serial* premiered. The series was the fastest podcast to reach 5 million downloads and streams in Apple’s history.... (Quah 2017)

Serial was an investigative journalism podcast, a genre of podcast that still has a large following to this day. Online magazine *Vulture* is going as far as to say in its article, ‘The 10 True-Crime Podcasts That Changed Everything’ that ‘This list (and, some may argue, an entire era of podcasting) might not exist without *Serial*’ (Lavoie 2021).

Shortly after, in September 2015, the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) gathered to look at how to monetise and sell advertising time in podcasting. At this gathering, the IAB forecast and ushered in the joinery from access and content to monetisation, stating that ‘Ad revenue is predicted to top \$220 million by the end of 2017, up 85 percent from 2016’ (Lavoie 2021).

The history of podcasting was now irrevocably changing at the time of publication in 2017 and with the emergence of more efficient analytical tools, ones that would ‘measure both the size of an episode’s audience and whether people actually listen to it’ (Lavoie 2021). Nicholas Quah's (2017) article highlighted the concerns for listeners and podcasters, stating, ‘Some longtime podcasters fear these new tools will only further commercialise podcasting and make it harder for independent, idiosyncratic publishers to attract those advertisers who value scale above all else...’.

Raymond Williams discussed a space of emergence beyond the residual and dominant, ‘What matters, finally, in understanding emergent culture, as distinct from both the dominant and the residual, is that it is never only a matter of immediate practice; indeed, it depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptations of form’ (Williams 1978, p.126).

Podcasting has now carved out a unique cultural space. According to Llinares et al. in their book, *Podcasting New Aural Cultures and Digital Media* (2018, p.30):

‘Podcasts are made by podcasters, not radio producers, and for mobile listeners, in search of niche content, who listen on-demand. It is this sense of purpose, combined with improvements to technologies, funding mechanisms, talent development and profile, that has helped podcasting to mark out its own cultural space’.

Yet, the question of neutrality and the impact of using this digital tool and the media ecology arises. On the 2021 podcast, *The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill Podcast*, host Mike Cospers and guest Nick Bogardus unpack Media Ecology:

Mike Cospers: Here’s Nick Bogardus, who was Mars Hill’s PR and Media Relations Director, and was later the lead pastor at the Orange County campus. His time at Mars Hill led to a lot of reflection on the formative role of media in the spiritual life of the church.

Nick Bogardus: There’s a whole field of study called media ecology that I got into. Most people know Neil Postman, Marshall McLuhan. And so the argument that field makes is that when technology is introduced into an environment, it’s rarely neutral. A tool can sometimes be neutral in its usages, but it always impacts the environment. And so you can’t overestimate the power that it has to form, and the problem is that often we don’t notice it, or we assume its benefit without asking the hard questions about how it’s shaping us in return. (Cospers 2021)

As podcasting progresses, we can see in retrospect how ‘Early uses of technological innovations are essentially conservative because their capacity to create social disequilibrium is intuitively recognised amidst declarations of progress and enthusiasm for the new’ (Marvin 1990, p.234).

The question remains: Who will inhabit this social disequilibrium as both producers and listeners?

2. Podcasting: Listenership

In order to understand the listenership of those who tune into podcasts, we must first look at the features, statistics and concepts surrounding the listenership of podcasting.

Podcasting Features

In Martin Spinelli and Lance Dann's 2019 book, *Podcasting The Audio Media Revolution* they offer a list of eleven podcasting features. These include 'interior and intimate modes of listening', where podcasts can be consumed; how podcasts enable the listener to exhibit more control over their listening habits; listener engagement; global reach; interconnectedness of social media; lack of regulation or restraints over the creation of podcast and their subject matter; the zero charge 'freemium model'; consistent availability; the ability to edit after release; and zero restraints on length or release dates. (Spinelli & Dann, 2019, p.243-246)

These primary podcast features exhibit the user-facing orientation of the medium of podcasting. Easy, consistent access to specific genres and sub-genres of content, the interaction of social media communities and the primary solo act of listening can bring about an intimate user experience unique to this medium.

The podcast's journey from its inception in 2000 to its viral phenomenon, exacerbated further by the Covid-19 pandemic, is extraordinary.

According to RTE News Online (2021) 'The number of new podcast launches mushroomed last year compared to 2019, a download-tracking firm has said, as listeners around the world adapted new habits during pandemic-induced lockdowns'.

3. Podcast Statistical Overview

To understand the impact of podcasts on society today, we need to understand the statistics based on listener demographics and behaviour and the growing prominence of podcasts. It is worth noting that the digital world moves rapidly, with today's podcast statistics eclipsing quickly. I am offering multiple snapshots of a place and time in podcasting, and I would suggest they should be viewed as such.

Multiple companies have been created to capture the growth of podcasting, primarily US based. Podtrac, Podcast Insights, Infinite Dial and Chartable are just a few that have become prevalent portals of communication and information in recent years. These insights can still give us an understanding of podcasting demographics, usage and tech behaviours, providing the ‘podcast industry’s only ranking of top publishers, as well as the industry’s only ranking of podcasts based on unique audience counts’ (Podtrac 2020).

The newest statistical research on listenership comes from the online podcasting resource *Podcast Insights* (2021a). According to the ‘2021 Podcast Stats and Facts (New Research from Jan 2021)’ (2021b)., there are currently over 2,000,000 podcasts available as of December, 2021. And ‘There are also over 48 million episodes as of April 2021’.

2022 statistics, according to Demandsage (Ruby 2022), are reporting that there are 383.7 million podcast listeners globally, with Insider Intelligence (2021) forecasting around 424 million podcast listeners worldwide by the end of 2022. Further Demandsage (Ruby 2022) states, “As of June 2022, there are over 2.4 million podcasts with over 66 million episodes between them”.

Demographics

These demographics from Podcast Insights (Nielson 2017, cited in Podcast Insights 2021), and Infinite Dial 2020 and 2022, based on USA listener statistics, give a greater insight into the behaviour of listeners.

- 55% (155 million) of the US population has listened to a podcast – up from 51% in 2019 (Infinite Dial 20) with and estimated 177 million listening in 2022 (Infinite Dial 22).
- 37% (104 million) listened to a podcast in the last month – up from 32% in 2019 (Infinite Dial 20) with and estimated 109 million listening in 2022 (Infinite Dial 22).
- Infinite Dial 2022 reports that weekly podcast listeners in the US averaged eight podcasts in the last week (Infinite Dial 22).

- In 2020, 49% of podcast listeners of those surveyed identified as female with 51% identifying as male. (Infinite Dial 20) In 2022, 46% of podcast listeners of those surveyed identified as female with 53% identifying as male and 1% identifying as non-binary (Infinite Dial 22).
- Age of monthly podcast listeners versus US population (Infinite Dial 20) and in (Infinite Dial 22):
 - In 2020, 12-34: 48% vs 47% in 2022.
 - In 2020, 35-54 with 33% in 2022.
 - In 2020, 55+: 20% in 2022.

Where, What, When, How

- 49% of podcast listening is done at home, down from 51% in 2017. In 2022 the percentage grew to 59%.
- 22% listen while driving (in a vehicle), the same as in 2017. In 2021 the percentage was down to 20% in Q4.

Social, Technology and Behaviour

- Podcast listeners are much more active on every social media channel (94% are active on at least one – vs 81% for the entire population). 2022 figures not available.
- 69% agreed that podcast advertisements made them aware of new products or services. 2022 figures not available.
- According to Infinite Dial 2022, ‘Share of Ear’ shows that the ‘share of time spent listening to all audio sources’ (U.S. Population 13+) in 2021 was 5% rising to 6% in 2022).

Notably, following the 45+ age category, most listeners come from the centennial and millennial generations, followed closely by Generation X. According to Podtrac, ‘The age of podcast listeners varies by show. Considerable differences in gender and income levels are also seen when comparing individual podcasts versus the overall podcast audience’ (2016).

2019 Podcast Statistics and Facts Infographic



Figure 10: Podcasting statistics and facts 2019 (Podcast Insights (2021b))

Statics are more readily available in the US markets due to the volume of podcast listeners and monetisation, depicted in Podcast Insights (2021b) info-graphic. It is evident that ‘Around 7.1 million people in the UK now listen to podcasts each week. That is one in eight people, this is an increase of 24% over the past year – and more than double over the past five years’ (Ofcom 2019). Moreover, ‘According to New York-based Chartable, a total of 885,262 new podcasts were launched worldwide in 2020, almost triple the 318,517 new offerings the year before’ (RTE News Online 2021). Further, when uploaded as of December

5, 2022, ‘There are over 73 million episodes in Apple Podcasts and over 19,500 new podcasts added to the directory in the last 30 days’ (Buzzsprout 2022c).

However, staying power is lacking. Chartable, a company that creates podcast analytics and attribution tools, are leading the research to see what elements of fad or trend exist and how those can differ from the production of long-term platforms for content creation. Chartable cites, ‘About 30% of new podcasts only have one or two episodes, with content creators trying out the medium’ (Zohrob 2021).

Notably, there is still 70% remaining with more than two podcasts, of which ‘almost one-quarter of podcasts started in 2021 have already published more than 10 episodes’, according to Chartable. Additionally, Chartable cites, ‘That adds up to more than 200,000 new podcasts with real staying power’ (Zohrob 2021).

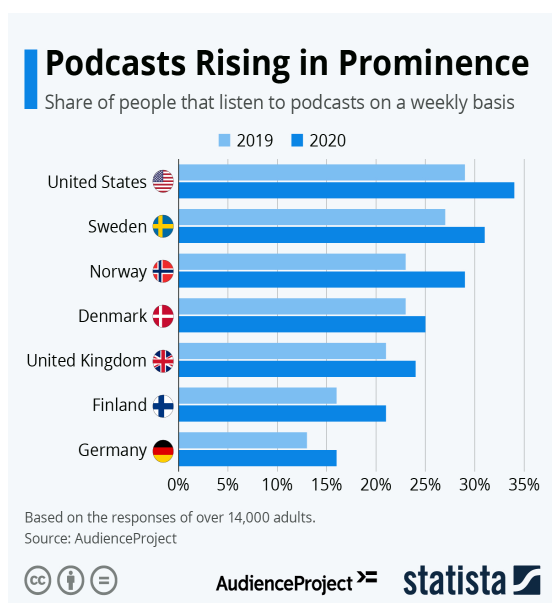


Figure 12: Podcasts rising in prominence (Armstrong 2020a)

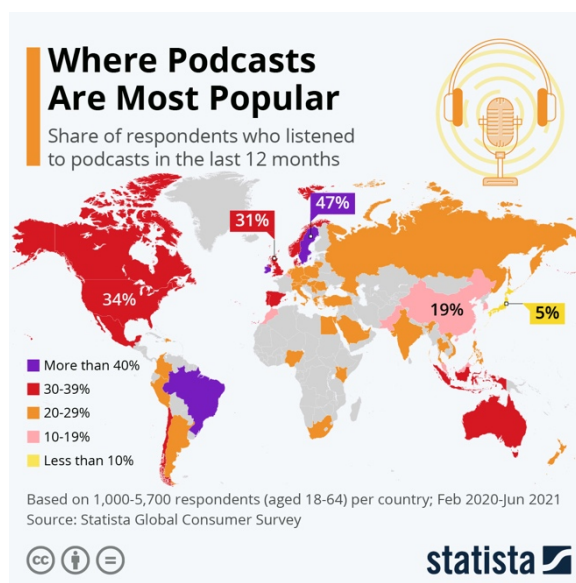


Figure 11: Where Podcasts are most popular (Zandt 2021)

The idea that podcasts are just for those who speak English is dated, with the growth of non-English speaking podcasts, as ‘just under half of the new programs coming in other languages. Hindi-language podcasts grew the quickest, with a 14-fold increase, followed by Chinese, Portuguese, Indonesian and Spanish’ (Zohrob 2021).

South Korea, Spain and Ireland lead in general podcast listenership, according to Statista’s (Richter 2021) ‘Podcast Popularity Across the Globe’. Regarding prominence, the United

States, Sweden and Norway have the largest share of people listening weekly. (Armstrong 2020a)

The top publishers of the podcast are *iHeart Radio*, *NPR* and the *NY Times*, with *iHeart Radio* at 266.1 million global unique streams and downloads in October 2020. (Armstrong 2020b) Though increasing in downloads the statistics in 2021 show similar publishers in the global top ten.

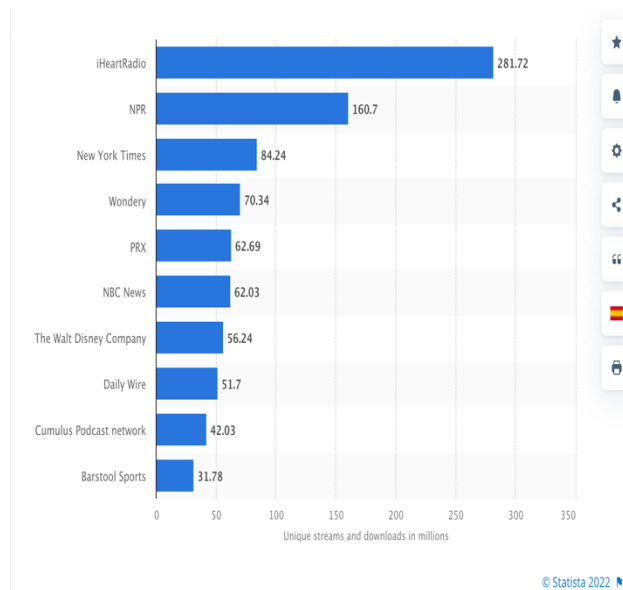


Figure 13: The world's top podcast publishers 2021 (Götting 2021)

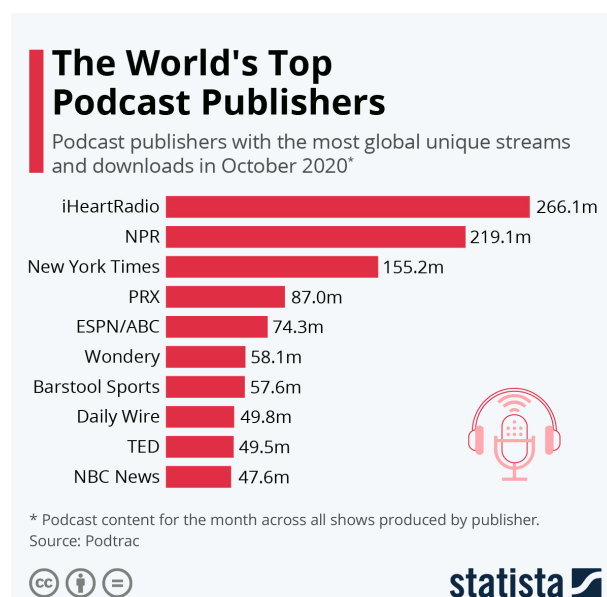


Figure 14: The world's top podcast publishers 2021 (Götting 2021)

Tracking the Religion and Spirituality Podcast Category

In late 2018, Dan Misener (2018) of Pacific Content ‘analysed 390,000 shows in the Apple Podcasts directory to measure which primary categories have the most shows. In this study, he cited that ‘Christianity, Music and Comedy are the most crowded primary categories. Furthermore, he noted that ‘...the top 3 categories in 2018 look a lot like the top 3 categories in 2015...’ when a similar study had been done.

There is an evident prominence of religious podcasts in the digital landscape. This could be attributed to many things, including the adaptation of those religiously inclined to technology -- a seeming break from tradition, the possible increased desire for a greater understanding of Christianity, and the intimate nature of this format.

Anglican Priest and former pop singer Reverend Richard Coles suggest in the Irish Times (Barners 2022) that ‘Christianity has always been an early adopter of communications technology, from the codex — pages bound in book form — to printing, to broadcast, to online’.

When connecting through the airwaves, the Christian tradition has embraced the new technology of the day, beginning with The Vatican broadcasting radio in 1931 and continuing with podcasting in 2005. New York Times journalist Tania Ralli writes of Father Vonhögen's broadcast Catholic Insider (catholicinsider.com) and its continuation in the podcast arena, 'Podcasting for us has been a resurrection of radio... It's the connection to a new generation.' (2005)

Ralli continues in her article, *Missed Church? Download It to Your iPod*, continues:

Just as Christian organizations embraced radio and television, podcasting has quickly caught on with religious groups. Since the beginning of July, the number of people groups offering spiritual and religious podcasts listed on Podcast Alley (podcastalley.com) has grown to 474 from 177. (2005)

Additionally, in 2005, an early adapter, The Rev. Mark Batterson, coined the phrase 'godcasting' (Ralli 2005) to refer to his religious-based congregation and spread his church's work.

From the earliest days of religious podcasting in 2005, the genre has grown exponentially alongside the expansive growth of podcasting. 'As of June 2022, there are over 2.4 million podcasts with over 66 million episodes between them'. (Ruby 2022) When looking at the current market, Religion has a 16% share. (Howarth 2023) It is worth noting in Edison Podcast Metrics that Religion and Spirituality are now ranked #10 (down from #9 in Q1 2022). (Edison Research 2022)

This shows the exceptional growth in this specific genre of distal communication; some still consider it unorthodox, while others see it as an opportunity for digital discipleship.

Batterson continues, 'I can't possibly have a conversation with everyone each Sunday. But this builds toward a digital discipleship,' he said. 'We're orthodox in belief but unorthodox in practice.' (Ralli 2005)

Further, concerning the production of podcasts in the religion, faith and spirituality genre, Llinares et al. write:

Not surprisingly, given the self-reflexive and independent nature of podcast construction and the intimacy of its format, many self-help-oriented podcasts have arisen in this new content creator's hothouse. Topics range from meditation, language learning and spirituality to happiness, physical health and financial coaching. (2018, p. 228)

In 2018, the category Religion and Spiritual: Christianity also far outpaced the other categories in creating episodes, with '...nearly three times the number of episodes as Music and Comedy. Not only is Christianity the most crowded category by number of shows, it's also by far the most crowded category by number of episodes' (Misener 2018). In 2022 it is being reported that Comedy is topping the charts with 22% and Religion and Faith dropping to 6th place with 16% of the podcast genre audience. (Buzzsprout 2022c)

In 2018 Misener wrote that when it comes to categories that '...produce the highest number of episodes per series, on average...A few Religions and Spirituality sub-categories dominate...' (Misener 2018). Topping the episodic average chart in the Religions and Spirituality sub-categories are, in order of the highest number of episodes per series: Buddhism, Christianity, Spirituality and Islam. This trend continues in Misener's 2021 statistical breakdown. (2021)

Nevertheless, Misener concludes his study, based on demand, by stating, ‘Setting aside the total number of series, religious categories are home to some of the most prolific shows in Apple Podcasts’ (Misener 2018).

Amid these prolific shows and continued expansion of the podcast world, there are eight recommended by the *NY Times* for the spiritual searcher, particularly those looking outside of the established Christian organised traditions. Emma Dibdin (2019) of the *NY Times* writes, ‘Organised religion may be on the decline, with more Americans than ever identifying as either atheist, agnostic or religiously unaffiliated. But spirituality’s grip remains tenacious, with the search for meaning merely taking different paths.’

The *New York Times* suggests the following eight podcasts ‘about spirituality and religion that should be on your radar’ (Dibdin 2019) It is worth noting that half of these, though not exclusively of Christian leaning, have overt ties to the predominant US Christian sub-culture, which may differentiate themselves from the more mainline Christian traditions, including Catholic, Presbyterian and Anglican. This does not suggest that they are actively advocating for the non-traditional sub-culture.

1. *On Being* with Krista Tippett
2. *Oprah’s SuperSoul Conversations* with Oprah Winfrey
3. *The RobCast* with Rob Bell
4. *Tell Them, I Am* featuring Muslim voices
5. *The Potter’s Touch* with Bishop T.D. Jakes
6. *Oh No, Ross and Carrie!* with Ross Blocher and Carrie Poppy
7. *Tara Brach* meditation and mindfulness podcast
8. *Joel Osteen Podcast* with Joel Osteen

4. Podcast Movement

Anything goes. The capturing and production of a podcast can take on many forms, from simply recording on a handheld device to an entire studio set-up with vocal booths and a team of writers and producers. This flexibility in production is widely held as one of the most important reasons for podcasting, as it has a punk rock feel.

Podcasts are still considered the wild west of broadcasting, with no official censorship or regulation, except for requiring _hosts to be fully transparent about any endorsements and

advertising content’ (Moss 2022). However, there are fears with cancel culture and narrowcasting that more regulated laws could come into play. As of 2021, this still is not the case. (Lutkevich 2022)

There is a reason that podcasting has been referred to as the wild west of entertainment. This does not disavow the tension between ‘amateur’ and ‘professional’.

In his book *Podcast Movement: Aspirational Labour and the Formalisation of Podcasting as a Cultural Industry*, Sullivan (2018) writes of the tension between the formal and informal and the wrestling for the identity of the podcast ‘...the deep tensions between two competing discourses at Podcast Movement: the formalisation of podcasting production practices, and utopianism of self-expression, authenticity, democratisation, and media diversity. These tensions are indicative of a broader struggle for podcasting’s identity’.

At the podcasters conference *Podcast Movement 2016*, the film director Kevin Smith argued that ‘...everyone now had access to technologies that allowed them to “self-express”, which allowed for podcasting to be enjoy the status of a uniquely democratic medium’ (Llinares et al., 2018, p.45).

In Ben Hammersley's (2004) Guardian Online article ‘Audible Revolution’, he writes of one of the founders of podcasting Christopher Lydon:

By combining the intimacy of voice, the interactivity of a weblog, and the convenience and portability of an MP3 download, Lydon's work seems to take the best of all worlds, and not just for the listener. The ability to broadcast out, and have the internet talk back to them, Lydon says, is very appealing to journalists: professional hack and weblogger alike.

It is interesting to note that there are still far fewer podcasts than blogs. According to *Podcast Insights* (2021a), ‘As of February 2021, there are just over 1.75 million podcasts, but over 600 million blogs. This does not include the 23 million *YouTube* channels existing today. Although podcasting seems to be a crowded and competitive market, in comparison to blogging, it is still relatively open. Podcast hosting site *Buzzsprout* (2022a) adds, ‘There is a lot of unexplored space in the podcasting industry’.

In 2014, along with 2 of my colleagues, we began a podcast called *The Graveyard Shift*. In Ireland and the faith-based sub-culture, this was one of the first. (McGuire 2017) *The Graveyard Shift* was a podcast about faith, life and Christian culture from an Irish perspective. The listenership steadily increased, with 131,887 downloads (Libsyn 2020) at the height of its popularity. *The Graveyard Shift* went to Number One in the Religion and Spirituality category a few times in the early years. A total of 187 episodes were completed over the six years, promoted via *Twitter*, *Facebook* and *Instagram*. Every episode focused on current news events, and some episodes featured interviews, as well as games like '50 Shades of Pray'. We recorded in living rooms, universities, kitchens and live music festivals. The establishment and production of *The Graveyard Shift* were time-consuming and followed what can now, in hindsight, be seen as a formulaic approach to setting up a podcast.

Podcast Team

Understanding the need for a podcast team can directly impact how those in the Religion and Spirituality market themselves and how the hosts/practitioners build their platform. To this method of communication, it is helpful to understand how podcasts are made and to reveal the scaffolding for this conversational platform.

According to *Spotify for Podcasters* (2019), the strongest podcast teams have six roles to fill.

Podcast Team:

1. Host
2. Executive producer (aka The Showrunner)
3. Editors
4. Senior producer
5. Producer
6. Engineer

Podcasting is time-consuming, and getting the balance between the business of podcasting and the creation of podcasts can be complex. Josh Elledge, podcaster, newspaper columnist, radio host and comedian, in his *Podcast Movement 2016* session, 'Go from Podcaster to Media Superstar' suggested that '...we end up spending so much time on the nuts and bolts of podcasting that we're not growing our business'. He went on to recommend that '...you do is that you spend twice as much time -- this is a good litmus test -- twice as much time

building the business of your podcast than actually working on your podcast' (Llinares et al 2018, p.47).

Maintaining a podcast for any podcasters is the number one challenge. Content creation is challenging to do with any level of consistency. This is why a team can be beneficial. However, teams and sustaining the growth of listenership platforms can cost a lot of time and money, but as seen in the following section, it can, for some, also create substantial revenue streams.

5. Podcast Monetisation and Rankings

When reviewing the significant financial rewards and expenditures surrounding podcasting, we can see how those who want to generate a larger platform, those in the religion and spirituality market in the case of this study, must wrestle with the challenges this monetisation - whether direct or indirect - generates. This relates to the ability to reach larger numbers of listeners (due to larger marketing budgets), the improved programme quality that may be possible through financial support, and the fact that financial remuneration to the hosts can bring broadcasting longevity. All of this can lead to building significant platforms to influence and resource the spiritual landscape through podcasting.

In this section, I investigate the complexities found in podcast monetisation and the dual frameworks utilised in generating and producing podcasts. 'It is important to observe that there are two different frameworks at play here: seeing a podcast as a means to generate money and needing money to produce a podcast' (Spinelli & Dann 2019, p.129-130). Yet, the question often presented, when discussing the monetisation of podcasting, is whether passion or money comes first.

At the podcasters conference *Podcast Movement 2016*, radio and podcast host Glynn Washington stated when answering questions about why podcasts are made, thinking of podcasts as 'the next frontier of narrative', that 'There is not enough money here to make us care about anything else. We are here because of that magic, that storytelling, that passion. Because there are easier ways to get paid [audience laughter]. I am feeling some things as a storyteller. This is a storytelling craft' (Llinares et al., 2018, p.42).

Washington articulates the opportunity and intimacy of storytelling and the invitation into another's story that podcasting can bring due to zero regulation.

Although it may be difficult to judge the individual or a podcaster's motivation, it is from the claim of studies such as those done by Alex Blumberg on his commercial podcast network Gimlet Media that money follows passion.

Anytime we tried to do things because we think, oh there's definitely a market for this", it doesn't work as well as when we just try to do something [with an attitude of] "here's a show that somebody really feels quite passionate about doing." That's what works, and that's when we get the audience, and then the money can follow from that. (Blumberg 2017, cited in Spinelli 2019, p.264)

Furthermore, money has followed. Schlossberg at Walk-On Holdings writes that 'According to the latest information, the monetization of podcasting is exploding, reaching \$1.33 billion in 2021 — and climbing still, potentially hitting \$3 billion by 2023.' (Schlossberg 2002)

With increased listenership comes higher earnings.

The Top Five Podcasts and Yearly Earnings: (Armstrong 2020c)

1. *The Joe Rogan Experience* | \$30 million
2. *My Favorite Murder* | \$15 million
3. *The Dave Ramsey Show* | \$10 million
4. *Armchair Expert* | \$9 million
5. *The Bill Simmons Podcast* | \$7 million



Figure 15: The highest-earning podcasts (Armstrong 2020c)

According to the podcast hosting platform *Castos* (2021), there are two main ways to generate income via podcasting in the *direct monetisation* category. The most popular being *direct* podcast monetization and the other is *indirect* podcast monetisation.

‘Direct podcast monetisation is when the show is the thing you’re selling. You can profit from creating original content, repurposing it, and granting exclusive access to paying members...On the other side is indirect podcast monetization. This is when you use your podcast as a tool to sell other things. Your podcast becomes the vehicle to promote products and create demand among your listeners’ (Castos 2021).

Most podcasts have a blended strategy that finds a balance between many economic options.

When looking at the genre of this thesis and then at podcasts in the religion and spirituality sector, podcasts like *The Liturgists*, which is ranked by popularity as the 88th in the USA (highest rating at seventh), have landed 357th in *Patreon*. *Patreon* is an online platform where you can create a platform of invested followers through paid membership tiers. (Since 2014 *The Liturgists* and Mike McHargue spin off podcast *Ask Science Mike* podcasts have led the western Christian diaspora with 2-4 million unique downloads combined between

the two at 250,000-300,000 per month.) (Payne 2018) *The Liturgists* have 2,981 patrons with a ‘best guess’ of undisclosed earnings between \$8-22,000 monthly, as reported by *Grahtreon* (2021). It is also worth noting that they have had a 30% drop in patrons over the last six months, with it being at number 18th in Feb 2020 and 88th in *Patreon* rankings a year later.

Once money, thorough advertising, and the exchange of money for access, as in *Patreon*, has been introduced into the host and listener relationship, it has a way of bringing into question the motives of a podcast. It alters and can even threaten the host and listener relationship.

As Spinelli and Dann (2019) state, ‘This relationship becomes clouded once sponsors and advertisers are introduced into the process and can create the perception that a host is no longer telling their audience something because they want to, but because they are being paid to do so’. Llinares et al. echo that ‘...any sign of overt commercialism threatens the perceived integrity and originality of amateur-produced media’ (2018, p.44).

It is evident from this research that the question and complexity in the relationship between monetisation and integrity, interests and their intuition, commercialisation and intimacy, and between podcasters and pod-listeners will continue to complicate the podcast environment as it evolves.

Information on the monetary position of the podcasting bodies and podcasts hosts within this study was not publicly available nor demonstrable as many are run as charities and as personal platform-building exercises, in addition to the multi-staffed team productions. As seen previously in this chapter, with podcasts being as inexpensive as using a phone to record on, up to a studio with staff, it is difficult to begin to put a price on what they can cost. Important issues concerning transparency, profits and the benefits gained by sponsors are yet to be addressed.

The challenges faced as an artist-researcher in conveying many statistics and lists of information in a documentary film are extensive. A capsule history, along with key statistics, is exhibited in the final film thesis. (TC 00:03:41)

Podcast Future

Looking toward the future of podcasting, *Pacific Content*, an audio content brand developer, defines 20 industry predictions. As new players enter the market and old rivalries like *Apple* and *Spotify* intensify, as consolidation continues and listener growth explodes, we will enter into the era of podcasting as a multi-billion-dollar industry. This will be fuelled by the growth of programmatic advertising and new revenue models and strategies. As podcasts become more ubiquitous, morphing into new modes, with distribution moving from downloads to streaming, personal and corporate blogs will move to the podcast framework, and experimentation with new distribution channels will emerge. As content becomes more diverse, polarised and discoverable, podcasts will go global, growing in ‘relevance in the overall media ecosystem’ (Misener 2018). With the development of new smart speaker hardware and software apps, accessibility to the podcasting ecosystem will become easier than ever.

Conclusion

This chapter offered a wide angle introduction to the contemporary religious landscape and briefly examined digital tools for conversation. It also addressed new media formats in podcasting, its ecosystem and what it takes to create and maintain a podcast.

In evidencing the decline in attendance of traditional or institutionalised churches and some reasons for this decline, I also described the emerging religious landscape in which the podcast has enabled new connections and conversations and had amplifying effects in both reflecting and helping to create a new spiritual movement. I looked at the rise of podcast listening and the role it plays within this growing diaspora of those negotiating new relationships to organised religion as well as its role in how this diaspora is being created and becoming visible to itself.

I also explored continuing shifts in how the term spirituality is being defined and deployed within North American culture, noting the continued growth of interest in spirituality even amid the decline of formal religious affiliations.

This chapter addressed how a growing 'spiritual diaspora' is looking for and finding leaders, whose primary mode of communication is virtual rather than in-person, and whose primary means of communication is the podcast

In this Chapter, I also traced the podcast's history, from its early 'punk' era to the billion-dollar industry it has become today. Paying attention to the growing listenership, we can see the possibilities for hosts/practitioners to use their podcasts to develop local, national and global communities.

This chapter also contained a basic guide to how podcasts are made and an introduction to the complexities of podcast monetisation. It included statistical analysis of the relative popularity of different podcast genres and considered projections about the future of podcasting.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Selecting a Methodology

This section describes the process and challenges associated with selecting a methodology. It also unpacks how I have arrived at using a blended methodology in light of the interdisciplinary nature of this research.

Before I discuss using my chosen methodology, the Cinematic Phenomenological Research Method and its place within creative practice research, I will set out how I arrived at this methodology, as this journey informed the practice and defined the process. This method will utilise interviews gathered through filmmaking as the primary research method.

Finding the best research method involved additional complexities due to the interdisciplinary form of the research, based on both theology and film, especially as the theology was revealed in and through creativity. In my case, the art of filmmaking and interviewing are the tools for understanding God and spirituality in the digital landscape and the search for the understanding of theology *through* the art form, in keeping with this doctorate's approach to 'theology through creative practice'. In research, a consistent line of questioning arises around what comes first: the theory or the art. The research or the creative practice? Could this mutuality create a healthy reciprocal relationship? Can it be that multiple approaches are not mutually exclusive and can coexist and contribute to one another? Smith and Dean assert that '...practice can result in research insights, such as those that arise out of making a creative work and/or in the documentation and theorisation of that work' (Smith & Dean 2009, p.2).

Moreover, as an artist-researcher the journey included learning to lean toward academia, its processes and language. At the same time, at times, against my instincts as an artist, I was encouraged to build the academic foundation for my art first. This conflict made me look more deeply at many methodologies and their attributes. Yet, any awareness of defining a specific methodology that could singularly encompass discovery in the

multiple areas of theology, film, interview, conceptual visual metaphors, spirituality and cultural movements proved challenging. As Smith and Dean write:

Attempts at definitions of research, creative work and innovation are all encircled by these fundamental problems – that knowledge can take many different forms and occur at various levels of precision and stability, and that research carried out in conjunction with the creation of an artwork can be both similar to, and dissimilar from, basic research (2009, p.4).

I learned that knowledge could be uncovered in many ways, through many means, especially when the art is being carried out in connection with the research or as a means of research. However, the discovery developed over time, ‘... just as the research problem emerges and evolves during the study, so the benefits of the research are likely to evolve and transform over time’ (Smith & Dean 2009, p.217).

The subject matter and research are focused on leadership and the hosts of podcasts in the digital audio medium. Further, it considers the role podcasts play in influencing, resourcing and forming spirituality in others. This research is also phenomenological as I, the interviewer, am experiencing the moment and expressing it in my film direction, just as the interviewee is telling me their experiences and story. This can be seen in the reflections both on film and in Chapter 5.

Having researched many methodologies and their attributes, and as this is an interdisciplinary project, I decided to use the synthesis of methodologies found collectively in the Cinematic Phenomenological Research Method, a practice-based research method with a qualitative approach through filmmaking. The Cinematic Phenomenological Research Method is a type of scavenger methodology (Halberstam, 1998, p.13), a form of bricolage, used to create and construct a unifying gesture. As defined more thoroughly below, this process combines the observational gathering practices of interviewing with the artistic and performative research practice of filmmaking.²

It has become evident that this method not only draws on accepted working methods but also works comfortably in my work as an artist-researcher when answering the research question: ‘Given the increase in USA-based podcasts that address Spirituality, how do the

² See Chapter 5, “Discussions and Reflections” and the Interview with Krista Tippet. In this interview, I utilise a live interview to critically examine the roles of the observer and interviewee and briefly discuss The Hawthorne Effect.

hosts of these podcasts understand the ways in which they resource or influence the spiritual landscape?’

The Cinematic Phenomenological Research Method is drawn from the work of Nisha Gupta and the French phenomenological philosopher and author Maurice Jean Jacques Merleau-Ponty. It is advantageous to quote them at length to understand this blended methodology I am undertaking in this research.

Some phenomenological researchers have indeed begun to advocate for an “aesthetic phenomenology” that conveys research findings in artistic ways, such as poetic prose and visual drawings (Todres & Galvin, 2008; Mahone, 2014). Cinema is a natural next step for the movement towards aesthetic phenomenological research. The sensuality of cinema mirrors the sensuality of phenomenological research; each seeks to express profound meanings of lived experience and being-in-the-world in an evocative, perceptual, experience-near manner. As Merleau-Ponty enthusiastically affirmed, phenomenology “consists not in stringing concepts together, but in describing the mingling of consciousness with the world, its involvement in a body, and its coexistence with others ... and this is movie material par excellence” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 59). Filmmakers have intuitively turned to psychological and qualitative research as an essential step in film development and production. Likewise, I am suggesting that phenomenological researchers should consider turning to filmmaking as an intuitive step in our research dissemination (Gupta 2019, p.9).

Cinematic Phenomenological Research Method

This section defines the cinematic-phenomenological research method and how I adapt it. I will also introduce a breakdown of each research procedure to show how I fulfil the required condition of the cinematic-phenomenological research approach. This will primarily be through filmed interviews, as detailed more comprehensively under the *Collect Participants' Anecdotes of Lived Experience* section. Furthermore, I will show how I collected, analysed and distributed the findings through film and written thesis.

Nisha Gupta states:

‘If we collectively seek to heal the wounds of our 21st century sociocultural contexts, we must evolve our language to reflect the culture of our times’ (Gupta 2019, p.9).

Chapter 3 Methodology

The cinematic phenomenological research method, or existential-hermeneutic phenomenological research, was initially developed for a paper by the PFCollective (Phenomenological Film Collective) ‘in order to illuminate lived experiences of sociocultural oppression for public viewership via cinematography’ (Gupta 2019, p.1). In this methodology, they ‘...demonstrate how filmmaking is an appropriate aesthetic language through which to disseminate phenomenological research about lived experiences...’ (Gupta 2019, p.1).

The PFC quote Merleau-Ponty in the paper, to argue that phenomenology ‘consists not in stringing concepts together, but in describing the mingling of consciousness with the world, its involvement in a body, and its coexistence with others ... and this is movie material par excellence’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 59).

The specificity of the cinematic phenomenological research method helped focus not only the documentary filmmaking research but also the theological findings, as it is both descriptive and inclusive. This was found more specifically as the research asked a similar set of questions to each of the interviewees in order to ‘illuminate lived experiences’ (Gupta 2019, p.2).

Gupta’s notes, ‘The Phenomenological Film Collective is founded upon the interdisciplinary vision of researchers and artists coming together to collaboratively produce phenomenological films that illuminate lived experiences of oppression to evoke empathic understanding among the public’ (2019, p.1). This can be seen as describing a growing proportion of western Christian individuals who have experienced levels of oppression in their churches concerning areas of physical, emotional and spiritual abuse and trauma. This oppression, in turn, can develop into what Watkins and Shulman powerfully write in their book *Towards Psychologies of Liberation*, ‘cultures of silence’ (Freire, 1968; Watkins & Shulman, 2008) and an ‘amputation of seeing’ (2008, p51).

Additionally, Gupta states that ‘artwork reverses the ‘amputation of seeing’ (Watkins & Shulman, 2008, p. 51). among the public by refusing to stay silent and daring to disturb dominant sociocultural narratives’ (2019, p.5). This is what I hoped my artwork would not only describe but also illuminate, as Gupta writes, ‘cinematic-phenomenological research embraces the evocative language of cinematography to disclose meanings about a lived experience in a way that can be immediately sensed and perceived, rather than intellectually

or theoretically grasped' (2019, p.5). The implications of this discovery are in the disclosure of meaning that can come from interviewing on film.

I was drawn to this methodology as part of my multidisciplinary research as '...existential-hermeneutic phenomenological research can induce in audiences a newfound degree of thoughtfulness, concern, and even outrage towards certain lived experiences in society' (Gupta 2019, p.3).

Using the cinematic phenomenological research method allowed me to '.... pursue knowledge about the subjective experiences of human beings — how they live through, make meaning of, and experience their "being-in-the-world "' (Heidegger 1996).

I understood that, as Max van Manen, writes:

...the phenomenological researcher's first task is to collect participants' anecdotes of lived experience about a human phenomenon as their chief form of data. Anecdotes are stories that describe a specific experience as it is lived-through in rich, vivid, detail. This rich, detailed quality of anecdotes can illuminate deeper meanings of lived experience than abstract or theoretical reflection could. The researcher's next task is to identify shared thematic meanings that resound across all participants' anecdotes of lived experience, in order to unearth insight about a particular human phenomenon against the backdrop of the shared human condition (Manen 1990, p.39).

It is helpful that this research method allowed for the use of cinematic language in a manner that remains as faithful as possible to our research participants' lived experiences, as described by them during the data collection process' (Gupta 2019, p.6). This method lends itself to the experiential nature of documentary making and interviewing. The interviews are not only filmed more cinematically, but utilise environments, movement, and stylised framing.

There are six research procedures in the cinematic-phenomenological methodology:

1. Select a sociocultural phenomenon for consciousness-raising
2. Collect participants' anecdotes of lived experience.
(This study will concern spiritual formation in the area of podcasting listening.)
3. Code and thematise the data
4. Translate data into cinematic language
5. Produce the film
6. Promote the film

1. Select a Sociocultural Phenomenon for Consciousness-Raising

The cinematic-phenomenological method asks researchers to ‘...identify a sociocultural phenomenon that perplexes us, wounds us, and demands that we open our eyes’ (Gupta 2019, p.6). A sociocultural phenomenon asks if we have experienced or witnessed a type of phenomenon that could have ‘deeper meanings... embedded in the shadows of its lived experience, which cinematic-phenomenology can help bring to light?’ (Gupta 2019, p.6).

I selected the digital sociocultural phenomenon of podcasting to raise consciousness around the diaspora of centennials and millennials, looking at who they are following and learning from in spiritual development. This is exhibited and explained through both the creative practice as well as investigating and accounting for the rise of spirituality and the podcast in Chapter 2.

These centennials and millennials can be further identified as increasing their identification as ‘spiritual’ and participating in a range of ‘spiritual practices’, while decreasing their identification as religious and their participation in traditional forms of religious behaviour and belonging (Heelas & Woodhead. 2008). Those who can bear witness to these ‘cultures of silence’ (Freire, 1968; Watkins & Shulman, 2008) and an ‘amputation of seeing’ (Watkins & Shulman, 2008, p. 51), discovering where this spirituality resides and is expressed. In this, we can see how searching for something beyond the traditional religious institutions can lead to spaces and places like podcasting.

The decreasing identification as religious (as defined in Chapter 2, Religious Landscape) has been driven by many things, predominately the hypocrisy of leadership and lack of clear leadership. Further, areas also articulated in Chapter 2, Religious Landscape, that have led to decline are the politicising of faith affiliations, treatment of women, exclusivity and rejection in areas of gender identity and sexual orientation, diversity, prioritising money over people, child abuse allegations and convictions, insistence of biblical inerrancy and general irrelevance.

The research process for the thesis, *Chasing Solidarity: A Critical engagement with the Hosts of American Spirituality Podcasts*, explored the understanding of:

- 1) The podcast hosts/practitioners' style of influencing, resourcing and leading in the spiritual landscape;
- 2) spirituality among prominent western Christian podcast hosts/practitioners;
- 3) what it is to participate in building a community with centennials and millennials who:
 - A) self-describe their spiritual identity as non-traditional, exiles and nones, and
 - B) are free from the formal control of institutional churches and thus compete in the marketplace of ideas.

2. Collect Participants' Anecdotes of Lived Experience

'...(T)he growing universe of the Nones — the new nonreligious — is one of the most spiritually vibrant and proactive spaces in modern life' (Tippett 2017, p171).

Participant Selection Criteria

The predominant reasons for selecting participants from the United States, or those whose platforms are impacting the US market, are the influence that the United States has upon cultural and digital trends, the prominence of products in the area of spirituality, and the possibility of access to the hosts of these podcasts.

The criteria for selecting these podcast hosts were, the prominence and platform reach of their podcasts, the historical influence of their particular podcasts, and their longevity in both podcasting and work within the Christian or spiritual practice communities. In addition, years of relationship-building and networking had brought the possibility of access to these particular podcast hosts. I was fortunate to have individuals within my media and spirituality-based networks who willingly extended their already established and trusted relationships with me to help me access the hosts/practitioners represented in this study.

Those selected range from nano-influencers (between 1,000 and 10,000 followers) (Ismail 2023) and micro-influencers (between 10,000 and 100,000 followers), and, in one case, macro-influencers (100,000 to 1 million followers). Most hosts/practitioners interviewed would be considered micro-influencers in the global sense but within their sub-culture, could be regarded as mega-influencers (1 to 5 million followers), not based on specific numbers of followers but on the platform share of followers in their specified sub-culture.

These hosts' platforms collectively represent millions of monthly show downloads and millions of social media followers, with some hosts having *The New York Times* bestselling books. Approximate totals reached through a basic multiple platform search from early 2022 show that the hosts/practitioners have an accumulative following of over 3.8 million between podcast, personal and organisational social media feeds. The hosts/practitioners are predominantly from the United States, although one podcast partners with an Australian host and another host is Irish. All of the podcasts are internationally known.

To collect participants' anecdotes, I utilised the cinematic-phenomenological research methodology in the research interview process of this documentary, as we shared the experience – interviewer and interviewee- in the interview process. I considered the process collaborative, as I worked with those with lived experiences, 'Cinematic-phenomenological researchers recruit research participants who have experienced this particular sociocultural phenomenon and are willing to share their lived experiences' (Gupta 2019, p.6).

Through developing trust with the interviewee, they, in turn, would often talk about their experiences as podcast hosts and influencers. As prescribed as part of the research process, I then transcribed 'all data into written form' (Gupta 2019, p.6) interpreting '...participants' anecdotes in order to write a rich, thematic, phenomenological description that evokes the essence of that lived experience, as described by all participants of the study' (Gupta 2019, p.6).

Having worked as a podcast host and co-producers, I was acutely aware that things move much faster in the digital world, and today's statics are rapidly growing with the surge of podcast hosting. Listening continues to escalate, and this includes those who are seeking spiritual formation. (See Chapter 2 for further details)

The movement from bricks and mortar to digital and back can be traced throughout recent history in the business world. This movement has been seen extensively in everything from the print industry, where it has gone from printing to Amazon online and back again to Amazon bookstores (Schaverien 2018); to the revived interests in vinyl records following a journey through the digitisation of music with Napster and iTunes, and back to vinyl. This is now echoed in the bricks and mortars of the church. With the decline of the church, those looking for community are arriving at the podcast space. This, in turn,

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has now led to prominent spirituality-based podcasts, like On Being, CAC (Center for Action and Contemplation) and The Liturgists running large weekend gatherings, including one that I attended October 5-6, 2018 in London. Further research is needed on the development of communities from these podcast movements.

According to interviewee David Kinnaman, author and CEO of Barna Group who specialises in religious research, additional investigation by the Barna Group is taking place around the specific market shares of spiritual-based podcasts, the monetisation of podcasts and their influence on the digital faith communities, infrastructure, costs, and monies earned off said podcasts. However, these are not easy to come by as this information is closely guarded due to the volunteer nature of many of these hosts as well as the charitable organisations some represent. The monetisation of the podcast is addressed more fully in Chapter 2.

As part of the qualitative research (defined more extensively in the section Code and Thematised the Data), I looked at the podcast hosts/practitioners' experiences, stories and shared experiences. In turn, I created the foundation of this documentary film and a greater understanding moving forward in the practice of spirituality among centennials and millennials. I unpacked through the research questions how the participants perceive and understand the world. In addition, this was done through my own recorded reflection of how I observed and gathered their experiences. These, in turn, informed my creative practice in discovering how spirituality can be developed in digital spaces, an under-researched area in this broader field.

The interview process (discussed further in the Produce the Film section of this thesis) and engagement of conversations, through sit down and walking interviews with podcast hosts/practitioners, was the primary source of data gathering, as I recorded subjective experiences. This approach was taken, understanding that 'Any attempt to gather observations through interviewing requires attention to the concrete issues of interview content' (Morgan 1996, p.47).

This learning was also influenced by Ruth Behar's thoughtful understanding of the 'vulnerable observer', - accessible and engaged in the story - where she encourages

researchers to ‘...act as a participant, but don’t forget to keep your eyes open’ (2014, p.4-5).

Understanding Follower-Interviews / Unstructured Interviews

A challenge has presented a conflict for me throughout the PhD process. In my practice, as researcher/interviewer, I asked 19 pre-prepared questions to look for findings within a structure that can be analysed. I asked what comes first, the creative practice or the academic part? Or do they occur simultaneously, with the understanding that ‘...practice can result in research insights, such as those that arise out of making a creative work and/or in the documentation and theorisation of that work’ (Smith & Dean. 2009, p.2). (See Chapter 3) My compulsion is to filter everything through my artistic lens and find it in the making, yet this can cause frustration in this process when writing about it in more of an academic manner. Nevertheless, once I gave in to the process of being an artist in an academic field, I began to see things as two languages melding into one. The academic and the practice were merging, and less was lost in translation.

My theology, being found through creativity, which is, in my case, filmmaking and interviewing, means that I have to lean into that creative practice, even when I want specific answers to specific questions. For example, in my practice as a researcher/interviewer, it seemed disingenuous to interrupt someone to get an answer to a more specific question, when the interviewee was leading me somewhere else.

This has led me to re-imagine the unstructured interview style within my practice in what I define as a follower-interview style. This is an unstructured interview with a twist. The unstructured interview is 'the most flexible type of interview' in which 'the questions and the order in which they are asked are not set. Instead, the interview can proceed more spontaneously, based on the participant's previous answers.' (George 2022) I found re-imagining this concept of an interviewer who follows instead of leads helpful, as an artist looking to explore the content the interviewee presents beyond a set of prescribed research questions. This could be more of a way of reminding myself of the posture I hoped to achieve in the research and film and highlighting a 'co-presence of potentials' (Massumi 2015, p.ix-19). This style does not differ much from classic media interviews that 'provide information and detail, create interest and build awareness.' (Top Agency 2023) However, where this

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concept can vary is in its pre-determined intention toward leaving space for the interviewee to go down 'rabbit holes' and journeys of conversation. A follower interview allows the interviewer to follow the content instead of regulating it due to a prescribed set of academic questions. As an artist, this freed me up to journey 'with' the interviewee instead of waiting at a prescribed destination. More broadly, the idea of a follower-interviewer could also be seen as a theological proposal for a form of leadership where a supportive environment leads to a co-created experience rather than the importation of already-established expert knowledge.

Upon reflection, I have learned that when it comes to interviewing, there is a skill set related to asking the questions that allow the other person to lead. In this place of interviewee confidence, it allows for them to choose to open up, be more vulnerable and lead to new insights. Part of the creative practice of interviewing, and documentary-making, is knowing when to stop leading, and when to follow. These follower-interviews bring the opportunity to know when to be at peace with knowing that you might not know what you thought you would know at the end of the interview. This can result in having a better and more consistent rapport with interviewees in the film. Reflectively, I have learned that the perceived problem is not the problem. Learning and listening, and then following leads to knowing which can bring something far more significant. I pursued this methodology and practised it in every interview of this study.

For example, in McBride's case, her perspective and insight came from a different place than many interviewed in this study. She wanted to focus more on the embodiment, being human and trauma. As a researcher, I wanted to say, what about podcasting? What about creating a community or the technological aspect? However, in my practice as an artist/interviewer, I knew I needed to allow McBride to lead. I had to set aside my prescribed questions and follow the prompts, the instinctual, intuitive overlaps, and the understanding of where the person I interviewed was leading me. Part of the creative practice found in the art of interviewing is not steering toward answers, but allowing the interviewees to lead towards their conclusions. This can be challenging to follow while interviewing, as it begins to go beyond the research boundaries. However, this research has taught me that the role of an interviewer and film director is to follow with intent. In addition, this intentionality brings confidence to the interviewee when the conversation is journeying to unknown places. It also creates trust in the coexistence of the interviewer and interviewee. As discussed more

fully in Chapter 3 on Methodology, Merleau-Ponty maintains that phenomenology consists not in stringing concepts together, but in describing the mingling of consciousness with the world, its involvement in a body, and its coexistence with others ... and this is movie material par excellence' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 59). Visually this can create interviews with pauses that can be seen. This, in turn, can lead to the viewer leaning into the content.

I approached my interviews with a curiosity that would be perceived by those interacting with me with a non-cynical posture. I wanted each interviewee to give their best. I did not have a character that I inhabited and even went to certain extents to show who I am as I approached the interview – whether being self-effacing or serving the guests, even as a guest of theirs. My primary aim was to ensure they were at ease and felt as if they had been heard. This was part of the follower-interview style of enquiry. It is appreciative and respectful in nature. I admire those interviewed and desire a generous outcome in inquiry and relationship. I wanted the interviewees to trust me. In short, my interview style intention was not one of 'gotcha journalism' but of curious enquiry. The filmic consequences of a more welcoming style are that visually you can see the more relaxed nature of the interviewer/interviewee relationship as they interact. This style can also put the viewer at ease, knowing that the enquiry is respectful in nature.

This style of interviewing described directly affected the outcomes of the research. Whether I was interviewing Tippet in a corporate setting, Rohr in a chapel, Bolz-Weber in her home, O'Tuama lakeside or McLaren on Zoom, my interviewing style transcended the environment. The interaction was characterised by consistent sincerity from both the interviewee and I. This interplay is less expected these days when conflict and challenges seem to be most prevalent in interviews.

Ethics Approval

Ethics approval was obtained for this research. The Research Ethics Application, Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects, was approved through the offices of the College of Arts Research Ethics Committee. This also included each interviewee approving and signing all three documents: Consent To The Use Of Data, Copyright Clearance Note And Deposit Instructions, and HIFG Privacy Notice. (See Appendix A)

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Each host/practitioner interviewed was also asked how they would define their ethical responsibility in a digital podcast space, found in Chapter 4 under Interviews and Findings, What the Podcast Is. Questions 7 and 10 of the research questionnaire specifically addressed ethics:

7. What determines the success and defines ethics of these podcast hosts?

10. Does this online platform provide a reconstruction or just a commodification of our pain? Are Podcasts ethically transactional?

Some of the host/practitioner responses to questions of ethics can be found in Chapter 4, an example of which is Gonzalez commenting, 'I think there are tremendous moral and ethical questions around the work of podcasting and how it's done.' (TC 00:50:19). A discussion of the ethical challenges the research raised can be found throughout Chapter 4, Interviews and Findings. Further consideration of the ethical challenges I faced as a researcher can be found within Chapter 5 under 'Interview Reflections'.

3. Code and Thematise the Data

As part of cinematic-phenomenological research, I adhered to the following, 'embark on a traditional data interpretation process to code meaning units' from participants' written data' (Gupta 2019, p.6). Furthermore, in terms of the codes utilised, qualitative research is layered in its gathering, '...the qualitative researcher gathers verbal, and occasionally visual or sonic, evidence' (Gupta 2019, p.6).

The data were collected through primary source material found in interviews with podcast hosts/practitioners. Moreover, thematic analysis of the interviews was done, looking to extract and pinpoint themes and consistent uses of certain types of language and expressions in defining their practices. 'In these combined uses of qualitative methods, the goal is to use each method so that it contributes something unique to the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon under study' (Behar 2014, p.3).

Manen asserts that cinematic-phenomenological research '...derives its roots from a kind of qualitative inquiry called existential-hermeneutic phenomenological research' (Manen 1990, cited in Gupta 2019, p.2). Additionally, Gupta remarks, 'Filmmakers have intuitively turned to psychological and qualitative research as an essential step in film development and

production' (Gupta 2019, p.9). This assisted in the editing process as 'themes can also serve as a structure with which to organise our cinematography into a coherent film' (Gupta 2019, p.6).

Moreover, 'the qualitative approach to gathering data permits...investigational evidence (where the researcher talks with those who can provide information)' (Smith & Dean 2009, p.4). Whether in text or film, Graham writes '...reading or interpretation comes about as a dynamic relationship between the film and the viewer' (Graham, cited in Marsh & Williams Ortiz 1997, p. 35). Graham further explains that '...information has to be interpreted. It is the interpretative process which results in what one "hears" or "sees." which is why there can be so many different interpretations or "readings" of any texts, including film'. (1997, p. 35). Like written texts and with film, there is '...an interplay of the information being transmitted and the reader' (1997, p. 35). I would add viewer to this.

In November 2019, the interview process began with prominent podcast hosts/practitioners influencing this digital space. These included names representing millions of podcast followers who would self-describe their spiritual identity as nones or dones, exiles or post-traditional, amongst other titles. These global podcast hosts are the thought leaders of the most recent Christian diaspora from the western church, primarily based in markets that can sustain podcasts of these sizes, The USA, UK, Canada and Australia. This focused pool of interviews looked from the hosts'/practitioners' perspective and toward their prospective.

Those interviewed defined the many roles of a podcast; the role of race and decolonisation of theology and God through podcasts; the role of empathy in podcasts; the realisation of a podcasts reach, even more than best-selling books; the role of community in podcasts; the need for a church in the digital era; solidarity and the impact of leading podcast movements; and the role of activism in podcasts. As I continued to interview research participants, utilising qualitative methods, I hoped to find an understanding of the social phenomena of those who lead in the areas of fellow spiritual development.

The list below of primary sources interviewed include prominent podcast hosts/practitioners and a total of over 10 hours of filmed conversations. An additional 20 hours of intentional supporting footage (b-roll) was filmed to enhance and illuminate the research interviews,

I conducted interviews with the following podcast hosts:

1. Krista Tippet: On Being
2. Lisa Sharon Harper: Freedom Road
3. Fr Ricard Rohr: Another Name for Every Thing
4. David Kinnaman: BARNAs Church Pulse Weekly
5. Mike “Science Mike” McHargue: fmr The Liturgists, currently Cozy Robot
6. Pádraig Ó Tuama*: Poetry Unbound (also from the On Being stable)
7. Hillary McBride: fmr The Liturgists, currently Other People’s Problems
8. Brian McLaren: Learning How To See
9. Jarrod McKenna*: Inverse
10. Drew Hart: Inverse
11. Shane Claiborne: Red Letter Christians
12. Nadia Bolz-Weber: The Confessional
13. Eddie Gonzalez: On Being, Social Healing Team

It is worth noting that this list is not exhaustive. However, the selected hosts represent some of the most influential and diverse faith leaders in this particular ecosystem.

Research Questions

The research questions used to gather data were developed over the first year and a half of the PhD. They were based on this researcher’s current understanding of podcasting and spirituality. The questions were refined in situ but always acted as the scaffolding for the study.

1. What is spiritual formation to you? What is a church to you?
2. Where and how is spirituality taking root in the millennial generation?
3. What is the role of the podcast with the current Christian diaspora?

4. Can faith/spirituality be formed within a digital community? Where are the new digital congregations taking root, and what are their prominent expressions of spirituality?
5. What do you like/do not like about the podcast format?
6. Are digital "followers" followers, or are they just fans?
7. What determines the success and defines ethics of these podcast hosts?
8. How do these leaders view these new digital followers and vice-versa?
9. Who is talking about the how and where of reconstructed Christianity?
10. Does this online platform provide a reconstruction or just a commodification of our pain?
Are Podcasts ethically transactional?
11. Who is shaping this new theological narrative in the world of podcasting? How are you/they participating in forming the next generation?
12. Who are the new leading voices of the disenfranchised, and what platforms are they using to grow and gather?
13. Which podcasts do you follow?
14. Not having buildings or traditional platforms to lead from, how are leading?
15. To what extent are we at risk of repeating the structures and limitations of the institutions they moved on from?
16. Will we continue to create new traditions?
17. If the current diaspora/ disenfranchised had digital spiritual sacraments/disciplines, what would they look like or be?
18. Is institutional church an optional extra, or is it a necessity for spiritual formation?
19. Where do you find God? Where does God find you?

As discussed in Chapter 5, the questions evolved, as varied threads were followed in the interview process. The venues of interviews also differed; five were conducted during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic over Zoom, and the remaining eight interviews were done at offices, a home, a chapel, a pub, an RV and on a lakeside. The process and effect of space are discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

Further defining the cinematic-phenomenological research method, Gupta writes:

...the existential-hermeneutic phenomenological researcher interprets participants' anecdotes in order to write a rich, thematic, phenomenological description that evokes the essence of that lived experience, as described by all participants of the study. The end-product of an existential-hermeneutic phenomenological research study is an interpretative, written phenomenological description. This description conveys the essential, meaningful structures of a

particular human phenomenon in a manner that allows readers “to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way” (Van Manen 1990, p. 39 cited in Gupta 2019, p. 1).

Conversely, understanding also comes through considering what is visualised and documented, or more generally, as a result of my creative practice.

The exegesis, a written thesis, accompanies an 84-minute-long documentary research film which includes interviews and visual metaphors. Looking forensically at the research as a whole, the finding and reporting endeavoured to answer the thesis question whilst amplifying and defining it.

4. Translate Data into Cinematic Language

‘Cinematic-phenomenologists then engage in a cinematic data-interpretation process in which we approach the data again through the lens of a filmmaker’ (Gupta 2009, p.6).

I believe it is advantageous to quote Gupta at length here:

Cinematic-phenomenologists are acquainted with the basic language of cinematography — that is, mise-en-scene, shot distance, framing and composition, lighting, camera movement, focus, sound effects, music, voiceover, and so on. As such, we are versed in the craft of filmmaking enough to translate participants' data into the language of cinema using our mind's eye. (2019, p. 6)

This was done through participant transcripts acquired through the interview process. Which, in turn, ‘... represented via cinematography — any metaphoric imagery, sensations, movements, gestures, and sounds they have used to express their lived experience’ (Gupta 2019, p. 7). Consequently, I crafted visual metaphors for visual theopoetics, to inspire both aesthetically and existentially, but also to extend the dimensions of the research through practice.

It is suggested that the process of cinematic phenomenology also involves a ‘dwelling with the kaleidoscope of images, sounds, and movements that appear in our imagination, inspired by participants' data. "Dwelling with" data is an important step in the phenomenological data interpretation process, for (Gupta 2019) “when we stop and linger with something, it secretes

its sense, and its full significance becomes ... amplified” (Wertz 1985, cited in Finlay 2014, p. 1).

By dwelling with and ‘witnessing the aesthetics that unfold in our imagination’, I could then create the notes necessary to capture the multiplicity of ‘...images, movements, and sounds in our mind's eye could logistically manifest as cinematic components of a film — that is, shots, scenes, soundtrack, colour grading, and so on’ (Gupta 2019, p. 7).

Gupta writes that it is essential to document these creative findings as we ‘consider how we could realistically execute these cinematic components... organise these components using the thematic categories...assemble a coherent, meaningful narrative for the film, offering a structure for the disparate cinematic components of our phenomenon’ (2019, p. 7).

Moreover, having done so, the method suggests that as these are ‘taken together and organised thematically, we have thus identified the main cinematic elements that can be stitched to evoke our phenomenological film-world’ (Gupta 2019, p. 7).

Paratext, Aesthetic Cognitivism and Intuitive Overlaps

In this research, there are three additional filters that I have found helpful when applying them to creating this documentary research. When applying my understanding of paratext, aesthetic cognitivism and intuitive overlaps to the process of discovery the findings have expounded. In this section I will elaborate on my understanding of these filters and how they have affected this research.

Paratext

Additional learning for me in this process of research was a growing understanding of paratextuality. When attributing paratext to film there is an interplay between understandings of ways a paratext is used in writing and applying paratext frameworks to filmmaking; i.e. the defining priorities of paratext in a written format can be applied to that of filmmaking.

‘Paratexts are textual fragments that surround a text/movie, but cannot be seen as the text itself’ [3,10–13]. They fill the gaps between audiences, the industry, and the text.

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Paratexts are accompanying texts, 'which transform and condition how the audience interprets the main text' (Völcker 2020, p.25). 'A paratext thus is a text that relates (or mediates) to another text (the main work) in a way that enables the work to be complete and to be offered to its readers and, more generally, to the public' (Skare 2020).

This can be seen more commonly in places like the medieval Christian manuscript, the Book of Kells (c. 800 CE), where the authors would lavishly embellish the text. Many transcripts of this time have comments in the margins from multiple authors or transcribers.

Historically paratext is used for print and when referring to film it is in the use of text in book jackets, posters, titles, credits, captions and subtitles, as well as '...toys, video games, advertising campaigns, websites with audience discussions...' (Gray 2010). Today this extends to conversations in social media and written comments in products, emails, pop-up and advertisements. With the prominence of Zoom, paratext can be seen in the comments section of digital conversation, as well as podcasts among other platforms. In this, we can see how paratext, in its 'spatial, temporal, substantial, pragmatic, and functional characteristics' (Genette 1997, p. 4), can be applied to Zoom, social media and podcasting.

Yet, when it comes to film, a bridge between the written word and the seen word is still being explored. In a published discussion with Elif Sendur writes:

Following popular application of Gérard Genette's literary term "paratexts" to film, paratexts here signifies those peripheral items emerging from and encircling a primary (filmic) text. Critically, film paratexts mediate the relationship between audience and film by shaping reputations, expectations and adding meaning to its consumption (Sendur 2019).

Yet, again this is primarily restricted to text, but what of the paratext that exists visually beyond the frame? In this context the paratext is '...a threshold, or — a word Borges used [...] — a "vestibule" that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an "undefined zone" between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary (Genette 1997, p.2, cited in Skare 2020).

I am more interested in this 'undefined zone' without 'fast boundaries' (Genette 1997, 2) where the film can most readily begin to use the language of paratext. The defining priorities of paratext can extend further beyond the ephemeral and into something of more permanence, unseeable by the viewer, as the paratextuality extends beyond the frame into

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the space, the environment of what is being filmed. Challenging the viewer to look to the periphery and asking them to engage in what is not dictated to be seen. The use of paratext features in the research film as I continually reach beyond the frame showing lived experiences and discuss aesthetic judgements. (See Chapter 5)

As a filmmaker I am interested in what's *outside* the frame and how it affects the image *within* the frame, similar to outside of the margins of a written page. The subtext, if you will, of filmmaking is found in the awareness and knowledge of what surrounds the image on the screen, the chaos or joy found just to the left of the frame, and the trust established outside of the frame that allows intimacy within the frame. All of these are paramount to the content's authenticity:

This evolving influence of paratexts on film culture and consumption demands attention, aligning with calls for media literacy in response to this proliferation of technology (Sendur 2019).

The understanding of paratextuality serves as a useful link between filmmaking and the written word, showing the necessity of looking beyond the margins of the page and the margins of the frame when interpreting the film.

Aesthetic Cognitivism

‘Artworks can raise important questions that prompt further inquiry’ (Baumberger 2011, p.12).

I have approached the creation of this documentary thesis not only as a piece that engages the senses visually and audibly but also as one that invites a level of understanding, inquiry and perspective. There is a purposeful aesthetic cognitivism to how this documentary was shot, edited and released. It is part of my creative practice; a creative practice that conducts itself within an “entangled and contested yet innovative and empowering space”, as Susan Kerrigan discusses at length in *Creative Practice Research in Filmmaking and Screen Production*. (Kerrigan et al., 2018).

In the article *Art and Understanding In Defence of Aesthetic Cognitivism*, Baumberger writes, ‘Artworks can deepen our understanding by enabling us to grasp connections between what we already believe’ (2011, p.12).

This deepening connection and the ability to articulate visually has been a lifelong pursuit. I approach art as something that draws me in regardless of reward, an instinctual pull towards a beauty of thought that engages viscerally:

Artworks can provide us with knowledge of how it is (or was or would be) like to have certain experiences or emotions, or to be in a certain situation. They do so by broadening our experience in encompassing things we might never otherwise have undergone or felt (Baumberger 2011, p.13).

To draw the viewer in viscerally, I use a lot of subtraction of content, camera movement and sound, looking at how I can best add meaning. As John Maeda, wrote in his seminal book, *The Art of Simplicity*, ‘Simplicity is about subtracting the obvious and adding the meaningful’ (Maeda 2006, p.89).

Baumberger writes:

Artworks can provide new perspectives on objects that enhance our understanding of them. By emphasizing and attenuating, exaggerating and downplaying, adding and omitting, deforming and alienating, pictures make us aware of hitherto unnoticed features of objects thereby yielding a new way of conceiving of them (2011, p.12).

For me, understanding is not just words or explanations. Art, to me, is not always rational, nor is it untenable. In this way, I pay attention to the in-between of the art when I approach it or when it approaches me. ‘Cognitive functions of artworks only partly determine their artistic value.’ (Baumberger 2011, p.19).

And again, we return to beauty in art and its role. The author Eugene Peterson echoes this when looking at beauty as a ‘sustained and adorational attentiveness’ (Peterson 2017, p.79). Further, when considering visual metaphors, we can look at the definition of aesthetic cognitivism as it refers to the philosophical claim and proposition ‘that art promotes knowledge and understanding’ (Christensen et al. 2023). In this way, it is clear that aesthetic engagement advances knowledge and enhances experience; a particular kind of ‘information’ is received through beauty.

In light of this, the question then becomes: How do I delve more deeply into understanding these discoveries? What is the unseen? Who am I in these stories? How can I look at the excluded middle of this story and experience the beauty of paradox without solving it but just experiencing it? And, in turn, inviting the viewer to do the same.

In my MA Contemplative Psychology Lecture, Dr Jack Finnegan (2017) said, ‘Deep mind beholds paradox, and the meditator looks for the third way’. For me, this third way is a unitive way. This is where we, as Seamus Heaney writes, ‘catch the heart off guard and blow it open’ (Dings 2015, p.73). As a researcher/filmmaker looking to make this invisible visible and engaging aesthetic cognitivism in each frame, being intentional and generous is all part of the artistic expression. As Peterson (2016) writes, ‘Art is making visible what’s invisible...’

Intuitive Overlaps

In this section, I will explore the process of being an artist-researcher, while being an interviewer/filmmaker. I will show how intuition informed and shaped my process and what it was like to be a conduit for content.

‘I am an artist first, making sense of theological knowledge from the creative intuition I have nurtured and refined over the years’ (Fujimura, p.12). Fujimura's quote has been a true north for me. It has allowed me to own the positioning of the research in the making of the art. As well as becoming more at ease with the question of: Do I find theology first and creativity flows or do I create and find an understanding of God within that?

Swiss Calvinist theologian Karl Barth (1958, p.103) in his seminal work, *Church Dogmatics*, would argue that when speaking or representing God:

The attempt to represent Him can be undertaken and executed only in abstraction from this peculiarity of His being (i.e. in relating divinity and humanity), and at the bottom, the result, either in literary or pictorial art, can only be a catastrophe.

The commentary, *Film and Theologies of Culture*, explains Barth's position: ‘In other words, only God can reveal God, and nothing which human beings fashion can enable revelation to happen’ (Marsh & Williams Ortiz 1997, p. 25). In other words, according to Barth (1957, p.179) ‘God is known only by God.’

Further, 20th-century Dutch minister, philosopher of religion, and politician, Gerardus van der Leeuw (2006, p.viii) shares Barth’s commentary on art and theology, ‘Religion and art are parallel lines which intersect only at infinity, and meet in God’.

However, I would push back in that my most profound findings, echoes and clarities of and in God have come when creating, whether it be making a documentary film or curating an

interview. Trusting this creative intuition has led me to this critical interrogation, , and the making of this documentary. I look again to Fujimura (2021, p.13) as he discusses trusting our intuition:

...we must begin by trusting our inner voice, an inner intuition that speaks into the vast wastelands of our time. This process requires training our imagination to see beyond tribal norms, to see the vista of the wider pastures of culture. Therefore, it is part of our theological journey to see the importance of our creative intuition and trust that the Spirit is already at work there...

Alternatively, as actor and writer John Cleese (2021, p.21) writes, when ‘...we are in touch with our unconscious, it sends us hints and gentle nudges’. In turn, the prolific film director Oliver Stone (2020, p.59) speaks to intuition in this regard in his book *Chasing Light*, ‘Maybe by connecting my own dots, I could help not just myself but others to see things they hadn’t seen before’.

I do not see myself as immune to being affected by the interviews conducted, or my role in affecting those reading or viewing these interviews. As veteran BBC reporter Emily Maitlis writes about interviewing the White House's chief strategist under Trump Steve Bannon:

The whole encounter will force me to ask myself uncomfortable questions about the interview process itself. Whether it’s right to air opinions our audience can use to understand this world, or whether we are oxygenating and empowering these views’ (Maitlis 2019, p.192).

This speaks to the interviewer's introspective role and understanding of enquiry, empowering or disempowering those who read or view the work.

In Jessica Johnson’s (2018), book, *Biblical Porn: Affect, Labor, and Pastor Mark Driscoll's Evangelical Empire*, she comments on Brian Massumi's (2015, p.ix-) writing of ‘the power “to affect and be affected”’.

Massumi writes, ‘Thinking through affect is not just reflecting on it. It is thought taking the plunge’, a process of change that is ‘the first stirrings of the political, flush with the felt intensities of life’. (Massumi describes affect as a ‘virtual co-presence of potentials’ through which ‘power comes up into us from the field of potential. It “in- forms” us.’ (Massumi 2015, p.ix-19)

This ‘virtual co-presence of potentials’ beautifully describes the interviewer/interviewee relationship and the desire to find understanding together. This effect-orientated participant-

observation ‘...does not occur in the field, it is of the field’. (Massumi 2015, cited in Johnson 2018, p.4-5)

In these fields of creative practice and art-making, media have many descriptions and conduits many names. Pete Ward writes in *Participation and Mediation: A Practical Theology for the Liquid Church*:

Media of all kinds act as intermediaries, for instance, the postcard or the popular song are both mediations, as are newspapers, television and the internet. Within this understanding of mediation as an intermediary action, institutions, groups and individuals engaged in the production of media are seen as agents that are engaged in shaping communication and meaning (Williams 1996, cited in Ward 2008, p. 107).

I hope the exposure to these interviews and films shapes the perception of leadership in this digital era, and as Ward writes, that it may ‘move theology and set it in motion’ (Ward 2008, p. 108).

The artist and author of *Art+Faith: A Theology of Making*, Makoto Fujimura (2021, p.3) writes:

The somatic knowledge gained through years of making has become a way for me to “understand” my works. And through this act, I begin to feel the compassion of God for my own existence deeply and, by extension, for the existence of others. My works, therefore, have a life of their own, and I am listening to the voice of the Creator through my creation.

As a spiritual person, this is an experiential knowledge that ‘... involves senses, perceptions, and mind-body action and reaction’ (Kerka 2002) has a bearing on my research. It is important to understand myself as an artist and also to recognize that I was born into a western culture that ‘...has been dominated by the separation of cognitive knowledge from embodied knowledge and the distrust of bodily knowing’ (Kerka 2002). This, in turn, causes a conflict, a juxtaposition of my somatic knowledge and a piece of knowledge that is easily explainable. Fujimura (2021, p. 3) speaks to this writing:

Christians have many presuppositions about what Christianity is that are often based upon an analytical approach to understanding truth as a set of propositional beliefs, such that understanding and explaining take dominance over experiencing and intuiting. Such intuitive overlaps are hard to explain rationally, and we tend to avoid the emotive, “feelings” side of experience; but as artists, we are trained to trust our intuition, to think through our feelings, and even to distrust our emotions at times to gain access to deeper integrated

realities. We artists dare not "understand" or over analyse our creative acts, just as the bird does not need to understand the aerodynamics of flight.

Fujimura's understanding of 'intuitive overlaps' (2021, p. 3) could guide everything from where the interview took place: I would use phrases like, 'this doesn't feel right', to setting down the iPad full of notes and relying on instinct and perception to guide conversations. This led me to say a phrase like, 'I'll let the story find me', instead of arriving with a prescriptive script to follow. In these intuitive overlaps, I found the most exciting threads emerge, and with patience and the eye to see, insightful and often unscripted reactions appeared.

Although my final film has quite a defined structure, the understanding of intuitive overlaps in my research process has expanded the limits of my creative practice as I track the lived experiences defined in my methodology. Fujimura (2021, p.5) states 'We are free to take flight in the grace of its sustaining currents without knowing where the wind comes from.'. This by no means sets aside what oral historian Studs Terkel talks about when saying we need both homework and humility when interviewing people. '...they've got to believe you're interested. I don't have written questions. It's a conversation, not an interview'. (Erstwhile 2017)

As a researcher I became the conduit for others to connect to those who may not have the chance to interact face-to-face with the interviewee. Preparation was vital for me, spending hours researching and crafting questions about the area and the person. One learning for me was eventually setting aside the questions, having conversations and allowing the intuition to overlap the preparation. However, even when interviewing seasoned communicators this of style enquiry can lead to conversations that extend beyond the subject matter. This accumulation of data then this leads to the making of the documentary and specifically editing, as discussed previously in this chapter.

As I approach each interview, these three research tools work in unison: paratext, aesthetic cognitivism and intuitive overlaps.

Understanding paratext and seeing outside the frame, the 'fragments that surround a text/movie' (Völcker, 2020, p.25) informs filmmaking as it deepens the 'understanding by enabling us to grasp connections between what we already believe' (2011, p.12). Creating visual metaphors and capturing the beauty in the interview and interviewee can lead to the awakening of knowledge described within aesthetic cognitivism. As a filmmaker and

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researcher, this gives me a greater understanding of the broader story, which exists within and outside the frame – the environment, the emotion, and the context. Understanding paratext and aesthetic cognitivism also informs and is informed by my instincts and the intuitive overlaps at play throughout the creative process, ‘making sense of theological knowledge from the creative intuition’ (Fujimura, p.12). All of these tools continue to shape my process as a filmmaker and researcher. Their use within my practice is described further in Chapter 5, Discussion and Reflections.

5. Produce the Film

‘Cinematic-phenomenologists then turn our attention to the actual video production process’ (Gupta 2019, p. 7).

It was key to the research that I, as a cinematic phenomenologist's styled director, keep the ‘...deeper phenomenological meanings and themes of the sociocultural phenomenon in mind. Staying faithful to the phenomenon under inquiry is the director's main task during phenomenological film production’ (Gupta 2019, p. 7). This could be achieved by creating storyboards, voiceover, scouting locations, hiring cinematographers, and securing interview and shooting schedules. Furthermore, to continue to do so in all aspects of the filming process, included framing, camera movement, chosen location, lighting style and editing, including pace, soundtrack, grading, possible animation and voiceover. The editing process was complex and time-consuming as continued tweaks were done to the edit ‘...until we believe its spatial and temporal rhythms accurately express the atmosphere and moods of the particular film-world’ (2019, p. 7).

Additionally, part of the process was to reflect on my creative process and the decisions made in the making, including the filming process. This is documented in Chapters 4 and 5 of this paper.

Producing the film took many forms, including;

- A) Filming, editing and producing the interviews
- B) Creating visual metaphors with hosts and their environment
- C) Creating visual metaphors through intentional supporting footage (b-roll)
- D) Creating bespoke short descriptive film

In this section, I will introduce the filming process and then break down each production form to show how I produced this research film as part of the cinematic phenomenological research.

This research, which is the film, is an 84-minute documentary film. This thesis film is an interview-based narrative film, a poetic expression of my journey within the burgeoning, digital leadership of the millennial and centennial western Christian diaspora and the meaning of the podcast in all of this.

The creative process — the making of this film — took on many extensive forms, from filming visual metaphors to draw the viewer into the conversation to on-site interviews with global thought leaders/ podcast hosts. The texture of the film was inspired by filmmakers and films such as Terrence Malick's *Tree of Life* and the Museum of Modern Art documentary of performance artist Marina Abramović entitled *The Artist is Present*. Showing how they bring metaphor to the spiritual landscape is something I hoped to emulate. It also drew inspiration from the works of journalist, broadcaster and host Louis Theroux. His intimate reflexive/performative documentary style brings the viewer into more personal contact and dialogue with the subject matter.

Other works, like Darren Wilson's *Finger of God* and *Holy Spirit*, which are more mainstream, faith-based documentaries, have been arguably less impactful in defining the diaspora and more successful at defining its tribe of the more charismatic traditions. This style of filmmaking was avoided in my documentary.

A) Filming, Editing and Producing the Interviews

One can never underestimate the hours needed when establishing and curating trust and creating access to the interviewee -- these are, in my experience, the most necessary skills when asking someone to articulate their inner life on film. The documentarian, Louis Theroux, writes about his work that he has '...always been interested in how people conduct the most intimate aspects of their lives' (Fullerton 2018). I concur, as trust is a catalyst for entrance into the intimate aspects of other's lives, the open door for questions to be experienced together in the interview process. The locations of the interviews and

impact on the research are documented in Chapter 5. Lawrence Weschler quotes Robert Irwin defining interviewing, and something Irwin defines as ‘the dialogue of immanence’.

I really feel that there is a kind of dialogue or immanence that certain questions become demanding and potentially answerable at a certain point in time, and that everyone involved on a particular level of asking questions, whether he’s a physicist or a philosopher or an artist, is essentially involved in the same questions. They are universal in that sense. And though we may use different methods to come at them, even different thought forms of how we deal with them — and we eventually use a different methodology in terms of how we innovate them— still, really those questions are happening at the same moment in time. (2009, p.141)

The understanding of the roll of ‘the dialogue of immanence’ in my research interviews is a further extension of previous thought by Gupta’s ‘dwelling with’ (Gupta 2019) construct.

The style of interview that I conducted is sometimes referred to as an ethnographic interview (Davies 2007, p.106), one that uses a set of questions yet is also semi-structured; this is also part of the cinematic phenomenological research process mentioned earlier. This style ‘requires attention to the interview context and the relationship between participants beyond simply what is said’ (Davies 2007, p.106), This style of looking beyond what is said and being engaged with it is what Heschel refers to as ‘... the ultimate category of prophetic theology: involvement, attentiveness, concern’. (2009, p. 264)

As most of the podcast hosts/practitioners I worked with are also names known internationally, the semi-structured style suited my research style best, as I could not spend more than a few hours with each individual, due to demands on their time.

‘Semi-structured interviewing tends to be the method of choice for ethnographic research on elite groups, where access is likely to be strictly controlled and hence participant observation is problematic’. (Davies 2007, p.106)

The time limitations helped focus the time, yet contained room to establish rapport. This was shorter on Zoom interviews.

Throughout the interviewing process, I embraced being the protagonist, seeking to journey with the interviewee to assist the viewer, embracing the process of making versus just getting the job done. In short, as an artist, visual work is all about collaboration. It is about discovering the essence of a person (or a range of persons) and their story or what interests

them. And from that place, together, to create a narrative that tells that story. ‘A researcher may further increase and deepen such understanding through interactions with a range of interviewees focusing on a given area of interest’. (Miller & Glassner 1997, cited in Davies 2007, p.109)

The filming process is typically laid out in pre-production, looking at venues, environments, storyboards and, more commonly, now Zoom. This included leaning on my instincts as an artist-researcher, something I suggest that we all have, and though at times it can feel undefinable, it was nonetheless a guiding factor to my research and art. Influential creative artist and lead singer of *The Talking Heads*, David Byrne once said, *Deep down, I know I have this intuition or instinct that a lot of creative people have, that their demons are also what make them create*’ (O’Neal 2008). I write more about the use of instinct and intuition later in this chapter.

I believe that my art/research is, in part, being present -- through intuition or instinct -- to that which surrounds and can, at times, be undefinable. As Lawrence Weschler writes, ‘...there’s all this reality — this incredible, inexhaustible, insatiable, astonishing reality —present all around!’ (Weschler 2009, p.292). I feel it is our role to capture and reveal this other, giving it space to reveal itself to others.

As the American Restaurateur Will Guidara says when discussing instinct, ‘It’s a matter of putting intention to intuition’ (Guidara 2022).

Robert Irwin, the renowned installation artist and theoretician, encapsulates the desire of the documentarian filmmaker when he says:

The experience is the “thing,” experiencing is the “object.” All art experiences, yet all experience is not art. The artist chooses from experience that which he defines out as art, possibly because it has not yet been experienced enough, or because it needs to be experienced more. (De Fay 2005, cited in Weschler 2009, p.131)

This instinctual experience was exhibited when my Director of Photography (Cameraperson) asked me, ‘what angle’ and though I could practically see the light for the best exposure, I was also just as likely to interpret a feeling -- to play with ‘what feels right’ at that moment and trust my instinct as an artist-researcher. This also applied to follow-up questions in an interview or allowing silence to inhabit a space. For me, the

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intersection of information and inspiration guided the directing and storytelling, allowing the information of what I studied to be trumped at times by the inspiration of the moment, the beauty, knowing that this would guide the viewer where words may not.

Podcast pioneer, *On Being* podcast host and interviewee of this study, Krista Tippett wrote in her book, *Becoming Wise: An Inquiry into the Mystery and Art of Living* 'I think beauty in that sense is about an emerging fullness, a greater sense of grace and elegance, a deeper sense of depth, and also a kind of homecoming for the enriched memory of your unfolding life' (2017, p. 77). This, at times, was definable, and at other times I needed to trust myself as an artist-researcher.

I will write more about the use of intuition, imagination and instinct in the following chapters, as these can be seen as vital components when framing the professional skills necessary to engage in the interview process.

The 'professional' frames within which filming and the capture of content are pursued have a commonality in which cameras -- be they everything from iPhones to Go-Pros to the primary camera that I use, the Canon EOS C300 Mark II. As a director, my use of drones and Go-Pros alongside the C300, consistently shooting in 4K, adds a cinematic dimension to my craft and a flexibility in the edit.

The production and logistics of managing a film shoot do not come naturally to most artists-researchers. However, they were a necessary evil, pulling together 13 interviews on three continents. Geographical locations that represent a high level of podcast usage in the area of spiritual formation. Moreover, time was limited; with filming and editing, the more you do, the more it costs both financially and personally, and you need to make sure to work with a small team that you can trust. I usually travel with just one crew member a Director of Photography (Camera person), who doubles as my sound technician.

It is worth noting that the envisaged approach to the gathering of data changed dramatically due to the pandemic. Covid-19 has become an altering factor in my data gathering, as my research is directly associated with establishing trust and filming in the podcast hosts/practitioner's environment. I find both of these challenging when on Zoom. An unseen benefit has been the more affordable access to the podcast host/practitioners

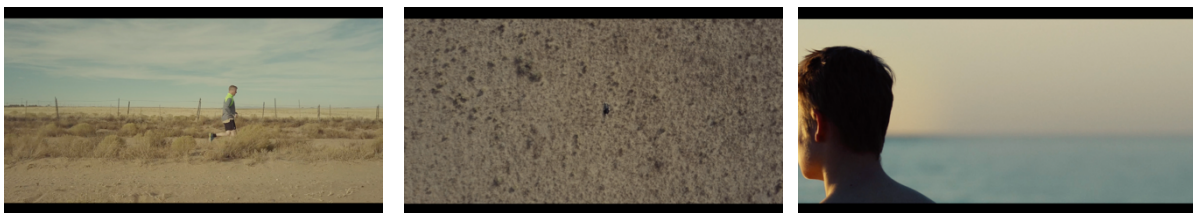
Chapter 3 Methodology

via Zoom interviews. I would have avoided this for this documentary, but have been encouraged by its outcome regardless of what some could perceive as relational limitations. This has undoubtedly been a pivot to a new contingency of creative practice.

This research documentary involved over 30 hours of filming conversations and intentional supporting footage (b-roll). This included over 10 hours of conversations with hosts/practitioners, over 5 hours of reflective audio and video journaling, and over 15 hours of cutaways/b-roll all over the world;

A conservative estimate of costs, not including my time on the film, which included hundreds of hours pre-producing, filming, editing, writing, transcribing, uploading and archiving, is over €35,000.

B) Creating Visual Metaphors with Interviews and Dramatisation



(TC 01:16:46) / (TC 00:46:50) / (TC 00:06:37)

With the interviews and the dramatised visual metaphors, I evoked the content of the comprehensive research data. A demo sample of the thesis documentary utilised the medium as the language to draw the viewer into the conversation, the message. As an example, in the interview, Mike McHargue spoke of the isolation of some listeners, saying, 'I think we start with the assumption that the person is isolated', and further that 'leaving them in isolation doesn't seem responsible to me'. (TC 01:16:46) What I then show on screen is a lone person isolated and running in the desert, except for a pair of headphones, depicting the connection through digital media and solidarity found through podcasts.

I filmed hours of cutaways in the desert of New Mexico depicting lostness and distance. These visual metaphors, whether it be a drone rising to hundreds of feet while continuing its focus on the single person lying on the desert floor or a person staring off into the sea

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as the camera draws closer, are created to communicate on a more instinctual, spiritual and visceral level to the viewer. (For further discussion see Chapter 5)

Before primary filming, I created two short films for possible use in the research documentary. I did this as I began looking at experimenting with visual metaphors and their texture and content. These are entitled *No Line 1* (39 seconds in length) and *No Line 2* (39 seconds in length). ‘No Line 1’ was utilised in the research documentary, and its placement is described in Chapter 5.

No Line 1 and *No Line 2* embrace Thomas Keating’s articulation of the spiritual journey:

If you stay on the spiritual journey long enough, the practices that sustained your faith will fall short. When this happens, it can be very disillusioning. But, if we stay on the journey, we find out this is actually an invitation to go deeper with God’ (Heuertz 2018, p.8).

I shot this short insert with the express condition of needing an environment where the viewer struggles to see the horizon, the definitive. This is based on extensive conversations with millennials and the feelings of wonder and trepidation concerning their faith and spirituality in a post-institutional setting. This was filmed on Newcastle Beach, County Wicklow.³

C) Creating Visual Metaphors Through Intentional Supporting Footage



(TC 00:01:34/ TC 00:05:38)

I also filmed multiple scenes listening to podcasts in different environments, from cars to coffee shops to Ventura boardwalks and beaches, all in reaction to the interviews and how it feels to be isolated and connected. This intentional supporting footage or b-roll, which

³ For more specific examples of how I utilised visual metaphors, See Chapter 5, “Discussions and Reflections”. In this chapter, I take particular findings and create visual metaphors used when bringing further expression to the interview content.

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in this case refers to anything filmed that isn't the main interview, extends to graffiti, forests and murmurations of birds. All of which act as visual metaphors. This connection of metaphor to phenomenology is discussed in Chapter 5 when looking at intentional supporting footage.

6. Promoting the Film

This will be accomplished in multiple forms, including film premiers, conferences, social media, online streamers, and film festival hubs, including *Film Freeway* with 'Over 9,000 of the world's best film festivals and contests, including 168 Academy Award / BAFTA Award accredited festivals [with], to reach over one million filmmakers worldwide' (2022). And possibly terrestrial television.

All with the continued desire to express '...phenomenological insights via cinematic language' (Gupta 2019, p.9).



Figure 16: Chasing Solidarity Documentary Poster

Conclusion

When creating a critical, cultural artefact -- especially one that is research arts-based and that seeks to find an understanding of God through the craft -- it is necessary to not only develop the art but to present it in a way that the claims made can be both demonstrated and understood at an academic level. In this chapter, I addressed the utilisation of the cinematic-phenomenological research methodology in the research interview process of this documentary. I showed how I recruited 'research participants who have experienced this particular sociocultural phenomenon' of podcasting who were 'willing to share their lived experiences.' (Gupta 2019, p.6).

Chapter 3 also defined how the interview data was translated into a visual language through filming, editing and producing a documentary film based on findings and through the methodology of the cinematic-phenomenological research. As written about in Chapter 3, this form of enquiry-based research is aligned with the chosen methodology as 'Cinematic-phenomenologists...are versed in the craft of filmmaking enough to translate participants' data into the language of cinema using our mind's eye' (Gupta 2019, p.6).

In this chapter I showed how understanding of paratext and its parallels with filmmaking and searching beyond the frame changed how I approach the environment and invited new creativity when filming research. Moreover, engaging the understanding of intuitive overlaps and how intuition informs and shapes my process has freed me as an artist to trust what I have nurtured over the years and the new creative nudges. Additionally, paying attention to the in-between of the art and the influence of aesthetic cognitivism gave my process another tool in the articulation of the intangibles that could influence thoughts and perspectives. These three areas shaped my process and understanding of the findings of this research and how to translate them into a documentary film.

Chapter 4

Report of Findings and Analysis

Critical Consideration

Chapter 4 examines my findings from the interviews conducted with 13 of the foremost Christian and spirituality podcast hosts/practitioners in the period 2019-2022.

Each host introduction in this section will also include a triptych of images from the film that capture a snapshot of who they are, where we filmed, and the interview. As a visual artist, I believe it is essential that the art, the documentary, and the interview findings are in concert with one another. These contributor triptychs will serve as a bridge in this context, showing through the film and telling through the chapters. Each host's name is accompanied by the podcast title they host.

Podcast Hosts/Practitioners Interviewed

This study interviewed:

20. Krista Tippet

Podcast: *On Being*

Filming venue: *On Being* studio, Minneapolis, Minnesota



21. Lisa Sharon Harper

Podcast: *Freedom Road* (Washington DC)

Filming venue: University of College Dublin, Ireland



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22. Fr Richard Rohr

Podcast: *Another Name for Every Thing*

Filming venue: The Center for Action and Contemplation,
Albuquerque, New Mexico



23. David Kinnaman

Podcast: *BARNA Group's Church Pulse Weekly*

Filming venue: *BARNA* offices, Ventura, California



24. Mike "Science Mike" McHargue

Podcast: fmr *The Liturgists*, *Ask Science Mike* and *Cozy Robot*

Filming venue: offices, Los Angeles, California



25. Pádraig Ó Tuama

Podcast: *Poetry Unbound*

Filming venue: Lower Lough Erne, County Fermanagh, Ireland



26. Hillary McBride

Podcast: fmr *The Liturgists*, currently *Other People's Problems*

Filming venue: Zoom (Vancouver, Canada and Newcastle, Ireland)



27. Brian McLaren

Podcast: *Learning How To See*

Filming venue: Zoom (Florida and Newcastle, Ireland)



28. Jarrod McKenna

Podcast: *Inverse*

Filming venue: Zoom (Kalbarri, Western Australia and Newcastle, Ireland)



29. Drew Hart

Podcast: *Inverse*

Filming venue: Zoom (New York, NY and Newcastle, Ireland)



30. Shane Claiborne

Podcast: *Red Letter Christians*

Filming venue: home, North Carolina



31. Nadia Bolz-Weber

Podcast: *The Confessional*

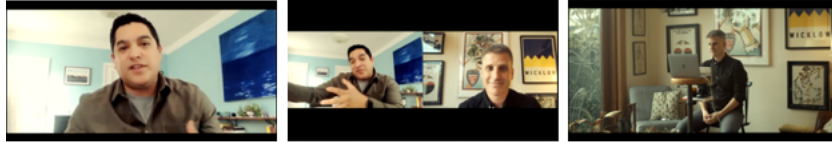
Filming venue: home, Denver, Colorado



32. Eddie Gonzalez

Role: *On Being Podcast, Social Healing Team*

Filming venue: Zoom (New York, NY and Newcastle, Ireland)



To assist in the reading process, I will refer to interviewees as hosts, the common colloquialism for those leading podcasts.

The thesis findings are based on the conclusions filmed in the accompanying documentary. Thus, I will use time code (TC) signatures -- a sequence of numbers and digital addresses -- to show where this specific dialogue or image can be referenced in the documentary film. For example, 00:50:19_means 50 minutes and 19 seconds. By scrolling through the film timeline, this moment can be referenced.

Based on an analysis of the interview findings, six primary themes emerged. Each theme represents the indicative findings collated from the interviews and their defining and overarching characteristics. Under each theme, findings will be introduced and further extrapolated by means of the interviews. As a participatory element of each interview, I will also define the findings from the perspective of a researcher/artist/interviewer. Using the same rationale in editing the research film, I did not give equal airtime to each podcast host as some had more to say than others on specific subject matters.

Primary Themes

Primary Themes:

1. Defining spiritual formation
2. What spiritual formation is
3. How podcasting can be part of spiritual formation
4. How podcasting relates to leadership
5. What the podcast is
6. The podcast and how movements react to it

This is a written report of what I have already presented in my research film. The process of editing and translating the images into cinematic form and documentary form is the foundation of the findings. My analysis is bound up with the making of the documentary. In this chapter, I am reporting and commenting on the outcome of the editing process as a documentary artist, and presenting to you what I have found. This is how my film begins.

Introduction

Four years ago, I set about creating a documentary for my PhD, looking at how podcasts influence our lives, focusing primarily on spirituality. Can spirituality be formed in a digital landscape through podcasting? If so, what does that look like? I also asked: ‘Given the increase in USA-based podcasts that address Spirituality, how do the hosts of these podcasts understand the ways in which they resource or influence the spiritual landscape?’

As an American living in Europe for my adult life, an insider/outsider perspective has allowed me both the distance needed for critical consideration and the innate, sensitive understanding of the culture I am analysing. I looked to my birthplace and centred my research on the US market and my childhood faith Christian sub-culture, predominantly listening to the growing community of exiles looking beyond traditional faith institutions to form a spirituality more aligned with their beliefs. I have continued as an artist to ask theological questions.

Understanding the culture and the desire to understand the critical question of podcasting and its leadership, I put together a wish list of podcast hosts, whose influence is far-reaching with a collective following and downloads in the millions, and shockingly, they all said yes. So, with my trusted collaborator and cameraman, we set about filming 13 interviews on three continents; some in person and some on Zoom, all during a global pandemic.

Podcasts have become ubiquitous. It seems like everybody has a podcast. With over 2.4 million podcasts in circulation and over 380 million listeners (Ruby 2022), this is a multi-billion-dollar industry (Inside Intelligence 2021) with billions of downloads yearly (Buzzsprout 2022a) and a reach surpassing traditional communication methods.

Podcast hosts are making millions, TV shows and movies about podcasting are topping the charts, and podcasts are even going on tour. (I write more about this in Chapter 2) A-listers, influencers, pastors and punters are lining up to interview and chat in a longer format. All you need is a smartphone and WIFI, something I learned from 6 years and 189 episodes as a co-host and co-producer of my genre-topping podcast.

Concurrently, there is a documented decline in religion, with a rise in the search for a more profound spirituality. Many turn to podcasts for answers as they search for meaning, community, and solidarity.

In this research film, I show how the digital and the spiritual are not mutually exclusive but work in harmony. We see through the voices of prominent practitioners how the digital and spiritual not only co-exist but can thrive because of one another.

As a filmmaker, ‘the making of’ part of my thesis is making art, specifically, a documentary about this subject matter, a video about audio. As a researcher, I utilised the Cinematic Phenomenological Research Method (See Chapter 3) to capture beautiful angles, collect fascinating interviews with global leaders, and examine the phenomenological. This method and reflection brought about a profoundly personal discovery while I participated intimately in the interviews and curated images encapsulating my spiritual road trip.

It was fascinating seeing how this spiritual road trip and research created a library of interviews with faith and spiritual practitioners in the area of podcasts and digital media. Furthermore, I will argue that the documentary offers valuable insights into how spiritual formation can be achieved through podcasting.

There is one thing, however, that all of our hosts have come back to, and that is that, in isolation, spiritual formation could not be found just in the digital realm. That what is also needed for spiritual formation is community, connection, intimacy, and touch. This is interesting because podcast hosts are excited about the digital era. They are excited about their podcasts because they are reaching more people. However, they are also all agreed that podcasts do not hold enough in isolation. They do not give enough traction for

transformation regarding our spiritual lives. To quote one of the interviewees, podcast host Mike McHargue at the opening of the research film:

Can I build a house with only a screwdriver? Probably can. I can probably turn it around backwards and drive nails with a handle, but it's going to take longer, and it's going to be more difficult. So, I'd say that digital media can play an essential part in spiritual formation, but relying only on digital media and spiritual formation makes things more difficult than they should be. We're social animals. Community is the essential component of spiritual formation in my mind. (TC 00:00:02)

This research looks at podcast hosts in the digital landscape to see how spirituality and community can be formed in a virtual space.

Each interview was conducted over a 45-60-minute period and consisted of 19 primary questions. This did not include the times taken before or after for relationship building, setting up the filming or the extra cutaways. This is discussed more comprehensively in Chapter 5.

Interviews and Findings:

As I distilled the responses to the interview questions into six themes, the significance of spiritual formation stood out. Therefore, before exploring the host's/practitioner's understanding of Spiritual Formation, we should look at the genealogy of spiritual formation.

Historically, the phrase spiritual formation has been primarily used in the Christian context by authors, pastors and priests concerned with nurturing particular vocations. It has been popularised and broadened in scope in recent decades through the writings of figures as diverse as Simone Weil, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, Richard Foster, Lucy Bregman, Phyllis Tickle, Dallas Willard, Krista Tippett, Eugene Peterson and Richard Rohr, among many others.

Though parallel terms could be found in most religions, Wilson Teo quotes Sheldrake in his Regent University contribution to *Emerging Leadership Journeys*, 'The term spiritual formation has a historical association with the Roman Catholic Church. It is used within

the Catholic Church to denote the training of full-time ministers in both the academic arena and spiritual disciplines such as prayer, bible reading and fasting.' (Sheldrake in Teo2017, p. 138-150) Teo highlights the requirements, writing, 'Spiritual formation at the personal level requires the elements of the Bible, the Holy Spirit and people.' (Andrews and Tang in Teo 2017, p. 138-150)

The phrase spiritual formation has been adopted and adapted by Protestant traditions. In some contexts, it could now be interchanged with phrases such as 'practising spirituality' or 'developing a spiritual life.' In *Spiritual Formation: What it is, and How it is Done*, former Southern Baptist minister Dallas Willard brings the language of spiritual formation to wider circles that begin to include those from Protestant circles when writing, 'Christian spiritual formation is the process through which the embodied/reflective will takes on the character of Christ's will.' (Willard 2023)

From these multiple sources, I understand spiritual formation in its many iterations in the terms used by Fr. Henri Nouwen when he writes, 'Spiritual formation, I have come to believe, is not about steps or stages on the way to perfection. It's about the movements from the mind to the heart through prayer in its many forms that reunite us with God, each other, and our truest selves.' (Nouwen 2011)

1. What Spiritual Formation Is - As Defined by Podcast Hosts/Practitioners

In this section, I will explore the findings around defining spiritual formation, with each host describing their understanding of it. It is worth noting that each of these hosts comes from different places on the 'spirituality spectrum'. Spirituality, in this sense, is a 'style' and not just a faith position or a denominational affiliation. However, these different places represented on the spirituality spectrum include mainstream evangelical, radical evangelical, contemporary Anabaptist, radical Pentecostal, mystical Catholic, mystical agnostic, and radical/emergent Lutheran. It is important to note that these categories are not self-defined by the hosts.

In order to understand where these podcast hosts are coming from when and influencing others, it is important to understand their definitions of spiritual formation.

Findings from Filmed Interviews

When asked, ‘What is spiritual formation to you?’ Brian McLaren- author, speaker, activist, and public theologian, responded by focusing on desire:

I think spiritual formation is the formation of desire. I think the heart of spiritual formation is being intentional about our desires... I think spiritual formation is saying, “Okay. All of these forces are working on our desires. Let's be intentional about it”. (TC 00:04:53)

The New York Times bestseller, ordained Lutheran Minister and public theologian Nadia Bolz-Weber related her understanding to questions of origin and the meaning of life saying, ‘... spirituality is about living with an awareness that life has meaning...It's sort of having an awareness of what's my source’. (TC 00:05:49)

Poet, theologian and author Pádraig Ó Tuama referenced inwardness, meaning, and narrative:

I think of spiritual formation as what happens when a person is paying attention to their own inner compass, the way they tell their story, the way they process other people's stories, how they connect with meaning, whether that's with religion or outside of religion, whether that's in practice rather than doctrine. (TC 00:06:37)

Having been awarded the National Humanities Medal by US President Barack Obama, Krista Tippett is regarded by many as the go-to for podcast and radio hosting in the area of spirituality, as well as a *New York Times* best-selling author. Recently her show, which she co-founded, *On Being*, was described by *The New York Times* (Soloski 2022) as ‘a weekly interview show about the mysteries of human existence’. When I asked her about *On Being's* role in spiritual formation, she replied by addressing the questions of what animates and connects us to an understanding of ‘being human’;

...it's about the animating questions behind this part of life that we call spiritual and religious and the animating questions that religions arose to address. That is what it means to be human. I mean, it is about God, but ultimately, it's about what it means to be human, how we want to live, and who we will be to each other. (TC 00:07:08)

Another widely respected authority in spiritual formation is the Founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation, Fr Richard Rohr. A Franciscan Friar and *New York Times* best-

selling author Fr Rohr describes spiritual formation ‘As I was first formed, it was largely the transmission of information. Suppose you knew this information about the Franciscan tradition or the gospel. Of course, over the years, it's become more and more experiential knowledge, transformative knowledge, practice-based knowledge’. (TC 00:08:21)

It is my opinion that many, including myself, who have identified with those who are deconstructing their faith - a phrase used to identify the questioning and taking apart an inherited package of beliefs, assumptions and practices - can identify with Ó Tuama's and Rohr's assertions of journeying between doctrine and practice-based knowledge, with many leanings more toward story and away from information as dogmatic. Rohr states, ‘We kept thinking information would get us there. That education was transformation’. In this context, Rohr states furthermore, ‘It clearly isn't’. (TC 00:09:07)

Activist, author and founder of *The Simple Way* community, Shane Claiborne, describes the times we find ourselves in as:

a spiritual formation crisis. It's a discipleship crisis. It's a spiritual crisis in our country as much as it's a political one too. I think we have to discipline ourselves in love, in nonviolence, in generosity, so that love becomes instinctive, impulsive. I think that's what we're created for. (TC 00:09:17)

When answering the question, ‘What is spiritual formation to you?’ Mike McHargue, author, science advisor and co-founder of Quantum Spin Studios responds ‘The journey of spiritual formation is learning to understand yourself well enough to not have to think about yourself all the time’. McHargue adds, ‘What is enough is what helps you be who you are and love others well. Not be consumed by the ways that you've been hurt and harmed, but instead to be liberated from that’. (TC 00:10:21) In these words, we may begin to see the pain reflected by those who have left organised systems of formation that so many have moved on from, in order to find a type of liberation of a spiritual kind. The desire for transformation so that others can ‘...move through the world in a way that creates what humanists would call flourishing and what I would call shalom’. (McHargue) (TC 00:10:21)

This trend is articulated more fully in Chapter 2, Religious Landscape and The Podcast Ecosystem, in a discussion of this exodus among Gen X, Millennials away from established Christian traditions. It is evident from Gen Z minimal engagement that these multiple generations are interested in spirituality, yet not gathering as previous generations

have. When it comes to individuals connecting on a human level, we seem more isolated. This isolation can extend to podcast listening as it tends to be a solo engagement, listening to podcasts when exercising, driving, or whatever. I asked the hosts, ‘Could there be something missing...or is it just part of spiritual formation?’ Writer and activist Lisa Sharon Harper responded by addressing the myriad of opportunities that are presented for spiritual:

I think it's a part of a new constellation of things that are coming up in order to create spiritual formation experiences. Like when you think about the spiritual formation of the past, generally speaking, it happened in church on Sunday morning, or if you were in an evangelical church, every day of the week...So that was our spiritual formation. But now it's podcast anytime. (TC 00:12:24)

Sharon Harper adds:

...it's not just showing up on Sunday morning to these different programs, but it's rather, in some ways, we are engaging in deeper conversations in multiple spaces, not just inside at the church wall and not controlled by any one person at the top. I think that those days are gone. So instead, we are actually curating our own conversations in multiple kinds of spaces, including podcasts and digital media. (TC 00:12:48)

Section Conclusion

Defining spiritual formation, even for those working as practitioners and hosts in this specific area, can prove elusive. The research points to a common theme that these new constellations and curated podcast conversations can lead to a deeper understanding of spirituality. As well as how podcasts can form and inform our lives beyond education and into transformation, learning what it means to be human.

2. How Podcasting Can Be Part of Spiritual Formation

We see through research (See Chapter 2) how, across America and especially Western culture, people are turning to podcasts for this personal contribution to a lot of their spiritual formation and leadership in faith.

In the varied constellation of spiritual formation experiences, it is good to remember that the development of industry and technology has also been utilised for information dissemination. David Kinnaman, author and CEO of Barna Group, a leading research and communications company says, ‘I mean, look at how much technology has changed the face

of how human beings practice religion, going back 500 years, the printing press unleashed the process of reformation'. (TC 00:14:59) McLaren also states,

I think podcasting is supremely important. I think what the printing press was to the reformation, podcasting probably is right now. I think they're replacing the book as the primary long-form communication because not only do you have the long form of a podcast that might be an hour, or hour and a half long, which does something to bring you immersively into a conversation. (TC 00:40:34)

If this is a digital reformation, are podcasts just new forms of communication or are we open to the message evolving? Kinnaman shows concern over the evolution of the message calling it 'a ...modern-day Tower of Babel'. While acknowledging the merits of digital disruption, Kinnaman warns of individualism, 'I think that digital technologies, at their best, are disruptive forces that level the playing field and say, "We got to start with a fresh slate, or human beings are doing different things"'. But Kinnaman adds further that he believes formation is still a collective engagement 'Now at its worst, it becomes a modern-day Tower of Babel...We can just figure all this stuff out ourselves. We can figure out our own spirituality on our own. We can just piecemeal everything together and then make something of ourselves'. (TC 00:14:59)

Kinnaman goes on to look at this digital sphere as being able to bring about the curation of resources, saying:

...the most effective pastors and youth ministers that we're seeing today think of their role less as, "I'm solely responsible for you as a pastor spiritually, but I'm going to be a curator so that each week I'm introducing you to podcasts or other books or media, or Ted Talks" etc. (TC 00:15:52)

Conversely, Brian McLaren pushes back against the possible need for traditional understandings of the church, 'In certain contexts, we ought to create space to imagine spiritual formation without our traditional understanding of the church. I think we just have to. Because it's a possible scenario for the future that we have to engage with'. (TC 00:17:02) Ó Tuama also leans into finding ritual elsewhere, even in the digital sphere of podcasting, saying, 'Finding a ritual of your own to listen to a podcast that you find nurturing is really important'. (TC 00:17:23)

Extending the community of podcast hosts to include the professional therapeutic sphere, Dr Hillary McBride, therapist, researcher, speaker and writer, when asked about spiritual

formation, looked at the personal engagement possible with podcasting, connecting podcasts with other practices:

I like podcasts as a way to learn myself and to feel stimulated. I really, really like reading and learning. Those are important values for me and practices. I would call them like spiritual practices. So, I get to be a part of doing that for other people. I get to witness and learn from other people's podcasting work. (TC 00:16:41)

I pressed the hosts, asking, 'Are you saying that people can form spirituality and reconstruct their faith or go deeper in their faith even on digital platforms?' (TC 00:17:53)

Drew Hart, activist, author and Professor in Theology at Messiah University, responded with:

Absolutely. I mean, it's happening. I mean, I've seen the way that people are growing and engaging and challenging one another and hearing and receiving each other's stories, the way that people's lives have been changing and transforming in all kinds of ways that I think were unexpected to all of us. (TC 00:18:04)

Rohr agrees that connection is paramount, although restricting digital spiritual formation as 'isolated enlightenment' without a community stating:

... it's got to lead to encounter to 'I-thou', to relationship, to at least small informal community, to affiliation. If it doesn't lead to affiliation, it's just isolated enlightenment; it's very dangerous. We Americans at least are very prone to that, to just got our individual kick. (TC 00:18:55)

On Being's Director of *Engagement, Civil Conversations* and *Social Healing*, Eddie Gonzalez, looks at the proof of formation on lives in the podcast space commenting, 'If spirituality can show up in a digital space, the proof is in some ways that we are seeing how amazing this could be and also not a complete replacement for being in person.' (TC 00:19:39)

Australian activist, author, and founding CEO of *Common Grace* Jarrod McKenna states that his shared podcast's primary role is 'producing leaders, not superstars, who are serious about service of others'. (TC 00:19:26)

Bolz-Weber closes out this findings section with a conflict that all interviewed podcast hosts have intimated. The conflicting ideas in communication lead us towards love and

transformation rather than jingles. An additional tension can be found in the desire to reach out to many with the development of access through digital and the explosion of podcasts, yet the further desire to stay connected in person, a seeming necessity when forming spirituality:

I think there are things that you can experience and be offered that can then be metabolised into your life and your understanding of yourself and others and the divine. But just being like icons on a screen, maybe with cameras on, it's a little better because you can see people. I don't know. I struggle with that. (TC 00:20:01)

Section Conclusion

In this section the importance of the podcast was addressed, comparing podcasting's importance to that of the printing press and its ability to be a disruptive force. While other hosts warned of the podcast's ability to create superstars and icons on a screen. An emphasis was also placed on the engagement that comes with being in person outside of the podcast space.

This overview provides context for this thesis, as we see the hosts/practitioners speak to the both/and of digital engagement, with one host warning of 'isolated enlightenment. These discoveries will continue to shape the findings in this ongoing chapter.

3. How Podcasting Relates to Leadership

Podcasts have become ubiquitous, and platforms for those who host podcasts have increased a thousand-fold. (See Chapter 2 for a breakdown of podcast platform and reach.) While many hosts have maintained the construct of a podcast 'host', podcast host is a phrase defined in many ways. It is seen as: figurehead, conduit, content service provider, intermediary, and interviewer. Moreover, many hosts are seen in border terms as leaders and influencers in their fields, leaders of movements and ones that many now choose to follow. I am referring to 'following' both in the traditional sense of not only opting in but engaging an ideology and the social media construct of the following, which can be seen as more of, but not always, passive. This research engages in these complexities addressing the question of 'followers' with the hosts. In this section, I will look at how they, the hosts, feel they are viewed and, in turn, how they view themselves and their 'followers'. As I look at the possible disconnect between what a host says and

the responsibility of those who listen, I ask the host if they consider themselves a spiritual leader, a faith leader, a denominational church leader or simply a host.

McHargue:

I do not consider myself a leader at all. I've done everything I can to subvert anyone's assumption that I am a leader. What I've tried to be is a source of solidarity and comfort. But I think a leader is trying to lead people somewhere. (TC 00:21:02)

McHargue brings up an interesting conundrum, are you a leader just because you call yourself one? Or is it enough to have followers that consider you one? A leader by default. McHargue defines his role as not leading to a specific prescribed place but a possible place free of agenda, a place that, in his words, is 'safe':

Our work has been to say, "Wherever you're at, you're okay. If you need some time to rest, rest here." But whether your future is to reform the church or join Richard Dawkins and eliminate it, I don't care. I want you to feel safe and included it as you process. (TC 00:21:02)

From a faith standpoint, the temptation to build a containing structure around what arguably cannot be contained can build scepticism into the foundation. McHargue looks at the culture that surrounds this:

So, what we have in America, I think across the west, is if you're in a certain place, you can build a community around that place. I don't mean, I mean mentally, a certain worldview. Wait, are you in our camp or not? We've tried to build a waystation for people in transition because everyone distrusts when you're in transition. We've tried to make a place where you just don't have to be in a camp. (TC 00:21:02)

McHargue articulates the voice of a deconstructing faith generation when he says, '...when you're in transition, everyone distrusts'. (TC 00:21:02)

McHargue's use of the therapeutic term 'transition' echoes this sense of 'deconstruction'

This is one of the attractions of podcasting, but it can also be easily exploitable. As this is still an early stage, though the containment by institutional constructs is emerging, the world of podcasting is, by a majority, free from many of the 'camp', political or culturally tribal definitions. This is where the idea of fans and followers can easily blur. Alternatively, they could be listeners without affiliation, an idea that just as easily can be

seen as a get-out clause when it comes to people leaning a particular understanding of 'leadership' found in the host/listener relationship.

McHargue:

I think the largest number of them are just listeners... My work represents something to do while they're in traffic. They like to think about it. Yeah. Maybe they have been at some point where they're in some serious emotional, existential crisis and the work was comforting. (TC 00:22:38)

Holding an audience and not just being something to pass the time in traffic is one of the challenges of any host, especially when it can lead to serious engagement. In the world of spiritual formation, this is not any different. How we relate to traditional institutions can carry over into even casual podcast listing. In some cases, the redundancy of this role seems baked into the understanding of the hosts' role.

McHargue:

We also know from our own data; a lot of our audience moves on. They graduate from our work, and that's kind of built-in and baked in and expected. So, they relate to that using a word they know, which is pastor. But I think in the west, we've over-identified pastoring with teaching. The pastoring I value is the work of loving people through their daily lives. (TC 00:22:38)

In this interview, I pressed McHargue further, as the ethics of responsibility surrounding podcasting, of what is said and heard- should seemingly land somewhere. I asked, 'Do you feel a responsibility to those who listen?' (TC 00:23:34)

I have felt a significant responsibility in the past. So much so that I've learned through therapy. I was forming a co-dependent relationship with my audience. I felt a need to rescue each and every person in crisis in a way that wasn't healthy for me and didn't invite them to health. (TC 00:23:48)

McHargue's posture changes here; this weighs heavy on him. His acknowledgement of the original need to rescue and the idea that he cannot be the rescuer and still maintain healthy mental or spiritual health is a hard choice. This type of self-awareness and wrestling is one of the things that attracted millions of followers to his podcasts. But this, too, can be commoditised. A critique is that you can sell the sickness and the cure.

McHargue:

The seminal work for the last year in my spiritual formation has been wrestling with my co-dependent tendencies. I think I self-commoditised my own pain for

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years in a way that brought a lot of people comfort and solidarity but was really destructive to my mental health. So that's a great critique. Yeah. (TC 00:23:48)

McHargue goes on to put forward his hope for spiritual formation, ‘...what can we do right now that is sincere and earnest and genuine over what is strategic or performative or financially successful?’ (TC 00:24:59)

The distinction between fan and follower has struck a chord with the hosts interviewed. Many seem not to have considered this distinction or the need for a distinction. When asked, most hosts pause for longer than a set answer would tend to allow. The reactions are varied but point toward multiple conclusions. Some are amazed that those who call themselves their ‘followers’ do not understand their fundamental ideologies or politics.

Rohr:

I think they're fans. I think it's a very good distinction because I've been amazed over the years. People who say they're followers of Richard Rohr, I'm going to make it very straightforward. Then I find out their fans of Donald Trump. I say, “How is that conceivable?” ... And not see the dissonance, the major dissonance with the voice of this president. Gosh, I've seen it again and again. People whom I think are my followers that when the real message of service or not making money, which Francis taught us, was offered then. They ran. They ran. (TC 00:25:37)

The challenge of the host as a spiritual leader, coupled with the host's desire to distance themselves from leadership, can be motivated by the desire to empower listeners to lead themselves.

Ó Tuama:

People will choose in great goodness to listen to something for a while. That will hopefully create something for them where they're able to access the resources of their own life rather than thinking that the podcast is the priest because I don't think it is. (TC 00:26:50)

Most podcast hosts seem reluctant leaders, though ones with self-awareness surrounding their role as a host/leader.

Tippet:

I think that host language is actually really relevant. There's hospitality to what we're offering. I mean, yes, I'm in there. I have a presence, and I'm the curator. But what we offer week after week is shining a light on these teachers and role

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models and mentors and wise people. So, it's the sharing of this, of the guests. That, I think, is leadership. Yeah. I think there is a pastoral care component to it. I mean, in effect. (TC 00:27:27)

I followed up Tippet's answer with, 'Did you sign up for that?' (TC 00:28:08) Tippet's response and the corresponding conversation are worth quoting in their entirety for what it reveals for podcast hosts as spiritual leaders.

Krista Tippet: (TC 00:28:10)

Well, I hesitate because in the early days, in public radio, there was a lot of suspicion about this project. Like that's what it would be. Somehow this is the religion show. I mean, people also will say things like, "On Being is my church" Right? Which always-

Greg Fromholz:

Oh, interesting.

Krista Tippet:

Made me a little nervous, or people would say you consider-

Greg Fromholz:

Really quick, though, why would you be nervous?

Krista Tippet:

Because I think that's a bigger responsibility, to be somebody's church. Right?

Greg Fromholz:

Right.

Krista Tippet:

I'm not curating the space to be somebody's church, but it's turning out that way. So, I need to just take that as that's a great honour to have that role. I hope they supplement *On Being* with other things if it really is their church. (TC 00:28:42)

What can be read into this interview was my desire as the research interviewer to follow the conversation and to be present enough in the thread that I could tap into the willing vulnerability of the interviewee. (I write about this more in Chapter 5). We see that Tippet is nervous about the responsibility, like McHargue, of being the guru, pastor or church for others. Though, we see that the reluctance is an acceptance of what is made outside of what is designed.

As an artist, researcher and spiritual wanderer, I am fascinated by the communities that rise around podcasts. I am interested in how those who could be identified as the Christian diaspora, the disenfranchised, or those who are just on the fringes of faith look for one another as they explore spirituality. Many of those identified engage in podcasts and have previously leaned particularly into *The Liturgists Podcast*.

McBride, a regular contributor to *The Liturgists Podcast*, responded to the ‘followers or fans’ questions with the following:

Well, first, I see them as people.... I would see that it probably depends on what they need and the time of their life and how that changes over time. There are some people who have, I would say, allowed us to become part of their family or their friend group in a way where they feel like they have real relationships with us.

Then there are other people who have objectified us and made us into their next leader or their next guru or the enemy... I have seen all of those things play out in the community around us. (TC 00:29:42)

This tendency is echoed by Ó Tuama when he comments on hosting by saying, ‘All kinds of strange things can happen by being hated or by being loved’. (TC 00:26:50)

This confluence of influence can be seen as the less glamorous side of being part of a genre-topping podcast; people can love you, hate you, over-follow you, and project towards you. Being able to separate yourself from your persona could be perceived as a very unpastoral thing to do. However, as well as presenting an opportunity for formation, this is entertainment, as it is a show. Furthermore, the entertainer, the host, must decide the level of vulnerability they project and the level of exchange they are willing to negotiate with their fans/followers/listeners.

McBride:

It really helps to be a therapist who has years and years and years of training in seeing people's stuff projected onto me and go, oh, that's really interesting. Or like, “Wow, oh, what are you telling me about yourself? Alternatively, what is this bringing up in you?” I'm appreciative that my work is landing, but I don't really try to take in any of the intense reactions, whether they're really positive or really negative." (TC 00:31:20)

Many of the hosts interviewed were conscious of and intentional in avoiding creating cults of personalities. Even though this fame and reach achieved by podcasting feed the algorithms of platform creation, it is symbiotic in nature. How can podcast hosts remove themselves from the same platform they have created?

McKenna:

That kind of intentionality around decentring ourselves, dismantling celebrity culture, making sure that as any good pastor would be it, online or in person, that you don't set yourself up as a guru. You create pastoral communities and small groups to care for one another. (TC 00:31:52)

A distinction is made between the community and the podcast itself. As Drew expounds;

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Because there's the podcast itself, then there's the community. Right. Okay? I do think it's important. They're related, but there are two things happening simultaneously. For our community, we are not at the centre... They're not going to get a reinforcement of celebrity culture. (TC 00:32:19)

However, the research points to a common theme that community as a church can still be problematic for many, with the two being difficult for many to separate. As described in Chapter 2, the decline of established churches is widely known, and one of the principal reasons for the decline of those surveyed is hypocrisy.

Bolz-Weber:

I think people don't leave the church because they stop believing in the gospel. People leave the church because they believe in the gospel so much they can't stomach being part of an institution that says it's about it and clearly isn't. (TC 00:33:58)

This desire for de-institutionalised, 'decentralised, anti-hierarchical movement' (Boggs cited in Ponti 2021) that practices in a space where everyone has a voice and a movement that not only intersect but infiltrates the dominant society; can be seen as the established Christian traditions. I suggest that the podcast can be seen as prefigurative in its nature.

“‘prefiguration,’ a concept defined by the academic Carl Boggs as a decentralised, anti-hierarchical movement that practices the participatory democracy...’.

The dangers of the established church usurping the influence of an unstructured podcast space can be seen in the quick adoption to control the narratives via podcasts. This is understandable with the rise of influence and the proliferation of podcasting, having over 2 million sharing the 'airwaves' in 2022. Yet, this proliferation is fertilised by the structurelessness of the same format. In this, podcasting could be seen as a form of prefigurativism. Kruetz defines, 'prefigurativism is thus a way of engaging in social change activism that seeks to bring about this other world by means of "planting the seeds of the society of the future in the soil of today's" (Raekstad & Gradin 2020, cited in Kruetz 2021, p. 122).

The idea of podcasts as prefigurative structurelessness raises the question: to what extent are we at risk of repeating the structures and the limitations of the institutions that people have

moved on from? Could the digital space fall back into old ruts instead of moving forward into new grooves or rhythms?

In his interview, McLaren breaks down these concerns and their possibilities:

I think that's a danger. But I think one of the interesting characteristics if we can say, what's going on in the Christian world, is the Christian wing of a larger spiritual movement. Suppose we could even say that larger spiritual movement is the spiritual wing of a larger civilisational shift, which I think is true. People who are part of that new consciousness or paradigm or word we want to use are so different that I think we'll have different problems and some of the same ones. (TC 00:34:54)

Harper further echoes the decentralisation of spiritual formation and the role of the podcast in this changing subculture, saying:

I actually think that the podcast plays the role that the preacher used to play on Sunday morning as people are moving from within church walls on Sunday and getting their church on Sunday. People can now get to church any day of the week by downloading a conversation with a theologian or a spiritual leader and moving forward.

I do think that my role as the host and the curator actually, of these conversations, having people, inviting people into having the tough conversations, what it's doing is it's actually creating a kind of a church community, a spiritual community that is searching and wrestling. There, it's a new kind of a church that should, I guess, per se, because it's disaggregated. It's not all together, but we are having common experience. We are sharing one hour or an hour and a half sometimes of experience and creating common memory of experience. (TC 00:38:59)

From Harper's response, we can understand how she is willing to see podcasting as a way of being church, possibly because she is more comfortable with the idea of being church. This contrasts with Tippet's reluctance to be perceived as a church saying earlier, 'I think that's a bigger responsibility, to be somebody's church. Right?' (TC 00:28:4)

Creating a shared memory can be seen at the sinew of creating movements, like communities that may not look like today's colonised evangelicalism and have their inception in podcasts.

Leadership is key to these new forms of community.

Claiborne:

...the spiritual landscape of what God's doing is bigger than white evangelicalism. So, I think that's where we've got to not allow the loudest voices to colonise the narrative of what Christianity is about. So, a lot of our work at Red Letter Christians is we say we're harmonising, but not homogenising. So, the way that you change the narrative is by changing the narrators.

‘The way that you change the narrative is by changing the narrators’ also pertains to podcasting, as the format has re-popularised the concept of changing the narrators by having new guests on every show.

Section Conclusion

This section addressed how the digital era has ushered in a new style and type of leader. It also looked at the dangers of the confluence of influence for both fans/followers and hosts. Although there is a reluctance around being defined as a leader, pastor or priest, to the point of one host who chooses to ‘subvert anyone’s assumption that I am a leader.’

This section also addressed podcasts as a ‘decentralised, anti-hierarchical movement’ and the advantages and disadvantages of structurelessness when it comes to spiritual formation.

4. What the Podcast Is

Resenting a new technology will not halt its progress. The point to remember here is that whenever we use or perceive any technological extension of ourselves, we necessarily embrace it. - McLuhan (1969)

In this section, I explore the understanding of the podcast, as well as how the hosts define and embrace the construct of podcasting. I look at the listening experience, its role in culture and the ability to find and be a voice in this communication genre.

The digital reformation is the wild west, the punk era of information dissemination. It is wide open and threatens those maintaining large institutions with large staffs and roofs. A low economic entry point creates access to the resource via the podcast, expanding the possibilities by communicating worldwide on the internet. McLaren:

The fact that anybody with internet and 75 bucks for a decent microphone can be in the business of building worldwide networks, that lower overhead I think is not to be underestimated. The cost of keeping traditional infrastructure going creates all kinds of competitive temptations. (TC 00:40:34)

Kinnaman goes further as he looks at the power of new technology or inventions to challenge the predominance of faith institutions:

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Really hopeful actually about how technology does change the church. The printing press was bad news to people that have the hegemony of power and language and all the rest. But it's good news to people who are disenfranchised or who were oppressed. (TC 00:42:17)

Ó Tuama expands on those marginalised and their renewed access to places of belonging in the podcast sphere. This is also a place where the search engine can circumnavigate the exclusory and excusatory nature of traditional society and faith institutions, creating connection.

Especially for people who feel marginal to a few communities, I think people who are interested in faith and theology and who have been excluded, and there are all kinds of lists of people who've been excluded, women, migrants, asylum seekers, people of colour, travelling community, LGBT people, the list goes on and on and on. But one of the things that search engines can do is that you can go podcast, religion, theology, whatever, and then put the group that you're interested. You find all kinds of things. There can be a way within which the threats that you might be facing, you hopefully are able to access these conversations that are happening in a way that's safe and in a way nobody else is going to be listening into your listening. That can be a great thing to nurture the imagination, which I think is one of the primary tasks of supporting courage and action. I don't think courage has ever come without imagination. I think podcasts provide accessibility to people whose imagination has been chained up. (TC 00:45:10)

Is this a grandiose idea that podcasting could share space with the printing press? That the reach of podcasting could eventually eclipse the reach of print media? Though this may be trending in this direction, with US Sales of e-books reaching 191 million v the print media selling 750.89 million units (Errera 2022), there are also e-readers, Kindle and other platform statistics that show a rise and fall in the digital reading space. It is notable that *Insider Intelligence* (2021) projects '424.2 million podcast listeners worldwide in 2022, accounting for 20.3% of internet users.'

McLaren notes that '...you just think there has never been a format to expose people to as many living theologians across traditions and backgrounds in the history of the world. There has never been that capacity'. (TC 00:40:34)

Podcasts also represent a malleable nature, more flexible than radio. Conversations can be a few minutes to a few hours long, inviting the listener to engage in more immersive ways. This understanding has led to changes in the most successful radio shows as they pivot to podcasting.

On March 24, 2022, *The New York Times* (Soloski 2022) reported:

On Being, a weekly interview show about the mysteries of human existence, hosted by Krista Tippett, airs on nearly 400 public radio stations, with more than half a million weekly listeners. Archived episodes are downloaded millions of times per month. By any reasonable metric, *On Being* is thriving. Yet on Thursday, Tippett and her team sent a letter to her radio affiliates, announcing that after nearly 20 years, the radio version of *On Being* would cease production in June.

“We’re going to move on,” Tippett said. “This is going to end in its current form. It’s almost existential, theological, right? Things die.

Nearly a year prior to *The New York Times* interview Tippett, in our interview, articulated her impulse for creating the podcast:

Podcasting really brought listening back in a beautiful way. I love that we reach people that we wouldn't have reached before on public radio. I do love the flexibility of the form. I mean, the radio show has to be the same, and it's in the same place every week. But we can throw things in the podcast feed. We can be really experimental and creative. It's not the only place where we grapple with what I call moral imagination, but it's a primary place. So, we need to be able to put words around that. We need to be able to avail ourselves of this repository, of this kind of thinking and this kind of questioning. So that was my impulse for wanting to start the show. (TC 00:43:20)

This practical and creative way to ‘grapple with...moral imagination’ sets itself apart from many ex-evangelicals. ‘Ex-vangelicals’ is a self-descriptive term for those who have moved on from their traditional evangelical expressions to no longer attending or following evangelicalism or its leaders. Though not mutually exclusive, it is important to note that many ex-evangelicals still express faith or spirituality or both. Ex-evangelicals lament the loss of early forms of faith communications, the style seen in early Jewish, native American or the practices of the Desert Fathers and Mothers where a conversation is encouraged and intimate. However, inviting conversation over the airwaves and fibre optics can pose challenges, How do we have a conversation as podcast listeners? Those who desire further access to these online conversations can do so via social media platforms or official podcast email addresses. However, as podcasts are predominantly monologues or pre-recorded dialogues, it elicits further queries about what it means for a podcast host to have listening consciousness and shows the need to practise digital hospitality. Furthermore, what is the practice of podcast hosting, the theology of communication? ‘It's a contemplative practice, just being absolutely present to what the other person is saying and then having that instinct in terms of what to ask next.’ Bolz-Weber (TC 00:46:50)

Ó Tuama expands on this when discussing a podcast's access, experiential nature, and eavesdrop learning.

We're happy to talk about that with books. I mean, podcasts are just another way of accessing information and hearing it often, not always, in an interactive way where you hear two people talking and one person learning as another person's sharing or being moved. There are all these other layers to it, which are beautiful. (TC 00:45:10)

Sharon Harper:

They are listening in, on a conversation, and then they're continuing that conversation yeah in their churches, in their circles. They're just letting that conversation and the questions that it raises become their questions, yes. That they take forward, and they work out in their own lives. (TC 00:44:13)

Hart says, 'When people listen to our podcasts? I think the beauty of it is the lived experiences, that everything is flowing out of rather than just hot takes per se'. (TC 00:47:59)

McBride links the experiential nature of podcasting to the therapeutic intervention of bibliotherapy and how 'the information gives us the buy-in to then go inside of ourselves to look in'. (TC 00:42:35) This is a key proponent of the engagement that podcasts can have beyond listening.

McBride adds:

We can use podcasts in the way that we often use books. I think about something called bibliotherapy, which is a specific kind of therapeutic intervention where we say, "Read this book," and how the information gives us the buy-in to then go inside of ourselves to look in. What I really don't like about podcasting is I like having conversations with other people and seeing their bodies. I like the feedback, particularly like a live event where I'm sharing something, and I get to see how it is landing for people. It's so strange to record something in this capsule and then put it out there and not get a sense of being able to have further conversation about it. (TC 00:42:35)

Gonzalez speaks to the responsive nature of podcasting and brings in the need for ethics around how they are done:

In some ways, a podcast can own the impact of its content; as Krista (Tippet) likes to say that a podcast can be responsive to its listeners and not just being created out of a vacuum. I think there are tremendous moral and ethical questions around the work of podcasting and how it's done. (TC 00:50:19)

What, then, is the role of a podcast? Has the digital age brought about a new spiritual reformation? Is it therapy? Is it church? Is it community? Is it a new denomination? Are there limitations to what can be achieved in the digital space? This is where every host has a different opinion. McKenna lays out his podcast mandate when saying:

What we've found is that rather than offering clickbait or sensational, or even like we pray that it's a healing space for people coming out of religious trauma. But the purpose of our group isn't to post anything. While it might be healing, it's not actually therapy; it's formation. We hope that creating listening spaces where people aren't looking to the experts, and a lot of people's conditioning in mainstream churches is just, that, is the person in the pulpit has all the power, and they know all the answers. (TC 00:48:10)

McHargue:

I think podcasts are post-denominational. Because we're not creating some new ecumenical structure, but rather across ecumenical, intra- and extra-ecumenical collaboration, so, people can participate in the work of our podcast and in that community, regardless of their denominational affiliation, even if that is no denominational affiliation at all. I think people are frustrated with church politics getting in the way of spiritual formation, and that frustration and disenfranchisement is what has created the space for things like the *Liturgits Podcast*. (TC 00:49:03)

Like most transformational movements, podcasts and their popularity has grown out of the soil of a compelling frustration and oppression with the status quo. In this case, it can be argued that spiritual formation has pivoted to podcasts due to a compelling frustration and oppression of traditional and evangelical institutions. It can be argued that these institutions have stunted the growth of those wanting more from their formation, creating a co-dependency rather than a sought-after community.

Sharon Harper is of the opinion:

But you also will have, and I think the greater portion of people, who are actually leveraging these platforms to have the kinds of conversations, honestly, we should be having in churches, but we're not. (TC 00:51:50)

Yet, no one could predict the expansive growth over the last few years exacerbated by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The desire for formational content and the inaccessibility to traditional Sunday morning services have created a vacuum. The filling of this vacuum by podcasts cannot be underestimated.

McLaren:

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I think our concept of church is in the midst of a massive decomposition. I think Covid, as with many things, I think Covid has accelerated changes that were already in the offering, but what might have taken 10 or 20 years has happened in one year. (TC 00:55:16)

McKenna:

There's been a cultural lockdown for some people as well, where they felt that their convictions about the Trump presidency or climate change or a healing and inclusive vision of human sexuality, or nonviolence being at the core of an understanding of healing justice found in Jesus, those kinds of things people have experienced lockdowns within lockdowns.

As a child of the evangelical world, I found it interesting that Jesus' name was not referenced as consistently as I thought it might be in these interviews. This could be for many reasons. I believe it is primarily due to a trigger that can exist around the abuse of the story and narrative of Jesus in this evangelical Christian sub-culture, the theological appropriation experienced by many.

In Kristin Kobes Du Mez's (2020) book *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured A Nation*, a book which has attracted a lot of attention both negative and positive and one I believe we could see as a defining playbook for the ex-evangelical movement, she writes: 'The products Christian's consume shape the faith they inhabit. Today, what it means to be a "conservative evangelical" is as much about culture as it is about theology.'

Still, we are human and what we create reflects who we are. As Tippet responds, we see the need for hosts who are leaders in this space who 'actively humanise' this new sub-culture.

Tippet:

In my mind, the digital world, it's another canvas for the human condition. That isn't the old, the ancient human condition. But again, it has the power to put it up on a great big pervasive screen. We're seeing ourselves reflected in a different way there. The origins of the digital sphere didn't take the human condition into account. Right? So, if this digital realm is going to serve us in the next period, we have to kind of retroactively humanise it. We have to retroactively apply the intelligence we have about the human condition, about growing ourselves up and grow the internet up. (TC 00:50:47)

Rounding off the conversation on the construct of the podcast and those involved with podcasting, I threw a curious hypothetical out to Fr Richard Rohr, asking, ‘Do you think Jesus would host a podcast?’ (TC 00:52:53)

Rohr replied, ‘I can't imagine that he wouldn't. I can't imagine that he wouldn't. How often doesn't it say he addressed the crowds, he addressed the crowds? Yes, I do think so, I wish he would've, in fact’. (TC 00:52:54)

Section Conclusion

This section looked at how podcasting is showing itself as more extensive than denominational structures and faith institutions and out of the reach of those looking to suppress to control a particular narrative, a historical, contextual theology, or a fan theory. One host commented, ‘American religion got in the way of spiritual formation’.

This section addressed the accessibility to podcasting for anyone to build a worldwide network where search engines can ‘circumnavigate the exclusory and excusatory nature of traditional society and faith institutions, creating connection.’

This section also briefly examined the role of the Covid-19 Pandemic in accelerating for both church and society. (I have written more about this in Chapter 5)

This section also addressed the continually expanding and expansive nature of the podcast as a place where we contend with ‘moral imagination’ and a place to understand the human condition more deeply.

5. The Podcast and How Movements React to It

‘Indeed, one can participate in the religious culture without attending church at all.’ -Kristin Kobes Du Mez (2020, p.8)

When interviewing Mike McHargue, the founder of the seminal spiritual formation podcast, *The Liturgists* and *Ask Science Mike*, I commented that it was fascinating how they went from being digitally based to having 'meet and greets' and running large weekend

gatherings. I further commented that tradition fills a void. 'It is almost like a group of people saying, 'I'm done with the Sunday morning tradition'. (TC 00:56:27) It seems post-traditional people are looking for a 'new tradition, and the digital space hasn't been enough.' (TC 00:56:37) With these weekends and gatherings, I asked, '...are we in danger of repeating history?'" (TC 00:56: 42)

McHargue noted, 'I think we're always in danger of repeating history... If there's one defining characteristic that ties human societies together, it is believing they've transcended history while repeating it'. (TC 00:56:51)

Taking the conversation further with Tippett and McLaren, I asked, 'Do you think we'll ever get back to creating more bricks and mortar churches or do you think that this digital space is here to stay?' (TC 00:57:23) Tippett answered, 'I think anything can happen in a digital space that happens in a bricks and mortar space'. (TC 00:57:10)

Hart:

I don't want to erase the significance of being in person, right? As if that doesn't matter anymore, touch. Right? What does it mean to touch someone, hugs? Do you know what I mean? Those things are powerful expressions of community, relationship, and intimacy. So those do matter. Yet it's not to say that in ways I hadn't anticipated, we found intimacy, connection, and belonging through the screen. (TC 00:58:27)

McLaren:

So, to answer that, I'd have to say, I think it's both. I think both will continue, at least in the short run, and both will continue to grow. We will see a resurgence of the worst forms of Christianity. I think they will consolidate power in the next generation or so. I just think it's in all of the above like when people say the traditional church is dying, part of me wants to say, "I wish you were right." But I think that we'll see a resurgence of white nationalist Christianity. (TC 00:57:35)

When looking at the concern of a resurgence of white nationalist power structures while the new digital reformation finds traction, Sharon Harper shares her experience:

I don't know if it's the same around the world, but I do know that around the world, there is this question of white nationalism that's rising up in multiple nations, post-colonised nations around the world in the United States, no less...That is causing angst. It's causing the deeper questions of the faith. (TC 00:12:48)

Yet, Dr Hart, in his role at *On Being* podcast, has seen first-hand the symbiotic relationship that can exist between the digital and the physical. In particular, He found at an *On Being* event:

500 people showed up in California to be part of this thing where there were live interviews taking place, but also plenty of time to get meals, enjoy coffee, be in conversations with folks. What we saw there was these relationships start to form within that gathering. People went back home and then started to what they call re-gather in their more local communities. Some of them are still gathering to this day and are still in contact with one another. It's kind of incredible how that happens. (TC 00:59:13)

Still, we find that podcasts are indeed acting 'like churches' in that they gather individuals in a shared space in order to form spiritually, a spiritual community. This continues to create challenges for those who host this genre of podcasting. Tippet notes, 'I would say *On Being* has an audience that acts like a community... And that wants to be a community'. (TC 01:00:17)

As a researcher who uses the interview as his primary finding tool, I sometimes find breaking up conversations problematic. Yes, it allows glimpses of what each host is intimating. However, at times, it can take away from a beautiful sub-narrative that should be seen in its whole or a more significant part of the whole. For this reason, I am enclosing a more extensive exchange between Tippet and myself when discussing the generative role of podcasts and the community.

Fromholz:

What characteristics does an audience that acts like a community have? (TC 01:00:31)

Tippet:

Well, this is one of the most precious things for me about what we've created, and I think all of our development now is in how we can be responsible and responsive to this. There is a destructive story of our time with which we are all profoundly familiar, and we are given a lot of that narrative is fed and watered every day.

Fromholz:

Far too much.

Tippet:

And far too much. And then there is what I think of as a generative narrative of our time, where 21st-century people are really living in a new way into these questions of what it means to be human, and how we want to live, and who we'll be to each other. There is a generative landscape. My experience that we've had

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from the very beginning of *On Being* is that we would hear from people. They would say, "I listen to this show, and I feel less alone." So, it's a community in the sense that people are actually walking alongside each other metaphorically like, without knowing it. I think that this story and this expression of humanity is so much more prominent than we realise, it's just as big; it's just as powerful as that narrative of dysfunction. This landscape, people feel more alone than they are, and then the world needs them to be.

So, with the podcast or with other things we do, how do we create connective tissue? By that, I also mean shared learning, shared growth and the kind of muscular hope and vision that we really have to have to keep walking into this century and not just being in a mode of survival. (TC 01:01:30)

For many on the fringes, this survival mode has found homes in the podcast space, but is it possible for the community to thrive in the digital sphere?

McLaren:

Yes, I think so. I think there are wonderful, wonderful advantages of being in person. But look, if we think that a book is a mediated reality, a book is an artefact, a substitute; it's a virtual conversation, a one-way conversation. It's, in a sense, virtual listening. Well, so is the telephone, and so is a podcast. Then when you add all the physical cues that come through facial expression, gesture, and so on, I mean, it's getting close. (TC 01:02:35)

This growth and the sustaining of a community can be found in meaningful conversations of the marginalised, something Ó Tuama spoke of, and which is echoed by McLaren:

My sense is that a big expansion of this has been people who are targeting these wider conversations to their specific tribes. They call those critical conversations. It's where groups of people still somewhat in private are able to start having the conversations that they never could have. I think podcasting is the way for people to be divided no more, to start building community of congruence and to go public. (TC 01:03:19)

As these congruent communities grow, a continual challenge exists in the physical, yet it is harder to translate into the digital.

Bolz-Weber:

I think that there is an extra challenge to grace existing in the digital spaces...if you are in front of me in a human body, I am going to recognise your dignity more readily than if you're on my screen. ...So I think that in order for digital spaces to be places of grace, there has to be some kind of covenant. (TC 01:03:51)

Yet, with Bolz-Weber, there is a seeming lament concerning the construct of digital-only:

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I would be very sad if somehow online spiritual community became the default, and there was not the in-person thing. I would not be great with that because I love singing in harmony with other people. You can't sing in harmony alone, and it doesn't work on Zoom because there's a delay because you're not together. I love being handed an actual chunk of bread, not me taking it, being, I like receiving it, somebody saying, "Child of God, the Body of Christ given for you". I like to be in a room with other people who are not of my choosing. It is a way to live in the gospel that's so particular. So while I think the digital connections are important, and I think we can do those in imaginative and increasingly robust ways and be creative, it's never going to be a replacement. (TC 01:04:49)

McBride's opinion is similar, expounding on connection and attunement properties, articulating understanding and the importance of knowing the 'how' of accompanying. This applies to both the physical and digital spaces.

I think to reduce the human experience down to one facet of being, body, connection, interconnection, spirituality, intellectuality, is to pull us apart from ourselves. Another thing that's really important about the therapeutic relationship is anytime there is an adjustment that needs to be made, how we accompany each other through that creates even more opportunity for attunement and connection. (TC 01:06:01)

McHargue pushes back further on the isolation of one medium over another, yet expounds on how defining the necessity of each does not mean they have to be in concert. McHargue also considers those of differing abilities.

McHargue:

So, what concerns me about saying something like digital community's not enough, our lived experiences are so different from each other. I mean, we're all the same, yes. If you're a nonverbal autistic person whose movement is very restricted, like you can't walk, there's something liberating about online community in that you aren't subject to people's immediate pity or dismissal... Because for somebody, it's not only enough. It's best. (TC 01:07:53)

I wanted to know more about the 'how' of forming community in the digital space and how that can evolve. I pressed McHargue further about communities, as he had stated, 'Communities do form around our podcast work.' (TC 01:07:53) His comments also bring this migration's reactive 'why' to digital.

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McHargue:

People finding each other online primarily, and then migrating to in-person meetups, typically with no leader or authority, I think that's wonderful in a lot of ways. I think it's a reaction to how much selfish and irresponsible church leadership there has been in America and in the west. (TC 01:08:44)

Ó Tuama comments on how the quality of interaction, be it online or in-person, reflects who we are, an idea Tippet spoke to in a section of the interview I quoted earlier in this chapter:

I hope that we have gotten beyond the stage when we talk about something in real life or online life as if those two things are different; because the implication is that you're hiding or not disclosing something online that you are in person. People hide and don't disclose things in person all the time. So basically, all online life does is reflect us back to us. So, the question is, what's the quality of your integrity and your interactions, whether that's in person or online. (TC 01:09:16)

This quality of interaction has been echoed by all of the hosts interviewed. Though some hosts are satisfied with not creating a hierarchy of digital over physical or the inverse, most hosts interviewed still lean toward the both/and approach. I asked each host, 'Is it possible just to spiritually inform or develop your faith in a digital community?' I posed his question, as this can be seen as the crux of the findings. (TC 01:09:09)

Rohr:

Well, I'm going to say you must have presence to other people. Now, I know you can be present via voice, but the interface of human contact, I think it has to move there or back into individualism. I think the key is, and most of the books, letters I've gotten, like the *Another Name for Everything*, they almost always say, "And we formed a group to discuss". That's the key. (TC 01:10:58)

Furthermore, beyond forming groups, some hosts state that action beyond the digital sphere is key to formation:

McKenna:

I'm talking about people paying each other's medical bills. I'm talking about like we had somebody facing homelessness, and people gathered to get their rent and set them up. For me, church is not church unless there's communion. I don't mean simply like everybody having crackers and grape juice at the same time...I

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mean, what it is to actually be storied and remembered in the body of Jesus in such ways that our economic practices and all that one another stuff unless our imagination is concretised around a real people whom when people are hurting, we can be there to meet their needs. (TC 01:12:26)

Mckenna then expounds on the replacement of leadership in similar communication vehicles, the sermon versus the podcast host monologue, individualism versus the community's common good, a journey seen as a necessity in spiritual formation. This shows us further challenges that digital-only can bring:

I think podcasts for some people have replaced a sermon, and now I can hear the sermon that I want to hear that fits whatever. I think that's also really horrible. What Drew [Hart, co-host] and I have been seeking to actually create is real communities where people love one another across, connecting digitally but like in actuality. (TC 01:12:26)

Are podcasts in themselves enough when creating a space for cultural tribes to gather and be heard? Do these platforms give room for those who feel isolated but still tune in?

Sharon Harper:

So, what the podcast has done is it's actually created a platform or has potential and has created a platform for voices that have previously been silenced. That's a healing thing, to speak your story, to actually be given, to have your voice heard, recognised, and appreciated and received, and wrestled with, is an empowering thing for people whose power has been taken from them. (TC 01:14:21)

McBride:

People think through what they're doing. But I think that the benefit of being able to say, "I'm telling my story and what's heard, and it's getting witnessed," is such a gift for some people who have been self-silenced for so long or have self-silenced... Really the conversation is how do we heal ourselves, how do we heal our social fabric? How do we make room to be fully human in a way that doesn't see the divine of God as far away but sees the right now as proof of God's imminence? (TC 01:14:48)

McHargue:

We start with the assumption that the person is isolated. Solidarity through digital media is a step closer to the community than they had a moment before. What we love about digital media and about podcasting is the reach to reach anyone anywhere, anytime. Once they realise it's not just me, even if they're still

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isolated socially, that felt sense of isolation decreases in a way that we have found changes their behaviour over time. (TC 01:16:46)

Other hosts/practitioners see gathering outside the specific podcast as a natural extension.

Gonzalez:

I think our audience experiences themselves as a community in different times. We've had certain times where I think it's been able to experience itself as a community in person and digitally.... As we get to know one another, a natural thing that really starts to occur is we start to ask ourselves, "What could we do if we started to do something together now that we know each other?" (TC 01:17:18)

Claiborne:

I don't think anything in the world can replace real community and real connectivity like physical... we are communal beings, but community's a bit of a nebulous thing. It's kind of hard to wrap your hands around, you know? So, can you have virtual community? Can you have toxic communities or unhealthy communities?

But, I think, you know, in the virtual space, there's that same longing, I think, to belong, to be a part of something bigger than ourselves to, you know, find people that resonate with our message and all that.

So, I think that's there. I guess I would say I get a little nervous, though, that if all we have is a virtual community, you can still be pretty lonely people, something about proximity that makes, that puts the fire in our bones. You know, so being near to the struggle or experiencing the struggle first hand, obviously like, puts that urgency, whether it's gun violence or immigration or the death penalty, you know? And, and so there's no real shortcut to that. I think that empathy comes from proximity, you know, from being near to the people that are impacted. (TC 01:18:16)

This research points to common themes of how belonging, acceptance, a place for your voice to be heard, and opportunities to fight for justice and solidarity are all necessary components of those forming spirituality. This research also shows how podcasts can accompany such a journey.

McHargue:

Wherever you're at, if you have some interest in spirituality or even Christian spirituality, we think you belong here. That started to incorporate more justice

work because we became increasingly, we're our own growth, how many people are pushed, exiled, and excluded in the church. But the ultimate goal of the show is just simple solidarity. (TC 01:21:53)

Section Conclusion

This section revisited the idea of an unconstrained Podcast while looking at the commonality mediated in spaces represented by books and phones, other virtual non-physical spaces that build community and connectedness. This section looked at what it is to create space for 'meaningful conversations of the marginalised', shared learning and growth. One host commented that online community, 'for somebody, it's not only enough. It's best.' However, the majority of those interviewed came back to the idea that, in isolation, digital in the form of podcasting may not be enough.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at the changing digital narratives that have emerged more clearly, surrounding the newest generation's desire to find a new way of expressing and following faith leaders, which exist partly as podcast hosts. This sentiment could be regarded as accurate for most generations as they attempt to improve on the previous ones. However, this generation is the first to have constantly available, long-form, global access to these new narrators, which has informed and formed new movements. As well as accessibility and the disruptive possibilities of podcasting subvert traditional understandings of spiritual formation.

This chapter addressed both the cultural understating of spiritual formation and the host's understanding of spiritual formation, as well as the role, albeit reluctantly for many, hosts may play in influencing those who listen as fans and followers. Further research is needed to address this new paradigm of investigation for future generations to explore the implications of this fan/follower relationship and its application in several disciplines.

This chapter shows how most hosts/participants see the ongoing need for in-person engagement and the digital space but seek to de-centre themselves or, in some instances, do not want to lead. Furthermore, many suggest that the podcast is insufficient, yet do not see their role as providing these in-person alternatives to existing structures. Although, it is worth noting that The Liturgists and On Being have. It is a significant ethical position and

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makes many assumptions about how the online can/does translate into the physical and in-person. People can remain lonely for a place to call home, as well as just a set of ideas or practices.

There is one thing that all of our communicators have come back to; in isolation, spiritual formation most likely cannot be found just in the digital. The research in this chapter points to the common themes that many are searching for meaning, community, and solidarity and are finding in the digital space.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Reflections

Introduction

Throughout this chapter, I will highlight how my research objectives are addressed in my creative phenomenological practice of filmmaking and interviewing. The findings suggested in the preceding chapter are integral to the practice and methodology of translating ‘...participants' data into the language of cinema’ (Gupta 2019, p. 6). The gathering of the data was done with the filming of the interviews. This chapter reflects on the process of interviewing, the related content and what it was like to film the hosts and further translate the data into a documentary.

The primary question addressed is, ‘Given the increase in USA-based podcasts that address Spirituality, how do the hosts of these podcasts understand the ways in which they resource or influence the spiritual landscape?’

I utilised the Cinematic Phenomenological Research Method, a reflective, creative practice-led based, auto-ethnographic methodology that shows ‘...phenomenological insights via cinematic language’ (Gupta 2019, p. 9).

Furthermore, ‘Cinematic-phenomenological researchers recruit research participants who have experienced this particular sociocultural phenomenon and are willing to share their lived experiences’ (Gupta 2019, p. 6).

As discussed in previous chapters, historical institutions have approached the ‘new’ with suspicion, whether it be the Gutenberg Press or the podcast. In my experience, the idea of spirituality being found or formed in a digital space is new and held with a particular suspect within churches. Yet podcasts and the pandemic have raised awareness of the possibility of podcasting for spiritual formation. In this research, I ask if spirituality can be formed in virtual isolation or if it must be in consonance with the physicality of a community.

Chapter 5 Discussion and Reflections

Moreover, this research seeks to answer these questions, but also investigate the ramifications of the digitisation of spirituality through one of its newest and most prolific iterations, the podcast. This research has been done by interviewing renowned podcast hosts, while capturing the research process in a unique and global first documentary about spiritual formation in the digital era, generating new knowledge in the area of podcast-based spirituality leadership. These hosts had little to gain from participating in this research as they already do a lot of media and promotion. However, they wanted to be part of research into the theological aspects of spiritual formation in the podcast sphere.

In this research, I have further discovered how my creative practice can be integral to theology. This chapter looks at the processes of a conversation with regards to my artistic, intuitive overlaps and the methodologies (discussed in Chapters 3 and 4), and both physical and virtual conversations of hosts/practitioners. All of these play an integral part in this creative theological journey.

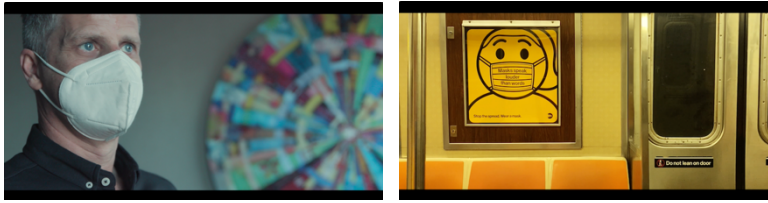
In this chapter, I reflect on and discuss the findings of my filmed research. I reveal complications and challenges when interviewing and directing a film. Moreover, I lifted the veil to show how I processed in real-time during the interviews and critically reflected post-interview. I also show how all of these feed into my research. Additionally, I will show the creation of the documentary as I elaborate on and evaluate my presence. I will also appraise the interviewees and look at the effect of the space and cameras. As Gupta writes, ‘Cinematic-phenomenologists ... are versed in the craft of filmmaking enough to translate participants' data into the language of cinema using our mind's eye’ (Gupta 2019, p. 6). (See Chapter 3 for further discussion)

The discussions and reflections from the 13 interviews are broken into two sections. The first looks at the interviews on Zoom, and the second at the interviews done in a live setting.

Understanding and Elevating a Medium: Covid-19 and Working on Zoom

I begin this chapter by looking at the media cultural phenomenon of Zoom and its use in my research, the challenges and the opportunities it presented.

Chapter 5 Discussion and Reflections



(TC 0:53:47 / TC 0:55:)

Zoom brought convenience and access to this research during the Covid-19 pandemic, with prominent speakers opening their usually full touring schedules.

Zoom has a way of drawing in the viewer in a new way. When interviewing, most standard documentaries have a camera positioned with an eye line to the interviewer just off screen to the left or right, not staring at the screen. The phrase ‘looking down the camera lens’ rarely happens in documentary films. This leaves the viewer in a more passive position when watching the interview, creating a voyeuristic relationship where insight, pain, or a narrative is viewed from a slightly removed distance. However, with Zoom, the interviewee is facing forward, looking right down the lens at you, the viewer, as if you, the viewer, are asking the questions themselves. For me this brought a feeling of intimacy and a heightened sense of engagement. How I chose to use Zoom was a purposeful, strategic engagement for me. It was taking a relatively new approach to a standard personal medium, like Zoom, and elevating it.

Though being there in a physical sense and shared space is a staple of qualitative interviews, Zoom has meant being there differently for interviewers and participants. Somewhat disorientating, we were no longer able to fully plan, let alone influence exactly where the interviewee would be when they spoke with us. (Olliffe et al., 2021)

Further in this chapter I look at the consequences of not sharing the space with the interviewee.

In this thesis documentary, I have utilised the commonly experienced split screen, where the interviewee(s) and the interviewer are viewed together. I also cut between the interviewee and interviewer, as a multi-camera setup may do on a talk show. Moreover, I set up additional cameras in the room to allow the viewer to see the setup to reveal the space, a

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living room with a laptop balanced on books and notes on an iPad. In addition, I placed a camera just off to the left of the laptop to show the process of recording Zoom. I did all of these angles to assist in inviting the viewer further into the conversation. It could be argued that ‘showing the strings’ or how it has been made could remove viewers from the mysticism of the filming. I would agree with this when considering scripted dramatic films, though this too has been played with, the colloquial phrase ‘breaking the fourth wall’, where actors ‘...acknowledge the existence of the audience and speak to them directly. When they do this, the fictional world gives way to the literal reality of the medium’(Masterclass 2021). This also applies to reality-based filming. A concern with showing the production and breaking the fourth wall on this film was that it could dilute the content. However, it was more necessary to show the personalities of the hosts/practitioners to assist in creating access to their ideas.

With this research film, I wanted to create an experience that allowed everyone to become participant observers of their own. I do this by owning that film is not made by magic, by revealing the mechanics of how it has been made. This generation also knows how it has been made, they as create content daily. Showing the strings creates greater access. I have addressed this in previous chapters when looking at paratext. (See Chapter 3). And with the ubiquitous presence of smartphone cameras, the paratext is now more known. Cameras of all shapes and sizes are now expected and pervasive in the current culture.

The presence of a camera can change the way we engage, by bringing a heightened level of importance, that can lead to a more performative posture. I discuss the act of observation further in this chapter, however it is worth noting that ‘Zoom allows the interviewer to observe participants’ non-verbal communication and where the participant chooses to be during their interview, which may provide the interviewer with a glimpse into the participant’s life’ (Gray et al., 2021, p.1292-1301).

The Context and Complications of Cinéma Vérité

As a director I have worked in the film style *cinéma vérité* for decades and Montuori (2004) description of what is considered the first film in this style is comprehensive.

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In 1961, film-maker Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin made the documentary *Chronicle of a Summer*. Set in Paris in the aftermath of the Algerian war and before the explosion of riots that played such a role in the 1960s, culminating in the events of 1968, this documentary holds the distinction of being recognized as the first example of *cinéma vérité*. It breaks down the barrier between the camera and the subject in a precursor to a far more participative approach to inquiry and documenting events, and the more recent excesses of “reality television.” Roland Barthes wrote, “What this film engages is humanity itself.”

Zoom has also brought to the research inconveniences and frustrations and in this way a working example of *cinéma vérité*. We can see this in the Hillary McBride and Brian McLaren interviews and the complications Zoom brought. No matter how prepared you are, having tested the links, the recording processes, the audio, and the classic ‘Is your mic on?’ phrase that has become ubiquitous in this Zoom generation. There are almost always technical surprises. Moreover, these surprises tend to happen while you are attempting to ‘go live’ with an interviewee, having to resend and reset a link to Florida, the recording only working from the interviewee's laptop in Vancouver or the time changes between NYC and Australia. However, a certain level of grace comes with different interviewees because everybody is in it together. We all know what it is like for WIFI to go down. We all know what it is like for the camera not to work, we all know what it is like for a link to have to be reset. Furthermore, when filming in a participant-observer posture, a choice is made to make *cinéma vérité*. The construct of *cinéma vérité*, that being to engage with the reality of life, as previously explored, also adds visually in the film by showing the wide shots of the set up. This worked well within this research process and my chosen methodology to ‘...demonstrate how filmmaking is an appropriate aesthetic language through which to disseminate phenomenological research about lived experiences...’ (Montuori 2011, p. 1).

In turn, *cinéma vérité* can affect how viewers engage with the content. This engagement in humanity is also what continues to invite the viewer in. It shows the interviewee/interviewer relationship in an encapsulated form, where we are all the same. In this film and thesis, while reflectively looking more closely at my ethnographic interviewer style (See Chapter 3 on Methodology), I have explored theologically what Heschel refers to as ‘...the ultimate category of prophetic theology: involvement, attentiveness, concern’ (Heschel 2009, p. 264). The impact of this intentionality requires attention to the interview context and the relationship between participants beyond simply what is said.

Chapter 5 Discussion and Reflections

How I reacted to these complications and reset my posture could be challenging, as this all preceded the collection of content. As a researcher/interviewer/director of the film doing research via zoom on your own, without a crew to assist in organising the mechanics of making, you have to allow yourself to be fully present to the complications while dealing with them and getting yourself back into a pre-complication mindset. This is all part of the creative practice in which understanding and embracing *cinéma vérité* brings opportunity in film and findings. In my Zoom interviews, this can be found most in the trust established with the interviewees as we sorted out technical difficulties and navigated Covid-19.

Arriving at the Interview

Understating my research process, Covid and the pandemic have impacted how I film and interview. I arrived at each interview centred and aware of the questions, not rushed. The ideal for me was to arrive at an interview set up, sit down and start talking with the guest. When working in small crews, my hands and eyes are on almost everything, so there is never just sitting down and talking. There are always cameras to be set up and adjusted, sets to be created, or rooms that need to be moved around. In this way, Zoom can be more straightforward.

Before arrival, I made every effort to provide for all possible contingencies through extensive pre-production and patience when entering a new space. Arriving at an interviewee's home or space of work added a level of heightened creativity, as I had to work with what was in front of me while honouring the interviewee's space and showing who they are. Doing this in a home or community room was more accessible than in an office, as the viewer builds their opinion on the interviewee based upon what you show them. That is all they can see, including visual paratexts. A sterile room can affect the posture of those on camera and how the content is received. A lakeside, a comfortable sofa, and chairs situated far apart or near, all contribute to the interviewee/interviewer relationship and how the viewer perceives the content. The opening image in these moments can open up or close down the viewer's desire to engage in upcoming content.

The Interview

It is a notable discovery that over half of communication is through body language. This phenomenon is known as the 7% rule, in which 93% of communication is argued to be non-verbal. (Mehrabian 1971) In recent years experts have adjudged interpersonal non-verbal communication to constitute 70% of communication (Hull 2016) still a large portion of communication. Regarding interviewing, reading the body language and non-verbal signals on Zoom is much more challenging. It is far more challenging for me to relax with the person in front of me because they come with assumptions that are not easily switched off. In-person, the eye-to-eye contact and the ability to not look eye-to-eye and give the interviewee a break is a more natural choice. I say 'choice' here because everything I do when walking into an interview and greeting a guest is intentional—mirroring the interviewee's body language, picking up on micro-social queues or commenting on the environment that we are in. Understanding these non-verbal cues, like how the interviewee leans in, pauses or unclasps their hands have led to greater attention being paid to the concrete issues of the interview.

With Zoom, the interactions can be more limited. I found myself being into the content much more quickly, without opportunities to build trust, establish a relationship, or laugh. Trust in these interviews was paramount. Trust takes conversations to more insightful levels and findings. Therefore, trust in the concept and format and, ideally, in the integrity of the interviewee and interviewer is necessary to take the conversations beyond the general answers. The presence or absence of trust was visualised through the decision to film the interviews.

It would usually take me four or five minutes on zoom to establish trust with someone I have not met face-to-face in this research. This pertained to Hillary McBride, Eddie Gonzalez and Drew Hart. When meeting someone for the first time live, in this case, Krista Tippet and Nadia Bolz-Weber, the time frame is significantly reduced to less than a minute. With the remaining hosts/practitioners, I was fortunate to have already had the opportunity of establishing a trusted relationship. However, approaching any interview with an academic research posture brought an increased level of anxiety for me, wanting to get it right while not wanting to change who I am.

As established in Chapter 2, the primary podcast features exhibit the user-facing orientation of the podcasting medium, also pertaining to Zoom. Easy, consistent access to specific genres and sub-genres of content, the interaction of social media communities and the primary solo act of listening can bring about an intimate user experience unique to this medium.

A further impact of working on Zoom that my creative practice research took on can be found in the minutiae of eye contact. Eye contact is critical in the findings, as it can affect how the interviewee responds. Making eye contact is exciting on Zoom, because you must look up to the top of the screen to look at the camera on a standard laptop. You are doing this to communicate to the interviewee that you are looking directly at them. However, the issue is that you are no longer looking directly at them. They are on your periphery and below your eye line, creating an interesting dynamic—a very present feeling of being a viewer yourself. In a real-life situation, you look them in the eye, mostly. On Zoom just above, those millimetres can cause a greater distance. If you are unaware of it, you can tune out. This represents a further challenge to gathering the research as it is another level of listening concentration.

Interview Reflections

In this section, I will discuss and reflect on the 13 interviews conducted in this research, my point of view as the interviewer and the formation of visual metaphors utilised when bringing further expression to the interview content.

Zoom Interviews

Brian McLaren

Podcast: *Learning How To See*

I was excited to interview Brian McLaren, who understands the culture, community, movements and spiritual formation. He understands how the zeitgeists emerge and how things have changed and continue to change. These characteristics are important to broader

Chapter 5 Discussion and Reflections

research as his experience-based expertise brought thoughtfully informed answers to the research questions, as the findings show in Chapter 4. A further example of this can be found below, showing how the filming and the edited film worked together in interpreting the research, ergo McLaren's answers.

One of the things that I learned in McLaren's interview about myself was to be patient with the process. It is okay that his answer ends, and my interview question is not ready. I can feel, at times, like a keeper of the interviewee's time. Moreover, this can be at play in the 'room', as with McLaren's interview, where I reminded myself to sit back within myself and to listen to these answers deeply, allowing the information to flow beyond an eventual transcript and into applied learning. 'Dead air' is always dreaded, as it takes a certain confidence in patience to stay, as there is life in that dead air. This certain confidence comes from being patient between answers and follow-up questions.

I learned about how I interview by researching interviewing, the broader conversation on podcasting and what conversation looks like and feels like when recording. Even without an operator, the camera is the third or fourth person in the room. Further in this section, I look at the wider discussion around interviewing as a research tool, the interview's dynamics and the varying research styles. These understandings and reflections led to analysing the interview findings and emerging themes (Chapter 4) and translating them visually into the film. As highlighted in Chapter 3, the implications of these discoveries are in the disclosure of meaning that can come from interviewing on film. Further, as Gupta indicates (Chapter 3),

'Cinematic-phenomenologists then engage in a cinematic data-interpretation process in which we approach the data again through the lens of a filmmaker' (Gupta 2019, p.6).

Research is a different interviewing style than interviewing for other media types. When interviewing, I tend to know the next two, three, and four research questions, and I can weave them into the conversation, giving signposts. Nevertheless, it is sometimes unhelpful for me when researching to be in control of every question and try to weave it in as it can stifle the flow, which needs to flow to find new understandings. In this phenomenological setting, allowing for space is a key to more significant findings. Going 'off script' leads to new findings.

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This means being more prepared to the point that muscle memory kicks in, allowing intuitional overlaps. (For further discussion, see Chapter 4). Pre-production and preparedness ensured that I was ready for conversations to go in any direction or nowhere, allowing silence to punctuate the conversation in a way words would struggle to do. In this research, an interview style emerged, referred to earlier as a follower-interview. It is a style I grew into and it was a better interview style for this format, documentary and podcast.

I learned that this research is my creative practice, my art, and the filmmaking surrounding it. My practice was further animated through interviewing. I have learned that research, filming and interviewing are symbiotic and in collaboration with how I create. Place fuels filming, and content fuels narrative and other visual metaphors. It is an embodiment, connection and capture.



(TC 00:35:55 - 00:36:14)

For example (see screengrabs of the film above), in the research film, when discussing the risk of repeating the structures and the limitations of the institutions that many have moved on from (TC 00:34:33), McLaren says that the 'old system was really built around, what did people call it, the sage on the stage, or the big man. In that certain sense, it's the religious strongman; it's Billy Graham, it's Billy Sunday before him, Ravi Zacharias, and it's Bill Hybels. Part of what's happened is, now, there's this big suspicion about the big man, especially the big white man. Then, because of feminism, there's suspicion about the big man of any kind. Then, because of multiculturalism, there's big suspicion that any individual or group who are primarily of the same race who are having the conversation.' (TC 00:35:55). I knew I needed supporting footage to enhance the dialogue on screen. For this, I drove to the local forest to film b-roll (intentional supporting footage) of trees. To bring further metaphor and meaning, I crouched low on the forest floor and shot upward, showing a foreboding view of the trees as they arched over. These trees, which had represented shelter only moments before, now feel imposing, threatening, and suspicious.

Chapter 5 Discussion and Reflections

As discussed in Chapter 3, my chosen methodology, Cinematic Phenomenological Research Method, facilitated an aesthetic phenomenology that ‘.... conveys research findings in artistic ways...’, while ‘...turning to filmmaking as an intuitive step in our research dissemination’. To requote Gupta (Chapter 3), ‘...cinematic-phenomenological research embraces the evocative language of cinematography to disclose meanings about a lived experience in a way that can be immediately sensed and perceived, rather than intellectually or theoretically grasped’. (Gupta 2019, p.2-9)

The research discovered through interviews and interpreted through visual metaphors exhibits the methodology presented by the 2018 paper, *The Phenomenological Film Collective*. (Gupta 2019) (See Chapter 3) This style of visual and filmic interpretations aims to ‘extract the universal from the particular’ (Schrader 2018, p.35).

In the interview with McLaren, there was a more evident opportunity to build visual metaphors, because of his descriptive language. He creates a picture when he is talking about birds, music, or white nationalist Christianity. These conversations brought about findings and had my creative synapses firing, seeing how I could visually build the documentary film in real time. For example, when asked in the interview, ‘Do you think we will ever get back to creating more bricks and mortar churches, or do you think that this digital space is here to stay?’ (TC: 00:57:23) McLaren responds:

I think that we will see a resurgence of the worst forms of Christianity. I think they will consolidate power in the next generation or so. I just think it's an all of the above, when people say the traditional church is dying, part of me wants to say that I wish you were right, but I think that we'll see a resurgence of white nationalist Christianity, yeah. (TC: 00:57:35)



(TC 00:57:55 / TC 00:57:56)

I immediately thought of images of power structures that have continued to influence Christianity, flags and government buildings. I wanted to present a conversation that was bigger than the construct of the church. I wanted movement, and specifically, I wanted

Chapter 5 Discussion and Reflections

murmuration. This particular shot ‘found me’ when getting out of a cab in DC. As a filmmaker, I have to be attentive. For me, this is not abstract. I see birds, which is obvious, but I look for obtuse angles, and in this case, again, I was looking for a murmuration in an urban setting, ideally near buildings that look heavy in light of the flight of birds. I immediately set my phone to a 4K resolution and turned it widescreen, capturing the birds together in flight. The light leak, the US flag, and the birds alighting atop the government building were a bonus to the visual metaphor.

I visually translate the concept of social and spiritual movements by utilising the act of murmuration, found as birds fly together. The beauty of this idea is the different aspects of each person's institution or tradition being represented equally amongst ourselves. One can see how there needs to be a consistent leader in murmuration. The birds all take turns leading, and they all have a role to play. No role is more important than the other because leadership is transient. Additionally, further footage captured shows birds flying in a V formation, as this directly correlates to the research findings, as seen below.



(TC 00:37:21 / TC 00:37:33)

As when McLaren states,

What that means is that that centralised power will be suspect going forward. The flip side of that is the new problem that we will face, that could create a beautiful kind of flying in formation, like geese going along in a V, where the person at the front of the V is constantly changing. That would be a very good outcome, and everyone is listening to each other because nobody thinks, “I have got this figured out”. Nobody wants to monopolise, control, and be the leader of the larger movement. (TC 00:36:47)

It is helpful as a researcher/artist to listen *through* the interview while simultaneously participating *in* it, seeing the images I want to create to amplify the interview, enhance the

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spoken word and welcome the viewer in, engaging aesthetic cognitivism. Filming the interview gives an immediacy that other methods might not offer.

Further reflection on this interview showed me how honing the research questions over the last two years had brought clarity that showed some currents coming together among the other podcast hosts and those they are ‘representing’.

Hillary McBride

Podcast: fmr *The Liturgists*, currently *Other People’s Problems*

The interview with McBride was a humbling start. I had tested and re-tested the Zoom audio and my backups, only to be confronted with a server issue in real-time. Nevertheless, the measure of an interviewer and interviewee can be found in how they handle the unpredictable. McBride very quickly pivoted and suggested she record the interview. We discussed how I wanted to change between split screen, with the interviewer/interviewee in view and single shots of her or myself. As a filmmaker, I wanted the viewer to focus primarily on the host/practitioner as it is their content I was gathering while only seeing the interviewer occasionally. Additionally, I wanted multiple options aesthetically for variety in the edit. Making and editing these interviews for the film have further presented me with these options and considerations.

In Zoom, only the administrator can make these choices. McBride was happy to accommodate this. Moreover, she sent the complete files within minutes of the end of the interview. An inconvenience that broke the ice nicely, and though it caused me to break out in a cold sweat, it also brought us together in a way that only unpredictable situations can. As discussed in the previous chapter, trust has a huge role in my creative practice, and moments like this with McBride can accelerate trust.

In the McBride interview, I had a set of questions that I researched, did my homework for, and approached humbly, allowing the conversations not to be steered as much as I experienced. In semi-structured interviews, I allow the art of conversation and creative practice to flow in whatever direction it is needed, regardless of its outcome. My

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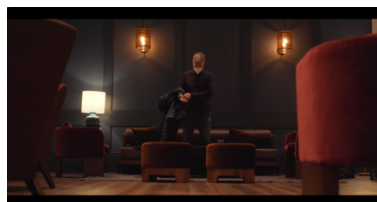
methodology informs this: ‘Semi-structured interviewing tends to be the method of choice for ethnographic research on elite groups’ (Davies 2017). As these are filmed interviews, this gives me further options in the edit to collate similarities in the research then.

Having a vision for the interview is essential, as I am not just going in and throwing everything at the wall and seeing what sticks around the topics I want to discuss. Understanding where I want the interview and where I think it could or should not go is good. Of course, it is good to surround the interview with a theme.

I interview people who can lean into specific topics as this following-interview style can generate a more robust, holistic conversation. So, if the interviewee starts talking about something else, I must let go. I have to be able to let go of the interview. For me, art is found in letting go. This is my creative practice. This is an understanding that going together is more critical than I would have prescribed. The critical implications of this can be seen in the nuance of the interviews and the varied content.

Are the questions important? Yes. Working out the questions, doing my homework, figuring out what makes this person tick, like what they love about what they do and allowing them to express this is very important, as it creates a context. Nevertheless, there is humility in getting things wrong. I loved the interview where McBride said, ‘I am not sure. Is this what you are trying to ask?’. I enjoyed the freedom and ease McBride brought to the interview throughout.

Moreover, my response was, ‘Yes, that is exactly what I was trying to ask. You should be interviewing me’. It is a phrase that could be seen as false humility, yet it is the joy found in going somewhere together. As an editor this scene was omitted from the documentary but included here as a visual paratext.



(TC 00:29:24 / TC 00:54:12)

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Visually, I wanted to capture day-to-day isolation and show the protagonist listening to podcasts in situ. The reason for this is based on what McBride articulates when she says:

We can't practice being bodies together in the way that I think is important for shaping our democracy, and there is something about seeing each other through a screen that creates a filter and a barrier, that makes us easier to misperceive what people are saying or to be cruel, or judgmental to other people because we do not have all of the other information and there is some sort of barrier that shows that cognitively when we perceive the other person as an object on the other side instead of in flesh in front of us. (00:54:01)

For this, I broke up the images using a pedestrian sign reading, 'Be Alert', and a coffee shop with the masked protagonist sitting alone, but not alone.

As a documentary director and editor, it is challenging to switch off your brain in these situations. So, in your mind, you are thinking, how will I edit this? How do I get to the next question seamlessly? This is only sometimes necessary, as previously discussed, showing the strings can be helpful. Upon reflection, I prefer to have the following question ready, still being ready does not mean you need to interrupt by asking it. With McBride, I wanted to interrupt and ask, 'How do we connect over Zoom and podcasting?' During her answer to my previous question, McBride says, '... it is about connection'. I was like, fantastic, beautiful segue. Many times, it does not happen that way. However, when they do, it creates mutuality in the conversation. This connection also implies a quality of interaction being exhibited. I also benefited from the interviewees being mostly accomplished speakers while ensuring they were the appropriate subjects for enquiry. As discussed in Chapter 3, 'The qualitative approach to gathering data permits...investigational evidence (where the researcher talks with those who can provide information)' (Smith & Dean 2009. p.4).

Eddie Gonzalez

Social Healing Team, On Being

I have taken to enjoy Zoom interviews, and the convenience of doing them in my home, where I can set up a couple of cameras. There is a different pace around it. Technically I am more in charge, which I enjoy, although I prefer the freedom that comes with working with a cameraperson who looks after audio and visuals. This teamwork becomes sharper when I am on a Zoom interview and the light in the room changes. Do I get up and change the

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exposure on the camera or do I stay in the conversation and allow light to be light? I am on my own, and I have to choose.

The only interview I conducted which was not with a podcast host, was when I was interviewing Eddie Gonzalez from *On Being*. He runs the *Social Healing Team* that focuses post podcasts on cultural and community engagement. I did this to get a greater understanding of the cultural and community implications of podcasts.

Parameters often change when in interviews. How I react is key to the interview flow, especially when I am self-shooting and self-filming. In the Gonzalez interview, the light was not the only issue. The microphone on my Air Pods did not to work, and it was my primary audio source. Thankfully I had my iPhone running and recording, along with the laptop microphone on Zoom. I had the second camera recording audio too. I know that I can match it in the edit. This is why it is essential to have a few backup plans. Outside of a longer process in the edit, this did not have an effect on the final film.

Gonzalez had a different way of looking at things. He was looking at it, not as a podcast host or producer. He was looking at it from the perspective of someone cultivating a community on behalf of *On Being* podcasting. The conversation concerned understanding movements and how podcast communities can be involved with social healing. We also looked at the impact of the Covid pandemic and how this affected the *On Being* ‘bricks and mortar’ events that were to happen nationally, acting as a place of regathering from the virtual space into a physical space. Moreover, during the Covid pandemic regathering was taking place in smaller digital pockets, experiencing digital charisms.



(TC 01:18:01 / TC 01:18:)

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When discussing how an audience experiences themselves as a community, I laid over Gonzalez's answer, 'As we get to know one another, a natural thing that starts to occur is we start to ask ourselves, 'What could we do if we started to do something together now that we know each other?' (01:17:18) I used a drone shot that not only referenced the journey through a lens flare caused by leaking light. As the drone continues, we see a gathering of Mule deer grazing together while an SUV drives a different road in the distance. This represents how a community can be found in different places and paths and shows it through the creative process of constructing this film.

Jarrold McKenna and Drew Hart

Podcast: *Inverse*

For this research, I focused on individual interviews, as there is a different dynamic in group or panel discussions. I wrangled these interviews in person and on Zoom, with my burgeoning internet coverage in rural Ireland finally cooperating. Leading the only dual interview and doing it on Zoom between NYC, Ireland and Australia certainly brought many logistical challenges.

I found the process around the interview smooth today, setting up a new angle with a black magic camera focusing on the laptop itself. My iPhone film was on a super wide shot, showing my space in the whole room, as I like 'showing the strings' of how it is made. This can provide the viewer with an understanding of the visual paratext, while inviting them into the process. Zoom was also generous, allowing an extension on the usually limited 40 minutes, as we went to 51 minutes, a fortunate opportunity as I interviewed two people.

Jarrold McKenna and Drew Hart quickly established that a podcast is just part of what they do and is much more of a community. The consequences of this decision by McKenna and Hart follow.

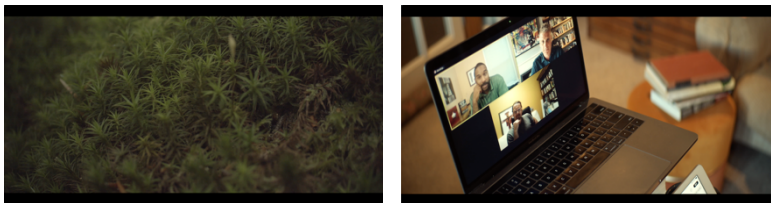
From the beginning of the interview, McKenna and Hart were coming at it from a different angle. This series of Zoom interviews took more work to distinguish an agenda. This is easier in live interviews I have done. Albeit at conferences or festivals, the platform was utilised to highlight their work, book or album. Upfront, McKenna and Hart acknowledged that their agenda as a podcast was to listen to those who did not have an opportunity to speak. They

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were the quickest to draw a link between what is not happening in reality and what is happening digitally, as quoted further in this chapter. This extended to a conversation about how podcasts tend to be linked to middle-class white male patriarchy.

In contrast, their podcast aims to grow communities worldwide, from sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Australia to inner-city Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The implications of this podcast style are in growing diverse and equal communities, even in sharing finances for those in need. (See Chapter 4)

As they spoke of their work in building community, it became inspiring. I was inspired many times during this research, but this caused me to reflect further on what it was in the interview that brought about new levels of emotion, as they quantified the practical outworking of a community and how people felt. These included not just feelings but experiences in podcasting and the digital space. This effected the inclusion of this interview into the final edit.



(TC 00:18:11 / TC 00:19:30)

When discussing spiritual formation, Hart states:

I've seen the way that people are growing, and engaging, and challenging one another, and hearing and receiving others' stories. The way that people's lives have been changing and transforming in all kinds of ways that I think were unexpected to all of us. (TC 00:18:06)

I purposefully chose to show the mechanics of how growth can occur online. I did this by showing the multiple angles captured by a secondary camera. The changing camera angles achieved this by giving the viewer a visual sense of change, the angle representing the 'changing and transforming' spoken.

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McKenna took it further, saying, ‘.... this is something vulnerable, and small is actually really important, and it's producing leaders, not superstars, who are serious about service of others. (TC 00:19:26). I went to the forest with a macro lens to capture early growth on the forest floor, as well as on the neighbouring trees. This represents the vulnerable growth that can be nurtured in a digital space. When describing the nurturing aspect of a digital space, I wanted to show something more tangible and relatable to understanding multiple types of growth, thus showing the forest floor and the towering trees.

I reacted to questions and answers and took the time to go deeper. This is both a good and bad thing. As a researcher/interviewer having time can lead to deeper listening and findings, but it can also lead to interviewees expounding and overexplaining concepts. As an editor/director, I know this will add unnecessary editing time. These are also the times when a posture of patience is vital. As a follower-interviewer, I can see the interviewee trying to find their way back to something more profound, further forward. It is my role to allow that space, regardless of the time constraints, as the in-between can bring about the most profound moments and findings. Whether I am holding a silence together to allow the interviewee to expand on a subject, the in-between is the most exciting time of any interviews I conduct. Leaving space for wandering creates space for finding. This is a vital part of the semi-structured gathering process, as discussed more fully in Chapter 3, a methodology based on the creative practice of filmmaking and interviewing.

With McKenna and Hart, the threads led to discussions on what podcasts could be or should be, maybe are, but maybe still need to be.

Like the Gonzalez and McHargue interview, this interview looked at podcasts pivoting towards physical bricks-and-mortar style gatherings or hybrids of the digital and physical space places where listeners can experience the digital expression.

McKenna and Hart did seem hesitant about moving digital to that physical space because of the pastoral care issues surrounding the gathering and the titles that can be applied. They were clear on multiple occasions about not becoming celebrity podcast hosts or elevated pastors, echoed by many hosts/practitioners. They were purposeful in deescalating this, as they gave the virtual microphone to many other voices.

In this process, as an interviewer and host/practitioner, I find that our role is to present something, place an idea out there, speak half of a sentence on purpose, pause for longer than expected and then get out of the way, letting the conversation evolve. It is in this space where new ideas emerge. The McKenna and Hart interview was an example of how that could be executed. You can see this is exhibited in the final film, but many more of these examples have been edited out to make room for the research findings.

Live Interviews

Krista Tippet

Podcast: *On Being*

The implications of my creative practice process directly correlate with the methodology and filming, affecting the research findings. I suggest that understanding the interviewing process and how it evolved during these studies will bring a greater understanding and engagement with the content of the filmed interviews following. This is why I will take the time to discuss the interview process.

What would it be like to interview someone widely known as one of the most insightful interviewers in radio and podcasting? My interview with Krista Tippet, a Peabody Award-winning podcast and former public radio show host who led the way in podcasting with a spiritual inquiry, was one that I had anticipated from the inception of this thesis. The broadcaster and writer Studs Terkel has been attributed to speaking of homework and humility as necessary when interviewing. (Erstwhile 2017) Both homework and humility were a necessity.

And then, I decided not to use notes. It was only a few minutes into the interview, and I was experiencing a conversation with Tippet that felt at ease and natural. She had a posture of presence and relaxed eye contact. There was mutual respect and trust established. I know that this is a gift that Tippet brings but one that I was beginning to reciprocate. This can be

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seen in the film, where I included multiple interactions with Tippet outside of the sit-down interview.

One of the reasons why I chose to set the notes aside was to facilitate feeling and communicating full presence. Having established interpersonal trust, this interview was different as I did not feel distracted by the person, place or act of interviewing. Throughout this research process, I had come to trust my abilities and those of the interviewee. I was not wrestling with my abilities or my hopes for the film and thesis. I was embodying the creative practice, the art. This illustrates the creative practice engaged, and the '...complexity and diversity of screen production research, which creates new knowledge about the filmmaker's perspective when that knowledge has been acquired through an insider's perspective' (Kerrigan & Callaghan 2016, p.6). Trust brings you inside.

We had entered into a conversation where Tippet saw me, and I saw her, and we listened intently, journeying together toward a greater understanding. I found myself hearing Tippet's answers and seeing in my mind's eye the many places the conversation could go without leading. I felt free to move on to the next question to gather data for a thesis. This conversation was the follower-interview that I had prepared for, one forged in the previous four years of study. Moreover, there was an interviewing idea that I had spent three decades exploring, and I was seeing come to fruition in in these 13 interviews.

We had arrived at Tippet's office in the *On Being* podcast space. I saw her in her studio going over notes, so I did not rush in to greet her. That space at the beginning of every interview is significant to me. I see it as sacred. I go in and take the temperature of the room. If the beginning is relaxed, the interview following will likely be as well. I was in Tippet's space, and like other hosts that welcomed us, she first had to host my camera person and me in person before we turned to the discussion on hosting others virtually.

We set up the interview by creating a new space. I wanted a border on one side to create comfort and a space to the left that allowed freedom of movement for the cameras. We decided to film with a locked-off wide shot of Tippet and myself with my camera person on an additional long lens, filming close-ups of Tippet over my shoulder. The wide shot allows

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the viewer to understand the space and observe the interview/ interviewee relationship. The close-up of the primary interviewee, Tippet, added intimacy and energy.

On her admittance, Tippet does not do many on-camera interviews, preferring her honed style of radio and podcast interviews. These are interviews that she typically does alone over fibre optics with the interviewee.

At one point during the interview, I wondered if there was an interview happening today, as it felt so conversational. It felt like the conversations I tended to have before the camera rolled. It is common for many interviewees that once the lapel microphones are clipped on and the little red camera light glows on the back, the answers tighten. In these moments, I interject a few extra beats of silence and even purposefully fidget a bit, giving the interviewee, in a sense, permission to fidget, too and then relax. I begin with questions that are less about content and mostly about getting the interviewee into a space where they feel like they can be themselves. They hope to get beyond their on-camera persona and into a space where they forget about the camera and time. Doing this can be challenging, depending on many things, from their previous exposure to cameras to what kind of conversation they had in traffic that morning.

The act of observation can cause a modification in the interviewee's behaviour, known as the Hawthorne Effect. The Hawthorne Effect is the 1920s and 30s study based on observing employees evaluated in a workspace. The study ascertained that to overcome the effect of being observed, 'it is important that the researcher becomes successfully immersed in the social setting by gaining trust and making the workers feel relaxed and unthreatened' (Oswald et al., 2014). The presence of a camera as an additional observer can have the same effect. It is 'possible to make observational-style films that accurately reflect the true nature and behaviors of human subjects' (Trainor 2021).

Thankfully, due to the seasoned experience of the hosts/practitioners in being interviewed on camera and the prevalence of Zoom cameras, this effect took less to mitigate. However, the necessity of time and establishing trust remained.

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With Tippet being in a very relaxed, free-flowing, yet focused conversation, I wondered whether this could be sustained for the allotted hour. Something I was monitoring in an internal clock, as memory cards on our cameras would last only 50 minutes in 4k resolution, meaning I would like them changed at the right time so as not to interrupt the conversation. Usually, this happens around the 40-minute mark.

The content was thorough, talking about podcast history, the transformational power of trends, formation through podcasts, the digital world and Tippet's spiritual journey. I ignored the temptation to think about how this would fit into an edit, as it could distract me. Later, this distraction would be a welcomed one as I applied my creative practice in capturing footage that could assist in exploring the content mentioned earlier in the film.

For example, Tippet extrapolated around the generative narrative and landscape that she sees, saying,

Then there is what I think of as a generative narrative of our time, where 21st-century people are living in a new way, and to these questions of what it means to be human, how we want to live, and who will be to each other. There is a generative landscape, and my experience that we have had from the very beginning of *On Being* is that we would hear from people, and they would say, “I listen to this show, and I feel less alone”. (TC 01:01:01)



(TC 01:01:18 / 01:01:27)

Hearing this in situ, I was immediately reminded of the Bob Dylan graffiti drawn by Eduardo Kobra (2015), which I had seen the night before and knew what this art was saying, was needed visually as Tippet spoke.

‘The Times They Are a-Changin’’. – Bob Dylan (1941-)

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I filed it away until I returned to the hotel that night, where we filmed the desired b-roll (intentional supporting footage) of the graffiti as seen in the film.

On further reflection, I had graduated from a new place of interviewing. Although I went into the interview feeling the least confident I had ever felt as an interviewer, I felt a new calm once I arrived. It felt new, and it felt correct and good. I could lean into those instincts, the intuitive overlaps, follow what was happening in the room, and lean into the conversation with Tippet. I felt like she was doing the same thing and we were discovering new things together.

The implication of this style of filmed interview is how it challenged me as a researcher to be fully present and receptive to emerging findings. Additionally, to be present in the filming process, not allowing the presence of a camera or technology to “.... displace the body from its central position as an arbiter of experience’ (Marvin 1990, p.233). I was present as an artist, experiencing the conversation while digging for more information and curating a space that could inform the bigger picture of spiritual formation in a digital age, a key research finding observed in the preceding chapter.

At the end of the interview, I opened up my iPad and checked my notes, and together we had covered everything and more.

Afterwards, I felt raw and vulnerable, wondering if I had done a good job. You can always have imposter syndrome when you are sitting there in front of people who are so accomplished. In this space, I realised that I belonged here and that academia and art are not mutually exclusive.

I have changed much over these years of study since I started this project. That may be why this one felt different. That may be why I changed some of my creative processes, allowing them to evolve. In this interview, I was an artist creating art through conversation. Conversation as creative practice.

Mike McHargue

Podcast: fmr *The Liturgists*, *Ask Science Mike*, currently *Cozy Robot*

Mike McHargue was the first interview I conducted for this research. Because of this, I was overly prepared and more nervous about ‘answering every question’. I am thankful that I had taken the time to hone the questions used in this research and also that I had taken the time to research McHargue thoroughly.

The profundity of McHargue’s vulnerability struck me. Many of those I interview are very present and open, but few choose to be vulnerable. We discussed why he does podcasts, the ethical responsibilities of funding podcasts, ethical responsibilities when it comes to the listeners, and whom listeners represent. McHargue spoke openly about the pitfalls, struggles, and expectancies brought on by hosting podcasts. He spoke of solidarity and the digital community. Knowing that the camera was observing and recording this allowed me, as a participant observer and director, to hear what McHargue was saying in a live setting and revisit this visually. There was a choice made to capture the vulnerability and be close to it. This choice came in lens selection prior to the interview. Using a zoom lens allowing the viewer to observe and participate.

I was fascinated that he would not call himself a ‘leader’, the leader being the framing of the question I presented. When asked, McHargue said, ‘I do not consider myself a leader at all’. (TC 00:20:59). He went on to say, ‘I’ve done everything I can to subvert anyone’s assumption that I am a leader. I try to be a source of solidarity and comfort, but I think a leader is trying to lead people somewhere, and our work has been to say, wherever you’re at, you’re okay’. (TC 00:21:02) Although the role of hosts/practitioners is de facto a place of an amplified platform, it is evident from this research that many of those interviewed avoid titles such as leader.

I started to understand that being called a movement leader is different from what many podcast hosts are pursuing. When I hear leaders of large movements speak about not wanting the leadership title, it can be perceived as disingenuous. They want the platform without the responsibility of the consequence of standing on or being elevated onto the said platform. Podcast hosts run to the podcast to circumnavigate the mantle of leadership. In the case of

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the podcasts represented in this study, many conversations are about healing the toxic leadership experienced in their former churches. So, the idea of a leader is seen as untrustworthy. This was brought into further focus as McHargue unpacked the co-dependent relationship developed with his listeners and heard the subsequent health implications leading him to take an extended break from podcasting.

The act of trust directly correlates to one of the primary research questions: Who is leading the formation of spirituality in this new digital era? Additionally, when pertaining to the importance of trust, this research questions each host/practitioner about the ethics of podcast hosts and investigates how these new digital followers are viewed and vice-versa. (See Chapter 4) Utilising the aforementioned methodology identified the consciousness-raising aspects of this sociocultural phenomenon while collecting the participants' anecdotes of lived experiences. (See Chapter 3)

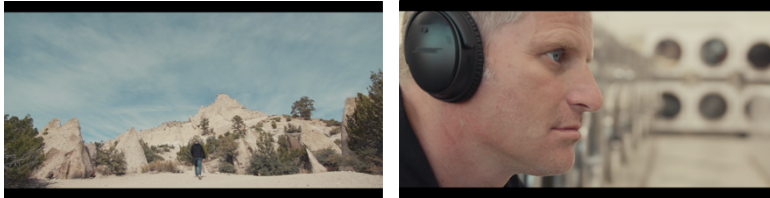
I would have liked to have asked McHargue more about Christianity and the space that Christian thought occupies in the culture, as many of his listeners would see themselves as post-Christian or those in the process of deconstructing. On reflection, this would not have only been a question for the research but a personal one as, at this time, I was going through a process of deconstructing and reconstituting a new understanding of my faith and how I pursue spiritual formation.

I valued the flow and silence of this interview and the pushback that McHargue gave on some of my questions. You can see in the documentary interview where McHargue pushed back on the way I was framing specific questions, and then together, we reframed and readdressed the context seeing it from a different worldview. This reminded me of the necessity of humility as a follower interviewer. The back and forth of these conversations not only serve as mining for content but also welcomes the viewer into a new space that can be permission-giving for disagreeing with the interviewer. It also models good communication while further understanding visually the range of interactions documented.

Visually I knew I would be travelling to the Nevada desert with the explicit desire to film myself, headphones on, listening to a podcast. I wanted to show transition and podcasts' role in the journey, crossing a metaphorical journey. Additionally, I wanted to show an urban

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setting. I chose a laundromat in Los Angeles, myself as the continuing protagonist inviting the viewer to see themselves in the wandering character and hear what McHargue was saying. And when doing so I show the intentional images.



(TC 01:22:02 / TC 01:23:01)

McHargue says:

...what we tried to build is a way station for people in transition because when you're in transition, everyone distrusts you. "Are you in our camp, or not?" And we have tried to make a place where you just do not have to be in a camp. (TC 00:21:02)

What McHargue said had me rethink the options and versions needed for this documentary. McHargue also highlighted an area I had yet to consider, picking up on the necessity of transcribing for the deaf and the hard of hearing, something I had never considered when it came to podcasting and spiritual formation. This has directly impacted the documentary and its presentation as I have burnt in the captions and can provide other transcriptions for the deaf.

With this first interview, I was pleased that we were already mining content like why podcasts exist, what they can be, and what they can do. This included what podcasts should not do and the role they can play in bringing solidarity to a faith-seeking diaspora, those disenfranchised, or those who have moved on from the church, as well as addressing the monetisation of podcasting in a spiritual space. In my opinion, the introduction of money has shown to be effective in smothering down a transformative power sought in spiritual formation. It elevates individuals and creates divides that are a 'bug more than a feature' when developing healthy, formational communities. The asking of money to support a faith-based concern while remaining relevant without taking out the baggage of the last few

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centuries, where it is so transactional, is a big ask. Where money is, control comes, and institutional ways form.

Pádraig Ó Tuama

Podcast: *Poetry Unbound*

The environment can tell us a lot about who we are, including the surroundings we choose to be in. As well as the ability to be comfortable in a space not typically used for an interview about podcasting. I chose to interview Ó Tuama on the banks of the Lower Lough Erne in County Fermanagh. The fields, populated with hares, led to the lough. The shore we inhabited was also inhabiting us. This location spoke to who Ó Tuama is as a human, poet and podcast host. Giving a visual context to these dialogues enabled me to exhibit ‘...phenomenological insights via cinematic language’ (Gupta 2019, p.9).



(TC 01:10:30 / TC 01:10:13)

The environment provided extraordinary views and audio challenges, wind, water, and birds, which as a filmmaker, I embraced and used as visual metaphors underlining the content brought by Ó Tuama.

I initially found the interview challenging as we have been dear friends for most of our lives, and here I was interviewing him. Both of us were very aware of each other’s language, upbringing and future hopes. At first, this was a concern for my research aims as I did not want the shorthand that familiarity can bring to circumnavigate the details surrounding Ó Tuama’s experience of community, spiritual formation and podcasting. I found myself challenged not to overthink or predict what was next. Furthermore, once I surrendered to the conversation and flow of information, it became a full, delightful and inspiring interview.

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We arrived together during the interview I did with Ó Tuama. It may not have been the predictable, apparent mathematical academic understanding of arrival, but it certainly was where the practice was free to go.

I found a new iteration in my interviewer and participant observer interaction. If I am not careful, the desire for answers as an interviewer, whether for research or live at conferences, can force answers in a particular direction and give a false positive. ‘Leading the witness’ is tempting when gathering information. Since the hosts/practitioners are practised media operators, they, too, are aware of the interview dynamic. For these moments, I lean into my methodology that asks of the researcher, ‘...to gather observations through interviewing requires attention to the concrete issues of interview content’ (Morgan 1996, P.47). And to do so while identifying ‘...shared thematic meanings that resound across all participants’ anecdotes of lived experience, in order to unearth insight about a particular human phenomenon against the backdrop of the shared human condition’ (Manen 1990, p.39). Not to lead the witness. (See Chapter 3 for further discussion)

I can hear in their voice that they know that you know, where you want them to go. Moreover, people likely follow that prompt in most situations because they are like, ‘Okay, we are here for this reason. This guy wants to talk about this subject. So, I am going to answer this in this way’.

However, as an interviewer seeking new insights, I pause when I see their body language change. In this pause, I ask myself, do I go where the obvious leads or make room for the interviewee? I pause, look at them, and wonder what they want to talk about right now? For example, around an area of injustice? I may want to talk about activism, but they may want to talk about their own life and how they have experienced injustice.

Moreover, both answers can lead to similar conclusions, but they might differ from what I am looking for mathematically or academically. In these circumstances, in my creative practice, when interviewing people and practising my art, there is no wrong answer when you are humbly approaching the person to be true to themselves. In those moments, I can see a spark in their eye. I see a deeper breath in their lungs when their shoulders roll back as

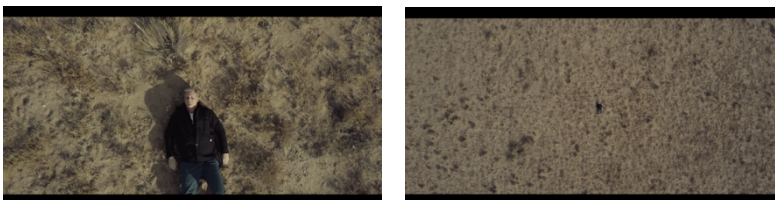
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they find within themselves a truth that they may have wanted to express all along but were never given an opportunity to.

At times, Ó Tuama would bring up a subject, and I would look at him, thinking, ‘Why is he talking about this right now?’ However, everything in me wants to lean forward, show body language, and make sounds like, ‘Uh-huh, yeah. Interesting’. I can do this more than once in order to indicate to the interviewee that it is time for them to wrap that sentence up, which is easier to do in physical space than it is to do in Zoom. All to go where I think it *should* be going, being impatient for where it *could* go. However, one of the things I have learned, I am learning, in my creative practice is that when someone goes there, you are better off going with them.

You need to trust that they are going there for a reason. If you genuinely want to experience this person for who they are, you should probably go there and not think about how I ‘get this back on track’.

Wertz discusses patience and a sense of dwelling when interviewing in my chosen methodology. He writes, ‘when we stop and linger with something, it secretes its sense, and its full significance becomes ... amplified’. As an artist that uses interviewing as a creative process, it is my greatest joy to give people the opportunity to express a truth that maybe has never been expressed before or in that way before, allowing them to amplify their voice. Furthermore, I am not just talking about amplifying their voice to the people who listen to or watch something but allowing amplifying their voice to themselves. That is, they hear it, experience it, and it empowers them. And then it empowers us.



(TC 00:46:24 / TC 00:46:49)

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I exhibit a drone shot from the desert here. The protagonist is lying flat on the dried earth. Ó Tuama says, ‘I do not think courage has ever come without imagination, and I think podcasts provide accessibility to people whose imagination has been chained up’. (TC 00:45:50). As Ó Tuama says this, I zoom out, showing a perspective of imagination. An aesthetic visual interpretation is exhibiting access without boundary, which this research has shown podcasts to represent. (See Chapter 3 for further discussion)

These findings reflect research suggested in Chapter 2 pertaining to podcasting and its easy, consistent access to specific genres and sub-genres of content. The interaction of social media communities and the primary solo act of listening can bring about an intimate user experience unique to this medium.

With Ó Tuama, I would ask a question, and he would hear the question, understand my intention, and answer it. I would pause and ask an unwritten follow-up, possibly unexpected question. And then, confidently, we would go into an undiscovered area together.

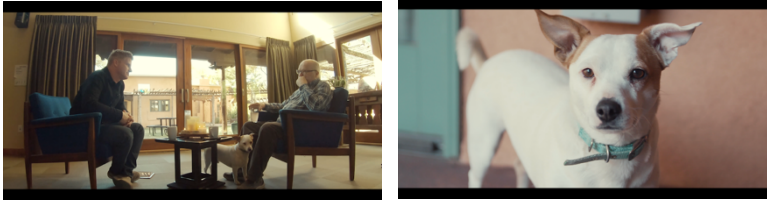
Richard Rohr

Podcast: *Another Name for Every Thing*

Arriving in the desert in Albuquerque, New Mexico, was an experience. Not only had I come to interview someone widely considered one of the most articulate and profound voices in the contemplative spiritual world, but the environment surrounding me had all of my creative synapses firing. A Rohr in the desert, I was here to interview Fr. Richard Rohr, a mystic monk and *New York Times* bestseller. Nevertheless, we were also here to film a large portion of the visual metaphors I wanted for this study's documentary film portion, alongside the written one, as the visual informs the written word, and beauty can lead to knowledge.

Rohr had invited me and my cameraperson to join his community first as they practised meditation. This opportunity was unique among all my pre-interview preparations, but it set a tone of peace and connectivity from the beginning.

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(TC 00:08:20 / TC 00:52:44)

The conversation, set in the chapel on its community compound, was relaxed with candles and the welcomed presence of Rohr's dog. Those who have watched my previous documentaries, where I welcome informality, like dogs that wander around interviews, have commented that they see this as an interruption. Yet, as an artist/researcher, this is part of the connected performative space that welcomes anything that speaks to our humanity. This type of presence invites the viewer to look beyond the spoken word as it visually interprets the findings, in this case, when discussing community and welcome. This interpretive filming is an important aspect of showing my research, as 'Media, of course, are devices that mediate experience by representing messages originally in a different mode' (Marvin 1990, p.190). Furthermore, it shows 'creativity expressed through the modification and extension of materials already on the ground' (Tanner 1997).

In our conversation, I looked at how Rohr sees podcasting assisting the transformational side of spirituality to faith, moving from a more transactional faith over the last few centuries to a more transformational one. Together we looked at his experiences of movements, how tradition could be created, and the role that tradition may or may not play in the future. We discussed ethics, the roles of leaders, and ways of defining a follower. (See Chapter 4 for further analysis)

In the research findings, many of the hosts/practitioners discussed how in isolation, spiritual formation most likely cannot be found just in the digital. It is interesting how they are excited about the digital era because they can reach more people. However, they also return to the idea that the virtual sphere needs to hold more in isolation. It needs to help give more traction for transformation regarding our spiritual lives. The research findings also show how community, connection, intimacy and physical contact are necessary for spiritual formation. The research process of gathering and interpretation on film, through the form of a documentary helped foster these conclusions. As written in Chapter 3, 'Cinematic-

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phenomenologists then engage in a cinematic data-interpretation process in which we approach the data again through the lens of a filmmaker’(Gupta 2009, p.6).



(TC 00:19:01 / TC 00:19:17)

Further, when asked about the possibilities of spiritual formation in the digital space, Rohr answered, ‘...it's got to lead to encounter, to “I, thou”, to relationship, to at least small informal community, to affiliation. If it doesn't lead to affiliation, it's just isolated enlightenment. It's very dangerous’. (TC 00:18:55)

To show this visually, I walked with Rohr throughout his sun-soaked, walled garden, exhibiting encounter, proximity and informal community.

Rohr said he gets more comments about podcasts than in books lately. It was not only a revelation for a person most widely known for his writing but also set us up to discuss his thoughts on podcasting more thoroughly. I was pleased that we spent less time discussing his books, as the temptation to discuss what they are most comfortable discussing was high. Filming the interview and adhering to the research questions about podcasting assisted in keeping the conversation focused.

The time went quickly, but I had enough time to work through research questions, walk about the gardens, and chat further about the subject matter. This conversation featured much leaning in as we both were in the business of listening deeply. As a follower-interviewer, I was happy to entertain what some could perceive as rabbit holes, but I celebrate this burrowing. I relish in these opportunities to exit one space and enter a new one, as this can bring new insights and further exploration of what may have felt more formal when sitting down. Most cutaways used when introducing the podcast hosts in the film are of these walkabouts. These visual sequences add to the research creating ‘spatial and temporal rhythms[that] accurately express the atmosphere and moods’(Gupta 2009, p.7). of the

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physical environment, as well as introduce the subjects. It also brings the viewer beyond the interview frame and into the visual paratext.

I could have chosen not to have cutaways, whether in a live interview setting or on Zoom. My choice to do so was about bringing access to the interviewees. When in a live setting, show their environment and space. When on Zoom showing them laughing and cutting away to a b-roll filmed to assist in translating their answers. (See Chapter 3)

David Kinnaman

Podcast: *Church Pulse Weekly*

David Kinnaman is a statistician and author who looks at the issue of church future, young adults, including exiles, nomads, and the disenfranchised. His company Barna describes itself as a ‘leading research organisation focused on the intersection of faith and culture’. We had a long conversation about his views on podcasts and the digital world, regarding how podcasts can complement or take away from the church’s growth.

This interview, conducted in Kinnaman’s Barna offices, where we were given plenty of opportunities to curate a space, still felt slightly less natural than I had hoped. The time constraints and office environment could have been more conducive to the conversation. There were moments when I thought I was more watching a presentation than having a conversation. I found Kinnaman’s content compelling as he spoke from a more church-forward stance, especially as many of those I interviewed have moved outside the traditional faith development understanding. I appreciated Kinnaman’s perspective as it not only highlighted institutional shortcomings but was looking at ways to better engage in the areas of deficit. At one point, Kinnaman remarks that ‘I feel like we’re doing dial-up ministry in a WiFi world’. (TC 00:39:41) And further, ‘... we’re not just part of a small little church, but we’re part of a larger movement’.

At the time of the interview in November 2019, it became evident that my questions were focused on a newly emerging area. This concerned early data that Kinnaman and his research company Barna were just at the beginning of conducting and collating, as podcasting was

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only coming to a more cultural prevalence. Seeing that my research was asking questions that a significant research company was beginning to look into and knowing that my research could add to this emerging conversation was validating.

As a researcher looking for emerging data is good news for this research and film, as I am asking relevant questions. There is a need for more documented answers.

I again enjoyed the ebb and flow of some of the conversation and the pushback engagement in this interview. I had to navigate language, differing cultural lenses and perceived bias, acknowledging my own while maintaining perspective and offering open questions. I enjoyed the internal dialogue and challenge this gave me as a researcher. I must be able to set them aside as I mine for content while welcoming new ideas. New ideas or angles on older ones emerge when acknowledging that I have my own biases and lenses. As well as how I bring those biases to conversations, especially regarding whether a church can be found outside the church. This research has shown that church can be found outside traditions (See Chapter 4) and when looking statistically at a society. (See Chapter 2) However, Kinnaman would come from what I perceived as a more church-centric position. Having interviewed a statistician from a Christian perspective drove me to investigate opposing research for balance.



(TC 00:15:51 / TC 00:50:39)

With Kinnaman, the filming was twofold. The first was to allow the viewer to see him beyond that statistical analysis, so I filmed us walking in his office's neighbourhood. I have utilised this visual device throughout the film to give a sense of journey, connection and place. This is something a recorded sound-only interview would not have. Further, when Kinnaman said, 'I think that digital technologies at their best are disruptive forces that level the playing field' (00:50:39), I wanted to echo the stop animation of Wes Anderson in *Isle of Dogs*, which shows the digital in a non-threatening, accessible and childlike manner, for

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this phrase. To do this, I filmed a sequence of transmission towers on a foggy morning, focusing the movement on an abstruse angle while turning up the camera's digital sensor to give it a blown-out look, a transmitter looking for clarity. Everything is intentional. These intentionally filmed interpretations of digital technologies levelling the playing field have consequences rooted in the research, as it shows key findings in how podcasting can bring access to spiritual formation, for anyone looking.

Nadia Bolz-Weber

Podcast: *The Confessional*

How I handle an interview that goes in a different direction than I had prepared for can make or break the interview itself. Forcing a subject matter or getting frustrated has a way of infecting the content and can even create a combative atmosphere. I had to jettison the prepared content early in my interview with Bolz-Weber. Many interviewees like to know the questions before interviews, but many are very busy. If the questions are in the area of their specialisation, they may not look at them, being very comfortable in their ability to navigate the conversation. However, as an interviewer, it can be up to me to assist in the navigation. If I am interviewing in a live situation, I allow longer answers from the interviewee, giving me the time to regroup. You can stop and reset on camera, but I keep it rolling and see where it goes for both the interviewee and interviewer.

On arrival, Bolz-Weber expressed that podcasts and community were not something she was passionate about talking about anymore. This was an area I wanted to discover more about from Bolz-Weber, as her experience of the online community was renowned. In real-time, I wondered how I would 'fill' an interview that I had just prepared for and which would be 70% of the interview subject matter.

And so, I paused, reminding myself that this interview was not about me. Although this is academic, I am looking for certain consistencies regarding how people view podcasting or online communities. I was not using notes again, because I enjoyed internalising the questions and then inhabiting the follower-interview style. With 70% of my research questions scrapped, I realised she wanted to talk about certain things about online community, empathy and trust. This part of the creative practice took the interview into a flow state, less linear.

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(TC 00:33:34 / TC 00:33:58)

When Bolz-Weber made the following statement, I knew that I wanted to show a sense of confusion, bewilderment and something unsettled.

People will often tell me why they aren't part of Christianity anymore. They'll lead with it, like, "Oh, I was raised Methodist, but my mom got divorced, and they were horrible to her". And I was like, no. Or, "I had to choose between my sexuality and my faith", or whatever. They have all these reasons. (TC 00:33:14).

Visual metaphors can be bespoke footage (TC 00:06:10) or intentional supporting footage shot spontaneously. The image of the swirling Alice in Wonderland sculpture found me on New York's Little Island. For me, it encapsulates the many facets of identity, conditioning and an unstable posture. Looking closely at the film, you can see my reflection, a different metaphor for the formation process as discussed in the research questions around forming spirituality alone or in a community. Hopefully, this will lead the audience to reflect on, question, or possibly respond to a deep understanding of their place and community.

On reflection, one of the areas of learning for me as an artist/researcher is that interviews are better when framed as a conversation. Even though it is performative as a participant observer, the essence of the interview/interviewee construct is to inhabit the space together. Together we were inhabiting a space the research showed as a necessary need for spiritual formation. (See Chapter 4)

Lisa Sharon Harper

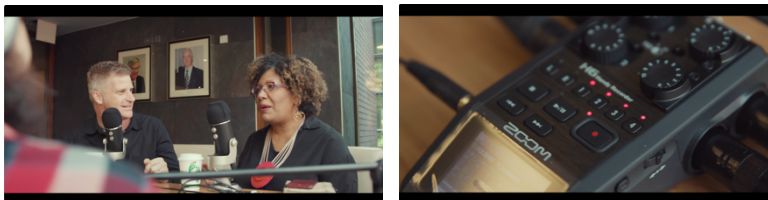
Podcast: *Freedom Road*

I interviewed Sharon Harper at an empty pub in a local Dublin university. Ideally, I would have interviewed her where she lives in Washington DC, but convenience and availability opened the opportunity for my first research interview with her. It was a very relaxed interview, yet not as personal as I would have hoped, as a familiar place can bring a different depth of vulnerability. Nevertheless, Sharon Harper was up for the interview and a recording

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of my co-hosted/co-produced podcast *The Graveyard Shift*, a podcast about faith, life and Christian culture from an Irish perspective. A podcast that ran from 2016-2020 with 187 episodes. We filmed both the interview and podcast recording, providing an opportunity to have both the podcast recorded and subsequently released and footage captured throughout the documentary. For originality purposes of this thesis, I only used the images recorded as b-roll and none of the audio. This decision added a set of immediate consequences to my research, knowing that the recorded podcast's audio would be released later that day.

Sharon Harper's depth of understanding of race issues, history, church and how podcasts can be used to develop and form faith was very informative. I thought I would feel out of my depth in this interview, but I allowed this to become a mechanism for me and the viewer to learn together. The role of the interviewer can be defined as humility and considered ignorance. The desire to say the right thing or to be perceived as competent in interviews can be distracting. I have found that allowing a level of *naïveté* opens me to ask the questions and look for the clarifications that may seem evident to 'those in the know, yet are the very questions and clarifications that many listeners and viewers are asking. This by no means negates preparation, but this posture does allow the preparation not to inhibit a welcoming conversation.



(TC 00:38:31 / TC 00:38:47)

As Sharon Harper unpacked her role as a host and curator of tough conversations, I saw the opportunity to show the mechanics of the making of podcasts. I also did this briefly with Tippet's interviews but spent more time with Sharon Harper on the dynamic of the conversation, while being more literal in the footage captured, microphones, digital recorder, and the panel of hosts. I laid the following audio over this portion of Sharon Harper's interview.

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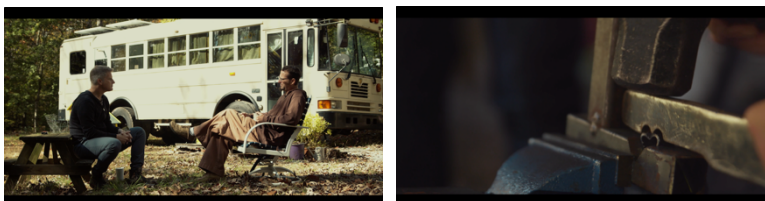
Because of the democratisation of information through the podcast, you actually have more ability to get more information.... the podcast plays the role that the preacher used to play on Sunday morning.... People are now able to get church any day of the week by downloading a conversation with a theologian, or a spiritual leader, and moving forward. (TC 00:38:19)

The following podcast episode was a great experience, having both my co-hosts bounce off while interviewing Sharon Harper. I prefer one-on-one interviews because they allow me to control the interview's pace. However, there is also lovely chaos that comes from a panel interview giving the opportunity for more angles of questioning.

Shane Claiborne

Podcast: *Red Letter Christians*

You face new challenges when you interview someone on podcasts or for other media outlets multiple times daily. How do you set yourself apart in the way you interview them? Although you may be soliciting similar content, you still want it to feel fresh. Putting the interviewee into an unexpected yet familiar enough space can give the interview an edge. With Shane Claiborne, I arranged to travel to his home, an RV parked in the woods of North Carolina. From the moment it began, with leaves falling through the trees, dogs walking about, and the mismatch of chairs, it became a new conversation style. Additionally, this also allows the viewer to see who Claiborne is before they hear who he is. I did this by showing the RV he lives in and the guns he melts into garden tools and hearts made of gun barrels.



(TC 01:19:04 / TC 00:10:07)

Claiborne understands the podcast environment, utilising the podcast space to lead justice-orientated movements. Furthermore, Claiborne understands the influence of digital media to pull together communities, leveraging them towards physical, practical, presence-based activism.

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This interview was another example of an interview in which I could relax into myself and conduct a follower interview. In this place, we journeyed together, I was not trying to lead the interviewee or rush into an answer, all in trying to change the subject to something I would need to hear for academic reasons. This interview style gives more space for the interviewee to be who they are, tell their story, and be part of the kind of narrative they live.



(TC 01:19:18 / TC 01:20:39 / TC 01:21:27)

When Claiborne says, ‘I think in the virtual space there is that same longing to belong, to be a part of something bigger than ourselves, to find people that resonate with our message’ (TC 01:19:05). For this, I knew that I wanted to show the protagonist isolated yet within the virtual community. I did this by wearing full-sized over-the-ear headphones in a remote area. I left the multiple focus pulls between myself and the mountains in the edit as it represents the tension between intimacy and space.

When Shane mentioned George Floyd, I knew I would be using footage I had filmed on my iPhone 24 hours earlier at the site of George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Although I did not have footage, I wanted to represent the children from Afghanistan that Claiborne spoke of. I did this metaphorically. To do this, I first filmed a remote desert by drone, followed by a tight close-up of wildflowers representing uncontained hope. This happens as Claiborne says, ‘...the kids in Afghanistan heard that we were going [to Ferguson]. They saw it on Twitter; they were like, “Listen, could you take a flower and place it there from us in solidarity?”’ (TC 01:20:49)

Music and Wild Track

The music used throughout the documentary was sourced from Artlist, 'a subscription-based platform that offers high-quality music licensing' (IMHO Reviews 2022). I spent days looking for music that would act as a sonic scaffolding, a soundtrack to build the interview on. I mixed the music just below the interviewee's audio, amplifying it more when I changed scenes or chapters. Certain tracks were used numerous times to bring familiarity to the music. I also used silence to inhabit parts of the film, in order to give the viewer relief and space to pause and watch. Additionally, I enhanced the 'wild track' throughout the whole project. The wild track is heard in drone flying, a bird passing by, the hum of a crowded airport or the traffic on a city street.

Conclusion

These interviews were formed while developing an understanding of the follower-interview construct (See Chapter 3) and how I film interviews. This included how I ask the questions, how I phrase the questions, how I wait for the answers, and the willingness to follow the newly formed rabbit hole paths that the interviewee embarks on. This was an exciting journey in discovering how I get the best research out of the hosts/practitioner's interviews. Capturing these and developing '...phenomenological insights via cinematic language' (Gupta 2019, p.9). As discussed previously, I use Final Cut Pro to edit these film-generated insights. Each coloured sliver in the below photo represents an edit, soundtrack, layer, wild track and voice.

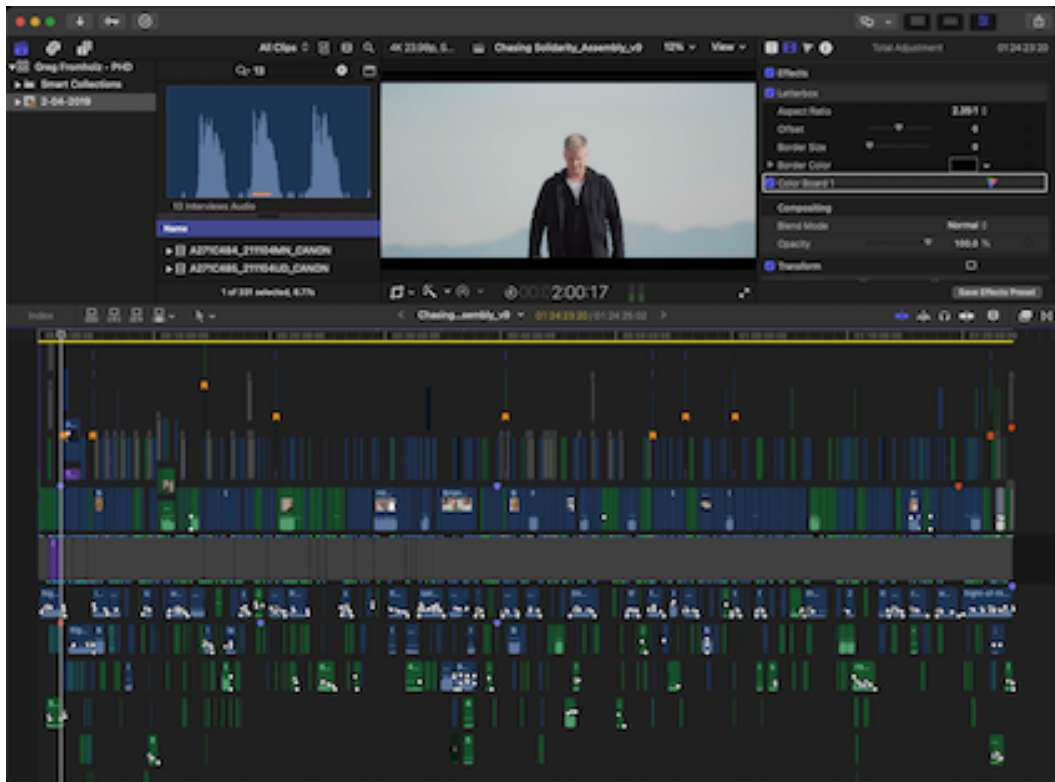


Figure 17: Final Cut Pro Time Line of this documentary, Chasing Solidarity

After each interview, there are the technical logistics to deal with; wrangling the three terabytes of 4k video and other angles; converting Zoom files; backing up all video and multiple audio files; sending out permission waivers; transcribing the interviews; and reflecting on an interview while it is fresh in my memory. This is all prior to building video timelines, creating visual metaphors, and editing the film, all while processing and writing up findings. Again, understanding that ‘...practice can result in research insights, such as those that arise out of making a creative work and/or in the documentation and theorisation of that work’ (Smith & Dean 2009, p.2). All with the desire to continually ‘extract the universal from the particular’ (Schrader 2018, p.35).

As I reflected on the 13 interviews, I was aware of my role modulating between seven postures; the interviewer as initiator, the interviewer as a researcher, the interviewer as a follower, the interviewer as director, editor and camera person, and a seventh, the interviewer as a protagonist. This creative practice, based on gathering data through filming interviews and translating the findings (see Chapter 4) into a documentary, revealed within me not only the capacity to theologically research while engaging in creative practice but

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the validity of research when engaging in this creative practice of 'screen production research' (Kerrigan & Batty 201, p.4).

Concerning the act of participation as the interviewer and observation as a director, on further reflection, during the interviews, I was, at times, observing myself observing the subject of the interview—our body language as we greeted one another, our postures over a cup of tea while sitting next to or across from one another. The micro-gestures and expressions of a body shifting its weight or eyes darting towards the camera and a slight hand movement all show me a myriad of information. That it is time to move on, or that they are comfortable or uncomfortable with a question or that they are heading towards the end of their answer and to capture the in camera in order to '...accurately reflect the true nature and behaviours of human subjects' (Trainor, 2021).

Observing requires attention. The gathering of information is more than just audible. It can be performative, reflective, and immersive '... because we cannot study the social world without being a part of it...'. (Hammersly & Atkinson 1983, p. 249)

This is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 3 when discussing methodology and in practice earlier in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6

Conclusions: Introduction

The purpose of this research was to identify and critically engage with the hosts of American Christian or spiritual or both podcasts when answering the research question: ‘Given the increase in USA-based podcasts that address Spirituality, how do the hosts of these podcasts understand the ways in which they resource or influence the spiritual landscape?’

This chapter has been broken down into seven separate areas that encompass my reflections on creative methods and practice and what I have learned through them about spiritual podcasting.

Conclusion 1: Reflection on Practice and Process

Firstly, reflecting on my creative practice, this interdisciplinary research project utilised the Cinematic Phenomenological Research Method, a practice-based research method with a qualitative approach that sought to ‘...demonstrate how filmmaking is an appropriate aesthetic language through which to disseminate phenomenological research about lived experiences...’ (Kerrigan & Batty 201, p.1). This research was intended as a documentary film of a journey of faith accentuated by our times. It explores how spirituality grows and evolves even while some forms of traditional religion atrophy while exploring how podcast hosts influence and resource their platforms. This was also filmed partly during a global pandemic, in which I did both Zoom and in-person interviews as the restrictions were lifted. The wide variety of sources indicates the wide variety of ways people reach for spiritual discovery or formation or both today.

This research generated unique insights and understandings of the influencing and resourcing of the spiritual landscape in an emerging field of communications by means of phenomenological research with people who themselves are observing what is emerging, contributing new insights from the hosts/practitioners; hence, creative practice is the tool for doing this; the experience of the film is also the analysis of the outcomes.

My primary research tools were filming and interviewing. This research is phenomenological as I, the interviewer, experienced every moment and expressed it in my

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film direction, just as the interviewee is telling me their experiences and story. The film endeavoured to challenge the viewer to look to the periphery, asking them to engage in what is not dictated to be seen. The use of paratext features in the research film as I continually reach beyond the frame showing lived experiences and discussing aesthetic judgements while ‘making sense of theological knowledge from the creative intuition’ (Fujimura, p.12). In this research, I have used the creative practice of filmmaking to collect, analyse, express and distribute the findings through film and written analysis, understanding that ‘practice can result in research insights, such as those that arise out of making a creative work and/or in the documentation and theorisation of that work’ (Smith & Dean 2009, p.2). This study represents a unique gathering of information through documentary-making while utilising a more conventional interviewing tool, capturing these interviews and developing ‘...phenomenological insights via cinematic language’ (Gupta 2019, p.9).

The research interviews were further interpreted through visual metaphors or filmic interpretations aiming to ‘extract the universal from the particular’ (Schrader 2018, p.35). Visual metaphors have been used in filming murmuration, loneliness in the desert, the vastness of communication towers filmed from the plane and the 'road trip' as a device and research, among others. For example, I visually translate the concept of social and spiritual movements by utilising the act of murmuration, found as birds fly together. (See Chapter 5 Discussion and Reflections)

These extracted insights captured through the filming of interviews have led to the findings and discussion addressed in previous chapters and conclusions below.

These discoveries developed over time, ‘... just as the research problem emerges and evolves during the study, so the benefits of the research are likely to evolve and transform over time’ (Smith & Dean 2009, p.217). The insights that can be found through filming the phenomenological experience show spiritual discovery or formation taking place in the digital sphere but growing specifically through podcasting and ‘...demonstrate how filmmaking is an appropriate aesthetic language through which to disseminate phenomenological research about lived experiences...’ (Montuori 2011, p. 1).

Conclusion 2: Understanding Hosts as Guests

The calibre and platform reach of those interviewed here is significant: these are the leading voices, with millions of followers and downloads. ‘Cinematic-phenomenological researchers recruit research participants who have experienced this particular sociocultural phenomenon and are willing to share their lived experiences’ (Gupta 2019, p.6). To the best of my knowledge and at the time of this writing, those represented had never been brought together under a single filmed project. Many of the interviewees tended to be relatively reserved about being filmed. Nevertheless, all of the hosts/practitioners interviewed expressed how this subject matter needed further discussion, documentation and analysis, and that is why they were more than happy to engage in this research.

The hosts/practitioners were selected from different genders, races, and diversity; the research would have been incomplete without this representation, as ‘radical inclusion can speak beyond the interest that is assigned they hold.’ (P Ó Tuama 2023, personal communication, April 11).

Years of relationship-building brought access to these podcast hosts. An emerging reflection on the process is that the connective tissues of trust are needed for good interviews. Establishing and curating trust is, in my experience, the most necessary skill when asking someone to articulate their inner life on film. I was fortunate to have individuals within my media and spirituality-based networks who willingly extended their already established and trusted relationships with me to access the hosts/practitioners represented in this study. When those you are interviewing see that you are trusted by people they already trust, they are quicker to welcome you into their home, laugh and go deeper in the conversation. The component of mutual trust is essential when engaging in vulnerable conversations: trust brings you inside. As an interviewer, I am very intentional in establishing and maintaining these relationships. Intentionality, not over-eagerness, is a vital component of sustaining access and putting ‘intention to intuition’ (Guidara 2022) in the creative practice.

When filming, I turned the podcast hosts into guests, creating a space where the host’s self-understanding could be safely disclosed. This was a space and posture which came with risks - both for them, as to whether I would be a good host, and to me, as to whether these figures so used to hosting would be willing to inhabit the guest role. The interface between how I react and create, as a filmmaker and research student, conceives the relationship. In this

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research, as an interviewer, I explored the tension between asking the obvious versus avoiding it as we share the navigation of the conversation. This was not a gotcha style of interviewing; it was not designed to go at them but to go with them.

My focus was on the particular experience of putting them on camera, which allowed for a much broader experience of research understanding as they physically communicated through what you could see and hear. This environment allowed hosts to be seen and heard - making a video about audio. In this broader experience, I was bearing witness and ‘dwelling with’ (Gupta 2019) while capturing these moments from a ‘vulnerable observer’ (Behar 2014) posture. It was evident from multiple interviews that this subject matter was causing them to pause and consider their position in the influencing and resourcing podcasts, especially around their role as potential leaders and in addressing how their fans or followers or both were viewed and related to. This research also addresses the phenomenon of ‘celebrity’ leadership and how this can be as problematic when influencing and resourcing the spiritual, digital landscape as in other settings.

I was grateful that the hosts interviewed did so by accepting to be subjects of critical enquiry for an academic project with the University of Glasgow.

Conclusion 3: Multi-Platform Films Require Multi-Platform Hosting

As I reflected on the 13 interviews, with over 30 hours of filming conversation and intentional supporting footage (b-roll), I was aware of my role modulating between seven postures: the interviewer as a researcher, the interviewer as initiator, the interviewer as a follower, the interviewer as director, editor and camera person and a seventh, the interviewer as a protagonist. My role as protagonist in this film was a conscious choice. My inclusion in the piece was to show what it is to listen to podcasts in multiple environments and show a vulnerability in understanding my place I chose to show the search through multiple interviews and cutaways of physical travelling which represent the internal journey. My choice to hold back from using my consistent voice-over was purposeful. Following the introduction, in which I endeavour to welcome the viewer, I wanted them to consider their place in this film without a tour guide. Ultimately, in the film's last minutes, I speak directly to the camera to explain my findings on this spiritual road trip and invite the viewer to articulate their reflective practice.

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This research was filmed when enquiring about those influencing the spiritual landscape in the digital space while gathering lived experiences and working knowledge from experts in their field. These findings show that the digital and physical methods are considered best or arguably the preferred situation when used together as a spiritual formation method, overlapping and mutually beneficial, as neither provides enough traction for transformation alone.

The communication phenomenon is not limited to a single medium; it will always be multi-platform.

I chose to approach theology through creative practice because I wanted to apply the camera lens towards those who found themselves almost accidentally leading, influencing and resourcing new movements found in today's spiritual landscape. and the viewer's place in this evolving spiritual landscape.

The phenomenological and creative approach, therefore, was the ideal tool to:

- a/ Ask questions about the experience
- b/ Examine the experience of those I interviewed as I looked at the discovery through the hosts' phenomenological experience.
- c/ Reflect on their emerging experience.
- d/ Consider this research through my experience as an artist and researcher, only discovering what I have done once I have done it.

Throughout this research, I have learned how filming and interviewing are symbiotic and in collaboration with my creative process. Place fuels filming, and content fuels narrative and other visual metaphors. It is embodiment, connection and capture, all to 'illuminate lived experiences' (Gupta 2019, p.2). It is integrated, implicated and simulated.

This creative practice, based on gathering data through filming interviews and translating the findings into a documentary, revealed within me not only the capacity to theologically research while engaging in creative practice but the validity of research when engaging in this creative practice of 'screen production research' (Kerrigan & Batty 201, p.4).

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These insights suggest how film, spirituality, visuals, interviews, and theology can all combine to make an experiential exploration of the dynamics of leading, influencing and resourcing the spiritual landscape, specifically the voices of hosts/practitioners of podcasting.

Conclusion 4: Personal Discovery through Research

The areas of understanding the spiritual landscape beyond institutional trappings are also a journey of discovery for me. The ongoing findings of the research brought introspection into my spirituality and the influencers, leaders and resources with whom I was engaging. Furthermore, finding an academic research program that explored theology through creativity was exciting.

Having worked with archbishops and artists for over three decades, I was always interested in how my two worlds could collide. I was looking for an opportunity to find some wisdom in the wrestle of film and theology, or is it a dance? I discovered through this process that, for me, it was both.

I have lived outside America for 35 years and worked for the institutional church across the spectrum of predominantly Christianity for 35 years, and it has been a complex relationship. I have possessed a reluctant outsider posture that has led me to search beyond the typical boundaries of institutional faith development. My hunger comes from a vocation of communication and consulting about media my whole life. I have always been curious about the medium of the message, the sharpness of religion, media and culture, and academic, theological, and communication criticism.

Yet, the loneliness of vocation was an ever-present guest in my 'belonging to the church.' I was believing and not believing at the same time. I was experiencing a spiritual transition of my own. In this PhD research journey, I have looked to find a kindred community in the outsiders. This is the tension I carry. While facing a faith crisis, I saw culture face a crisis of spiritual communication. There is a prevalent lack of trust in those shaping the religious landscape, as '...when you're in transition, everyone distrusts.' (McHargue TC 00:21:02) I wanted to see how this applied to theology. I have done this by examining how the podcast platform can bring freedom of spiritual communication and formation to those like me looking for solidarity. I found myself reaching beyond and reaching for podcasts to walk

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with. This profoundly impacted my spiritual journey as I searched beyond my childhood's traditional faith upbringing and found a connection in the digital podcast communities.

For this research, I looked at my birthplace. I centred my research on the US market and my childhood faith's Christian subculture, predominantly listening to the growing community of exiles looking beyond traditional faith institutions to form a spirituality more in line with their beliefs.

As a filmmaker, I was intrigued by the prospect of potentially fascinating interviews with influential leaders. However, this became something more as it evolved into a profoundly personal discovery. I participated in and reflected intimately upon the interviews and curation of images encapsulating my journey on this spiritual road trip.

This background forms the framing for my PhD. Through the research and findings, this PhD has allowed me to engage with my life skills, learn new things about the worlds I inhabit, and discover what is next for those like myself pursuing spirituality and art.

It was genuinely fascinating seeing how this spiritual road trip and research created a library of interviews with faith and spiritual practitioners in podcasts and digital media. Moreover, it has shown me, through podcasting, how my own spiritual journey can continue to find meaning.

Conclusion 5: The Possibilities of Digital Media for Contemporary Approaches to Spirituality

In addressing my critical conclusions, I believe my research affirms that in today's digital era, the influencing, resourcing and shaping of spirituality can occur through podcasting. The study identifies several common themes in the work of those curating podcast conversations, which inform our understanding of contemporary.

This research contributes new insights from the host/practitioner perspective into how and why the emerging communication tool of podcasting is being utilised in influencing and resourcing the spiritual landscape while curating a unique library of interviews with hosts/practitioners in the area of podcasts and digital media.

Chapter 6 Conclusions

The 13 interviews represent a generous addition to the body of work that addresses podcasting and spiritual formation.

This study suggests that the digital era has ushered in a new style and type of leadership, that is decentralised and anti-hierarchical. This research investigates the growth of podcasting amid declining denominational structures and faith institutions. It suggests further that podcasting is free of those looking to suppress or control a particular narrative, a historical, contextual theology, or a fan theory. I agree with Mike McHargue's assertion that 'American religion got in the way of spiritual formation'. (TC 00:50:07) Further research could be considered on how faith institutions use podcasting to control narratives.

This study considers how Covid has impacted institutional church attendance and its effects on the growth of podcasts in this specific sphere.

The research discusses the impact of digital media in the 21st century and how, according to some hosts/practitioners, it is comparable to print media in the 16th-century Reformation.

This research addresses how podcast engagement takes place in both the fringes and multitudes and how the understanding of 'belonging' is being reinvented in this generation, in this podcast community, as it becomes less of a denominational community and more of an audience community, how Podcasts are more participatory yet less engaged physically, but not exclusively. It looks at how movements find a new way to communicate outside the institutions and mediawhich were historically dominant.

This research has confirmed my belief that many are searching for meaning, community, and solidarity and are finding it in the digital space. This study shows how research can positively impact how we discuss spiritual growth and change in a digital age.

Conclusion 6: Possibilities for Further Research

The research presents through the voices of prominent practitioners how the digital and spiritual not only co-exist but can thrive because of one another. What is evident from these findings is that spiritual formation is being curated in digital spaces and that spiritually-based podcast hosts are leading a new digital reformation that, in some cases, has developed into communities with a Christian or Spiritual or both focus.

Chapter 6 Conclusions

My research interviews show how podcast hosts are curating, influencing and resourcing new patterns of spiritual discovery or formation or both.

Regarding content, an additional area of interest for researchers would be the broader community of those who feel disenfranchised, finding depth in their faith or spiritual formation or both through podcasts, where connection can be created away from the exclusory and excusatory nature of traditional society and faith institutions.

That lies beyond the scope of this research, but it warrants further research and examination in the future. Further specific listener research and examination are warranted in the upcoming years and could lead to an inverse understanding of spiritual discovery or formation in a digital space. However, as this project is host/practitioner based, it is also information specific to the platformed side of the podcast microphone.

To better understand the implications of these findings, future research could address the growing digital space and its relationship to the decline of traditional spaces used for spiritual discovery or formation. Further research is needed in the area of spiritual discovery in digital media, more acutely in the area of podcasting, to explore how far traditional and digital spaces are used separately or in opposition. Future studies could also address leadership development for those working in the spiritual formation area of digital media.

Conclusion 7: In Closing

This thesis contributes significantly in furthering the conversation regarding the tools of post-Christian/exile Christian spiritual formation found in podcasting, the role of hosts and how creative works such as documentary films can help illuminate significant social issues in a distinctive and valuable way. This research exhibits film as an expansive creative practice for researching areas of theology.

Additionally, as most of the featured podcast hosts/practitioners included in this study are experienced and accomplished media figures/personalities, this thesis may also serve to raise the debate around the utilization of podcasting to develop spiritually in the digital landscape.

Chapter 6 Conclusions

This research could be of further interest in theology, documentary studies, anthropology, social sciences, philosophy, humanities, arts, cinema and television, as well as other areas of creative practice research. This research could be a resource to those in this podcast field, those in churches understanding this emerging form of communication and the generations connecting with it, developing new leadership styles, and chasing solidarity.

Glossary

Glossary

The thesis findings are based on the conclusions filmed in the accompanying documentary. This is also the case when discussing and reflecting on the findings and process. I will use time code (TC) signatures, a sequence of numbers and digital addresses, to show where this specific dialogue or image can be referenced in the documentary film. For example, (TC 00:50:19) means 50 minutes and 19 seconds. By scrolling through the film timeline, this moment can be referenced.

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Appendix A



CONSENT TO THE USE OF DATA

University of Glasgow, College of Arts Research Ethics Committee

I understand that Gregory M. Fromholz is collecting data in the digital video interviews and transcriptions for use in an academic research project at the University of Glasgow.

This research documentary film will be an interview based narrative film looking inside the burgeoning leadership of the diaspora of Christian millennials- and how and where they are leading from; as well as, focusing on how millennials are re-constructing their faith, their spirituality, out side of traditional institutions. This research involves both interviews and participant observation.

This documentary film will be shown in a public forum, either in cinemas screenings and/or on online screenings.

I give my consent to the use of data for this purpose on the understanding that:

- . The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- . The material will be retained in secure storage for use in future academic research
- . The material will be used in future publications; film, print and online.

Signed by the contributor: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's name and email contact:

Gregory M. Fromholz

Email: _____@student.nla.ac.uk

Supervisor's name and email contact:

Rev Dr Doug Gay (Principal of Trinity College)

Email: Doug.Gay@glasgow.ac.uk

Dr Ian Goode (Film & TV, University of Glasgow)

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4 The Square, Gilmorehill Campus

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GLASGOW G12 8QQ



COPYRIGHT CLEARANCE NOTE AND DEPOSIT INSTRUCTIONS

This deposit agreement ensures that your contribution to Gregory M. Fromholz' Research Project is used and deposited in a public archive in strict accordance with your wishes. All material will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for use in research, publication, education, lectures, exhibitions, broadcasting and web archiving.

I hereby assign the copyright in my contribution to the Project conducted by Gregory M. Fromholz under the supervision of Rev Dr Doug Gay (Principal of Trinity College) and Dr Ian Goode (Film&TV, University of Glasgow) at the University of Glasgow, which will deposit it in one or more public archives.

I understand that it will be stored and used as detailed above only under my real name.

Signed: Date:

Name:

Address:

.....

..... Postcode.

.....



University of Glasgow

Privacy Notice for Gregory M. Fromholz' PhD Research Project (Untitled)

Your Personal Data

The University of Glasgow will be what is known as the 'Data Controller' of your personal data processed in relation to Gregory M. Fromholz' PhD Research (Untitled) project. This privacy notice will explain how the University of Glasgow will process your personal data in line with the implementation of The General Data Protection Regulation.

Why we need it

We are collecting your personal data for the purposes of historical research. This data is collected during filmed and oral interviews, correspondence, images, personal archival materials and in signed informed consent and copyright clearance forms. This data will only be used in the ways which are specifically detailed and consented to in these forms. We will only collect data that we need in order to fulfil and oversee this research.

Legal basis for processing your data

We must have a legal basis for processing all personal data. In this instance, the legal basis is 'Public task: Archiving in the public interest'. Because we are also processing Special Categories Personal Data (Religion and Politics) we therefore also require a legal basis for processing this data. We are processing Special Categories of Personal Data under condition GDPR Article 9(2)(a): *Explicit consent*.

What we do with it and who we share it with

All the personal data you submit is processed by staff at the University of Glasgow in the United Kingdom and will be deposited in the University of Glasgow research data repository and will be made available through online catalogues with worldwide accessibility. Unless you have requested anonymity, this will include your name, gender, date of birth, place of birth and religious affiliation if applicable. It will not include your personal contact details.

The University has the right to edit any comments/testimonials for the purposes of correcting grammatical, spelling, punctuation and formatting purposes without altering the viewpoint and nature of the original text.

How long do we keep it for

Your data will be retained by the University of Glasgow indefinitely as part of a historical research project and may be used for further research. Some images, film, oral recordings or written comments will be kept permanently once they are published.

What are your rights?*

You can request access to the information we process about you at any time. If at any point you believe that the information we process relating to you is incorrect, you can request to see this information and may in some instances request to have it restricted, corrected or, erased. You may also have the right to object to the processing of data and the right to data portability.

If you wish to exercise any of these rights, please contact dpo@glas.ac.uk.

*Please note that the ability to exercise these rights will vary and depend on the legal basis on which the processing is being carried out.

Complaints

If you wish to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact the University Data Protection Officer who will investigate the matter. Our Data Protection Officer can be contacted at dataprotectionofficer@glasgow.ac.uk

If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are not processing your personal data in accordance with the law, you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) <https://ico.org.uk>



University of Glasgow

Description of activity

The University of Glasgow is committed to controlling and processing personal information in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection laws. The personal data collected as detailed below will therefore be controlled and processed in line with the relevant Data Protection laws and Regulations in the way(s) and purpose(s) detailed in the accompanying Privacy Notice.

I consent to my personal data being used in the following way: Please tick one option

<input type="checkbox"/> I would like to use my real name in all publications and participant acknowledgements	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> I would like to use my real name and general location (city/country) in all publications and participant acknowledgements	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> I would like to remain anonymous in all publications and participant acknowledgements	<input type="checkbox"/>

I consent to my personal data being used in each of the following formats: Please tick yes in each row if you agree

	YES
<input type="checkbox"/> Images (still, video and film) – printed and digital	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Audio Recordings	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Written comments/testimonials/transcripts	<input type="checkbox"/>

Note that media files may contain metadata including personal data which could be accessible to others when they are processed/shared.

I consent to my personal data being used in the following ways: Please tick yes in each row if you agree

	YES
<input type="checkbox"/> Deposited in public reference archives as a permanent public resource	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Printed materials including journal articles, books, leaflets, flyers, posters, brochures, magazines.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Presentations including conferences and exhibitions	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Teaching materials	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Websites / Social media posts	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Film	<input type="checkbox"/>

Sign below to give *explicit consent* to the processing of 'Special Categories of Personal Data'

I hereby give my written and explicit consent to the processing of 'Special Categories of Personal Data' [Religion and Politics] being processed in the way(s) detailed in the attached Privacy Notice.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Please sign and date below to provide consent to all the above including the attached Privacy Notice.

Signed: _____ Print Name: _____

Date: _____ Email: _____