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TITLE **Podcasting Blindness: Breaking through the *Static* to co-create accessible audio**

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Media and Cultural Policy in Cultural Industries, School of Culture and Creative Arts, College of Arts and Humanities, University of Glasgow.

Declaration I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: Meg Wilcox

Signature:

Date: April 2026

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Abstract

This practice-based thesis explores how podcast practice — often rooted in broadcast radio and journalism practice — can adapt to meet the needs of diverse storytellers.

Static: A Party Girl's Memoir (also known as *Static*) is a six-episode podcast series telling the true story of how 19-year-old Ashley King lost her eyesight when poisoned by methanol while travelling in Bali. This series, collaboratively produced with Inside Out Theatre and Chromatic Theatre in Calgary, Alberta (Canada) considers the intersectional nature of relationships, identity, and disability in its content as well as its modes of production.

Through an iterative action research framework, supported by disability justice principles and Dokumacı's theory of activist affordances (2023), *Static*'s team developed a process for adapting standard podcasting practices to better accommodate the team's accessibility requirements — specifically, producer, playwright and actor Ashley King's visual impairment. In collaboratively re-conceptualizing the podcast's scripting, recording and revision processes, this practice-based work provides a practical demonstration of how affordances can be used to identify challenges to accessible and inclusive podcasting while also serving as a tool to theorize solutions to these challenges. This research theorizes an accessible podcasting landscape, from technological considerations to how embedding best accessibility practices into story content — the *narrativization* of essential story information — can create more accessible media outputs and open new and exciting opportunities for remediating digital stories across audio, video, and text.

Informed through the lens of podcast studies, disability media studies, practice-based research and disability arts practice, this research contributes to the field of podcast studies and other fields by theorizing a new framework for how media makers can adapt their production processes to better serve accessibility and inclusion in their work. It also contributes to literature on practice-based research, podcast studies, radio studies, disability media studies, journalism practice, and disability arts practice. Further, this work contributes to the developing area of practice-based research by using podcasting and action research to consider practical and theoretical aspects of practice-based work, including a discussion of the challenges that research-practitioners may have in navigating institutional ethics processes, as well as potential solutions.

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Podcast series: *Static: A Party Girl's Memoir*

(Note: these audio files are uploaded as MP3s with the thesis and available online, either through the links below or by searching "Static: A Party Girl's Memoir" on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Amazon Music, etc.)

Trailer: Coming Soon: Static by Ashley King
Episode 1: Calgary to Byron Bay
Episode 2: Byron to Bali
Episode 3: Home
Episode 4: Where Next?
Episode 5: Static: A Party Girl's Memoir
Episode 6: Brisbane to Laos

The embedded audio clips in this thesis can be found at https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.32248323.

Podcast graphics, episode descriptions and links to episode transcripts can be found in Appendix B.

Chapter 1: *"This is Static…"*

Podcasting is often identified as a medium for diverse voices; without gatekeepers to manage its open publishing platforms and the relatively low technological barriers to entry, it is certainly more easily accessible for storytellers than the mainstream media. While podcasts can create opportunities for voices and views not always seen or heard in traditional broadcasting (Florini, 2017; Vrikki & Malik, 2019; Fox et al., 2020; Donison, 2023b) much of the discussion around podcast production — particularly from the most popular shows — is still rooted in broadcast radio and journalism conventions (Abel & Glass, 2015; McHugh, 2022). However, podcasting's flexibility — in production, format, and publication — can provide a variety of options for producers looking to break away from conventional practice.

This thesis explores, through theory and practice, how podcasting can adapt to meet the needs of diverse storytellers in a Canadian context. For the practice-based element of this research, I collaborated with Ashley King, a visually-impaired artist and playwright, and Inside Out Theatre, a theatre company in Calgary, Alberta, that works with artists with disabilities. Guided by an action research framework (Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021) and Dokumacı's theory of activist affordances (2023), we co-created an accessible podcast practice that was refined through iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Hearn et al., 2009). This work was also informed by my practical experience in audio production: 15 years as a journalist, radio host and audio producer and 10 years of teaching journalism. Through this process, we created *Static: A Party Girl's Memoir*, a six-episode podcast series that merges audio drama and interviews to tell the true story of how King lost her eyesight at 19.

A classic line in journalism is "show, don't tell" — meaning that the actual core details, ideally from its original source, are always more effective than a re-telling after the fact. That's why it is essential to listen to *Static* before reading further — it is the practical example that not only *shows* the concepts discussed in this thesis but connects these concepts (and many more!) much more clearly than I can hope to *tell* through writing. The dissertation component of this thesis, which you are reading now, addresses the theory and research connected to *Static*, tying together practice-based research, podcast studies, radio studies, disability media studies, journalism practice, and disability arts practice. This

research contributes to the field of podcast studies and disability media studies in two ways: first, by bringing together Dokumacı's theory of activist affordances with podcast practice to theorize a new framework for how media makers can adapt their production processes to better serve accessibility and inclusion in their work; and second, by creating and detailing the team's collaborative methods in developing an accessible podcast practice.

Before delving into the research, I wanted to define a few key terms that may guide your reading:

Podcasting refers to the making of podcasts, which is "a practice – a group of connected technologies, practices, and institutions – rather than a new, stand-alone medium or format" (Sterne et al., 2008, p. 20). While *Static* was produced as an audio-only podcast, the discussion of podcasting in this thesis can apply equally to video podcasting and other forms of digital audio production. Throughout this dissertation, I often use terms like podcasters, producers, storytellers, journalists, and media-makers interchangeably; not only does it hopefully add a bit of variety for your eyes, but it also reflects the many ways that people in podcasting describe their work. You will see that podcasting is also referred to as podcast practice or podcast production — again, all terms that are often used interchangeably in the field, though the terms podcast practice and podcast production can also refer to a more established or formalized process that podcasters use in making their work.

The definition of what makes an **independent podcast** depends on who you ask; it can range from entirely amateur productions to those produced by smaller, independent production companies. *Static* is an independent podcast in that it was produced in conjunction with two local independent theatre companies (Inside Out and Chromatic Theatre) and without the financial or promotional support of an established media or podcasting organization.

Accessibility can be defined from a variety of perspectives. A more formal definition is "the provision of flexibility to accommodate needs and preferences, and refers to the design of products, devices, services, or environments for people who experience disabilities" (Baker & Vasseur, 2021, p.3). This reflects the social model of disability, which argues that "people are not disabled as a function of their bodies; they are disabled by built environments that act as a materialized form of exclusion and discrimination"

(Dokumacı, 2023, p.32). While accessibility can apply to a wide range of physical and/or mental disabilities, this thesis mostly considers accessibility in the context of blindness, low-sightedness and visual impairment, due to team member Ashley King's visual impairment and it being a central part of the *Static* story.

Beyond this chapter, which introduces an overview of the project and defines some key terms to the research, you will find that the thesis begins in Chapter 2 with a review of the key literature and concepts in podcast studies, radio studies, disability media studies, disability arts practice and practice-based research that underpin this study. This lays the foundation for my doctoral project, which connects the oft-disparate fields of media studies and disability media studies. Chapter 3 details the project's action research framework and how it aligned with the podcast production cycle used to create *Static*'s practice-based research outputs. However, since action research provides little guidance for axiology, I found that pairing action research methods with the principles of disability justice (Berne et al., 2018) provided a context-appropriate theoretical grounding that met the production's practical needs as well as its values. Chapter 4 is the first of three findings chapters, and uses Dokumacı's theory of activist affordances to conceptualize accessible podcasting practice. Based on my time as a participant-observer working with the *Static* team at Inside Out theatre, this section explores how affordances can be a framework for identifying barriers to access while also serving as a way to theorize solutions to these barriers. Chapter 5 takes the theoretical discussion from the previous chapter and applies it to how the team actually made the podcast. It identifies the affordances we considered in developing the series, describing how they helped identify access barriers and inspired solutions at key parts of our podcasting process. Interestingly, a review of our accessible podcast practice showed that organizational factors (such as scheduling) played a bigger role in improving access than technical factors such as accessible software. Chapter 6 begins to theorize an accessible podcasting landscape through the lens of two accessibility practices: audio description and transcriptions. While accessibility for mainstream media is often determined by legislation, the Internet's open publishing platforms provide a variety of challenges and opportunities for creators looking to improve accessibility around their work. Lastly, Chapter 7 provides a concluding look at this thesis project and its findings, including its gaps, limitations, and opportunities for further study.

Chapter 2: *"Can someone get me a goddamn straw?!"* A review of the literature that shaped *Static*

Emerging, expanding, nascent — all terms that researchers have used to describe the relatively new field of podcasting and podcast studies. In the early 2000s, relatively few people were recording and sharing their own podcasts (or "audioblogs") on the Internet. Today, podcasting has grown into a multi-billion-dollar industry, with millions of shows — from amateur productions to series produced and promoted by celebrities and media conglomerates — available for download and streaming.

While the increasing popularity of podcasting is undeniable, the medium is still very much in flux. What started as a younger sibling to radio has grown into its own, bringing with it questions around production, aesthetics, and its role as an equalizer for those underrepresented or misrepresented by media gatekeepers.

2.1 A brief timeline of podcasting

As with any new digital technology, the foundations of podcasting came with the development of a new digital tool. RSS, known both as Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication, created standardized web feeds for automated content aggregation that revolutionized how users accessed news and blogs. Four years later, in 2004, RSS feeds transformed podcasting with the development of the first "podcatcher" client, iPodder, which allowed listeners to catch up on their favourite show updates in one place. This allowed early shows to shift from short audioblogs that were rather experimental in content and format into longer, regularly released audio shows that more closely resembled the podcasts we hear today (Bottomley, 2015). By 2005, podcasting was all the rage, known as "the year of the podcast," (Bowers, 2005) where even the New Oxford American Dictionary called podcasting the word of the year (Sterne et al., 2008). The immediate excitement around podcasting slowed, but was revitalized as it hit its 10-year anniversary thanks to the arrival of podcasting mega-hit true crime series *Serial* in 2014, and developments to iTunes with integrated podcast support about a month later (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). This timeframe has been called the podcast renaissance (Roose, 2014), the Golden Age of podcasting (Berry, 2015) and the Second Age of podcasting (Bonini, 2015).

In the past decade, podcasting has continued to surge in popularity, with 48 per cent of Americans having listened to a podcast within the past month and 40 per cent listening weekly in 2024 (Edison Research, 2025). While most podcast listener statistics reflect the American market, the trends look very similar in Canada when scaled for population, with 39 per cent of Anglophone Canadians having listened to a podcast within the past month in 2025 (Triton Digital, 2025). One area of difference is that Canadians are as likely to listen to Canadian content as they are American content, with Canadians listening to 44 per cent Canadian shows in 2023, compared to 43 per cent American shows (Signal Hill Insights, 2023).

While part of the field is still driven by amateurs and independent producers, the massive growth of commercial podcasting since 2014 has cleaved the industry into two distinct parts (Berry, 2021). Successful podcasting companies are being bought by media conglomerates — in the U.S., Spotify acquired Gimlet Media in 2019 for a reported $230 million (Jarvey & Perlberg, 2021) and Sirius XM bought Stitcher for a reported $325 million in 2020 (Spangler, 2020), while Canadian media behemoth Rogers bought Pacific Content, a branded podcast company, for an undisclosed amount in 2019 (Paddon, 2019). Podcast ad spends in the U.S. were just under $2 billion in 2023, and projected to increase to $2.6 billion in 2026 (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2024). This continued development of subscription platforms and exclusive content is creating what Bonini (2015) calls “toll podcasting,” a play on the toll broadcasting of the 1920s in the United States: “What is happening to podcasting, 11 years after its invention, is its transformation from a do-it-yourself, amateur niche medium to a commercial mass medium: from narrowcasting to broadcasting” (p.27). Public broadcasters also have a strong foothold in the podcasting world, from the influence of the BBC in the UK (Berry, 2021) to NPR in the US and the CBC in Canada (Clark et al., 2020). Public broadcasters-turned-podcast-superstars, like *This American Life* host Ira Glass, *Radiolab* creator Jad Abumrad and *99% Invisible* host Roman Mars, have been the subjects of graphic novels like *Out on the Wire* (Abel & Glass, 2015) as well as academic texts (Llinares et al., 2018; Spinelli & Dann, 2019).

2.2 The affordances of radio broadcasting and podcasting

While podcasting is barely two decades old, audio storytelling is hardly new. Though academics’ views differ as to how much podcasting and radio are connected today, its roots are indisputably in radio — and despite the arrival of new technologies like television, satellite radio and the Internet, radio is still largely influential in citizens’ day-to-day lives.

According to Numeris, 84 per cent of Canadians aged 12 and older listened to AM/FM radio in a given week in 2024 — a century after the first formal radio stations were introduced (Numeris, 2024).

Over radio's 100-year-long history (and the much shorter history of radio studies as a field), academics have spent a lot of time identifying its characteristics. In *Understanding Radio*, Crisell (1994) identifies radio as a *blind* medium, as its codes are entirely auditory. Because of this, Crisell argues, radio does not exist in space but in *time*, and in listeners' imaginations as they supply their own visuals. The other radiogenic qualities he identifies are its *liveness*, the present-tense nature of the medium where listeners are engaging and imagining in real-time; its *intimacy*, with radio addressing listeners individually through voice and dialogue to create an authentic listening experience; and its *flexibility*, that listeners can do other things while engaging.

These characteristics apply equally to podcasting, though scholars have expanded the list to include additional terms such as immersive, authentic, and distinctive (Spinelli & Dann, 2019; Berry, 2022). Dowling and Miller's (2019) description of *immersive* media is connected to Crisell's (1994) characteristics of *blindness* and *liveness*, noting how podcasting has afforded richly-textured and designed audio narratives that are made even more compelling with headphone use. Their use of the term immersive also ties to Crisell's characteristic of audio as an *intimate* form, noting that many podcasts go even further than radio, with hosts sharing personal reflections and leaning into the subjectivity of stories. Bonini (2022) argues that podcasting has remediated radio intimacy through its ability to offer asynchronous listening. Podcasts have also been described as *authentic*, partly due to the medium's reliance on personal voice, individual perspective and host self-reflection, where the stories feel like an unmediated conversation (McHugh, 2016), creating a sort of hyper-intimacy (Berry, 2015) reminiscent of the New Journalism of the 1960s and 1970s (Lindgren, 2016). This reflects podcasting being a digital medium, where authenticity is a core value of digital culture (Perdomo & Rodrigues-Rouleau, 2022) and the option for interaction between producers and listeners can blur roles and create a sense of connection and intimacy in what's made, shared, and discussed online (Berry, 2006; Millette, 2011).

Despite the mediums' similarities, many scholars identify podcasts as *distinctive*. Berry (2022) notes that radio and podcasting are connected yet different, writing that:

> Their work bears a shared aesthetic, derived from the political status of a gatekeeper-less medium that affords autonomy, creative freedoms, a permission for audio to sound less than perfect, and can demand close listening from opt-in listeners. Such affordances allow podcasters to produce work that doesn't fit neatly into silos. (p. 403)

The term *affordances* is often used in media studies circles when discussing podcasting. Adapted from Gibson (1979/2015), affordances can be described as what a medium offers or provides, helping situate its wider role in the media landscape (Swiatek, 2018). Many of podcasting's affordances are tied to its open publishing system, requiring no gatekeepers or permissions, meaning that listeners play an active role in selecting what and how they listen. This publishing freedom also means there are no timing or schedule constraints for podcast content, and there is no singular definitive podcast text or archive — episodes can be added, updated, changed or deleted (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). Swiatek (2018) identifies podcasting as an intimate bridging medium in that it affords a sense of intimacy between podcast participants and listeners while bridging boundaries of knowledge, geography and social context. These affordances not only contribute to a definition of podcasting but also point to its strengths and capabilities as a medium distinct from radio.

But as Jenkins (2006) notes, "Delivery systems are simply and only technologies; media are also cultural systems" (p.14). While most early definitions of podcasting focused on its technological characteristics, more recent definitions are now also considering its cultural context. Rather than identifying podcasts as simply media objects such as episodes, or distribution technology like RSS feeds, Bonini (2022) situates podcasting as a new, hybrid cultural form that draws from radio, theatre, performing arts, design, and internet culture that is constantly reworked through "an evolving network of different, and dynamic, clusters of human (audio producers, editorial curators, software developers, graphic designers, listeners) and non-human actors (platforms, recommender algorithms, mobile media devices, distribution technologies, and internet infrastructures)" (p.26). This aligns with the simple and still very applicable definition of podcasting that Sterne et al. (2008) proposed almost 20 years ago: "a practice – a group of connected technologies, practices, and institutions – rather than a new, stand-alone medium or format" (p.20).

2.3 Toward the field of podcast studies

While there was a significant amount of media coverage on podcasting when it first came on the scene, very little was published about podcasting in an academic context. In fact, Bonini (2015) identifies fewer than 15 articles published in the most notable media studies and communications journals between 2004 and 2014 — at that time, most of the academic discourse on podcasting was tied to its use in education. When the industry began to flourish in 2014, so did research on podcasting, with Llinares et al. (2018) first suggesting the need for podcast studies as a unique interdisciplinary field, and many scholars following since (Spinelli & Dann, 2019; Berry, 2022; Beckstead & Llinares, 2025).

In a recent meta-analysis of podcast scholarship, Sharon (2023) suggests that research has tended to revolve around three large categories: technological, which focuses on the medium of podcasting and its delivery mechanisms; formalistic, or podcasting as an aesthetic form; and socio-cultural, which considers podcasting production and consumption/listening practices. Most early podcast research, from around 2006 to 2015, would be classified as technological: where scholars, influenced by media theorists such as Marshall McLuhan and Stuart Hall, looked to define and situate the field — often using radio studies research, media reports and grey literature to compare its technology and formats to other media, such as radio (Berry, 2006; Menduni, 2007; Berry, 2015; Bonini, 2015; Bottomley, 2015; Cwynar, 2015; McHugh, 2016).

The success of *Serial* in 2014 meant that podcasts became texts worthy of analysis, which contributed to a wave of research falling under what Sharon (2023) classifies as formalistic or aesthetic, where researchers “treat the concept as an artistic umbrella that encompasses a range of distinctive audio genres, a recurring set of structural schemas embedded in recurring discourse practices” (p.329). Academics have brought theories and methods from a variety of fields to their podcast analyses, including but not limited to feminist media critique (Copeland, 2018), fan theory (McGregor, 2019), disability media theory (Kleege, 2023; M., 2023; Treco & Jordan, 2024), historical analyses and oral histories (Copeland & Knight, 2021; Donison & MacLennan, 2021), and cultural critique (Florini, 2015; Fox et al., 2020).

Around this time, academics also turned their focus to define and assess the field of podcasting more broadly, from what Sharon (2023) identifies as a socio-cultural view: “to focus on the human agents who create, consume, and communicate through podcasts,

which in effect constructs what podcasting means" (p.327). This research has been mostly qualitative, with academics basing their work in theory, historical analysis, critical textual analysis and ethnography — predominantly interviews and surveys — along with grey literature such as media and government reports. Earlier research ranged from podcasters' socio-cultural dynamics (Millette, 2011) and motivations for podcasting (Markman, 2012; Markman & Sawyer, 2014) to analysing how established podcasters create their work in a changing ecosystem (Llinares et al., 2018; Spinelli & Dann, 2019; Berry, 2021). Within this growing stream of socio-cultural research, more scholars are beginning to further examine podcasting's role in supporting minority and racialized voices often kept outside of mainstream media.

2.4 Podcasting theory into practice

With much of podcast studies research rooted in critical text analysis, methods are often limited to scholars analysing the final podcast product without context to its modes of production — which begs the question, can a podcast be properly assessed solely on what is published? In considering the inclusiveness of diverse voices and perspectives, can a podcast that promotes these goals in their episodes but follows hierarchical or colonial media making practices be considered as meeting these goals? It can be challenging for researchers to access podcast producers to better learn more about their processes, and most scholars choose to interview producers about their work, which is limited by personal memory and individual experience. But more scholars are beginning to consider podcasting practices in their research. This includes challenging the conventional positivist ontologies that inform media and communications research methodologies, which often prioritize the written word, objective interpretations of media, and colonial systems of production. For example, Perdomo & Rodrigues-Rouleau (2022) have challenged the practice of exclusively using text transcripts to analyse podcast content; in their qualitative thematic analysis of the *New York Times* series *Caliphate*, both researchers coded podcast episodes by listening to the audio together to better identify the sonic elements and information lost in transcription. Indigenous research methods have also been a way for researchers to develop participatory and community-oriented approaches that re-establish the value of oral histories (McHugh et al., 2020), story work and experiential learning (Wilcox et al., 2023) and relationality (Wilcox & Napier, 2024; Ball et al., 2025) in podcasting.

Though the field of podcast studies is rooted in sound, Jorgensen and Lindgren (2022) note that much of the academic work in the field has involved the analyses of texts, policy documents, production and distribution ecosystems, archival research, audience studies, and interviews with producers, presented in traditional written outputs, like journal articles or scholarly books. This gap in practice and sound-based research can partly be attributed the primacy of text in academic discourse (Garland-Thomson, 2009; Makagon & Neumann, 2009; Perdomo et al., 2025) though the relatively short history of radio studies and the challenges of accessing and maintaining audio archives to study have no doubt played a role (Lacey, 2008). Another challenge in presenting academic research through sound is the traditionally-accepted system of double-blind peer review, which would require sharing the identity of the person making the soundwork. Some academics have theorized options for peer-review of academic podcasts (Beckstead et al., 2024), while some peer-reviewed journals, such as the Canadian journalism-focused *Facts & Frictions*, accept and publish podcast submissions (Facts & Frictions, n.d.). As the field continues to grow, podcast studies is beginning to see a growing interest in research 'by doing' (Lindgren & Jorgensen 2023) that is reflected in practice-as-research and international collaborations (Jorgensen & Lindgren, 2022). The recently published *Podcast Studies: Theory into Practice* (Beckstead & Llinares, 2025) also highlights a move in the field toward more practice-based inquiry, though still a text-based dissemination of practice-based work.

2.5 An emancipatory medium?

Since its inception, podcasting has been framed as an independent and alternative medium; a place for those who couldn't make it past traditional media gatekeepers (or perhaps didn't want to). There are many affordances that make podcasting ideal for those under or misrepresented in mainstream media, including open systems that allow for anyone to produce or listen to content, bypassing the "traditional model of 'gate-kept' media and production tools" (Berry, 2006, p.146) This break from hierarchical means of production, dissemination, and consumption opens up possibilities for anyone to create and share their own podcast. Millette (2011) positions independent audio podcasters within their own subculture of online participation, using Bruns' work around "produsage" (2009) to highlight the unique media footprints where users can interact. Aligning with the view of podcasting as an alternative or disruptive medium, Bonini (2015) considers podcasters within the realm of the "amateur broadcasters of the 20s, the radio pirates of the 1960s, free radio activists, the phone phreakers and computer hackers of the 1970s, the netcasters

of 1990s and the bloggers... of the 00s" (p.22). With the ability to produce and self-publish, many alternative media outlets such as community radio stations, local newspapers and magazines are expanding their reach through podcasts as well. In 2021, 49 per cent of American podcast listeners engaged with at least one independently-produced podcast a week (Webster, 2021).

Though many see and use independent podcasts as a way to push back against the hegemonic media discourse, the inequalities perpetuated in traditional mainstream media are still replicated in the digital public sphere (Swiatek, 2018) — where large media organisations and celebrities tend to dominate the podcast charts and enjoy the highest listenership. Feminist media studies scholars such as van Zoonen (1994) were leaders in challenging the hegemony of gender, power, identity and influence in the media — though most of that early discourse focused mostly on text and visual media (Mitchell, 2016; Copeland, 2018). The development of radio studies as a field created space where academics brought much-needed critique to what has been largely considered a white, male-dominant industry. In her book *Women and Radio: Airing Differences*, Caroline Mitchell (2000) made the case for how radio space is gendered and how, despite their lack of inclusion in radio histories, women played an active role in radio both historically and more currently. While still a small section of a relatively nascent field, scholars such as Kate Lacey 2008) and Michele Hilmes (1997; 2007) have continued to enrich our understanding of radio history and women's roles in it through documenting where women have been heard and represented — and where they are notably absent. This has laid the groundwork for podcast scholars to continue analysing radio and podcast work, such as Karathanasopoulou & Williams' discussion of the podcast *The Heart* as a feminist space for disclosure of trauma (2023). Many podcast scholars are now continuing this work through an intersectional feminist lens, such as Stacey Copeland's work around queer women's voices (2018; 2018b, 2022), Hannah McGregor's memoir connecting podcasting, feminism and decolonialism (2022), Fox & Ebada's (2022) exploration of the connection between podcasting and Egyptian feminist identities, and Aline Hack's work highlighting the feminist trajectories of Brazilian women podcast producers (2024).

These white, male roots of radio and its influence on centering white middle-class sonic norms and hierarchy in radio formats and practice has continued into audience listening expectations in other formats, including podcasting (Stoever, 2016). Kumanyika (2015) writes of his own experience as a Black broadcaster and the challenges that come with narrating his own work, noting that while there's an effort to include diverse voices in the

stories produced on public radio, these individuals are usually program guests rather than hosts. For those narrating stories, “journalists of various ethnicities, genders and other identity categories intentionally or unintentionally internalize and ‘code-switch’ to be consistent with culturally dominant ‘white’ styles of speech and narration” (Kumanyika, 2015, n.p.). The term *sonic whiteness*, as defined by Brekke (2020), is “to encompass crafted soundscapes that unreflexively frame whiteness as synonymous with rationality” (p.174). She situates this sonic centering of whiteness in the history and development of radio and argues that podcasting has furthered many of these traits — though these digital technologies are now enabling counterhegemonic listening practices within the broader public. “Although the digital age has not led to a utopian democratization of the media landscape, it has offered new pathways for resistance” (Brekke, 2020, p.174). This is particularly relevant as podcast audiences are becoming increasingly diverse — 37 per cent of Canadian podcast listeners identify as racialized, 32 per cent as Indigenous, and 31 per cent as having a disability (Media Technology Monitor, 2022).

Independent podcasts are serving important creative and community needs for producers and their audiences. “While by no means an idealized Habermasian salon, the world of podcasting offers a space in which interlocking counterpublics and sphericles are afforded a chance to rigorously advance public discourse,” note Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo (2019, p.268). Vrikki and Malik (2019) also consider the public sphere while exploring podcasting as an anti-racist tool, arguing that podcasting provides an alternative space for young Black and Asian people to articulate their lived experience and create communities of resistance. They conclude that podcasts facilitate new forms of social affiliation — creating what Fraser (1990) calls subaltern counterpolitics, which provide a space for those outside of the dominant political discourse to connect and “circulate counterdisclosures to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs” (Fraser, 1990, p.60). Researchers in the U.S. have also analysed the role of podcasts in creating a counterpublic for “the kinds of everyday interpersonal interactions that often serve as important spaces for Black Americans to construct a sense of shared ideologies and worldviews” (Florini, 2017, p.441) that Fox et al. (2020) call a curriculum for Blackness, a “potent articulation of Black identity and experience in media history” (p.299).

Researchers have also framed podcasts as a tool for counterstorytelling, a core part of Critical Race Theory that “aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p.171). For example, Donison's (2023a) analysis of 20 Canadian podcasts finds that they can critique

history “while celebrating non-settler histories and experiences that shape what podcasters believe to be their authentic selves exhibited in their vocalized values, attitudes, and beliefs,” inviting the audience to hear a diversity of peoples, perspectives, and cultures (p.2). In particular, scholars have analysed the content of different series to show how podcasting can support Indigenous voices and perspectives by sharing personal experiences and re-framing histories (Copeland & Knight, 2021; Donison & MacLennan, 2021). Podcasting also aligns with Indigenous traditions of oral storytelling, a way for Indigenous Peoples to tell stories, connect with communities and share their traditions more widely (Mitchell, 2017) — making it a unique platform for expressing sovereignty and self-determination (Ball et al., 2025). Looking to disability studies, Treco & Jordan (2024) have identified podcasting as a counterstorytelling tool that can push against ableist narratives, a praxis connecting disability studies with critical race theory, also known as DisCrit.

2.6 Blind story, blind medium

> We relish looking, produce endless images, and root our understanding of the world in observation. Indeed, most information comes to us through sight in this intensely technological world saturated with advertising and crowded with computer, television, and video screens (Garland-Thomson, 2009, p.25).

Garland-Thomson, a feminist disability scholar, notes that the modern world is built to maintain this ocularcentric hierarchy with sight as the primary means of sensing the world. This belief in the primacy of sight dates to Greco-Roman civilization, where the “burgeoning of architectural and artistic iconography… celebrates looking as a source of knowledge” (Garland-Thomson, 2009, p.26).

In contrast, radio is one of the only electronic mediums that is inherently non-visual. As discussed earlier, Crisell (1994) specifically identifies radio as a *blind* medium [his emphasis] as its codes are entirely auditory, consisting of speech, music, sounds, and silence. One of the challenges of an audio medium in a world prioritising sight over sound is that “the ear is not the most ‘intelligent’ of our sense organs” (Crisell, 1994, p.15), which leads to producers regularly using signposting and framing statements to fill in gaps for listeners. On the other hand, Crisell identifies many advantages of radio’s blindness — listeners can enjoy rich visuals while imagining the story, which can create a greater sense

of intimacy with the story. It also means that radio is much cheaper to produce than video, allowing for a greater variety of programming. Radio is often also called a secondary medium, since listeners can do other things while engaging with the content — a sign of its portability and flexibility.

McMurtry (2019) provides another way of considering podcasting's blindness, using McCloud's (1993) discussion of comics as a mono-sensory medium to make the case that podcasting, and specifically radio drama, can also be classified as such. Mono-sensory media rely on "only one of the senses to convey a world of experience" (McMurtry, 2019, p.237). One of the key defining features of mono-sensory media is closure, which McMurtry describes as what humans mentally complete in the absence of information. She explains further:

> We use the visual-only information from comics to mentally reconstruct all other aspects of their fictional worlds – sound, touch, taste, smell, time and motion. In audio drama, from sound-only information we construct a storyworld through sight, touch, taste, smell, space and, to an extent, motion. (2019, p.238)

Whether we call it radio, podcasting, or something else, audio storytelling's affordances create rich environments for listeners to fill in (or, as McCloud would say, close) informational gaps with their own imagination.

Many scholars have taken issue with Crisell's assessment of radio as a blind medium. Chignell (2009) notes this classification of blindness can be problematic in the sense that it can be reductionist and essentialist — both things researchers strive to avoid — and that "the use of the word 'blind' is a deliberate sleight of hand to insinuate that this is a disability" (p.70). Others have proposed alternative terms — radio's 'invisibility' (Shingler & Wieringa, 1998) and radio's 'darkness' (Hand & Traynor, 2011) — without questioning Crisell's definitions, suggesting that their key concern was around the politics of vocabulary; assuming that a word suggesting disability is inherently negative.

On the other hand, Bolt (2020), a blind scholar working in the field of disability studies, agrees with Crisell's definition, noting that "radio is often and diversely linked to visual impairment. For example, it may be enjoyed in a so-called blind way by an audience occupied with visual tasks" (p.1235). Bolt goes further to connect radio studies and

disability studies, pointing out that they are both relatively young fields and interdisciplinary in nature — making them ideal potential collaborators. And while Crisell's classification of radio as a blind medium didn't address disability directly, disability scholars have noted that the Blind community has a rich historical connection with radio; for example, the British *Wireless for the Blind* program established in 1929 that provides audio gear customized for blind users, or radio reading services that began in the U.S. in 1969 and now run internationally through the International Association of Audio Services. More recently, as podcasting has provided an option for radio on demand, "Blind broadcasters were in the vanguard of podcasting as a culture of use, and inflected podcasting with their own particularities of usage" (Ellis & Goggin, 2015, p.44).

2.7 Representations of disability and blindness in the media

From a disability studies perspective, the idea that scholars would rather call radio 'invisible' or 'dark' instead of blind speaks to a long history of negative representations of blindness in media and culture more broadly. "Disabled people have often been represented as figures of trauma, tragedy, pity, terror, or inspiration. Even today, cheats, charity cases, and inspirations constitute the vast majority of mainstream representations of disabled identities" (Hadley & McDonald, 2018, p.5). This is perhaps not surprising considering the earliest scholarship connecting disability arts, culture, and media studies was the historical and theoretical analysis of fairs, sideshows, and freak shows, which evolved into accounts of how representation in drama, theatre, television, film, literature and the visual arts "have used the disabled body… to prop up dominant culture accounts of what it means to be human" (Hadley & McDonald, 2018, pp.2-3). As such, much of the research centered on analysing roles and representations of disability is based in older, more established mediums such as literature, theatre, and cinema (Ellis & Goggin, 2015).

In considering blindness specifically, Bolt has published on the negative representations of blind people in literature and theatre (2005) and the biases that inform positive or 'beneficial' stereotypes of blindness (2006). He builds upon these concepts in a later critique of aesthetic blindness (2013), which he argues is based on two preconceptions: that blindness and ignorance are synonymous, and that aesthetic qualities can only be perceived by visual means. He continues to analyse works of literature in this study, but also looks to theatre — specifically, Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blind,* published in 1890 — to argue that the play privileges sightedness not only in how characters are represented in the script, but also in the play's structure and staging.

Theatre is a naturally visual medium; it isn't surprising that a 19th century play depends on what Bolt identifies, invoking Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's *Extraordinary Bodies*, as "the 'normate' subject position of a sighted audience" (Bolt, 2013, p.97). Garland-Thomson's use of normate refers to "the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them" (1997, p.8). Normate is an identity that shifts and changes depending on relationships and circumstance, as there are always times when we as people are considered more or less 'normal' in terms of aligning with societal expectation or social order. This is because, as Garland-Thomson writes, "If one attempts to define the normate position by peeling away all the marked traits within the social order at this historical moment, what emerges is a very narrowly defined profile that describes only a minority of actual people" (1997, p.8).

Bolt (2013) argues that symbolic blindness is problematic because it relies on the stereotypical assumptions of blindness to make its point. In the case of *The Blind*:

> The characters may well be 'portrayed as sightless in order to make a philosophical point,' says former National Federation of the Blind president Kenneth Jernigan, but 'what emerges on the stage is a ridiculous tableau of groping, groaning, and grasping at the air'; it 'reinforces every negative stereotype of blindness.' (p.100)

These actors portraying disability are rarely visually impaired themselves — a practice that has been called "crip drag" (Mazzeo, 2016, n.p.) and an ableist equivalent of "blacking up" (Bolt, 2013, p.105). This isn't just a representation problem for blind actors, but an economic one as well. Keeping visually-impaired artists out of the industry not only continues the precedent of harmful representations of disability, but also hinders disabled artists' abilities to make a living. Campaigns such as Lizzy Clark's "Don't Play Me, Pay Me" aim to include those with disabilities in the conversation around access and disability and to remove barriers for disabled actors in finding work, but the challenges for access continue. Bolt calls upon academics and activists to address the "general lack of informed tropological criticism in the humanities, the absence of critical readings that are appreciative of disability" (2013, p.106).

Unsurprisingly, these trends in disability representation are equally present in today's media culture, though there is still limited research focused on emerging digital media, particularly among media studies scholars (Ellis & Goggin, 2015). This is an incredibly important area of inquiry, as disabling media stereotypes "form the bedrock on which the attitudes towards, assumptions about and expectations of disabled people are based. They are fundamental to the discrimination and exploitation which disabled people encounter daily, and contribute significantly to their systematic exclusion from mainstream community life" (Barnes, 1992, p.19).

2.8 Podcasting and Disability arts, culture and media

Disability studies and disability arts, culture, and media studies might be seen as new fields, but their development around 30 years ago makes it a more established discipline than podcast studies. Not only are scholars drawing on their expertise and insight to provide accounts of how disability is defined in dominant cultural systems, institutions, and discourses, but they also focus on practice, where they:

> deliver insights into how arts and media workers are developing new accounts of what it means to be disabled and adapting, adopting, and imagining new production platforms, aesthetics, and audience engagement techniques to assist disabled people to speak back to the stereotyping they are subject to in the public sphere. (Hadley & McDonald, 2018, p.1)

This practice-based work provides a rich array of considerations and alternative approaches to media making practice — particularly with growing interest in the field to investigate how disabled artists and their publics circumvent mainstream media challenges by moving to more "democratic" digital media platforms (Ellis & Goggin, 2015; Mills & Sanchez, 2023).

Podcasting, as a digital technology, affords a flexibility in production that has "opened up new paradigms of media circulation, exchange, and audience response" for those with disabilities, though the inaccessibility of the offline world has, in many ways, been replicated online (Ellis & Goggin, 2015, p.109). "As we have already seen, the reality — even with the much more potentially flexible, configurable software, hardware, systems and applications that make up online media — is that accessibility is still often viewed as too complicated" (Ellis & Goggin, 2015, p.43). Bri M. (2023), who hosts the *Power Not*

Pity podcast, identifies the medium's ability to provide a platform for disability justice, though notes access issues around transcripts, physical production spaces and a general lack of worker benefits. As such, creators and audiences with disabilities still face challenges in making and engaging with digital content such as podcasts.

2.9 Disability justice, cripistemology and dismediation

Much of disability arts and media research is centered on the values of disability justice and inclusion. The work of disability activists and scholars is at the foundation of disability justice — Charlton's *Nothing About Us Without Us* is a foundational text that identifies the socio-economic factors contributing to the oppression of those with disabilities and advocating for their "empowerment and human rights, independence and integration, and self-help and self-determination" (Charlton, 1998/2004, The Politics and Philosophy of Empowerment). While originating in the context of disability, the expression "Nothing about us without us" is now used by a variety of equity-seeking groups and serves as a shorthand for the inclusion of voices and perspectives of those with lived experience in decision-making.

Disability justice is a core value at the heart of activist disability arts practice and research. Sins Invalid, a San Francisco-based disability justice performance project, centres their work around 10 key principles: intersectionality; leadership of those most impacted; anti-capitalist politic; cross-movement solidarity; recognizing wholeness; sustainability; commitment to cross-disability solidarity; interdependence; collective access; and collective liberation (Berne et al., 2018). Not all disability media scholars use these principles, but the topics of intersectionality (whether disability, race, class, etc.), sustainability (also referred to as care and self-care) and interdependence (also called relationality, reciprocity and community) appear often in the literature. These concepts, also found in feminist studies, critical race studies, and others, connect with broader critical and participatory methodologies.

Scholars have also explored the concept of disability as research method, a term that gained popularity across several disciplines in the 2010s, though Mills and Sanchez (2023) note that similar ideas were circulating in disciplines and activist circles earlier, using different language. Dokumacı (2023) defines the practice as:

> [A] creative approach through which research methods are informed by, modeled after, and tailored to the situated knowledges of disabled people. It involves attuning and sculpting research methods and modes of analysis to the particular ways of relating to the world that disabled living entails. (p.11)

By considering media as "containers of possibility" that can extend beyond traditionally-accepted ableist uses, Dokumacı (2018) used disability as a research method in her practice-based work to experiment with new techniques and aesthetics for integrating audio description into the filmmaking process.

Disability as method is also connected to cripistemology, a reclaiming of the offensive term cripple and merging it with epistemology (Bolt, 2020). Bolt writes that “Disability studies address conventional ways of knowing and knowledge of the body, of capacities” (2020, p.1236) — while cripistemology is both about disability and extends beyond it. Johnson and McRuer (2014) coined the term to describe the work of challenging those who frame disability as a “thoroughly comprehended object of knowledge… for asking questions about remote locations, styles, and modes of transmission for prohibited knowledge about disability” (p.130). Pushing back against the “inspiration porn” often seen in the media, crip experiences are centred with a recognition that there is no right or wrong way to navigate disability. Hamraie writes that crip is not interchangeable with disability: “Rather, it is a specific commitment to shifting material arrangements” that push against unjust, inaccessible conditions (Mills & Sanchez, 2023, p.9).

In the field of disability media studies, Mills and Sterne’s work on dismediation (2017) recognizes “disability as method, not simply as content for media studies” (p.368). Dismediation can support scholars to theorize media change from a disability studies perspective by taking “some measure of impairment to be a given, rather than an incontrovertible obstacle or a revolution” in media technologies (p.366) and “demands that we radically expand the methods, sites, and contexts through which disability and media are understood” (p.367). Mills and Sterne suggest that dismediation is a critical counterpart to remediation — how new media “refashions” its predecessors and how older media refashions to “answer the challenges” of new media (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p.15) and can help theorize change in existing media systems that “work toward digital justice, which may take the forms of cripped or minor media or of mainstream access” (Mills & Sterne, 2017, p.368).

2.10 Affordances in theory and practice

Thus far, Gibson's theory of affordances (1979/2015) has been introduced in the context of describing the characteristics and advantages of podcasting, such as Swiatek (2018) using the theory to consider podcasting's unique elements as a medium that connects people from all backgrounds across the world through knowledge and information. However, this theory extends far beyond podcasting — it has been adapted by all sorts of scholars across a wide array of fields, including disability studies. This section outlines Gibson's original theory and considers how affordances can both serve to identify challenges to accessible and inclusive podcasting while also serving as a way to theorize solutions and opportunities to these challenges.

Gibson, a psychologist, developed his theory of affordances in considering human perception of the environment. He distinguished between visually apprehended qualities — such as colour, texture, size, shape, rigidity and mass — and affordances — what an object allows for. Affordances are:

> in a sense objective, real, and physical, unlike values and meanings, which are often supposed to be subjective, phenomenal, and mental. But, actually, an affordance is neither an objective property nor a subjective property; or it is both if you like. (Gibson, 1979/2015, p.121)

For example, Gibson notes that if a surface is nearly horizontal (not slanted), nearly flat (not convex or concave), and sufficiently extended (relative to the animal's size) and if its substance is rigid (relative to the animal's wight), then the surface affords support for bipeds or quadrupeds on what we might call ground that is stand-on-able, walk-on-able and run-over-able. While these four physical properties (horizontal, flat, extended, and rigid) can be measured in standard units used in physics, the affordances of this surface have to be measured relative to the animal as it is unique to the species. Because of this, he writes, affordances are equally a fact of the environment and of behavior; they point to both the environment and the observer and cut across "the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy" (2015, p.121).

In considering both physical and subjective barriers (or as Gibson calls them, inadequacies), affordances are particularly well-suited to consider issues of access and inclusion. While physical barriers can create access issues, disability is "what society

makes of it in response to the experience and fears of impairments in human bodies and minds… the frameworks, myths, and power relations that form our social perceptions" (Ellis & Goggin, 2015, p.8). By bridging both the subjective and objective elements of an environment to identify their greater inadequacies, Gibson's theory of affordances serves to conceptualize the bigger questions of power and influence at the root of inclusion and access. This will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

On a more practical level, Dokumacı (2023) finds the original theory of affordances lacking when applied in a disability studies context as it doesn't consider disability's variability and unpredictability. Gibson's theory of affordances, she writes, focuses on the moment of encounter between the body and the environment and suggests a relatively static set of options with which users either will or won't engage. Dokumacı suggests that affordances should instead be considered in processual and comparative terms, considering the differing amounts of creativity and labour needed by individuals to realize an affordance compared to a normate expectation, and how this may change over time depending on one's abilities. She defines her adapted theory as *activist affordances*, which describes the "micro (and often ephemeral) acts of world building, with which disabled people literally 'make up,' and at the same time 'make up for,' whatever affordance fails to readily materialize in their environments" (Dokumacı, 2020, p.S98). Depending on each unique situation, objects, practices and people can all serve as affordances for those who are "*making up* and *making real* worlds that we were not readily given by *making do with* what we have" (Dokumacı, 2023, p.9).

Aside from affordances serving as a way for researchers and podcasters to identify access inadequacies or gaps, Dokumacı's interpretation of Gibson's theory shows how affordances can help theorize creative, inclusive and accessible solutions in the face of barriers. Disability theatre scholar and *Static* dramaturg Watkin (2022) uses Dokumacı's theory of affordances in her practice, describing her process as first identifying the barrier, then identifying the affordance or solution that serves as an action between where you are and how you can move through the inaccessible situation.

As will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 3, affordances served as an essential foundation for this practice-based doctoral research. The tenets of disability justice provided additional guidance within an action research framework, while disability as method, cripistemology and dismediation supported our work as we looked to develop alternative forms of media production to centre and support disability in our practice.

2.11 Practice-based research and its role in podcast studies

The mix of practice and research goes by different names, but many of its definitions are similar in scope. Rooted in the arts disciplines, this work has been gaining in popularity over the past thirty years as practice-based arts programs have become established in higher education institutions (Nelson, 2013). Some of the more popular terms include practice-based research, practice-research, and practice-as-research, though terms such as praxis — "theory imbricated within practice" (Nelson, 2013, p.5) — can also refer to this type of work.

Candy and Edmonds use the term practice-*based* research (PBR), defining it as "an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge, partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice" (2018, p.63). In the case of a doctoral thesis, Candy (2006) notes that research contributions can take the form of creative outcomes such as designs, music, digital media, performances and exhibitions. Documentation of process and critical reflection is a key component of this type of work, often as a textual analysis, as "a full understanding [of the research] can only be obtained with direct reference to the outcomes" (2006, p.1). This differs from practice-*led* research, which "is concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice" (2006, p.1). Since the focus of the research in this context is to advance knowledge about practice, it's possible to convey findings in text form, without need to include the creative work.

Hope (2016) defines what she calls practice-research by expanding upon Christopher Frayling's (1994) definitions of research and practice in art and design. By assessing Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded projects in the U.K., she identifies three main categories: research into practice, research through practice, and research for/as practice, arranging them into a colour wheel of practice-research. Recognizing the fluidity of these definitions when applied to real-world research problems, the wheel creates "a spectrum of positions of practice in relation to research, suggesting existing research paradigms are bursting at the seams and that the 'disciplinary matrix' of practice might offer other ways of knowing" (Hope, 2016, p.74).

Practice and research have long overlapped in the spaces of media production, though originally little was published on specific practices and researchers weren't necessarily

using terms like practice-based or practice-led to describe their work (Lewis & Jones, 2006). A review of earlier audio-focused practice-research shows that researchers have mostly framed their work in the context of praxis, participatory action research (PAR) and action research, applying theory and practice from adult education, community media production, and theorists such as Bourdieu and Schatzki.

One of the earlier books to describe practice-research in radio and digital audio is based in community media practice. *From the Margins to the Cutting Edge* (Lewis & Jones, 2006) details practice-based community media initiatives from the European Commission funded study *Creating Community Voices: Community Radio and New Technologies for Socially Disadvantaged Groups*, which ran in two iterations between 1998 and 2004 in Austria, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy and the U.K. Two key contributions from this book include Günnel's (2006) discussion and description of action-oriented media pedagogy, which underpinned the funded projects, as well as developing and documenting a process for tandem training that considers how skills are co-developed between media outlets, organizations and the greater community. Connecting the research to digital media making practice, the book has a website link to the project outputs described in the articles, though it is now defunct — the challenge of maintaining digital infrastructure almost 20 years later.

Two authors of *From the Margins to the Cutting Edge* further developed their community-media centred and practice-based research through the Transnational Radio Encounters (TRE) consortium, made up of six linked but independent projects research teams in Germany, Netherlands, Denmark and the U.K. This expansive project, described as a partnership of academics, broadcasters and archivists, “explored and analysed mainstream trans-border radio… international broadcasting and radio produced by social, cultural and ethnic minority communities, predominantly in the ‘third’ community radio sector” (Lewis & Mitchell, 2021, p.40). Alongside interviews and analysis of contemporary and archived radio programs, community media ethnography and participatory mapping was a core component of Lewis and Mitchell’s PAR methodology, which happened in sharing experience workshops in Britain, Canada, France and Spain. This mapping process inspired what would eventually become Radio Garden, a website and mobile app released in 2016 and described as “a globe peppered with pinpoints linking users to... stations’ streamed broadcasts, thereby providing a single point of entry to the world’s radio for millions of people” (Lewis & Mitchell, 2021, p.41). Radio Garden is not only a space that reflects the many concepts surrounding transnational radio, nor simply a digital place for

people to engage in borderless radio listening — it also serves as an exhibit of the TRE's research, with researchers' interviews, audio archive fragments and PAR stories "planted" in the Radio Garden, "adding a rich 'voicing' of participants' transnational radio experiences to the platform" (2021, p.41). Radio Garden is an example of practice-based research as the research process and its findings informed the project's creative output, but the full scope of the project can't be appreciated without understanding the researchers' methods and practice. While Radio Garden can certainly be enjoyed on its own, a listener would likely miss the depth, range and discussion that resulted from these multi-year studies by simply listening.

As a new and emerging field, it's worth noting that a good amount of practice-based podcast research is happening at the doctoral research level. Many researchers cite Bourdieu in their practice-based work — Coleman (2020) uses his work on field theory and positionality (2004), along with Schatzki's version of practice theory (2001), to ground her methods of desk-research and ethnographic-style inquiry, which includes journalistic practice as a form of gathering cultural data, while Kerrigan et al. (2023) reference Bourdieu's cultural production theories (1993) and Giddens' Structuration theory (1984) within a methodology of Practitioner-Based Enquiry (Murray & Lawrence, 2000). Some theses included more traditional journalistic fieldwork and outputs, such as audio features or a full-length documentary, alongside critical reflexivity (Coleman, 2020; Lindgren, 2014). Others have incorporated mixed methods in their practice, such as Jorgensen's practice-based doctoral thesis (2022), which included a three-part podcast series (about 75 minutes of audio content in total) alongside a 40,000-word written exegesis. Jorgensen blended interdisciplinary methods with podcast practice to investigate podcast production methodologies among independent Australian podcast producers. One example of this mixing of methods was recording post-interview audio memos — an adapted ethnographic method of written self-reflection memos — that were then used in the podcast series artefact. This allowed the podcast to serve as a research tool to document and communicate findings from the perspectives of the community, the producers, and Jorgensen as a practitioner and researcher (Jorgensen & Lindgren, 2022). In his practice-based thesis, Bird (2025) built on Lindgren and Jorgensen (2023), using his years of experience as an audio producer to create a podcast pilot episode as a case study for investigating the mediating role of journalistic subjectivity in news podcasts. He argued that while critical reflexivity is a necessary component to his research, it had limitations when considering media content's influence on the broader public. Because of this, Bird chose to include mixed methods in his practice, running a survey of news podcast listeners in Australia and following up with

semi-structured interviews and a focus group to provide feedback on the pilot episode. He noted that "combining these research steps with critical reflexivity on podcast practice provided a dynamic means of examining the democratic implications of journalistic production" (Bird, 2025, p.7). Lastly, Zokaei's (2024) practice-based doctoral thesis included producing *The Price of Secrecy* (2019), an award-winning five-episode fictionalised podcast series that addresses the issues of child sexual abuse in Iran. The podcast, in the Persian language and intended for an Iranian audience, serves as the culmination of Zokaei's engagement in diasporic digital media activism; it is how she develops her methodology of Podcasting-as-Care "as a method of activism that brings notions of feminist care, activism and listening in a close conversation framed through podcasting" (2024, n.p.).

Regardless of terminology, these examples of practice-based work employ an iterative mix of research and planning, action, and reflection — the keys steps of action research, defined as:

> [A] participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (Reason & Bradbury, 2008)

While action research doesn't require a creative output like practice-based research, audio researchers have been using it as a framework for building their practice-based work. For example, Lindgren and Jorgensen (2023) used action research as the overarching methodology for their practice-based study producing a health-based public-interest podcast series about anti-microbial resistance, noting that the qualitative approach of action research allowed for "testing research questions in practice" (Hearn et al., 2009, p.59). The authors also used Hope's (2016) approach of conducting research through practice, which allowed them to identify "challenges and missed opportunities at the intersection of constructive journalism and podcasting to be trialled from a researcher-practitioner perspective" (Lindgren & Jorgenson, 2023 p.78). Together, action research provided a process for going about the creative work, while practice-based research provided a framework for ensuring that the outputs were also scholarly in nature.

2.12 *Static*: podcasting blindness

The practice-based component of this thesis is *Static: A Party Girl's Memoir* — a six-episode podcast series that tells the true story of how 19-year-old Ashley King lost her eyesight when she was poisoned by methanol while travelling in Bali. The series was adapted from a three-act play of the same name, produced through Inside Out Theatre, a professional "Deaf, Disability, and Mad Theatre company in sunny Calgary, Alberta, equally invested in artistic excellence, community development, and deepening our cultures' accessibility" (Inside Out Theatre, n.d.) as well as Chromatic Theatre, which "develops, supports, and creates space for racialized theatre artists in Moh'kins'tsis" (Chromatic Theatre, n.d.). In the three decades that Inside Out has existed in the city, they have centered their work in the disability community, supporting artists in telling their stories and improving accessibility for those working in the arts and those who enjoy them. For example, their Good Host program works with theatre companies around the city to offer ASL-interpreted nights for those who are hearing impaired, touch tours and audio described plays for those who are visually impaired, and relaxed performances for those with sensory concerns (Inside Out Theatre, n.d.).

While *Static* tells a story of blindness, it is very different from the typical representations of blindness identified by Bolt and Garland-Thomson. Centred around King's personal experience as a second-generation Mexican immigrant who encountered a visual impairment later in life, her character is a fully realized and complex human being with goals, dreams, success and challenges — though dramatized at certain points for effect. The main theme throughout *Static* is King's relationship with her mother, who immigrated to Canada from Mexico as a young woman to marry King's father. Carolina King (played by Jaime Cesar) is the only other actor in the show and serves both as a support and a foil for Ashley's character throughout the play. Their conversations, arguments, and heartfelt moments enrich the story and connect to other themes, such as the joys and strains of mother-daughter relationships, the challenges of first- and second-generation immigrants, and the importance of finding one's way in the world. *Static* is unique to King and her experience; it doesn't attempt to speak for others with visual impairments or homogenize the experience of blindness. It doesn't downplay King's struggles in learning to move forward with her disability — discussing depression, challenges with friendships and relationships, and a suicide attempt. It's these unique, honest and intersectional elements that establish *Static* — both the play and the podcast — as a cripistemological text.

In this sense, it's only fitting that *Static*, the play, would be adapted for a blind medium — podcasting! Listening to audio is an inherently individual experience (Crisell, 1994) — a room full of people hearing the same story will all create their own personal, imagined environments as they listen. This creates an opportunity to tell a story with a unified experience for an audience, regardless of their visual abilities, which was extremely appealing for King as she looked to share her story in an accessible way. Additionally, audio storytelling's intimate nature, which addresses listeners individually and creates connection through voice and dialogue (Crisell, 1994) lends well to the very personal story of *Static* that is told through King's first-person perspective. While the tools to produce a podcast aren't particularly accessible for someone with a visual impairment — which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5 — podcasting allowed the team to control the methods of production and publication, providing flexibility in production timelines and format that wouldn't necessarily have been afforded by more traditional mediums such as radio.

Overall, a review of the literature demonstrates that, while a relatively new field, podcast studies builds upon the foundations of radio studies to establish its own distinct area of interdisciplinary inquiry. While early podcasting research focused on defining the medium, scholars are now situating their work in a socio-cultural context that connects a variety of disciplines and are beginning to consider practice-based research as a way to bridge the divide between making and theorizing. This is partly due to the affordances of podcasting — an open platform that affords publishing opportunities for individuals, voices and views that may not be part of the mainstream media. Much of this newer practice-based podcasting work is influenced by participatory research methods in radio studies, which was in turn informed by alternative media production and adult education pedagogies.

Looking to research gaps, there is limited practice-based work in podcast studies, particularly that considers how production methods can encourage collaboration and inclusivity. Disability media studies is a small but growing field that remains distinct from media studies, with very few media scholars focusing on disability. As Bolt (2013) notes, "the absence of critical readings that are appreciative of disability" (p.106) is a gap in arts and humanities research more broadly. While existing research identifies radio and podcasting as a blind medium, and considers the representation of blindness in media, literature, and society more broadly, to my knowledge there is no existing practice-based podcasting research that considers blindness and podcast production. Considering these gaps, the next chapter discusses the methodology and approach used in designing a practice-based project to help answer two specific research questions.

Chapter 3: *"Let's eat, pray, love, bitches!"* Action research as a methodology for developing accessible practice-based inquiry

My doctoral project used an action research framework to guide my practice-based inquiry into collaborative, accessible podcast production. In co-creating and releasing a podcast series with Ashley King and Inside Out Theatre, this work was informed through the lens of practice-based research, podcast studies, disability media studies, journalism practice, and disability arts practice. Specifically, this thesis looked to address the following research questions:

RQ 1. What can journalists and media makers learn from people with accessibility requirements, accessibility practitioners and advocates to develop more inclusive practices and reporting outputs?

RQ2. What changes to accepted podcast production practice or formats might better suit diverse storytellers and their listenership?

These questions invited a practice-based approach to provide answers in a practical context. While researchers may choose to interview podcast producers about their work, it maintains a distance between the researcher and the methods of production. In this study, I traded the breadth of interviews with podcasters — of which many studies already exist — for the depth of a practice-based approach that allowed me to incorporate my training as a journalist and 15-plus years of experience as a radio and podcast host and producer. Additionally, my 10 years of experience teaching journalism and audio skills at an undergraduate level has given me the opportunity to reflect and think critically about my audio production practice, which positioned me well for the self-reflection necessary for practice-based research.

Since the research questions relate to podcast production, it followed that the study's practice should be podcasting — and, as I will discuss next, the flexible and iterative nature of podcast production made it ideal for collaboration and self-reflection within an action research framework.

3.1 Practice-based research and podcasting

There are many reasons why practice-based research aligns well with podcast research. As Jorgensen and Lindgren (2022) note, it "presents a space where aesthetic and creative decisions, and editorial and ethical decisions, can be analysed and made explicit to other researchers through reflective practice … [and] opens the door to the internal logic governing audio production" (p.52).

The logic of audio production in podcasting, however, isn't an easy thing to untangle. Radio production has more than a century of established methods and formats, and while podcasters may choose to follow radio norms, they could also choose to make up their own systems, borrow from other media (such as TV or film), or fall somewhere in between. Examples of authors who work to demystify the podcast-making process include McHugh (2022), who uses her significant experience as an audio producer to discuss and outline many techniques used by audio storytellers in *The Power of Podcasting*. Another guide, *Out on the Wire* (Abel & Glass, 2015), is a graphic novel that shares interviews with established NPR alumni and American podcast producers such as Ira Glass, Jad Abumrad, and Robert Smith on their audio-making process. In a more systematic study, Rime et al. (2022) interviewed 16 professional podcast creators to attempt to create an archetypal workflow, which they found had three overarching steps: pre-production (conceptualisation, organisation, research, scripting, workshopping and casting/booking), production (recording, sound design and editing) and post-production (revisions and re-edits, publication). However, the authors noted that the iterative process of podcasting meant that the lines between the steps were often blurred, creating a constructive loop of "editing → revisions → recording and sound design → editing, etc." that is unique compared to more linear post-production processes, such as film (2022, p.15). Interestingly, they found that all the podcasters they interviewed consistently followed this workflow, regardless of podcast genre and whether they worked independently or with an established organization. While these three categories are so broad in scope that even podcasters with very different production practices would still likely classify their work within pre-production, production, and post-production, I would say they do align with my experience working in established newsrooms (i.e. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) as well as working as an independent podcast producer.

3.2 Action research and podcasting

With a focus on addressing practical problems, action research "seeks to build a body of knowledge that enhances professional and community practices and increases the well-being of the people involved" (Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021, p.4). Defined by its iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, Hearn et al. (2009) note that action research is particularly well-suited to new media studies, "where innovation and change are continual, and where processes and outcomes are usually not predictable and often involve fuzzy and emotional human parameters" (p.11).

Fittingly, the steps of podcast production align quite closely with the steps of action research. Applying these steps to Rime et al.'s workflow, *planning* fits in pre-production, *acting* in production, and *observing* and *reflecting* serve as a mix of production and post-production. The following diagram shows Hearn et al.'s (2009) figure for nested action research cycles mapped over Rime at al.'s (2022) main steps for podcast production:

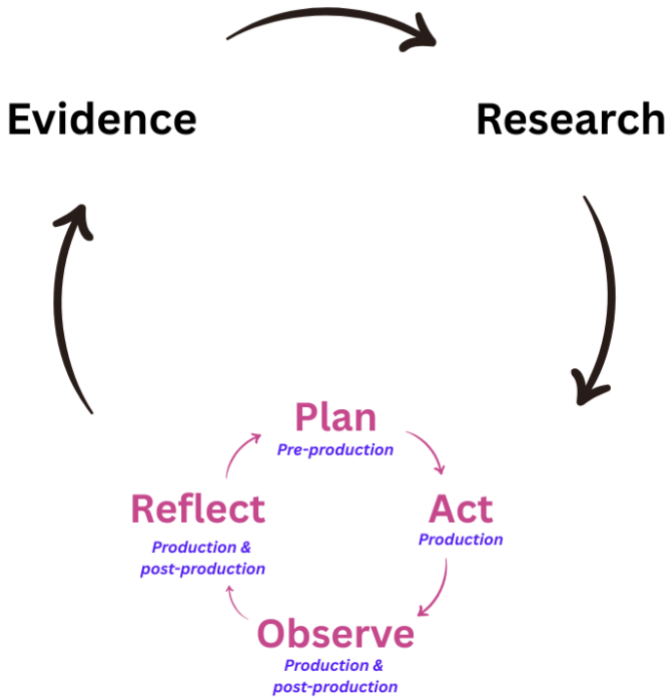

Figure 1: Nested research cycles (Hearn et al., 2009) with podcast production steps (Rime et al., 2022)

In podcasting, iteration can happen through the reviewing and editing that comes with producing an episode; it can also be found through the episodic nature of a podcast, with each episode informing the next. These iterations are also conducive to another essential aspect of action research and practice-based research: self-reflection. Podcasts often rely on host self-reflexivity in telling stories and sharing information, with Dowling & Miller (2019) noting that metacommentary serves as a core part of the medium's DNA, particularly in the case of true crime series. In these self-reflexive moments, reporters share their thoughts about the story and the journalistic process directly with the listener, which Rogers & Herbert (2020) identify as a unique practice and change of pace for those making a podcast:

> Being critically reflexive requires slowing down to listen and observe, to ponder and reflect, and to integrate and synthesise. It might also require us to put the microphone down. As a digital qualitative methodology, podcast production with accompanying critical reflection opens up a space for wider critical discussion and researcher reflection once a podcast is released into the world. (p. 44)

While most practitioners in the industry have little time to put down a microphone and reflect critically, Jorgensen & Lindgren (2022) note that practice-research PhD projects provide the opportunity to do so, and that "pausing to reflect generates a deep understanding of the value of the process for both the research community and listeners – not only for the quality of the final product" (p.450). In this way, the iterative process of podcast production not only aligns with the self-reflection required for thoughtful practice-based research, but also with the iterative and reflective cycles of action research — all cornerstones of my doctoral project.

The iterative nature of podcasting also ties into one of Hope's (2016) key distinctions of practice-research: that methodologies can emerge through the practice, rather than before — as opposed to non-practice-research, which starts with a defined research question and methodology to find answers. This can often complicate the research process, "as the questions and methodology emerge through making, doing, and testing things out. Searching might therefore be iterative, improvised, and intuitive resulting in cyclical or reciprocal research dynamics" (Hope, 2016, p.77). Because this contrasts traditional forms of research practice, this may be viewed as a less rigorous form of research, but Hope notes that the theory and analysis simply happen at different points in the research process,

and can be difficult to separate. “Intuition and improvisation stem from tacit practices that have been practised over time. The researcher-practitioner is able to draw on knowledge of previous iterations of practice to intuitively follow the next steps” (Hope, 2016, p.77). This is reflected further in this chapter, particularly in my adapted literature review and project planning while working with the *Static* team during the play and podcast production.

3.3 *Static: A Party Girl’s Memoir*

The practice-based component of this thesis was *Static: A Party Girl’s Memoir* — a six-episode podcast series that tells the true story of how 19-year-old Ashley King lost her eyesight when she was poisoned by methanol while travelling in Bali. The podcast was an adaptation of a play of the same name, written by Ashley King and co-produced by Inside Out Theatre and Chromatic Theatre in Calgary, Alberta. King and I co-produced the podcast, with King serving as the show host, while I was co-host and the series’ main producer and editor. In these roles, I developed the podcast’s sound design, edited all of the audio, developed graphics and descriptions, and published the series online.

The four original episodes, roughly an hour long, began with a 20-minute section of the play *Static* — adapted as an audio drama — and then moved into King interviewing someone connected to her story and reflecting on her experience. The trailer for the podcast was published in August 2024, and the first episode was released on November 15, 2024, with the following episodes published weekly through to December 13, 2024. A sixth bonus episode was published October 15, 2025. The series can be found on the Inside Out Theatre website as well as through the main podcasting platforms (i.e. Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Amazon Music).

Since its release, the podcast has been incredibly well received, in part because of its timeliness in the news with the November 2024 reports of six tourists killed by methanol poisoning at a hostel in Vientiane, Laos. As someone who had personal experience with methanol poisoning, King was interviewed by local (CTV Calgary, CBC Calgary, Mount Royal University), national (CBC’s The Current), and international outlets (U.K., Australia, Netherlands) about her story, which provided an opportunity to promote the series. Aside from mainstream media coverage, *Static* was promoted twice by Apple Podcasts in Canada and the U.S. — once in the New & Notable section and once for International Women’s Day — providing a significant boost to series downloads. Slightly more than 21,100 episodes of the podcast were downloaded between December 15, 2024,

and June 15, 2025 — and in early 2025 the series hit #1 in Personal Journals on the Apple Podcast charts in Canada and was listed as a top 10 show in the U.S. and Australia. In June 2025, the series was named runner-up (silver) in the Comedy Gold category at the International Women's Podcasting Awards at the BBC in London and won Best Podcast at the Alberta Film & Television Awards in October 2025. The positive response to the series suggests audience interest in hearing more fun, complex and intersectional first-person stories of disability, and that independent podcasting is a way to share these stories with a wider audience.

3.4 Research Timeline

The timeline below shows an overall view of the research process, which took place over 27 months, from first reaching out to Inside Out Theatre in August 2023 to the final episode released in October 2025.

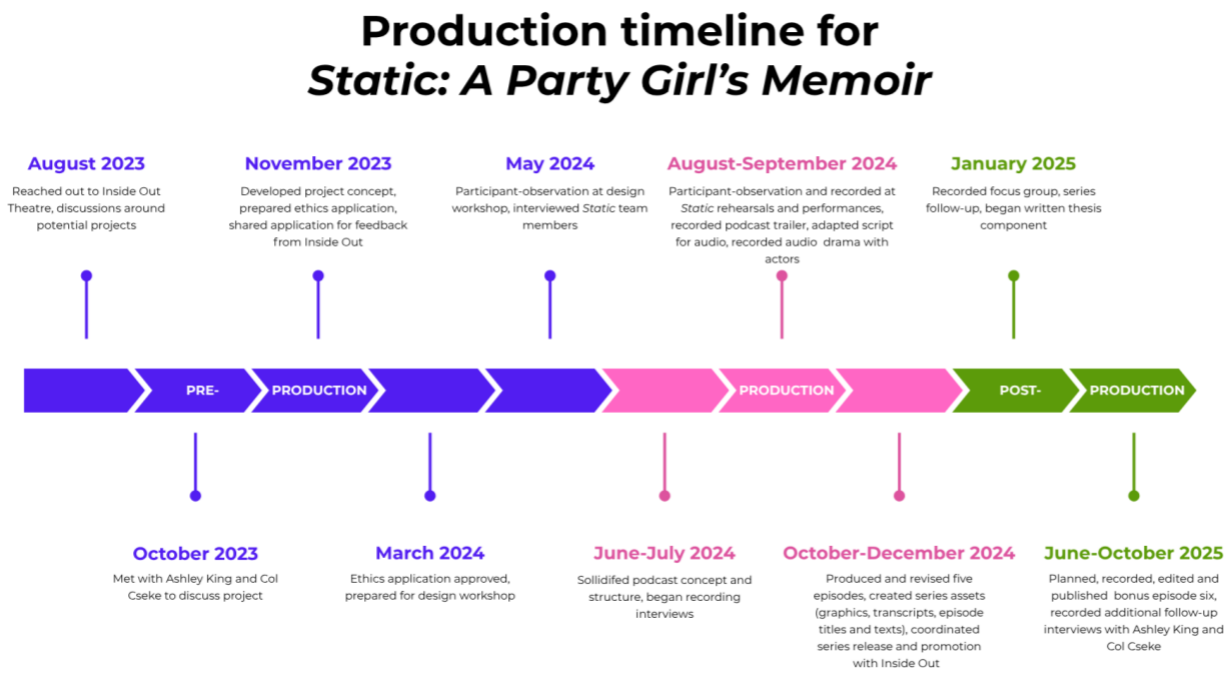

Figure 2: Production Timeline for Static: A Party Girl's Memoir

August to December 2023 was mostly where we (Ashley King — playwright/producer, Col Cseke — artistic director for Inside Out Theatre, and myself — producer/researcher) focused on developing a working relationship and determining a framework for the project. This included in-person and online meetings, emails, and the completion of the project's ethics application, which I shared with the team for review before submitting. After the ethics application was accepted in March 2024, we moved into what would be considered

the project's pre-production phase, where I was able to better learn about the team and their process through an eight-day design workshop in May, serving as a participant-observer and interviewing members of the team as they developed the play. This time on the ground with the team (about 56 hours) provided me with the insights needed to develop a concept and timeline for the podcast, which King and I finalized through online meetings in June 2024.

The production phase of the podcast started with some interviews in July 2024 but was mostly throughout August 2024, coinciding with the play's three-week rehearsal from August 15 to September 4 and then an 11-day performance run from September 5 to 15, 2024. Similar to the design workshop, I attended rehearsals as a participant-observer for roughly 77 hours, working with King and the team in informal ways to support the play, while taking the opportunity to learn more about the team, their process for accessibility and collaboration, and how the script evolved over time. This was also a chance for me to play around with audio recording gear and work out the best options for recording the live show. I attended and recorded four shows while *Static* was in performance, including two previews on September 3 and 4, opening night on the 5, and the matinee show on September 14, 2024. The production process for the podcast became busier in the second half of September once the play closed and King and the other actors' schedules opened up. This is when we recorded the audio drama version of the play with the actors and completed the final podcast interviews.

Series production and post-production began to overlap in October 2024, as King and I worked on the episodes in order, starting with episode one. We began with the audio drama editing and revisions and then moved on to scripting the transitions between sections — as we got to the review stage of one episode, we would start the same process for the next, which meant that we could use the studio time for the next episode to record any new takes or extra elements needed for the previous ones. This continued until the final podcast episode was published in mid-December 2024. Throughout the month of publishing the series, the team and I were in regular contact to coordinate the release, including developing a communications plan for the series.

3.5 Breakdown of practice-based work

The following chart shows the overall hours I worked on the series as a producer-researcher:

Work undertaken	**Hours**	**Recordings/assets**
Phase: relationship building		
Meetings, phone calls, emails	12	Field notes
Phase: pre-production		
Design workshop, participant-observer (May 2024)	56	3 interviews (Daniela Atienca, Jessica Watkin, design team Anton deGroot, Miranda Martini, Lindsay Zess) Field recordings (dramaturgy session, end-of-workshop performance) Field notes
Static rehearsal, participant-observer (August 024)	77	Field recordings (rehearsal) Field notes
Static, theatrical run (September 2024)	12	Attended and recorded 4 performances Field notes
Phase: production		
Scripting and recording sessions	25	Recording sessions (3 audio drama, 6 interviews, 6 narration)
Editing	150	6 podcast episodes
Phase: production/post-production		
Revision sessions	15.5	5 sessions with Ashley; 2 recorded
Developing podcast assets	47.5	Graphics, episode descriptions, episode transcripts, promotion materials
Other meetings and follow-up	11	Includes: recording of interview with Bryan Weismiller (Nov 2024), recording with Jessica Watkin (Nov 2024), focus group (Jan 2025), debrief with Ashley King (Jan 2025), interview with Col Cseke (July 2025)
Total production hours	**406**	

Table 1: Breakdown of practice-based work hours

As with the fluctuating nature of co-creation, it's impossible to document every aspect of the process, but over the year and a half duration of the project, I spent about 157 hours working with the team in meetings, workshops and performances for the theatrical iteration of *Static*. Through this time as a participant-observer, in the podcast's pre-production phase, I recorded five interviews with team members, as well as personal notes from meetings, observations, and conversations. I was also able to track our process and

progress through email and text communication, including team production schedules. Throughout the podcast's production phase, I kept a log of my time recording, reviewing, editing, and publishing the podcast, including meetings — logging 238 hours of work on the podcast between September 16, 2024, and January 5, 2025. This included two recording sessions in studio with the actors and an additional five studio sessions with King to complete the narration and other podcast elements. Over this time, King and I met six times (once online and five times in-person) to review and discuss the episodes — two of which I recorded to document examples of how we revised the podcast together. Outside of these sessions, King and I mostly communicated by text and email for additional feedback and scheduling.

The formal fieldwork component of the project wrapped on January 5, 2025, with a recorded focus group discussion with members of the creative team from Inside Out Theatre (Ashley King, Col Cseke, Ebony Gooden, Camille Craig), Chromatic Theatre (Kodie Rollan) and myself. But it wasn't the end! King reached out in June 2025 about a bonus episode of *Static* with Bethany Clarke, one of the tourists who survived the methanol poisoning in Laos in 2024, and I was more than happy to support King and the series and build upon our existing relationship. The production of this episode was over the summer and took a bit longer than the previous episodes, with the interview recorded in June, narration recorded in August, and the episode published October 15, 2025.

3.6 Podcast planning and project expectations

Using an action research approach for this study, I planned that production for this audio series would follow the complementary steps of planning, acting, and reflecting that mimic the main steps of planning, production and revision, then publication that apply to making any audio series. As podcasting is an iterative process, I expected that the work would be punctuated with points of reflection and conversation that would inform our decisions and next steps — much like the graphic of nested action research cycles in Figure 1. Given the collaborative nature of the project, I anticipated a longer planning stage than might typically happen in more traditional podcast production, such as working in a newsroom or with a client on a deadline. I also expected that the points of reflection and conversation might take longer than with other projects, and that there would be more revisions than the typical two rounds of editing that I usually encounter in my other podcasting work. All in all, I expected the work to flow in a mostly linear fashion, with planning followed by production, which would have iterative rounds of recording, writing, editing, and

reflection/feedback/revision before moving on to publication. As Rime et. al (2022) note, the process can become less linear in the production and post-production phase — which was also expected.

While developing and planning the series, my first approach was to apply my radio training and podcast production experience, which included planning the episode format, series arc, and guest interviews, using templates to prepare question lines. It also involved plotting general publication elements such as series graphics, a trailer, and determining what we would use for posting infrastructure (i.e. podcast host, website). In discussing 'typical practice' with King and the team at Inside Out Theatre, we were able to flag potential sticking points that may not work for this collaboration based on timelines, resources, or accessibility. While I did broach the topic of later steps — such as developing an agreement on how to approach editing and revisions — the team didn't seem too focused on creating a hard and fast system so early in the project. As King wrote in an email early in the process:

> In many cases, access needs come up as we're in the middle of work and can't always be thought of in advance. However, I know that if that does happen, we'll be able to pivot and work together to address any and all needs that do arise.
> (A. King, personal communication, November 14, 2023)

This, as I would understand more fully later, was reflective of Inside Out Theatre's approach to accessibility — improvisational, iterative, and responsive to the situation and team members' needs.

3.7 Collaborating, adapting, iterating

Following action research's cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, one of the first shifts in the research process was to adapt the scope of my research questions and literature review once Inside Out Theatre, King and I agreed to collaborate on a practice-based audio project. There were many reasons that I was interested in partnering with Inside Out Theatre: first, the company has a 30-year track record of community collaboration in the field of accessibility and theatre, facilitating accessible performances, co-producing with other companies, and running community programming. Second, their network is significant — while Inside Out is an independent theatre company, they work with other small and independent companies but also work with the biggest companies in

Calgary such as Theatre Calgary and Alberta Theatre Projects. This was important as I knew that, in order to learn more about creative collaborative methods, I needed to work with people who knew collaboration very well and made it a centrepoint of their work. Third, while I was interested in expanding my audio skills outside of journalism, I wanted to work with an organization that had a general understanding and appreciation for my background as a journalist — and artistic director Col Cseke has a history of working in verbatim theatre, which is based in research and interviewing and serves as a crossover between documentary and theatre work. King is also trained as a journalist, having graduated from Mount Royal University's journalism program in 2018 — though I never taught her and we never met formally until this project.

However, I had been considering a few options for project partners at the outset, including some local non-profit organizations and an existing relationship with an organization that braids Indigenous knowledge and academic research. Since the partnership would determine the content and focus of the practice, my earlier literature reviews focused on podcasting more generally, including its role in a democratic media sphere and ways it was being used by minority groups to share their perspectives and build community. My partnership with Inside Out and King meant that, before joining the first design workshop in May 2024, I completed a second literature review to learn more about disability and podcasting, with a focus on blindness and its representation in the media. Beginning with Garland-Thomson's (1997) work around normate perspectives, as well as her work around the modern world's ocularcentric focus (2009), I then moved into disability scholar Bolt's articles that describe the problematic ways that blindness is represented in literature, including theatre (Bolt, 2005; 2006; 2013). I also took this time to review King's latest draft of the *Static* script and consider how the play, as a story told by and centring the perspective of someone with a disability, both intentionally and non-intentionally challenges the stereotypes of blindness we often see in the media.

Tying back to the core focus of audio and podcasting in this project, radio has been called a blind medium (Crisell, 1994). While some academics have suggested alternate terms, saying the word blind is pejorative (Shingler & Wieringa, 1998; Hand & Traynor, 2011), Bolt (2020) agrees with Crisell's terminology and encourages further collaboration and inquiry between the relatively young, interdisciplinary fields of radio studies and disability studies. In my reading on disability studies and accessibility practice, I focused on broad concepts and discussions of best practices, such as Charlton's *Nothing About Us Without Us* (1998/2004), which lays out the foundations of the disability justice movement and

helped bridge the project's action research approach with *Static*'s core values. Wernick (2023) writes that action research can support the core concepts of disability justice when "centering the leadership, knowledge, and experiences of those most affected in research and action within an intersectional and interdependent lens—which mirrors the well-known disability rights movement saying 'Nothing about us without us'" (p.106).

I also looked to the small but growing discussion around disability media studies that focuses on podcasting and other digital media (Ellcessor & Kirkpatrick, 2017; Hadley & McDonald, 2018). Reading the perspectives of podcasters and creators with disabilities (Ellcessor, 2017; M., 2023; Mills & Sanchez, 2023) helped me better situate podcasting within a disability media studies discourse while also developing a better understanding of how disability stories fit into the podcasting sphere more broadly. While I did read about general rules for best accessibility practices, I purposefully kept this reading broad — understanding from my literature review and conversations with the *Static* team that accessibility is unique to individual needs and preferences, I wanted to leave space for learning best practices from my collaborators. Knowing that I would be joining as a participant-observer over the eight-day design workshop, this felt like a good opportunity to begin to learn King's and the team's approach to building *Static* as a play and how to apply this to podcast design.

Overall, an action research framework served as a strong methodology for this practice-based research as it mirrored podcasting's iterative production cycle and provided the space for reflection that was necessary for practice-based work. However, while action research as a methodology describes *what* will be done, its broad scope left significant gaps for me as a researcher looking for guidance in *how* to approach the work. In this case, pairing action research methods with the principles of disability justice — theory that aligned with the *Static* team's core values and creative approach — provided a context-appropriate theoretical grounding as I navigated my practice-based research. This, along with what I learned through participant-observation with the *Static* team, informed my podcasting practice in generating accessible alternatives while producing the series — which I will address more fully in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: *"No way I'm goin' to the club in a Handibus!"* Conceptualizing accessible practice through affordances

This doctoral research seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What can journalists and media makers learn from accessibility practitioners and advocates to develop more inclusive practices and reporting outputs?

RQ2. What changes to accepted podcast production practice or format might better suit diverse storytellers and their listenership?

These questions, while distinct, are interconnected — after all, it's through learning about how other fields (in this case, accessible theatre) approach their challenges that media makers can learn about existing best practices to adapt and apply in their work. This chapter relates to RQ1 and is informed by my time as a participant-observer working with the *Static* team. This laid the foundation for the findings discussed in chapters 5 and 6, which address RQ2 by applying these learnings with my 15-plus years of audio production experience to develop and test alternative production practices.

Before diving further into these chapters, it is essential that you listen to *Static* — since these research questions are tied to podcast practice, much of the depth and colour of these findings are best illustrated through the series itself. While the written component of this thesis is well-suited to describing the team's collaborative and accessible podcast practice, it's impossible to explain everything in detail, and a careful listen of the series will undoubtedly reveal even more elements and examples that extend beyond the findings you will read in the next few chapters.

Through the 150+ hours I spent with the *Static* team during their design workshop, rehearsals and performance run, I saw Inside Out's approach to accessibility in action — a dialogue-based, improvisational process that reflected their theatrical roots. This provided me with an opportunity to identify concepts such as disability justice and affordances and apply them in real-world contexts. In this chapter, I will share key practices and lessons learned from my time as a participant-observer, then will use affordances to frame my discussion of specific challenges and opportunities in producing *Static*, both as a play and

as a podcast. From there, I will return to my first research question and address how this can inform future podcast practice.

4.1 Condition, culture, and crip time

Experience, practice, and trial and error are all ways that artistic director Col Cseke identifies Inside Out's approach to accessibility. Since incredibly little formal training on accessible practice exists, both Cseke and Inside Out have developed their way of working over the past decade, learning through iteration and mentorship from collaborating artists and the community at large. At the root of their work is promoting disability culture — informed by Charlton's tenets of disability justice (1998/2004), this approach values interdependence and support and a reciprocal approach to community that advocates for its members.

When developing a project, Cseke develops priorities based on the core artists — this meant that Ashley King, as the playwright and lead actor, was the first consideration in designing *Static* as a performance. What is her drive for making the show? Who is the show for, and who will make up the audience? From there, he identifies the other key collaborators in the project and their needs — in this case, the production companies, the play's director and other actors, and the design team and supporting creative staff. Then, looking at the group as a whole, he asks what other training or supports are needed to bring this project together. These questions are answered by what Cseke calls *condition* and *culture* — condition speaking to the more literal concept of disability as a health condition and what specific requirements are needed to support an artist's work, while culture refers to disability culture and how Inside Out can support these values throughout the project and the team in the broader context.

One way that Inside Out facilitates an ongoing conversation around condition, while supporting their culture, is daily morning check-ins for the team. Throughout the play's workshop and rehearsals, everyone would gather in a circle, say a short hello and share their access needs for the day. Creating a daily space for this conversation served to centre the day's work around team members' needs while also allowing for any changes or shifts — recognizing that access needs are an ongoing relational engagement rather than a strict set of rules. As with any changing and iterative process, many of the team practices evolved as the workshop progressed. Many early sessions were conversation-based, with the team gathering at a large table and taking turns to speak. Most team members were

used to raising our hand when we want to speak — however, since two members with visual impairments couldn't see raised hands, we expected a certain amount of vocal interjection throughout. After a few people were cut off while pausing mid-thought, the team decided to introduce a practice where whoever was speaking would wrap up their idea by saying "end of thought" to help clarify when a speaker was finished.

Being able to watch the workshop and how it was organized was also a lesson in how timing can be adjusted to accommodate team needs — in this case, with an adapted schedule that started a bit later in the day and provided more frequent breaks. It is important to note that, in this case, *Static* didn't take more time in production than a normate play; the rehearsal followed a standard two-week schedule. Rather, the allocation of time was shifted to prioritize the team's needs, which meant that some parts of the process took longer than expected while others moved faster or were omitted altogether. For example, the original plan for the design workshop was to work toward a short presentation by the end of the week, but this outcome was simplified in order to make additional time for required script edits and dramaturgy. This change also served the needs and skillset of some team members, as many of those participating in the workshop were working as dramaturgs on the script.

Time is an important consideration in any deadline-constrained production but can take on a different meaning in disability culture – in particular, the idea of "crip time". Feminist and disability scholar Kafer (2013) defines crip time as "flex time not just expanded but exploded", that reimagines the "notions of what can and should happen in time" based on assumptions of ideal minds and bodies (p.27). "Rather than bend[ing] disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds" (2013, p.27). May (2023) notes that crip time "acknowledges the real, embodied experience of the individual in relationship to their society" (p.2006). As Canadian theatre scholar and *Static* dramaturg Watkin (2022) eloquently writes: "Disability culture is moving only as fast as the slowest in the bunch and not only valuing but celebrating that slowness" (n.p). For the most part, this happened with the *Static* team through regular, more formal team conversations such as the morning meetings, but many of these discussions happened more informally as one-on-one check-ins between supervisors and team members. These informal check-ins allowed for sharing specific details connected to team members' individual roles and provided a more private space for disclosing information that someone may not have felt comfortable sharing with the broader group.

4.2 Dramaturgy and affordances in practice

A unique aspect of *Static*, the play — tied to King's goal of designing a show for low-sighted audiences as well as the general public — was that Jessica Watkin, a disability dramaturg, came from Toronto to support King's needs as an actor and playwright, as well as audience accessibility for the show. Watkin, who is also legally blind, shares many similarities with King's visual impairment but also recognized that her needs in producing and performing *Static* were unique and would need to be identified and negotiated throughout the workshop.

Watkin's disability dramaturgy is about supporting the overall "ease of engagement" for the artists and the audience, with her practice rooted in Dokumacı's theory of activist affordances (2023). Watkin (2022) explains her process of creating affordances as first identifying the barrier, then identifying the affordance/solution that is an action between the point where you are and how to move through the inaccessible situation. One of the ways that Watkin would most effectively do this was asking simple questions at key points in the rehearsal process. For example, while running through a scene to work out the actors' staging, the director asks King to walk across the stage to a specific a spot. At this suggestion, the set design team rolls out a small kitchen island needed for the scene; the rest of the production team is watching the stage, considering what other elements (i.e. lighting, sound) will be needed to support the movement. The focus is decidedly on the stage when Watkin, sitting just to the side of it, asks, "Ashley — can you see the post here?" while motioning to a large post at the edge of the stage, just next to where the director has asked her to walk.

Everyone's eyes, including my own, sweep to King. This simple question —confirming how she's engaging with the stage — gently redirects the team back to King and her access needs. In most theatre productions, it's assumed that an actor can walk from one spot to another; by taking this for granted, the team had already moved on to addressing the technical elements that follow the actor's movement. Watkin's question challenged this assumption, creating a pause that enabled King to share what she could and couldn't see from her spot on stage and how it affected what she was being asked to do. Instead of King being responsible for working out how to cross to the director's mark on her own, the production team could now better understand where King *was* compared to where she *needed to be* — thereby making it a group effort to design affordances to bridge the gap. Throughout the workshop, the design team came up with some beautiful ways to

incorporate high-contrast markers that King could see, such as painting that corner post at the edge of the stage and integrating the stage's spike marks with a high-visibility colour among the floor's many multi-coloured mandalas. To the audience, these designs appeared to simply be part of the set design, but were very much the outcome of an ongoing collaborative process between King and the design team — an example of how early planning can allow for aesthetic choices in accessibility design.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Dokumacı's adaptation of Gibson's theory of affordances provides a practical way to consider how objects, practices and people can serve as affordances for those who are "*making up* and *making real* worlds that we were not readily given by *making do with* what we have" (Dokumacı, 2023, p.9). Watching Watkin's dramaturgy — a role that helped facilitate affordances in real-time — established a culture of open communication around access on-set and helped me better understand ways to navigate access questions and concerns. It also helped establish that, aligning with Mills and Sterne's work on dismediation (2017), barriers are a common and expected part of accessibility work; instead of seeing them as a sign of failure, it's an opportunity to develop creative ways to engage with these challenges while meeting the unique needs of those involved. As I will discuss further in Chapter 5, I took these lessons, as well as Dokumacı's approach to affordances, and applied them in working with King on the podcast as we developed our own shared practice.

It's worth noting that affordances don't immediately make an environment completely accessible in all ways; for example, these practices worked for our team as everyone was able to hear and speak with each other, but it would not have worked had a Deaf team member participated in the workshop. Because affordances are unique to people and their specific requirements in a situation, they can and must change depending on circumstances and environment. They are also tied to relationship — after all, a person must be close enough to another in order to understand their needs — a concept that writer and disability justice advocate Mia Mingus (2011) calls access intimacy: the "elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else 'gets' your access needs" without having to explain them (n.p.).

4.3 Broader affordances of *Static*

Aside from its practical applications, Gibson's theory of affordances (1979/2014) serves to conceptualize the bigger questions of power and influence at the root of inclusion and access. Considering *Static* through this lens, many aspects supported, or afforded, its

production as a play and as a podcast — including Inside Out's mandate and resources, my own skills and resources, and the affordances we created as a team.

First, Inside Out's mandate of artist-oriented and accessible practice created a collaborative environment centred around the values of disability culture and disability justice. This is afforded by Inside Out being a non-profit organization that manages its own budgets and hiring as well as its own rehearsal and performance space, which allows more freedom as they design their projects. Cseke also noted the team's broad experience — with about half of the members identifying as having a disability — as another affordance that supports Inside Out in their work, alongside strong, established relationships with their existing funders. By controlling their own means of production, Inside Out can better work around the ableist hierarchies found in other institutions. Since podcasting also affords more control over production and publication, I thought often about how we could replicate Inside Out's approach to challenge existing power dynamics and practices — particularly my working relationship with King — which will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

As a podcast, *Static* is directly afforded by my doctoral studies — in the literal definition of affording something, since Inside Out couldn't have afforded my salary for the project! On a personal and financial level, a year-long sabbatical from my faculty position at Mount Royal University further afforded me the opportunity to dive into an unpaid, intensive, practice-based project. Part of my view to working equitably included paying almost everyone on the team for their time — this was mostly done through Inside Out's existing contracts — though King was not paid for her hours working on the podcast. In her case, this was partly afforded by her paid position with Inside Out as playwright and artistic associate as well as the personal and career advantages she saw in a podcasted version of *Static*. Aside from labour costs, my expertise in podcast production afforded a new, valuable skill set to the Inside Out team. According to Cseke, my doctoral project — a complete and relatively self-sufficient endeavour — was appealing as it could serve as a sort of pilot project for new media opportunities with little time and money required on their end.

It feels reductive to speak of affordances solely as the resources we brought to the project, especially as our ongoing working relationship created entirely new and exciting affordances for *Static* and the team. Following disability culture's focus on interdependence and community, we supported each other not only in making the podcast, but in other ways that our lives intersected over the course of the project. Inside Out team

members lent their skills in voice coaching, communication and promotion, and accessibility design; King offered her communication and promotional time and skills; I supported additional web design, mentorship and training with other team members, as well as administration support for the podcast's licensing and infrastructure (along with sourdough bread and other baked goods throughout rehearsal!). My relationship with King and Inside Out Theatre continues now that *Static* is 'finished', not only on a personal level but also evolving into a community service learning partnership with my second-year podcast class at Mount Royal University. Overall, this partnership has afforded Inside Out, King and myself with training and learning opportunities, new friendships and collaborations, and an award-winning, chart-topping podcast. This project also afforded Inside Out an opportunity to see what a fully-realized multimedia collaboration could look like for future projects. In our final focus group, Cseke and other members of the team noted their interest in developing more work like the *Static* podcast, and that this partnership helped them identify how to approach grant applications that could provide the resources needed to fund a position similar to mine for future projects.

4.4 Conceptualizing accessible practice

Considering these findings in the context of RQ1: What can journalists and media makers learn from accessibility practitioners and advocates to develop more inclusive practices and reporting outputs?

First, the literature and my experience working with Inside Out shows that the flexible, iterative and collaborative nature of disability justice principles and disability culture can serve as a useful framework for journalists and media makers looking to incorporate inclusion into their practice. Furthermore, as a relatively affordable, gatekeeper-less medium where creators can publish at their convenience, podcasting is ideal for exploring new formats and new ways of making. But just because the tools and concepts are readily available doesn't mean that inclusive work necessarily follows. Cseke notes that most of Inside Out's practices to create accessible spaces could be done by any theatre company, pointing to how companies accommodate scheduling for child actors, adjusting rehearsals and double casting roles around schooling and the actors' abilities and energy levels. "They don't think about it that way because it's kids, but kids have access needs… that flexibility is available to everyone" (C. Cseke, personal communication, July 15, 2025).

Inside Out's accessibility mandate is what drives their work — this necessitates designing projects with artist and community needs at the forefront. To apply these concepts in most media making environments would require reassessing existing production systems and culture, which would alter reporting hierarchies and practices, deadlines and traditional journalist-source relationships. Those who own, fund and manage media outlets are certainly at the forefront of who is responsible for (or can afford) these changes. Media organizations may tout inclusion as a core value, but mandates driven by deadlines, profit and audience numbers are at direct odds with disability justice's tenets of interdependence, collective access and anti-capitalist politic. However, journalists have a certain amount of autonomy in how they approach their assignments on a day-to-day level, particularly while navigating sources and relationships. Within their work constraints, there are still ways that journalists and podcasters can include the values of disability culture in their decision making, particularly in terms of clear communication with sources and partners about their reporting goals, process and planned outcomes. Dokumacı's theory of activist affordances (2023), while oriented toward accessibility, can help practitioners identify challenges and solutions for access and inclusion in their work, such as identifying key voices that are being left out of a story, troubleshooting how to adapt gear or interview processes to meet guest needs, or strengthening relationships with guests and colleagues.

It is worth reiterating that while some access and inclusion practices require more time or additional physical or monetary resources, there are many circumstances where a re-prioritization of existing time and resources is more than sufficient to meet these goals. Flexibility in budgeting and scheduling — ideally building this in from a project's outset once the core team is determined — can help better allocate resources as needed. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, many of the affordances King and I developed in our adapted podcasting practice didn't cost more money or take more time, but simply required thinking a bit differently about our practice, such as changing which software we used or planning to meet at specific accessible locations.

Chapter 5: *"#YOBO! You're only blind once, that's the motto…"* Creating accessible podcasting practice through affordances

Working on *Static* was the first time that I was directly confronted with how much standardized podcast production relies on sight — from working with visually-oriented plans such as lineups and schedules to written scripts and timeline-based audio editing tools. In order to work collaboratively and accommodate King's vision impairment, we had to adapt our tools and/or processes at every phase of production, using Dokumacı's theory of activist affordances (2023) and Watkin's (2022) practical application of affordances to guide our work. Below, I detail how we designed the podcast in consideration of the medium's affordances and our team goals; then, I describe key examples of some of the barriers at each stage of production and share how King and I developed our own affordances, guided by the values of disability culture, cripistemology and dismediation, to develop alternative production methods. Lastly, this chapter considers these findings in context of RQ2: What changes to accepted podcast production practice or format might better suit diverse storytellers and their listenership?

5.1 Affordances in developing *Static*

In podcasting, affordances can describe the medium's many advantages, such as its flexibility, accessibility (referring to its ease of access for the general public more so than to disability), and providing an alternative to the written word. Podcasts are also characterized by their intimacy and authenticity through conversationality, first-person voice and deep-dives into niche topics that extend beyond broadcast radio.

In designing the podcast adaptation of *Static*, King and I had several conversations throughout and after the design workshop to identify our goals for the series and take advantage of podcasting's many affordances. For King, podcasting's blindness — where no essential information is conveyed visually — was an important consideration, particularly as she had already been working to design the play for blind and low-sighted audiences. *Static* is a character-driven story: it's through King's first-person perspective that the audience engages with deeply personal subjects such as her relationship with her mother, her sexual relationships, her traumatic experiences, and navigating her new disability. This makes it an ideal story to tell though podcast — an intimate medium that

shares stories through voice and first-person perspective, that can use language and tackle topics that usually aren't considered appropriate for radio broadcast. Podcasting's flexibility and accessibility were also important factors as it could bring the story — previously based in Calgary, Alberta, for a two-week run — to a worldwide audience on-demand.

It would have been sufficient to adapt the play as a straight audio drama, and King had suggested this in one of our first conversations. But throughout the workshop and rehearsals, as she shared extra details about her story that didn't make it into the script, I couldn't help but find the backstory almost more compelling than what was on stage. One of King's goals for the podcast — and mine too, as a journalist — was to increase public awareness of methanol poisoning and its effects. The play did a good job of toeing the line between entertainment and information, as theatre audiences aren't necessarily interested in a 30-minute deep-dive on methanol and its effects on the human body. But that's exactly what podcast audiences look for, and the medium's ability to convey information in a conversational way can make complicated scientific topics (like methanol poisoning!) more easily understandable for the public. Adding interviews to the podcast played to King's strengths as an interviewer and trained journalist and served her goal of developing her skills as an expert and advocate on methanol poisoning. By moving the podcast version of *Static* beyond the play's original script, it could better serve our public outreach goals while taking advantage of both King's and my skillsets and leaning into the most compelling parts of the medium. Additionally, this flexibility to create our own show format — mixing audio drama and current affairs interview — is another unique aspect to podcasting. Though most podcasts are like their radio counterparts in that they choose to keep to one set format (e.g. documentary, interview, audio drama), we had the option to pick the elements — a bricolage of sorts — to craft a format that worked best for the story. It was an unconventional format that reflected the show's theatrical roots — a podcasting take on the live theatre format of a show followed by an artist question and answer session.

We had discussed the possibility of using a live recording of the play for the podcast, and I recorded several shows in case we did, but in the end we decided to make minor adaptations to the script and re-record with the actors in studio. While this meant losing the liveness of the theatre performance, it afforded the opportunity to engage in rich sound design that extended far beyond what had been in the live show. Ultimately, our decision to re-record the script for podcast was based on the question, "Do we want this series to document *Static*, the play, or do we want it to stand on its own as a story?" We chose the

latter, which informed production choices that take advantage of the podcasting medium, which included adapting the script to remove visual jokes (e.g. in the play, King's best friend Britney is played by a mop); adding in transitions, sounds and narration to clarify elements of the play that were more visual (e.g. the air travel transitions to different countries originally had an accompanying video montage); and bringing back previously cut scenes to better serve the podcast's story arc and timing (e.g. the live tape of King's speech about losing her eyesight in episode four didn't make it into the play; we brought it back, adding in a montage of audio from her real travel footage). All of these changes, along with re-recording the actors in-studio, significantly changed *Static* from its theatrical version. For example, listen to the following monologue from the play:

Australia Monologue (Sept. 5, 2025 live performance)

Click here for a link to the clip if the embedded file won't play

As you can hear, the only sound cue in the play during King's monologue is the background party music. The crowd laughs — because King is dancing and twerking to the music — though podcast listeners wouldn't get this visual joke. While you can hear King clearly enough, her voice sounds distant, with an echo from the stage. Compare this to the same monologue in episode one of the podcast, where her voice is rich and close and her narration is punctuated by more than 25 sound cues — a much more engaging listen, particularly with headphones. The podcast version doesn't have the same interactivity with the audience in the play, such as with the Bam Margera joke, but it replicates it with the record scratch and King's reply ("No? Anybody? Whatever."). This encourages the listener to think of what their answer to the comment might be, which is then 'answered' by the sound of a sad trombone. As King and I discussed throughout the project, podcasts and live theatre each come with their own set of affordances, and part of adapting *Static* for podcast was about making creative decisions that served the story in its medium.

One of the biggest advantages of telling King's story through podcasting was the ability for her to tell it in her own voice, allowing the nuances of her personality and identities to shine through. During the viva voce for this thesis, Dr. Sadie Ryan, the internal examiner, asked about the role of voice in the podcast, which I addressed mostly through a consideration of King's many roles in the series, including both a younger version of herself in the audio drama and as her present, undramatized self as host and interviewer.

You can hear my and Dr. Ryan's conversation on this below:

Viva voce: Role of Voice (Feb. 16, 2026)

Click here for a link to the clip if the embedded file won't play

5.2 Barriers and affordances in making *Static*

While it might not seem so from the final (sound-based!) product, producing a podcast is typically a very visual process. Planning is done with written scripts and question lines; operating the recording gear requires the visual monitoring of sound levels; audio editing involves watching soundwaves while listening to determine where to make cuts and adjustments. And once podcasts are made, publishing them online requires adding visual elements like a show logo and text elements like titles, episode descriptions, and keywords through a mix of text-based websites and content management systems. This meant that, for King and me to collaborate meaningfully in making *Static*, we would need to develop a mix of affordances at most stages of production to take the podcast from concept to reality.

Static's episodes follow the same general format: first, a section of the play adapted for audio drama; second, a short transition section narrated by King that moves into a short chat with the producer (myself); third, King's interview with a guest connected to the story; and fourth, more discussion between King and I reflecting on the interview, and a short conclusion with credits. However, like most audio productions, the episode elements weren't all created in the order you hear in the episode. The guest interviews were prepared and recorded first, with the last interview with Col Cseke and Kodie Rollan recorded on the final day of the play's run. The show's actors came in to record the audio drama components in late September shortly after the play wrapped. I then focused on audio editing, cleaning up the interview audio and developing the audio drama segments in episode order, sharing drafts with King for feedback. Once the audio drama section of an episode was nearly finished, King and I would plot out the script for the rest of the episode — including transitions, our conversations and reflections — and book studio time to record these segments. While recording, we would narrate through the episode more or less in real-time, which included listening to the guest interview together before recording the final reflection section. This helped create a sense of immediacy and connectedness to the interview content, despite the fact it had been recorded months earlier, and it allowed us to revise the interview and discuss any edits or changes for the final version.

The main barriers we encountered during production could be classified into two categories. The first involved navigating physical access for King's vision impairment, which ranged from podcast production issues, like adapting written scripts and resources, to more practical access considerations like travel to and from the studio. The second category centered around the power dynamics of our working relationship — as series producer, I was acutely aware of the influence I could exert in the editing process and wanted to create an equitable environment that encouraged collaboration. This barrier wasn't exactly tied to King's disability — the visual nature of editing audio likely played a role in her not wanting to take on that work, but King's interest and focus on writing and acting meant that I likely would have edited the entire series regardless. As the podcast expert on the team, I felt that it was my responsibility to ensure King was included in and had the choice to engage openly in each step of the podcasting process. Our podcasting practice and affordances were guided by the principles of disability culture, particularly interdependence and care, as we relied on each other at different points throughout the project.

Below, you'll find key examples of how King and I navigated this process in each stage of production. Collaboration and navigation of power dynamics was much more straightforward in the interview and narration phases, where we planned scripts together and, as the host, King ultimately had the final call on what she would say in the recording sessions. Our challenges at this point were more technical, as we adapted the question lines (q-lines) for text-to-voice function. In our recorded chats, I found that radio's 'tape talk' format was a great way to encourage a conversational tone and limit the amount of scripting that King had to memorize. Editing these talk sections was also relatively simple since it was mostly basic audio clean-up to keep the conversation as true to the recording as possible. However, editing became more complicated with the audio drama segments, where choices in sounds, music, and overall edits — which might seem small — could shift the tone and story meaning significantly. Comparatively, the physical access barriers were minimal at this point in the process, which was helpful as it provided us with more bandwidth to focus on collaborative elements.

5.2.1 Pre-production: scripting and interviewing

The first part of podcast production for *Static* included preparing for guest interviews, where scripts are typically in a written (digital) form. As a starting point to prepare, I suggested we follow a current affairs radio format and shared a basic template for the q-line. This template, which I use to teach introductory audio interview skills, includes sections for guest contact information, interview focus, suggested interview questions, and background information and research. Over our planning meetings, King and I equally contributed to the interview planning, discussing the focus and key questions — and since King was ultimately running the interview, there was less concern on my part about any power dynamic issues.

By using software with embedded text-to-speech functions (in this case, Microsoft Word) written documents aren't necessarily a barrier for King, though it can be finnicky and time-consuming for her to access and edit files. Since it was easier for me to complete the template, we agreed that I would draft the first q-line based on our chats and then email the file to King so she could provide any notes and changes. This system worked reasonably well — in some cases, King would provide feedback via email, and other times it was easier for us to arrive at the interview 10 to 15 minutes earlier to discuss the q-line in person, which meant King didn't need to navigate her email and use voice-to-text to make edits.

From those first drafts, we didn't anticipate any further issues with scripts. However, we encountered a significant access challenge with the q-line during the first interview with Dr. Gee. Sighted interviewers can read a q-line while listening and conducting an interview; by using a text reader, King had to take a break after each answer to listen to the next question before asking it. This wasn't necessarily a problem for the podcast — guests were aware of King's visual impairment and had no problem waiting, and pauses could be edited out — but I could see that the stop-and-go pace bothered her. After the interview, we talked about how King preferred a conversational style where she and the guest could bounce off each other's ideas without forced breaks. With this goal in mind, what affordances could help?

In reflecting how to address this for future interviews, we had a few options. In her journalistic work, King is often solo and doesn't have to communicate regularly with a producer — she can have an idea of where the interview is going and riff as needed. This works well enough when reporting for a shorter piece where the journalist uses only quotes

or clips; however, it doesn't work very well for a long-form podcast interview where the host's questions and guest's answers ideally create a conversation that follows a bigger narrative arc. With multiple interviews planned, and each interview lasting at least 30 minutes, it wasn't feasible or necessarily helpful for King to memorize these question lines. How could we create a system to help cue King as needed while maintaining a conversational feel?

Considering these factors, I thought about the real-time nature of sound — any scenario where King is listening to the full question will take time and cause a break in the conversation. A new plan, iterated from the first: Why not try creating a second, simplified q-line for the interview with only a few words to cue King to each question? This could mean shorter pauses between answers and the next question. She was open to trying it out, which we did for the second interview, a remote conversation with Bruce Horak. In making the simplified q-line, we still created a full q-line and had a fulsome discussion before the interview so King knew where everything was going. This meant a short amount of extra work on my end to adapt the full script, but it was negligible (say, an extra 10 minutes) compared to the amount of time to develop and write a q-line, which could run anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour or more, including King's feedback and changes.

The simplified cues generally worked well in the second interview; in a few circumstances, the cue wasn't clear enough and King paused to ask me for clarification. Overall, the conversation had fewer interruptions than the first and King was able to follow the narrative arc we had planned. Reflecting on these changes, King and I agreed it would take some practice to make a system like this work smoothly — more interviews than the three total we were doing for the podcast. The final interview was intended to be a last test of the simplified q-line, but King forgot to bring her laptop to the interview, which was on the final day of play performances. To work around this, we reviewed the full q-line together in conversation before the interview and I provided some quick cues to help her remember the questions. During the interview, King just asked me for cues as needed — a system that worked well for the informal nature of the in-person interview, as the guests (Col Cseke from Inside Out Theatre and Kodie Rollan from Chromatic Theatre) were our friends and colleagues.

Having tried three different ways of approaching the q-lines — a full, standard scripted q-line, a q-line with simplified questions, and cueing questions in real-time — we didn't have enough time to come to a strong decision about what method worked best, other than

identifying that the first option didn't work for our needs. Depending on the type of interview and recording setup, the second and third options could be reasonable alternatives with extra practice and refinement. This is, of course, to meet the goal of facilitating a prepared and professional interview in a relaxed, conversational style without much interruption between questions and answers — what Garland-Thomson (1997) might call a normate interview. This begs the question of whether a normate interview should be the standard — which King and I discussed at several points throughout our recording and reviewing sessions. Sharing some of the pauses and errors could let listeners in on the process of what it feels and sounds like to make a podcast with a vision impairment — a way to illustrate, on a smaller and stylized level, concepts like crip-time, dismediation and disability as method, where artists and researchers with disabilities make differences evident through challenging normate formats and aesthetics (Dokumacı, 2018; Ellcessor, 2017; Kuppers, 2021; May, 2023).

Personally, I liked the idea of challenging the standard podcast format by illustrating some of these concepts in a real-time medium like sound, but King wasn't interested. Talking to her in May 2025, several months after the podcast's release, King said perhaps that choice was tied to her training as a broadcast professional, or perhaps her overall vision for *Static* and wanting to create the podcast series for a broader listening audience. Aside from some specific accessibility practices, like providing visual descriptions of ourselves in episode one, the series was edited to remove the gaps, pauses and errors — both the ones that come with King's visual impairment and the ones that happen in the course of recording a podcast. Ultimately, it wasn't my decision to make; as the one pouring her very personal story into the podcast, King gets to decide where and how her blindness is represented. This could be considered part of using a disability justice framework — that King holds the agency in telling her story — but on a more practical level, since all podcast hosts can clean up their work in editing, it would have held *Static* to a different standard if this wasn't an option. King also mentioned that, as a new podcaster, she felt more of a push to present her story in a polished way — though noted she might feel more confident in finding creative ways to challenge podcasting format and conventions in future projects.

5.2.2 Production: recording narration

While recording the podcast episodes, most of our access barriers were connected to King's visual impairment, which she is very adept at handling and I could support as needed. In terms of accessing the recording space, the Community Podcast Initiative studio is based at Mount Royal University — which King, an alumna, could already navigate on her own. She often organized rides for our sessions, but I would check in a day ahead and offer a pick up or drop off if needed. The ride, while technically an affordance to support that King can't drive, was also a nice, more relaxed time to catch up and get to know each other better. These conversations — about the podcast and things completely unrelated — helped us better understand each other, how we approach our work, and how we could support each other in and outside of the podcast.

In my experience, a podcast producer's role is to facilitate the best possible recording; on a technical level, this means everything is running smoothly and sounds good, but it also means looking after guests so they can perform their best. In this sense, I planned our recording sessions to help King feel comfortable — some of these elements were tied to her access needs, but most weren't. For example, I kept things consistent where possible, such as setting King in the same seat each session. While this helped her navigate the studio more comfortably, I would do this with any guest as it helps on a technical level for mic setup and sound consistency between recordings. As the producer, I took care of the technical elements such as operating software, mic positioning, and monitoring levels — which would have been challenging for King to do with her vision impairment but typically wouldn't be part of her role as the show host. Part of producing a show means making sure we have everything we need in recording, so I would bring a plan for each session: we'd start with a check-in (similar to Inside Out) where we could catch up, go over the plan, ask questions or add thoughts. I would take notes for my own reference and for editing later on. Since these sessions were often two to three hours long, and not much was open on campus in the off-hours when we met, I often brought snacks and water for both of us — a welcome treat for when we needed a break or some brain fuel. To ensure we didn't feel rushed through the process, I booked our recording sessions for longer than we anticipated needing — though we often filled the time or went over, working on other aspects of the podcast or just chatting after recording wrapped. With the exception of booking extra time for our sessions — partly afforded by my sabbatical schedule — the recording process was very typical.

5.2.3 Production: scripting and narration

King and I had already developed a good system for planning collaboratively through the interview q-lines, which we continued to use while developing the episode scripts and narration. Again, as King was part of the planning and could ultimately choose what to say in the recording session, power dynamics weren't as much of a concern at this point in the process. On a technical level, however, our scripts needed to be adapted for access. The chat-style host-producer segments were about five minutes long and loosely scripted, with key things we wanted to say at certain points, yet we wanted to keep the tone flexible and conversational. This meant we wanted to steer away from a formal script — not only would it have required an additional burden of memorizing on King's part, it wouldn't have served the tone and purpose of these segments.

My original intention for *Static* was not to be on-air — after all, this isn't my story! — but as we began to consider transitions and other elements for the series, it became clear that King would need someone to play off of while navigating the different formats (audio drama, interview, personal reflection) and difficult topics (disability, trauma, suicide) in a conversational way. Since many podcasts bring their producers on to talk with the hosts, it made sense to bring me in to facilitate the conversation, keep the show from feeling like an extended monologue, and let King be her naturally funny self. It also meant that we could write the segment scripts in a way that I could cue King about our next talking points. I based our script structure on the core elements of a radio 'tape talk', a format where a host interviews a reporter about a story, punctuated with audio clips (Farm Radio, 2019). Tape talks run longer than a news report and have a more relaxed approach, and while it is technically an interview, a good tape talk sounds more like a conversation between the host and reporter as the narrative unfolds. While our segments didn't use audio clips, we wanted to replicate the conversational back-and-forth of a good tape talk.

Most of what we talked about on the podcast was based on conversations King and I had while making the series — none of the information was new to us, and as actors and journalists we both felt comfortable talking from bullet points and improvising as we went. We planned these scripts as a story arc — what information needed to be shared? In what order? Who should talk about what? This helped guide the conversation structure. From there, I would finesse my bullet points to make sure that they cued King to the next idea. With this loose structure, we could record a second or third take if the first one went off the rails — an affordance of podcasts usually being pre-recorded and edited — but for the

most part we recorded in one take with occasional pick-ups or corrections. In certain cases, like the show intros and extros and guest introductions, scripted elements needed to be more precise. For these parts, King would listen to the text through her AirPods and voice along with them, or I would repeat the key points for her to memorize. Where possible, we would reuse past takes that were the same across all episode (such as the credits) to reduce memorization and additional recording.

Another way that we encouraged liveness and conversationality on the podcast, despite its pre-recording, was to record the narrative segments in order, which included listening to the full guest interviews between the episode's talk segments. We tried this approach for episodes two, three, and four, and found that it helped us both connect to the content, since the interviews had been recorded months earlier. Coming straight from listening to the interview added a rawness and emotional connection as King shared her reflections, particularly in episode three after hearing my interview with her mother for the first time. From an editing standpoint, listening to the interviews was an opportunity for us to review them together and flag any last changes that needed to be made for the final version of each episode.

Overall, King and I were able to design an accessible scripting format that met our show goals by merging established radio practice (tape talks) with the more improvisational and conversational aspects of podcasting. This was afforded by pre-recording our episodes, which allowed some freedom in experimenting with different ways of planning and presenting the information. Additionally, by planning collaboratively at the outset, we could ensure we were including what both of us felt was essential to the story.

5.2.4 Post-production: editing and review

Considering that audio editing is a heavily visual process, and that King had no interest in learning how to edit the podcast, we agreed early on that I would do the audio editing for the series, which made sense given my editing experience and role as podcast producer. However, because so many creative choices are determined in the editing process — from sound design to pacing to last-minute script edits — it was essential that King was an active collaborator throughout *Static*'s episode edits and revisions. As the team member who knew how to make a podcast, it was my responsibility to find ways to make the 'invisible' process of editing — which, when done well, can't be identified by podcast listeners — more transparent for King.

Similar to how we approached scripting, I would start by editing a draft version of the episode's audio drama, which I would send to King for review before we met to discuss changes. These early edits were drafted based on sound cues from the play and then I would add and layer with my own creative audio choices. As previously demonstrated, the podcast episodes sound very different from the original play — this happened through a rigorous collaborative design, editing and revision process.

Typically, a lot of podcast episode review can and does happen remotely — the editor will send the audio file and the reviewer will listen, note the timecodes of any issues, and email back their suggested changes. This, however, assumes that the person listening can watch the timer on the audio file to note time codes and — more importantly — has enough experience with audio editing to be able to explain the issue and offer a solution, whether verbally or in writing. The former was an access barrier for us revising the show remotely, but it wasn't the most pressing — if King couldn't properly convey her feedback on the edits, then she couldn't collaborate fully in one of the most important parts of the process. As *Static*'s author and someone familiar with storytelling and listening to podcasts, King was very qualified to give feedback on the episodes, but her comments were often framed more as questions for discussion rather than clear, concise editing notes. This access issue wasn't tied to King's disability; it was that she was new to podcasting production and unfamiliar with the language and practice of audio editing. This meant we needed to design a revision process that allowed additional time and communication around edits and review.

Since meeting in-person to talk about the interview scripts worked well, as did reviewing the edited interviews in studio, we decided to continue with in-person review sessions. We met at King's house — an accessible option for her and a relatively easy drive for me — and I would send her the latest draft ahead of time — ideally a day in advance, if not longer — so she could listen before we met and flag anything she wanted to discuss. Like the recording sessions, we would schedule two to three hours for each meeting, so there was lots of time to listen and review without any pressure to rush. Then we'd settle in at her dining room table — often with tea or a snack — and, after a catch-up chat, we'd listen through the piece together. I played the file on my laptop — not only was this the simplest setup, but it was helpful for me to hear the edit on lower-quality speakers after editing with the monitors in my home workspace. While listening together, either of us could say

"Stop!" at any point in the edit to discuss. As we went along, I wrote down the time codes and suggestions for the next round of edits.

As an audio maker and instructor, I have learned that the more refined a piece of work gets, the harder it can be to make edits and changes. An audio story is a complex thing, made up of interconnecting sounds, clips and narration, and the further along in the editing process, the harder it becomes to make a change that doesn't affect multiple aspects. With the extra work involved to adjust these elements, it can be easier for reviewers to keep the piece as is. Also, when an audio piece is presented in what sounds like a complete state, it can be hard for the listener to imagine alternatives, particularly if they don't have much experience in audio production. Because of this, it was important for me that King and I were connecting at multiple points in the editing process, particularly early on, before small decisions could snowball into bigger elements in the final product.

The editing process for the first two episodes was where we created the signature sound for *Static* — these decisions laid the groundwork for the sound design throughout the series. To engage King's feedback early on, this meant sharing very rough drafts that included gaps, errors and placeholder sounds — the kinds of early drafts that as a professional I usually wouldn't share. As uncomfortable as it was to send those over — would King hate it? Would she understand the vision I had for the piece? — it was important for me that she heard room for her ideas and contributions in the roughness and empty spaces. These drafts were also sent ahead of our meetings, so King had time to listen and process before we met.

For the most part, we could talk through sound options and make editing decisions during our meetings, but there were a few times where it was helpful to actually hear different options for a scene. For example, episode two opens with King describing the hectic streets of Bali's party district. In the play, she performs the monologue as a type of slam poetry while a mix of sounds and music play in the background; while voicing for the podcast, King did a few takes of the monologue that included the slam poetry style as well as a more standard narrative style. For our meeting, I made a rough mix of both options — one with King rapping and other with her talking, over the same background — so we could compare and decide which was a better fit. In these drafts, you can hear placeholder sounds in some sections, as well as uneven sound levels and other elements that still needed to be finessed.

Episode 2 draft: Bali rap

Click here for a link to the clip if the embedded file won't play

This example, where King is rapping, sounds more like how it was in the play. I liked the energy of it and how it brought a theatrical element to the story, though in terms of tone and pacing it was very different from the sound design of the podcast to that point. King, on the other hand, didn't like the rap version at all. She told me that, when writing the script, she imagined the scene in the movie *Eat, Pray, Love*, where Julia Roberts (playing Elizabeth Gilbert) arrives in India and is watching the hustle and bustle of the city from her taxi. Everything is muffled until Roberts opens the door — and is flooded by light, sound, and movement. With this direction (and a rewatch of the movie!) I took the narrated draft version and adjusted the pacing and sounds to create a similar sense of movement throughout the monologue, starting from the airport and hailing a cab to the ride downtown and getting out of the car in Kuta's party district. This was the draft we listened to at our next meeting:

Episode 2 draft: Bali talk

Click here for a link to the clip if the embedded file won't play

There were still placeholders to be filled, levels to be fixed and other tweaks to be made with sounds and pacing, but King could hear enough to know she preferred this option over the rap. I agreed that this version was the right choice — it was more consistent with the rest of the podcast's sound design and a way to take advantage of a finely-edited soundscape for home speakers and headphones. We made a few more notes for further edits that you can hear in the final version of episode two.

As we worked through the first episodes, developing a shared understanding of the project and the process, the revision sessions shortened and became fewer. The first two episodes had around four or more rounds of feedback, with the later ones having no more than three. These in-person reviews meant that, by the final draft revision, very little needed to be changed — King would take a listen and text me last changes, if any, before publishing.

Overall, our decision to review the podcast in-person wasn't tied to King's vision, or lack thereof — access was considered in context of her experience with audio production and

our meetings afforded a way for us to bridge our different skillsets and expectations in navigating the creative decisions that made *Static*. The logistics tied to King's disability — like meeting at her house — were simple and straightforward to plan. Where we chose to meet didn't really add much time to the overall project, though the extra rounds of feedback — sometimes as many as four per episode — certainly did. On my end, building in the additional time for feedback, particularly pushing up my deadlines to have drafts ready a day or two in advance, felt much more challenging. Admittedly, I could have extended deadlines to ease the production schedule but chose not to, wanting to take advantage of my limited sabbatical time — and perhaps an ingrained expectation of faster production times based on my years in the newsroom.

5.3 The affordances of designing for access

Considering these findings in the context of RQ2: What changes to accepted podcast production practice or format might better suit diverse storytellers and their listenership?

This chapter describes several ways that the *Static* team adapted their podcast practice to better suit the needs of the production team. This included, among other practices, adjusting q-line formats to work better with text-to-voice software, using alternative scripting techniques for narration, and developing a collaborative revision and editing process. These findings are directly applicable to podcasters and journalists as they develop projects and work with sources. Flexibility — with timing, location, templates or formats used — can significantly improve accessibility for storytellers and their sources, though finding these solutions requires the time and effort for both parties to engage in open communication.

At the outset of this project, I anticipated that King's access needs would add a layer of complexity to the production process. However, in assessing how we adjusted our practice overall, not much substantially changed from what I would consider the standard for podcasting. This is likely connected to the fact that, from the outset, the podcast concept for *Static* was built around the strengths and skills of the creative team — not unlike how other shows and series are developed. By playing to our advantages — a strong script, talented actors, and an experienced producer — we were able to work together to design a podcast, and therefore a process, that suited our needs. Podcasting's flexibility of production — pre-recorded, with no set length, format or deadline — afforded a variety of options to serve our creative choices. For example, adapting radio's 'tape talk' format with

improvised elements was a great starting point to develop flexible scripts that served the team's needs, but when we tried to emulate more traditional broadcast formats such as real-time current affairs style interviews, existing practices fell short. This reinforced the importance of accessibility and inclusion at the outset of a project — a well-established best-practice and Inside Out's approach to their work. By aligning team resources with a project's overall goals, we were able to eliminate unnecessary barriers at the start and allocate more of our time and effort to actually making the podcast instead of adapting our practice.

It's worth noting that most of the affordances we developed in producing the podcast didn't require specialized or complicated software or tools. On a technical level, our scripts were written in Microsoft Word and King's phone and laptop use standard accessibility features — if anything, our recording gear was more complex and more expensive than any of our access tools. Rather, most of our affordances were organizational — choosing where to meet, establishing regular check-ins, and adjusting the time allocated to certain parts of the work. These are all parts of any podcaster or journalist's work and can be adjusted without significantly changing their overall process.

In the end, the biggest difference was likely the amount of time we spent on the project, though it's impossible to compare our hours worked to an equivalent format. Radio drama takes a good amount of time to produce, requiring more scripting and finer edits than the interview formats that make up the majority of popular podcasts. However, since *Static* was written, developed and refined over two-plus years through workshops and funding through Inside Out and Chromatic Theatre, the audio drama script required very little revision and was only a small part of creating the podcast overall. Looking to overall hours worked, many shows — though certainly not all — would have a team larger than two producers, which might spread out the total hours worked on a similar project. As someone new to audio drama, I spent longer on edits than a seasoned professional; on the other side, my experience with interview preparation and editing meant that those elements were done quite quickly. We chose to allocate more of our work time to in-person revision and edits — more than I have experienced in my podcasting work so far — but without a direct comparison to a comparable project (of which there are few) it's difficult to say if these additional revisions took more hours altogether or if, like *Static's* design workshop and rehearsal schedules, we were simply shifting hours that would have been used elsewhere in the project. Regardless, King and I spent our time on *Static* because it was available to us and served our shared goal for the podcast. Among simpler formats and options that would

have taken less time to produce — such as using recordings of the play or creating an interview-based series instead — we chose to adapt the play to audio drama and include in-depth interviews and reflections because we felt this was the best way to showcase *Static* (the play and King's personal story) to a wider audience. Had time or other resources been an issue, podcasting's flexibility meant we could have designed a project that better suited those constraints while still considering accessibility and inclusion.

In the fast-paced world of media, making the case for more time can be a difficult one. But it was this time spent in the field that confirmed, for me, the value of slower, communicative and deliberate work in collaboration. During my field research, 157 of my 406 hours — almost 40 per cent — was spent developing my partnership with Inside Out and joining the team as a participant-observer. While the journalist in me rationalizes that this could have been shorter, being able to connect for set periods of time over several months was an opportunity to build relationships — particularly between King and myself, as we would be working closely and rather intensely from September through December on the podcast — and provided me with insight into the *Static* script and story that influenced the final version of the podcast and how we developed affordances in our production practices. Taking this time to engage fully with the project was a very different approach to the deadlines associated with my day-to-day journalism and teaching work, and was also an opportunity to experience how doing research informed by disability and accessibility — a field where scholars highlight the importance of rest, pacing, and taking the time to care for oneself and others — can create a more thoughtful and sustainable environment for researchers and creators. This time provided the space to consider new theories, concepts and practices that formed the foundation of my practice-based work which, as Rogers and Herbert (2020) and Jorgensen and Lindgren (2022) note, is essential to the critical reflection needed for the iterative cycles of both doctoral research as well as producing a podcast.

Chapter 6: *"Just because I'm blind, I don't get a f***ing view?!"* Audio description and accessible podcast landscapes

Podcasting's open publishing, as with most digital media, affords a variety of new and exciting access options for creators. This chapter begins to theorize what an accessible podcasting landscape might include from both a technological perspective as well as a content perspective. First, I address some of the key aspects of legislated media accessibility developed for legacy media — which focuses on ad hoc, technological translation — and how these practices cannot be directly applied to the online, open-platform environment of podcasting. I then discuss the options and limitations for media makers who consider access mostly through a technological lens before looking to another way to embed access: through story content. This was the approach that King took in writing the original theatre script for *Static,* using best practices for audio description to contextualize the story's visual information for low-sighted and blind audience members. This additional description, which is based in the same techniques as narrative podcast scripting, not only improved access for those with vision impairments but also served an important role in translating *Static*'s story across multiple media platforms. Integrating key story information across multiple modes (i.e. sonic elements and visual elements) ensured that essential information was maintained as *Static* moved from theatre script to theatre performance, was adapted to podcast, and then was translated back to text as a podcast transcript. In describing this process, I suggest a term for this practice — *narrativization* — and explain how it can serve to improve media accessibility overall, particularly in our current digital environment where stories are regularly published and remediated across audio, video, and text. The findings and discussion in this chapter directly address RQ2: What changes to accepted podcast production practice or format might better suit diverse storytellers and their listenership?

Standardized media access practices began in Canada when closed captioning was introduced in 1981 (The Canadian Communications Foundation, n.d.) and described video (a form of audio description) began in 2001, though it wasn't until 2019 that regulations came into full effect (3PlayMedia, 2022). These formats — both legislated — were developed around legacy broadcast media such as television and film. However, the arrival of the Internet and digital media formats like podcasting have fundamentally shifted the

previously established roles of who makes, publishes and consumes content, changing not only *who* affords media accessibility, but *how* it's afforded.

It is well-established that accessibility features, when used effectively with digital technologies, can benefit all users, whether or not they identify as having a disability (Web Accessibility Initiative, n.d.). However, looking to RQ2 and what podcast formats might better suit diverse audiences, the multimedia nature of the digital sphere makes it more complicated to answer when comparing podcasting to its legacy media predecessors. Podcasting's open publishing ecosystem means anyone can make and upload content, so creators are responsible for accessibility — if they choose to consider it in their work. Digital tools afford all sorts of accessibility options for audio, text, video and imagery, which is a great resource for those experienced in or curious about accessible production, but it comes with a learning curve for creators with limited understanding of access needs and practices.

6.1 Accessible podcasting from a technological perspective

In terms of navigating podcast technology, there aren't many guidelines on accessibility for podcasters. One of the few websites, Podcast Accessibility, identifies the three main components of an accessible show as audio players, websites, and transcripts (Podcast Accessibility, n.d.). First, in considering accessible audio players, there is a plethora of audio players and platforms available to listeners, and one of the advantages of podcasting's RSS feed system is that creators can upload their show to a single location and the podcast is published across multiple platforms. This means that listeners have a variety of options to access podcasts through software that best meets their needs. Second, in considering accessible websites, creators can refer to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) offered through the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C, n.d.) to better understand how to design websites that allow for keyboard navigation, high contrast readability, and clear alt-description information for essential visuals. Third are transcripts, perhaps the most discussed in terms of podcast accessibility as they are a helpful tool for all podcast creators and users, though they are often made to support online searchability rather than integrating accessibility. Transcripts are now considered a basic accessibility feature, but weren't integrated into a podcasting platform until Spotify introduced auto-generated transcriptions in 2023, with Apple Podcasts following suit in 2024 (Rivenburgh, 2025).

Often, accessibility is considered solely from the technological side — much like we see with closed captioning, audio description and described video — where a tool translates an aspect of media with physical access limitations in mind, such as providing written descriptions for those with hearing impairment and video descriptions for those with vision impairment. These translations are typically done after media production is complete, forcing those working in access translation to adapt best practices to the existing media as best they can.

However, as many disability experts advocate, the best options for access are usually a result of planning for access at the beginning. Considering access needs in the initial media making process can provide creators with another way to embed accessibility through the *content* of their work. As I learned working with King and the *Static* team, embedding accessibility in a story's content can create better opportunities for audiences to understand and engage with a story, and can also open rich opportunities for more accessible multi-media translation as stories are remediated across many formats. Specifically, King's choice to embed audio description in the theatre script for *Static* — a way to support low-sighted audiences in the play — also significantly supported adapting the story to podcast and, later on, to podcast transcript.

6.2 Embedding accessibility in visual content through audio description

Typically, adapting a play to an audio-only format would take a good amount of translation to address the action and visuals on stage. This wasn't the case with *Static*, as King used her personal experience of blindness and expertise in audio description to incorporate visual descriptions while scripting the play. This meant that most of the play's key visual information was conveyed through dialogue, contextualizing the sounds and action on stage. For example, at the start of the play, the audience is introduced to King's mother, Carolina:

> **Carolina**
> I've done everything to give her the life she has, and she has no idea how easy her life is.
> **[Carolina sweeps]**
> *¡Hay esta niñita tan gringita!* She doesn't even speak Spanish. *Chingada*. The only one out of 73 grandchildren who can't speak to her *abuelita*. I tried to teach her as a

baby, and you know what she did? NADA! NOTHING! She just stopped talking altogether. For weeks. Months. YEARS! We had to take her to a doctor… What kind of Latino kid doesn't speak Spanish!? Even then she was disobeying me. Sometimes I wonder if this is my karma... from when I smoked. My sins coming back to haunt me. That's why I need to pray.

[Carolina strikes a match and lights some candles]

OI! San Judas Tadeo, El Patrón saint of lost causes, *te pido cinco minutos por favor...*

Ashley [enters]

It smells like a dirty church, stop! (King, 2024, pp. 6-7)

The sound of lighting candles could be heard onstage — the strike of a match is a distinct sound that most people could identify without explanation. Carolina's comment about needing to pray, and Ashley's comment about the candles smelling like a dirty church helps explain that the matches were for Carolina's candles. While it isn't essential for the audience to know this to understand Carolina's monologue, it helps add colour and detail to the story.

The script's reliance on dialogue to contextualize key sounds and actions meant that it naturally translated to audio drama with minimal changes. Most edits were small dialogue adjustments to ease transitions and clarify sounds and actions that had been clearer on stage. In the podcast, when movement was essential to understanding the story, I adjusted the pan levels for the voices so that Carolina and Ashley would be in the left or right ear — their voices would pan back to the centre when talking together in a shared space. For example, a bit later in the same scene, which can be heard in episode one of the podcast:

Ashley

I was excited for Australia, I really was… Just after I lost 12 pounds and figured out how to tell my mom. **[in a singsong voice]** MOM!

Carolina [from outside the room]

Que?!

Ashley

Come here!

Carolina [from outside the room]

You're not driving the car!

Ashley

Ugh, just come!

Carolina [walks into the room]

Pero, I'm watching my telenovela. The one with the evil twin.

Ashley

They all have evil twins. Literally all of them.

[Carolina starts to walk back to her show]

Ashley

Wait, what? Oh! Come back! Oh, shit.

Carolina [turns back toward Ashley]

Aie, look at you. You're looking like *la Tia Gorda*.

[Ashley exclaims, insulted]

Carolina

Que paso? (King, 2024, pp.10-11)

Again, the physical back and forth of the characters isn't essential to understanding the story — if someone was listening on a single speaker or didn't notice the use of the sound pan, it wouldn't affect their comprehension — but Ashley and Carolina's back and forth adds to the energy and pacing of the story as their dialogue volleys, which gives the audience a better understanding of their relationship.

While writing *Static*, King had support from several mentors and dramaturgs, including Jessica Watkin, a Toronto-based theatre scholar and disability dramaturg who is also visually impaired. Watkin's experience with audio description comes from her own experience with disability, working with friends and colleagues who are visually impaired, and serving as a trainer with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB). From her perspective, the core elements of good audio description make for a strong script:

> It was working with audio describers doing it the more traditional way, where an audio describer comes in and is like, 'There's someone with blue eyes and white skin standing on stage and they're looking around…' I personally don't really love that approach… but what I learned from it was what context is needed in a moment to allow a blind audience member, a blind listener, or a blind witness to be able to infer what's happening…. What do we actually need to tell them?" (J. Watkin, personal communication, November 11, 2024)

Sitting in dramaturgy sessions with Watkin, and through our interviews and conversations, I was struck by how often audio description practices aligned with narrative podcast and radio writing, though our vocabulary or rationale sometimes differed. While there are distinct differences in live audio description — such as for theatre — versus something pre-recorded — like a podcast — the core rules of effective oral communication are consistent.

6.3 Best practices for audio description

Audio description (AD) is defined as "commentary that describes body language, expressions and movements, making the programme clear through sound" (Royal National Institute for the Blind, n.d.). Louise Fryer (2016) provides a fantastic overview of key practical considerations for effective AD, which Snyder (2014) calls "visual made verbal." First, scripts are designed for a listening audience, which means they are meant to be performed. This means that tone, language choice and delivery are essential and should match the tone and subject of the story. Scripts should sound conversational and be easy to understand, which means that full sentences aren't always needed. Second, clarity of communication is essential; this means speaking in present tense — active tense when possible to match the real-time element of the action — and using short sentences and everyday vocabulary. To keep things short and clear, Fryer recommends against using homonyms (too easy to misinterpret on first listen) and avoiding adverbs and adjectives unless absolutely necessary. Ambiguous description should also be avoided — for example, a 'young girl' could be a range of ages, but identifying a girl as seven years old and missing her two front teeth immediately provides helpful specificity. All these guidelines align with radio and podcast writing best practices — short, simple, present tense, conveying enough information to keep the story moving without bogging down in unnecessary detail.

Traditional AD, particularly in North America, has focused on describing what is visible in an 'objective fashion', known as What You See Is What You Say (WYSISYS). Agreeing with what Watkin noted above, Fryer (2016) recommends against this practice — not only is there too much to describe that there isn't enough time, but even the bias of what an interpreter sees and the words they choose to describe means description is never truly objective. Since the key goal of audio description is to bridge the gap of visual information by contextualizing sounds and actions within the spaces available in a story or

performance, it means prioritizing what needs to be shared for the audience to engage with the story. To accomplish this, Fryer is another scholar who looks at Gibson's theory of affordances, in this case applying the theory to identify how to quickly and effectively convey meaning in AD. She writes that an object is best described in the context of its affordances, or uses, in a scene. Using the example of a stiletto heel — known for being a fancy shoe that's difficult to walk in — she argues that in the context of a model walking a runway, the colour of the shoe is likely more important, while in a horror film it might be more important to describe the shoe's weak, pointed heel as a woman is running in them. Focusing on an item's affordances prioritizes the key elements of a story, allowing the audience to fill in gaps as they see fit. For example, back to the scene with Ashley, Carolina, and the candles — the dialogue never mentions candles specifically, or what they look like. The audience hears the striking of a match, which implies that something is being lit, but we don't yet know what. Carolina provides a hint to the listener when she explains why she's lighting candles — to pray — and Ashley mentions the sensation and smell of the lit candles — "like a dirty church". Describing the candles' affordances — which drive the story — leaves the listener to imagine the candles however they'd like without compromising their understanding of the story.

6.4 The shared affordances of audio description and narrative podcasts

Fryer (2016) notes that the best AD should "resemble football commentary rather than a post-match report" (p.64). This reference to live news programming points to the similarities between radio broadcasting and AD, a connection identified by American disability scholar Kleege (2023). She uses early radio's broadcasting of live baseball games as an example of how announcers translated the experience of the game — a rather visual event — into a sound-based experience. Today's narrative podcast, Kleege writes, is a more contemporary example of this, as "the audience derives all meaning from the combination of text, vocal performance, and sound design. Significant visual details must be communicated in words" (2023, p.321).

AD, narrative podcasting and radio broadcasting all use similar techniques in pursuing the same goal — to convey information through audio. In considering RQ1, podcasters can learn a lot from AD practice; the guidelines for good AD read the same as best practices for narrative audio storytelling. On the other side, audio describers can learn from podcasters as they look to translate media in a conversational, relatable, and entertaining way — a

complaint often heard from users is that AD tends to lean toward boring, formal descriptions that can take them out of the story (Fryer, 2016).

Journalists already have the core skills required for AD — they are trained in clear, concise communication across different platforms (i.e. audio, video, online) and radio journalists and narrative podcasters also have expertise in performing scripts. By this view, training on media accessibility would equip them to either work alongside and support those working in accessibility translation or to integrate small but impactful changes to improve the accessibility of what they produce. While it's rare to have the opportunity to do so, Fryer notes that being able to connect with the creative team when developing AD is one of the best ways to design a script that best meets the tone, language, pacing and intent of what's being translated. Following accessibility best practices, she notes that the earlier an audio describer can be involved in the project, the easier it is to integrate small shifts to support more seamless AD. This suggests that further connections and training opportunities between media makers and those translating media could help improve media accessibility on a broader scale.

6.5 *Static*: developing accessible podcast transcripts

In considering accessibility for *Static*, King and I developed the podcast with low-sighted audiences and a general public in mind. From a content perspective, this meant that throughout the episodes, we used language that could be understood by the average podcast listener, understanding (and hoping!) that low-sighted listeners would bring their own experience and perspective to the show and likely connect with certain words or concepts on a different level. However, in developing transcripts for the series, we wanted to be able to consider access needs beyond vision impairment — such as for Deaf audiences.

In considering how to approach transcripts for *Static*, auto-generated transcripts from Spotify or Apple Podcasts were a fast and easy option. However, the technology is still quite inaccurate, particularly considering how *Static* uses a mix of Spanish and English throughout its episodes. With accuracy and clarity of content being a main goal for the transcripts, I used Adobe Premiere Pro's transcription function to generate a draft, then reviewed and corrected the transcripts while listening along to the final episode audio. From there, it was necessary to consider how to format the transcript itself and how to include the podcast's non-dialogue sonic information in the transcript.

It is worth noting that, aside from editing the episodes, creating the transcripts was one of the most time-consuming parts of the post-production process. Using an auto-generated draft saved lots of transcription time, though it still required listening through with the audio to correct the (many!) errors. On average, each transcript took about four or five hours to complete, not including the time needed to format and post everything online. That said, I saw this as time well spent since quality transcripts were essential to meeting our goal of improving the podcast's overall accessibility.

6.5.1 Formatting an accessible transcript

While it's considered best practice for podcasts to have transcripts, there is very little discussion around how best to make and share them from an accessibility standpoint. To that end, I searched through dozens of podcasts to see how they posted their transcripts, from established shows like *This American Life* to smaller, access-oriented podcasts like *A11yRules*, looking to find accessible examples. All of the show transcripts I read had a clear demarcation of who was speaking; some used time codes; some separated the content by sections and chapters. One series, *More Than This* (Vox Media, 2021) experimented with what they called a visual experience of the podcast — a colourful and graphic representation of the transcript that used different images and fonts to pace the story and demarcate different speakers while reading through. This "immersive transcript" was touted as a resource for Deaf audiences (Scire, 2021), though its use of colours, stylized fonts and images might not serve certain readers' access needs. Such is the nature of accessibility — no one system or solution can serve all users all the time. This was a conversation I had with many of Inside Out's teammates as I navigated how to format the series transcripts. I also spoke with Jessica Watkin — *Static*'s dramaturg, who is blind — and Ebony Gooden — Inside Out's Communications Coordinator, who is Deaf — to gain their perspectives on what they found most important when using transcripts. While these perspectives don't speak for everyone with these impairments, it helped me understand different ways that users might approach transcripts.

A journalistic transcript typically includes lots of time codes to quickly find information in a media file, but as Gooden noted, she wouldn't be listening to the original audio nor looking for an audio clip, so lots of time codes would complicate her reading by cluttering the transcript with unnecessary information. Watkin, on the other hand, would listen to the podcast, then likely go to the transcript to confirm something she heard. She agreed that

lots of time codes would add unnecessary clutter, but she would appreciate some level of content organization to help with navigation overall. Following their advice, I cut most of the time codes but created a small table of contents at the top of each transcript that identified the episode's four sections with timecodes (audio drama, producer chat, interview, reflection) linking to the appropriate sections. This helped create a way for all users to navigate the lengthy one-hour transcript while maintaining readability. The text format for the transcript's web pages was in Arial, a standard accessible font that can be read clearly and used with a text-to-voice reader. Section titles were put in bold for clearer identification, and we followed script formatting where sound, action and descriptions were put within square brackets to separate dialogue from the non-spoken elements.

6.5.2 Bringing the *Static* sound (back to) text

The second consideration in increasing accessibility for our transcripts was translating the podcast's rich sound design to text. Most podcast transcripts focus on dialogue and narration, including generic references for music or the occasional sound cue, but *Static*'s significant use of music and sound effects meant that those only reading the dialogue would miss out on key elements of the story (and a good deal of its humour!). Just like implementing audio description into the theatre script for *Static* supported adapting the story to podcast, I found that applying these similar concepts to contextualize the story's sound design helped create a sort of closed captioning equivalent while translating the podcast to transcript. Following Fryer and Watkin's advice to avoid literal descriptions, I chose to describe sounds in context of the story's action. For example, the start of the first episode transcript reads:

> **[thumping upbeat dance music plays — "Like a G6" by Far East Movement. Vocals: "Poppin' bottles in the ice like a blizzard/ When we drink, we do it right, get slizzered…" Sounds of a crowd at a bar. Music fades and continues under Ashley's voice]**
>
> **Ashley [a young, female voice — inner thoughts]**
>
> What the fuck? This club is shit. Why is it so dark? Where's Britney and where the hell is the bar? Oh, there it is.
>
> **[stumbling sounds as Ashley slams into the bar]**
>
> **Ashley [to bartender]**
>
> Hiiiiiiiii!
>
> **[the sound of the bar quiets while Ashley is deep in thought]**

Ashley [inner thoughts]

That is the hottest bartender I think I've ever seen. Like, ever in my entire life. Like a sexy man muffin. Or a himbo. Or a Brad Pitt DILF. He could be in a crotch novella, you know, like a romance novel for your vagina? He's totally checking me out.

[the sounds of the bar come back into focus]

Ashley

Excuse me! Can I get another? What? Water? No, I don't need hydration. I'm like a cactus. I can survive on tequila alone!

[sounds of clanks and crashes]

Ashley [inner thoughts]

Oops. Sorry there, little coasters. I didn't mean to knock you over. You're like little surfboards for my drink. Hang ten little buddies!

You know what's funny? Me! I'm so funny. And cute. So funny and cute… and slizzered… I'll grow on him.

[thumping upbeat dance music continues. Vocals say, "Now I'm feeling so fly like a G6/ Like a G6/ Like a G6…"] (King & Wilcox, 2024)

Fryer's use of affordances (2016) helped me determine what sounds were essential to include in the transcript, since describing every sound effect would have bogged it down and taken away from the story. Additionally, in designing the sound for the series, many effects were used out of their real-word context, like layering in a variety of types of clanking and slamming to create the sound of Ashley walking into a bar. Very few listeners could likely parse how I created the sound, and it didn't matter as long as they understood the meaning. Likewise, describing how I created the effect on Ashley's inner monologue (muddling the background sound and putting reverb on her voice, a standard technique for differentiating thoughts from dialogue) isn't a helpful description for anyone reading the transcript. The affordances of these edits — slamming into a bar, the sounds of the bar returning to clarity as we transition from Ashley's inner to outer monologue— are what drive the story. By describing the context of the sound in the podcast — *narrativizing* these sonic elements — the transcripts convey the meaning of the sound rather than a description.

Considering the translation of *Static* from theatre script to theatre performance, to podcast, and then to podcast transcript, you might wonder: wasn't this simply reverting *Static* back to its original form as a script? Theatre scripts don't typically include sound design (or

generally any design cues) — theatre artists translate a script to stage performance through light, sound, set and movement, bringing in elements that never existed in the original text. The podcast is its own form of performance, where the story is conveyed through a rich layer of sonic information that was never present in the original play script, with much of it different from what was used in the stage performance. While some parts of the audio drama transcript are similar to the play script — particularly scenes where Ashley and Carolina are conversing — but there are many points in the podcast transcript that read differently than the theatre script. For example, returning to the example of Ashley telling her mother that she's moving to Australia in episode one, the beginning of the transcript reads almost identical to the play script and changes in the second half. I've underlined the sections that weren't in the original play version to show the difference:

Ashley

I was excited for Australia, I really was… Just after I lost 12 pounds and figured out how to tell my mom. **[in a singsong voice]** MOM!

Carolina [from other room]

Que?!

Ashley

Come here!

Carolina [from other room]

You're not driving the car!

Ashley

Ugh, just come!

Carolina [shuffles in]

Pero, I'm watching my telenovela. The one with the evil twin.

Ashley

They all have evil twins. Literally all of them.

[Carolina starts to walk back to her show]

Ashley

Wait, what? Oh! Come back! Oh, shit.

Carolina [turns back toward Ashley]

Aie, look at you. You're looking like *la Tia Gorda.*

[Ashley exclaims, insulted]

Carolina

Que paso?

Ashley

Sooo… I've been meaning to tell you — **(pauses for effect)** that I'm moving to Australia. YAY!

[sounds of twinkling and angelic choirs singing. Ashley notices Carolina is silent, and starts to talk faster and faster]

Oh, okay… So it's only going to be for a few months, and we've already started saving, and we maybe have somewhere to live, and we might even have somewhere to work. It's basically all planned. Really, I'm not asking you, I'm telling you, because this is a first world country and I have rights and autonomy… And I'm just letting you know that this is my plan. Really, I'm being considerate of your feelings because you have a lot of them. And I really need a new bikini. So can I borrow the car?

[pause as she waits for Carolina's reply]

Carolina

¿Qué te pasa? ¿Estás loca? Me vas a dejar sola?

[sounds of rumbling thunder grow as Carolina's voice gets louder, echoes]

Australia es muy lejos! Ni se te ocurra... Que niña más bruta! Jamás lo voy a permitir! Esto es ridículo. No vas a ir a ninguna parte. Te voy a encerrar, vas a volver a la iglesia y vas a aprender español!

[sound of telenovela-style DUN DUN DUN! while thunder crashes]

Ashley

Huh?

By including the story's sonic elements in the transcript, the reader has the characters' tone and pacing to help interpret the dialogue — much of which isn't found in a typical theatre script. Furthermore, narrativizing the sound cues with descriptions that use common language and relate to the story's affordances helps the reader see how sound shapes the story without digressing into unnecessary detail.

6.6 Narrativization as a tool for access and translation

From the earliest days of oral storytelling, narrative has been at the heart of how humans make meaning and share information. Since most media formats assume an audience without disabilities, translation for accessibility is about helping audience members engage with narrative in a meaningful way based on their unique needs.

Narrativization is defined as “the imposition of a narrative or narrative-like elements on real experiences or events; presentation or interpretation in terms of a story or narrative” (Oxford University Press, n.d.). As both Fryer (2016) and Watkin (personal communication, November 11, 2024) have noted, the best audio description enhances the narrative — as opposed to more traditional approaches like What You See Is What You Get, which can take the listener out of the story with technical language and unnecessary description under the guise of remaining unbiased. Narrativization of key story information, supported through Fryer’s use of affordances for audio description, is a way audio and video storytellers can effectively embed access in their work right at the beginning of a project at the script level. This technique could improve the listening and/or viewing experience for many, regardless of impairment, reducing what needs to be explained through accessibility tools such as audio description. As King demonstrated in the theatre version of *Static*, some careful planning, mostly through dialogue, is all that’s required to develop a compelling script for a visual performance that provides essential context for visual cues.

In fact, this practice is already happening in the film and television industry — though not with accessibility in mind. *Second-screen shows* are programs where, with viewers likely distracted by their phones, the show can be followed without having to look at the screen. In practice, this includes “overly expository dialogue, repeating plot points and adding lots of voice-overs to narrate the action and help the distracted viewer follow along” (Idiz, 2025). For the most part, discussion around second-screen scripting has been incredibly negative, with those in the field calling it a dumbing-down of content that changes the golden rule of storytelling — “show don’t tell” — to “show and tell” (Idiz, 2025).

But since showing and telling is at the heart of media access translation, could this instead be an opportunity of producers to embed better accessibility into their work? After all, the type of information included in second-screen shows’ narration and dialogue can serve both sighted and low-sighted audiences. I find it notable that producers are assuming that second-screen practices will “dumb-down” or degrade the quality of what they make — ignoring that the assumption of an ideal viewer (a ‘normate’ viewer?) and a ‘proper’ way to engage with a story is an ableist expectation embedded throughout the media industry. Whether a person is on their phone or has a vision impairment that limits what they see on the screen, why is it seen as a problem to make creative choices that support greater audience understanding of a story overall? While there are certainly some painful examples of poorly-crafted second-screen scripts, this negativity toward the concept suggests a lack

of consideration (and perhaps imagination) in developing smart dialogue and narration that can contextualize and reinforce key parts of a story in an engaging and intelligent way — a skill that radio practitioners (particularly in radio drama) have honed over the past hundred years and could very much support screenwriters looking to improve their practice.

As I discovered while working on the podcast version of *Static*, embedding access isn't particularly complicated to do, but does require a shift in mindset at the outset of the work to be successful. And it can be successful — as a sighted audience member at several of *Static*'s performances, I saw firsthand how King was able to provide expository information without overly simplifying her story nor hindering the overall visual experience.

6.7 Conceptualizing podcast accessibility

Considering these findings in the context of RQ2: What changes to accepted podcast production practice or format might better suit diverse storytellers and their listenership?

This chapter begins to theorize what an accessible podcasting landscape might include from both a technological perspective as well as a content perspective. Using the case study of *Static*, which used best practices for audio description to contextualize the story's visual information, reveals how these tools not only improved access for theatregoers with vision impairments but also served an important role in translating *Static*'s story across multiple media platforms. In describing this process, I suggest a term for this practice — *narrativization* — and explain how it can serve to improve media accessibility overall, particularly in our current digital environment where stories are regularly published and remediated across audio, video, and text.

Podcasting's digital environment affords new tools and options for integrating access, though this is dependent on creators' skills and interests, as well as platforms' available accessibility features. Additionally, with very limited guidelines on how to make an accessible podcast, podcasters are left to develop their own methods. At present, podcasters can improve the accessibility of their podcasts by looking to a mix of accessibility practices like audio description, captioning, transcription and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). For practitioners looking to apply AD elements in their work, Fryer (2016) shows how the theory of affordances can be used to create compelling descriptions that serve creative goals while addressing access needs. As well, the similarities between

AD and narrative podcasting techniques suggest potential for valuable collaboration and learning across both fields.

Overall, podcasting's open publishing affords new and creative ways to make and share accessible work, but can also make for a varied and uneven experience for audiences. On one end of the spectrum, podcasts have grown into a multi-billion-dollar industry; as this continues, more established players (some of them legislated to provide accessible formats) will no doubt move further in the direction of standardized access features, similar to what we see with legacy media. On the other end, amateur and independent podcasters may choose to follow these standards, ignore them, or develop something entirely new. In documenting the practice of how we approached accessibility for *Static*, we contribute to an ever-growing archive of accessible creative practice that we hope can inform future research and practice.

Chapter 7: *"Just one day at a time, one foot in front of the other"*

This doctoral project explores, through theory and practice, how podcasting practice can adapt to meet the needs of diverse storytellers in a Canadian context. While podcasting's flexibility makes it an ideal medium for challenging conventional media making practices, that doesn't mean that it's a necessarily easy or straightforward process. By combining the reflexive and iterative cycles of action research with the guiding principles of disability justice, *Static*'s collaborative and accessible podcast practice was the result of more than two years of relationship building, planning, producing, reflecting and reiterating — some parts more successful than others — to create the final series. This project's methodology was designed to better understand what journalists and media makers can learn from accessibility practitioners and advocates to develop more inclusive practices and reporting outputs (RQ1) as well as the changes to accepted podcast production practice or format that might better suit diverse storytellers and their listenership (RQ2).

Blindness is a key theme threading throughout this research, first introduced in *Static*'s story and Ashley King's visual impairment, then carried through our adaptation to podcast — a blind, or secondary, medium that can serve audiences both with and without vision impairment. While at the outset this appears to be a simple connection, it is the practice-based element of this research that builds on this theme by making visible the oft-invisible labour of podcast production. The many steps to make and publish a podcast — the planning, scripting, recording and editing that listeners aren't privy to — often rely on visual tools and techniques that can be a barrier for podcasters. By identifying these practices and their affordances, we can more clearly identify what barriers exist to podcast production and develop alternative practices, contributing to a more inclusive podcast landscape overall.

Developing an accessible podcast practice required identifying existing barriers to access in the production process. Dokumacı's theory of activist affordances (2023) provided a way for the team identify these barriers, and to then theorize the solutions that became the foundation of this accessible practice. In considering RQ1, this practical application of affordances extends beyond this study's application to podcasting; it is a framework that journalists and media makers can use to reflect on their existing practices and develop

more inclusive solutions, regardless of medium, and is one of this thesis' original contributions to podcast studies and disability media studies.

Looking to RQ2 and changes to accepted podcast practice, *Static: A Party Girl's Memoir* serves as proof-of-concept of an accessible and inclusive podcast. While there are countless ways podcasters can present the outputs of their own accessible practice, *Static* is a creative example of how mixing formats and challenging production norms can serve the needs of the production team as well as a larger audience. This thesis also contributes to practice-based podcast research and disability media studies by providing practical examples of ways that journalists and media-makers can adapt their practice, such as collaborating on scripting, adapting resources to meet recording needs, and developing a collaborative revision and editing process. In particular, our collaborative podcasting practice revealed that a shift in the team's mindset to prioritize accessibility was more important to developing an accessible practice than any specialized techniques or tools; in being more flexible with organizational aspects such as meeting times, locations and preferred methods of communication, we were able to circumvent many of the "standard production" barriers — suggesting that perhaps these are aren't true barriers but simply institutional preferences and biases.

Taking all of this into consideration, this research theorizes what an accessible podcasting landscape might include from both a technological perspective as well as a content perspective. Knowing that meaningful inclusion begins at the outset of a project, King's use of audio description in her original theatre script for *Static* demonstrates how integration and narrativization of key story information across multiple modes (i.e. sonic elements and visual elements) can create a more accessible output while also opening up new and exciting opportunities for remediating digital stories across audio, video, and text.

This research addresses gaps across several fields. As one of the first practice-based podcast studies to consider accessibility, specifically with blindness, it contributes to the small but growing field of practice-based podcast research and bridges podcast studies and radio studies with disability media studies — fields that tend to remain disparate despite their similarities (Bolt, 2013). *Static*'s online presence adds to the limited library of stories told by folks with disabilities (Ellis & Goggin, 2015; Hadley & McDonald, 2018), while this thesis contributes to a growing documentation of disability arts practice (Kuppers, 2021) and takes a small step in addressing "the absence of critical readings that are appreciative of disability" in arts and humanities research (Bolt, 2013, p.106). It also

contributes to the developing area of practice-based research by using podcasting and action research to consider practical and theoretical aspects of practice-based work. This includes a discussion of the challenges that research-practitioners may find in navigating institutional ethics processes, as well as potential solutions for universities and researchers.

That said, this study's findings around RQ2 are limited to the specific case study of producing *Static* — an independent play and podcast based in Canada that focused its accessibility practice around vision impairment. While some of these findings can be applied more broadly, there is certainly an opportunity for further case studies in other contexts and locations to develop and document accessible podcast practices that reflect the diversity of disability, access and inclusion worldwide.

As podcasting continues to develop as a medium, so does the opportunity for podcasters and media makers to challenge norms and practices that served and continue to serve mainstream media establishments. My hope with this research is to better my own podcasting practice as a producer, scholar and instructor, while contributing to the growing conversation of how journalists and storytellers can respectfully share accurate and meaningful stories in a constantly-evolving media landscape.

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Appendix A: Ethics approval and collaborative practice-based research

The research ethics application is an essential part of any institutionally-supported research project and was important in framing my research in an ethical and considered way. However, through the experience of my doctoral research, I found that the University of Glasgow's ethics process did not accommodate for a best practice associated with participatory research — in this case, the co-creation of consent forms. As well, the university's required forms and templates didn't follow basic digital accessibility requirements, which ultimately caused issues in obtaining informed consent from some of the project participants. In this section, I will detail the challenges faced through ethics process, discuss some of the positive outcomes of the process, and provide some suggestions on how ethics clearance could be improved to better address access and inclusion.

Inflexible processes and limited timelines

One of the challenges right at the start of the project was approaching the University of Glasgow research ethics application process with a collaborative, and therefore not completely determined, research project. This meant that I needed to create a broad, all-encompassing application that could apply to the variety of projects that *could* have happened with Inside Out Theatre. For example, Inside Out works with professional and community artists around the city of all ages; while many of their artists identify as having disabilities, others do not. Inside Out also collaborates with other companies — such as Chromatic Theatre, which co-produced *Static* — that work with artists who may be marginalized in other ways, such as racialized artists. To account for these variables, my ethics application had to consider the possibility of working with a variety of individuals, many of whom are considered vulnerable populations. This was straightforward enough in completing the main ethics application form but became quite challenging in developing the Plain Language Statement and Participant Agreement Form, as the specifics of the project hadn't yet been determined and wouldn't be until the fieldwork had already started.

Co-creating consent forms is a way to respectfully engage with co-researchers in participatory inquiry, giving the parties a process to steer the group and its research rather than focusing solely on research liabilities (Call-Cummings et al., 2024). This would have been my preferred method of consent for the project — however, this wasn't an option since the ethics process requires submitting consent forms at the outset. With the intent to conduct field research by May 2024, I submitted the research ethics application in December 2023, and it was approved March 2024. Since the project was being developed through May and June, this would have been the time to rework the consent form and submit the changes for ethics approval. However, with faculty and committees heading on summer break and a multi-week wait for approval, it seemed unlikely that changes would be approved before my fieldwork was set to end in September 2024. As such, I kept and used the original versions of Plain Language Statement and Participant Agreement Form. This meant that participants were reading and signing a long and very broad consent form, one that could have been much more effective in meeting research ethics goals had it been reworked to shorten, simplify, and more clearly describe the project we developed in the spring. For example, since the ethics application focused on the collaboration with Inside Out Theatre, I created a form oriented to those working on the performance of *Static*. This meant that, when the team decided to interview outside community members for the podcast, the forms weren't particularly well-suited for the interview guests' needs. These gaps were addressed through additional conversation and explanation on my part to ensure that guests understood the scope of their participation in the research and how their information would be used — but could have been easily avoided with a revised consent form or an additional form designed for specifically for interviewees.

In looking to potential solutions to this issue, while I doubt anyone is open to requiring more ethics reviews over the summer, it would have been helpful to be able to submit the ethics application for the project first, with an understanding that the consent forms would be sent later in the spring as an addendum for review. This would have allowed me to continue working with the team knowing that the overall project had ethics clearance while still allowing for some time to collaborate with partners on a more appropriate consent form. Co-creating consent forms with my research partners would have also helped us pre-emptively identify what later became a key challenge in obtaining consent — the fact that the required forms and templates for ethics clearance were not available in accessible formats.

Forms, templates and accessibility

While completing the project's ethics application and consent forms, I shared draft versions of the application to Ashley King, *Static* playwright and my main collaborator, as well as Col Cseke, Inside Out Theatre's artistic director. These were offered in the spirit of collaboration and making sure that all the information relating to the research component of my thesis was openly available. From a learning perspective, I wanted to ensure that the language I was using around disability and accessibility was appropriate; from a functional perspective, I wanted to ensure that the Inside Out team was able to deliver on what I was promising (e.g. Inside Out agreeing to house the podcast and infrastructure when publishing the series). Knowing that the forms were long and the formatting was complicated for someone using a text-to-voice reader, I provided an overall summary in the body of an email, flagging a few questions I had and offering a phone call or conversation to discuss further. I didn't receive a reply from Cseke, but King replied via email the next day that she felt confident in the ethics process and didn't have anything further to add at this point.

Admittedly, I was a bit disappointed that there was no further discussion on the submission — I was hoping it would help flesh out further project details. But this was a good reminder that an offer of collaboration doesn't always guarantee it. As individuals with different aims and roles in this wide-spanning project, our priorities won't always align and we choose to negotiate how to move forward. I chose not to push further discussion around the ethics application, though I wondered if accessibility issues were part of the reason King and Cseke seemed less interested in consulting on the application. Later discussions confirmed my hunch: their limited time and resources working at a non-profit arts organization, as well as the inaccessibility of the ethics application format — its several pages, academic language, and digital inaccessibility for text-to-voice readers — made it challenging for them to engage fully with the application.

Altogether, the University of Glasgow's College of Arts & Humanities Application for Ethical Approval of Research form that I submitted was 12 pages long. The Plain Language Statement, following the university template, was two pages, as was the Participant Consent Agreement. This means that, all in, there were 16 pages of relatively dense academic language to get through (though I like to think I had made it as compelling a read as one could!) Each of these templates is provided as a Word document and includes headers and footers on each page, with the main questions and information organized in

tables and checklists. Visually, this is an effective way to break up information. However, for someone using a text-to-voice reader, these tables and headers break up the flow of information, making it very difficult to interpret and understand — even if the data can read in proper order by a text reader (and big if!) The templates' inaccessibility also caused issues with the participant consent forms for participants with visual impairments. Digital files are usually an easier way for the low-sighted participants to sign forms, but the issues with template accessibility ultimately required extra conversations about the form and support from a sighted friend or family member to sign. This, in my view, represents a failure on my part as a researcher to appropriately address participant needs in obtaining consent, even though I was upholding the standards required as a PhD researcher at the University of Glasgow by following this process and using these documents.

As the podcast progressed, I did my best to fulfill the spirit of the ethics approval while also addressing participants' access needs. For example, I sent the consent form ahead of time via email to Bruce Horak, a legally blind actor who was being interviewed for the first episode. When he, King and I met online for the remote interview, Horak noted that signing the form was too complicated in its existing format and asked that we record his verbal agreement to the interview and its publication. Knowing that Horak understood the nature of the interview and how it was being used, I had no problem recording his consent — not only was it a more straightforward for both of us, but falls within my regular radio journalism practice, where consent for recording is obtained verbally.

The simplest solution, in this case, would be for the university to apply best practices for accessibility for their required forms and templates. This would not only benefit participants, but researchers and staff as well. There are also circumstances where text consent forms aren't appropriate, and some guidelines and options for researchers looking to pursue alternative forms of consent (e.g. recorded verbal consent) would help encourage best practices in developing their research plan. Additionally, it may be worth reconsidering the application's length and formality of language, particularly in the case of community-based or participatory research that works with non-academics.

Ethics approval and developing relationships

Despite these significant accessibility issues, I want to establish that the ethics application process is an essential one — particularly as a guide for myself, as an early academic, in framing my research, data collection and storage in an ethical and considered way.

Certainly, consent must be at the heart of any research work that includes individuals, and the suggestions above are offered in the hope of improving the consent process to ensure that all participants are able to engage fully — and thus consent fully — to the research at hand.

One of the unexpected benefits of sharing the ethics application with my collaborators ahead of its submission was that it strengthened our working relationship. King said she appreciated being looped into the ethics conversation, even though she chose not to engage too deeply with it — knowing that I was following my host institution's procedures helped her trust that I was approaching the work in the right way, and seeing the amount of work I had put into the application and documentation confirmed, for her, that I was committed to our collaborative project. In this context, the ethics application process helped build a foundation for meaningful collaboration, particularly for later in the project when King would be investing more of her own time and effort to produce the podcast.

Moving forward

Having gone through the university ethics process, I can now see some areas where I might have been able to ask more questions or request accommodations that better served my research requirements. However, this exemplifies how accessibility often becomes the responsibility of those with access needs. As an institution with an Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy (University of Glasgow, 2022), and since research ethics approval is central to the university's work, it follows that these processes need to be reworked with access in mind. At the most basic level, this means that all required templates and documents must be revised for standard accessibility best practices. However, that still doesn't address the systemic issues limiting access; this requires an in-depth evaluation and revision of the ethics approval process, forms and timelines to identify and address broader issues of access and inclusion.

Appendix B: *Static* artwork, episode descriptions and transcripts

Series artwork for Static, by Ebony R. Gooden & Maezy Reign

Series description:

Note: this podcast includes explicit language and references to sex, suicide, and trauma.

At the tender age of 18, Ashley King's life is all about booze, boys, and parties. But when she wakes up blind on holiday, she has to face her darkest depths — grieving a new life she didn't choose or want.

Static isn't your typical inspiration story. It's a poignant and funny take on the struggles and triumphs of a young woman learning to navigate the world without sight. This dark comedy asks — does everything really happen for a reason? Can joy be found in unexpected places?

Episode 1 artwork, by Meg Wilcox

Episode 2 artwork, by Meg Wilcox

Episode 3 artwork, by Meg Wilcox

Episode 4 artwork, by Meg Wilcox

Series Trailer: Coming Soon: Static by Ashley King

Description:

At 18, Ashley King was ready to leave home for the beaches, booze and boys of Byron Bay... But her hot Australian summer didn't go as planned.

Static: A Party Girl's Memoir is a four-part coming-of-age tale unlike any you've ever heard.

Subscribe on Apple, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts to hear Every. Single. Detail.

Click here for a complete episode transcript.

Music licensed under SOCAN 22C license

Royalty-free music: Anthem of Rain, Rock This House (Instrumental)

Royalty-free sound effects from Pixabay

Credits:

Static: A Party Girl's Memoir

Written by: Ashley King

Ashley King: herself, Britney

Jaime Cesar: Carolina

Podcast sound design, editing & production: Meg Wilcox

Podcast voice coach: Michelle Brandenberg

Dramaturg: Kodie Rollan

Cultural dramaturg: Daniela Atiencia

Disability dramaturg: Jess Watkin

Director, stage version: Javier Vialta

Sound designer, stage version: Miranda Martini

Podcast series graphic: Ebony R. Gooden & Maezy Reign

Episode 1: Calgary to Byron Bay

Description:

Ashley can't wait to leave home — and her overbearing mom, Carolina. She and her best friend, Britney, plot a hot Australian summer trip.

Note: this podcast includes explicit language and references to suicide and trauma.

This four-part series is an audio adaptation of the play *Static: A Party Girl's Memoir*. Each episode starts with part of the play, performed by Ashley King as herself and Jaime Cesar as Carolina. Then, in the second half, learn more about this true story as Ashley talks to those who inspired the script.

Guest interview: Bruce Horak, actor, playwright, and visual artist, and Chief Engineer Hemmer on Star Trek: Strange New Worlds.

Static is produced by Ashley King and Meg Wilcox, with support from Inside Out Theatre, Chromatic Theatre, and the Community Podcast Initiative at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Canada.

Click here for a complete episode transcript.

Episode 2: Byron to Bali

Description:

Ashley and Britney are having so much fun, they take the party to Kuta, Bali — but their adventure takes a turn.

Note: this podcast includes explicit language and references to suicide and trauma.

This four-part series is an audio adaptation of the play *Static: A Party Girl's Memoir*. Each episode starts with part of the play, performed by Ashley King as herself and Jaime Cesar as Carolina. Then, in the second half, learn more about this true story as Ashley talks to those who inspired the script.

Guest interview: Dr. Paul Gee, Emergency Physician at Canterbury District Health Board in Christchurch, New Zealand.

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Click here for a complete episode transcript.

Episode 3: Home

Description:

Ashley and Carolina return home, and work to understand their new reality.

Note: this podcast includes explicit language and references to suicide and trauma.

This four-part series is an audio adaptation of the play *Static: A Party Girl's Memoir*. Each episode starts with part of the play, performed by Ashley King as herself and Jaime Cesar as Carolina. Then, in the second half, learn more about this true story as Ashley talks to those who inspired the script.

Guest interview: Meg Wilcox interviews the one and only Carolina King.

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Click here for a complete episode transcript.

Episode 4: Where next?

Description:

Ashley starts to plan for the future — but can she still follow her dreams?

Note: this podcast includes explicit language and references to suicide and trauma.

This four-part series is an audio adaptation of the play *Static: A Party Girl's Memoir*. Each episode starts with part of the play, performed by Ashley King as herself and Jaime Cesar as Carolina. Then, in the second half, learn more about this true story as Ashley talks to those who inspired the script.

Guest interview: Col Cseke, artistic director of Inside Out Theatre, and Kodie Rollan, artistic director of Chromatic Theatre.

Static is produced by Ashley King and Meg Wilcox, with support from Inside Out Theatre, Chromatic Theatre, and the Community Podcast Initiative at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Canada.

Click here for a complete episode transcript.

Episode 5: Static: A Party Girl's Memoir

Description:

A special bonus episode — Static: A Party Girl's Memoir, in its entirety.

Note: this podcast includes explicit language and references to suicide and trauma.

This four-part series is an audio adaptation of the play *Static: A Party Girl's Memoir*. Each episode starts with part of the play, performed by Ashley King as herself and Jaime Cesar as Carolina. Then, in the second half, learn more about this true story as Ashley talks to those who inspired the script.

Static is produced by Ashley King and Meg Wilcox, with support from Inside Out Theatre, Chromatic Theatre, and the Community Podcast Initiative at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Canada.

Click here for a complete episode transcript.

Episode 6: Brisbane to Laos

Description:

It's been almost a year since *Static* was released — and Ashley King and Meg Wilcox are back to share some exciting updates on the series.

It will also soon be the one-year anniversary of the tragic death of six tourists in Laos — all killed by methanol poisoning from a happy hour event at the Nana Backpackers Hostel in Vientiane. Bethany Clarke survived being poisoned that night; her best friend, Simone White, did not.

In this episode, Bethany tells her own very personal story with methanol poisoning. Hear how she and Ashley have since become friends — despite living on opposite sides of the globe — and all about their advocacy work to spread awareness on methanol poisoning.

Guest interview: Bethany Clarke

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Click here for a complete episode transcript.