# BEYOND THE VIRUS

Nina Davies

[You can listen to this work through Youtube here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RbYPWGSyEk&t=2s)

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## Introduction

Niamh Schmidtke  0:11

Hello, you're listening to Future Artefacts FM radio show hosted by Niamh Schmidtke. And Nina Davies.

Nina Davies  0:19

Earlier this year, several radio frequencies were discovered airing a collection of broadcasts. At first they sounded like regular news stories and interviews. They felt familiar, but also not quite belonging to our present. Slowly, the listeners came to believe that what they were listening to, did indeed belong to their world, just not their time. They were looking into the future through the mundane edges of radio recordings and public service announcements. While this material is still being meticulously studied by researchers in various universities and museums, your hosts have managed to gain access to this collection to air a selection of these broadcasts for you, our listeners.

Niamh Schmidtke  1:00

For full disclosure, we will not be sharing this collection with you, as this introduction is based on a fictional event. In this monthly broadcast, Future Artefacts FM, we will present speculative fiction pieces by artists and writers, followed by conversation with hosts Niamh Schmidtke and Nina Davies. The programme will focus on fictional works intended for broadcast, such as radio plays or fictional interviews, to carve out a better understanding of the now by exploring various interpretations of the future.

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## Artist Introduction

Niamh Schmidtke  1:20

In this month's episode, we will be listening to Nina Davies' work Beyond the Virus, which is a fictional interview that takes a series of a podcast. The work is about 16 minutes long. Before we start listening to your work, Nina, is there anything you would like us to know?

Nina Davies  2:20

No, I think just sit back, relax. And we'll see you on the other side for a conversation. See you soon.

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## Beyond the Virus work

PC:

Good afternoon listeners, as usual I’m your host Pete Langley and you’re listening to “Beyond the Virus” Podcast. Today we have a guest that that I’m super excited have come in for a chat. Most of you have probably heard of him before, he used to play for the Vancouver Canucks and was banned from the NHL after he allegedly broke another players arm. Since then he’s had a successful career as a data scientist in foresting operations and is now joining us today to talk to us about his work and experiences living in zombie communities. - Jamie Lewis thank for joining us.

JL:

Hey Pete, thanks for having me in it’s great to be here. I’ll have to admit it’s a bit strange to be here speaking.

PC:

Yeah, I bet, I have to ask you – are these literally the first words you’ve spoken in a few years?

JL:

Well not exactly, I broke my silence about a year ago to attend interviews similar to this. …and on my way here I had to practice, so I gave my mom a call and went into a few shops to order coffee and snacks to just get back into that head space.

PC:

Head space? or Mouth space?

JL:

Exactly Pete, you get it.

PC:

How was that though? Because you seem fine right now. Did it just come back straight away?

JL:

Well yes and no, it’s not so much that I had a hard time finding words but it was that I found myself adding facial expressions over top – which in my head was adding an extra layer of information, but (laughs) it wasn’t translating AT ALL. I imagine there might also be some information that gets lost in this interview as well, no doubt.

PC:

(laughs)…. well I would have loved to be a fly on the wall for those interactions you had there. So… before we delve into everything, I have to ask – is Zombie a term you’re comfortable with?

JL:

Sure.

PC:

I imagine some of you will be familiar with the term zombie, they’re communities of people that don’t speak and like communicate with each other through non-verbal languages, is that correct?

JL:

That is indeed.

PC:

Now when I think of the term zombie, the first thing that comes to mind is footage on the news of people intermittently moving between normal speed and slow motion on the streets and some people just moving slowly all the time.

JL:

Yes, well this is I think a very common understanding of us and why we were given the name zombies.

PC:

Do you guys refer to yourselves as Zombies?

JL:

Well…. we don’t use words

PC:

Oh my god of course.

JL:

But we don’t refer to ourselves as zombies, no. Some people used to refer to themselves as dancers, but that term is a bit outdated now.

PC:

Wait so do you read? Like how are you aware of this term even?

JL:

I think the first misconception about zombie communities is that we have rules, or that we function similarly to a cult. People are allowed to engage with language as much as they would like. And in our physical communities it’s quite common that people go home and read.

PC:

Oh so people still read books?

JL:

(laughs) they might… but what I mean by read is more that people still will go on their phones or computers, if they have them, read words and maybe engage in typing messages. But I notice it more with people my age as we have our feet still planted in both worlds and not so much the youngsters.

PC:

So I just want to take it back a few steps because you say both worlds, and I think for our listeners I want you to explain how this new way of living even came about because it’s rare to get the chance to actually interview a zombie and… I’d like to know more.

JL:

Yeah that’s great.

PC:

These communities are cropping up at a rapid pace, and I know you say you’re not a cult but it seems strange that people are radically changing the way they live, and then congregating in areas around – metropolitan cites.

JL:

You know even as a member of one of these communities, it’s hard to say how they start up because each one, kind of has its own story. But one thing I can say is that it’s all gradual, some of the first community’s began with a group of teenagers that lived in a house together to create content for social media. It was what used to be called a content house. People would make short dances all day and broadcast them online.

PC:

But content houses still exist don’t they?

JL:

Yeah for sure. And most zombie communities don’t start up this way anymore as these houses are elitist organisations, run by corporations and they refuse to admit that we share any similarities.

PC:

Similarities? I’d say you guys couldn’t be more different

JL:

Well yeah, we are different in the sense that they seem more integrated into society than we are. But their day-to-day living is the exact same as ours except instead of speaking non-verbally with people physically, they do it solely within an online network sharing video of themselves.

PC:

(laughs) So you’re saying it’s like the old model….

JL:

(laughs) well kind of, yeah. Living in a shared house is sort of a community already. But the reason some of these houses were considered the first zombie communes was during the end of the pandemic. A lot of these kids living in content houses were extremely young just before the pandemic. They were the people that invented the languages that we use today.

PC:

No way! You know what, I had no idea.

JL:

Yeah, and also you probably didn’t know that, because the language has changed so much since then as well as these stories are kind of covered up. We obviously are not always performing the language within a little rectangle, it’s mostly in our - I don’t know - environment.

PC:

Right, yeah. but continue with what you were just saying… umm… about the pandemic and the kids being so young.

JL:

Yes! So I don’t know if you remember but Video sharing apps were really big during that time.

PC:

Yeah, I was studying English Lit at university and didn’t have too much time for it but I remember that’s when it really took off.

JL:

Well when the pandemic was finally over, I’m sure you remember this, we were all encouraged to go out, see friends, go to the cinema and spend our money to try and salvage what was left of our economies.

PC:

Yeah it was super fun, everything was really cheap… but then again I was broke and didn’t have a job so it probably worked out the same.

JL:

I think for people our age and older it was a hoot. But for these kids who were maybe around a decade younger it was a completely different story. A lot of kids didn’t have the social capabilities anymore and the pandemic had hindered a crucial learning curb, which a lot of us take for granted.

PC:

You know what, I always thought about that. I really felt for teenagers or people in their young 20’s.

JL:

Well I should probably say now this didn’t happen to everyone, as I’m sure you know. It generally happened to kids in affluent areas. Where families who had parents who could work from home or even afford not to work. And the houses had enough space to afford the kids privacy to make their videos. Again this is generally. But anyways these kids found it extremely difficult to reintegrate to societal norms that existed before the pandemic. Many of them would in fact stay at home continuing to make and watch videos, while others just carried on with their lives.

PC:

Right, yeah, I think I remember this, but reintegration schemes were introduced around that time.

JL:

Well yes and some of these scheme worked, which are probably the ones you have heard of and these were generally for the younger kids - like 14 and younger. But groups that consisted of people above those ages were extremely hard to control because they didn’t necessarily live with their parents any more.

PC:

What… so they were a bit more boisterous.

JL:

Sort of. I mean what happened in most of these classes for all age groups was that the kids were able to communicate silently with each other during class.

PC:

And I imagine they weren’t passing notes around either.

JL:

Precisely, it took the leaders of these sessions months before they realised that the students were sort of having conversations during class through facial expressions and small arm and feet movements.

PC:

But surely, I mean, this was a good thing right? Like the kids were communicating in real life with each other which is what the scheme sought out to accomplish.

JL:

Well I think this was what the participants found so confusing. They were asked to come into these spaces and connect and that’s exactly what they did.

PC:

I mean yeah, but what was confusing? like were the teachers unhappy with these results?

JL:

The leaders were also equally confused, it took them so long to grasp that there was another language operating in the space, let alone even understanding it. And this is how they lost control. They weren’t getting any feedback from the participants. They had no idea whether what they were saying was even getting through to them. And in this way the leaders felt like they weren’t doing their jobs.

PC:

…They were only  trying  to reintegrating them into their society..

JL:

Yeah exactly, I think the people who created these schemes were teaching these kids about a society that didn’t exist anymore - a society without computational media and online social networks. They way they were asking kids to engage with others didn’t even exist for people our age who were seen to not be struggling with reintegrating.

PC:

This is super interesting, but I kind of have to ask, why are you here talking to me then? You’re making it sound as if these kids didn’t have any facilities to engage with people on a – I guess linguistic level and here you are explaining it really coherently (laughs)

JL:

(laughs) Well, yeah, I can see how this doesn’t amount to me sitting here in this room with you. But this all happened around 10 years ago and these communities came to be through various sets of circumstances. But I guess before we move on – what I’m trying to get at is these schemes operated as a catalyst for zombies to exist in the real world and sort of live their lives in this sort of computational state of mind so to speak. But yes lets move on.

PC:

No thanks for clarifying that, and sorry to rush you through it I’m just weary that we’re sort of running out of time.

JL:

Yeah, I completely understand.

PC:

So yeah, I mean we’ve been in touch for a while and I think what you’re doing within your own community is really interesting and I wonder if you could talk a bit about that?

JL:

For sure, for sure. Well my route to living with zombies was completely different. But I first moved into a community in Pitt Meadows which is just outside of Vancouver about 7 years ago. And during these seven years i’m seeing a new generation beginning to be raised in these environments.

PC:

I’m imagining that these kids are exactly the sort of people I would never get on this show. (laughs)

JL:

uuuhhhhh….. no. I don’t think you could (laughs.)

PC:

So do these kids go to school? and do they engage in online activities?

JL:

Some parents make attempts at home schooling their kids, but these educational formats have their limits. They’re taught how to read but it’s not really for the purpose of reading lengthy articles. It’s more like signal recognition. And then in terms of online activities yes, most kids engage in online activities there are very few who don’t.

PC:

What kind of activities do they engage with online?

JL:

Mostly things that don’t require reading – a lot of games, taking photos and videos and posting them online. But the most common activity is listening to music – music is actually really important to us. It can help us communicate with each other – especially for new residents.

PC:

Right, so everyone is living in a movie all the time.

JL:

Yeah, but I wouldn’t say that’s unique to our way of living. I think we all have incorporated cinematic tendencies into our habits, we just have less corny monologues and more slow motion.

PC:

That’s what I live for, buddy. Why do you think I host a podcast station!? But you said to me in an email that you teach computer coding to some of these kids… is that right?

JL:

That’s right.

PC:

What’s that like?

JL:

It’s a challenge in some ways but it’s much easier than teaching them common language. But about a year ago I began to fear for these kids and at the same time see a hopeful future for them – and decided that in order for these communities to co-exist with your world - we would have to start putting some work in now.

PC:

Right, how does this future look like?…  or the not so hopeful future.

JL:

Well firstly its jobs, this generation doesn’t have great job prospects. Their parents still have their feet in your world and are able to work jobs remotely from their communities or make money advertising products through dance videos on social media, but this new generation don’t have those same connections to your way of living, and they communicate meaning in a much more bodily and gestural way, and I guess their a bit closer to nature in that sense as their are constantly processing physical information in front of them as  opposed to words and sentences. But what they linguistically do understand is computerised cognitive processes, which don’t contain reason or rationale, which are bound up by common language.

PC:

So how do you implement something like this? because these communities exist in most parts of the world so I imagine that’s a huge task to undertake.

JL:

Well, we’re at the beginning of this journey, but we’ve set up programmes in other nearby communities and for the most part they’ve taken off successfully. And if some communities don’t have          access to coders that understand our ways of communicating, I’m not so sure how some of these groups will evolve. I know in some parts of the States these communities have been forced out of their homes and onto the streets and thats what we want to avoid first of all. But at the core of this is a belief that we can make positive impact to the future coexistence of the natural and digital world.

PC:

Well, Jamie unfortunately we’re gonna have to stop there as we’ve run out of time, it’s been a     pleasure having you here with us. Thank you so much for taking the time to come over.

JL:

Thanks Pete, it was a pleasure talking with you, even if it was a bit weird.

PC:

You’re a natural, Jamie you should talk more often. Also I feel so compelled by what you’re trying to do that I have to say to any coders listening to this, get in touch with Jamie, (laughs) he probably needs your help.

JL:

Thanks Pete. Maybe you could post my email or handle when you put this up.

PC:

Oh yeah we can totally do that.

JL:

Regards

PC:

Thanks for tuning in please subscribe if you haven’t already or like what you heard. and we’ll be back next week with dietitian Sarah Burcham on how common Magnesium deficiency is affecting our sleeping habits, and what we can and can’t do about it.

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## Conversation

Niamh Schmidtke  19:15

Welcome back, you're listening to Future Artefacts FM. We've just listened to Nina's piece, Beyond the Virus. Um, Nina, thank you so much for coming on the show, and no.. you're a host of the show!

Nina Davies  19:20

Laughter

Niamh Schmidtke  19:45

I really enjoyed the work, Nina. And I guess one of the main things that I wanted to ask about was, you introduced us to a future or an idea of what the future might look like. I'm wondering, why did you choose to introduce this future through an interview or through a podcast setting, and of why this rather than, perhaps, let's say, a film or plain text?

Nina Davies  20:10

So I was thinking about how to how to put sort of a story together or put this sort of narrative together. And I was going through different kinds of conversations, you know, I was sort of looking at interviews, and then kind of narrowing that down to what different types of interviews there are, like a job interview, or a podcast or whatever that might be. One thing that I wasn't actually, I wasn't thinking about at the time, but probably influenced me or was deep in the back of my mind; my mum, when we were on a, we went on a road trip across Canada when I was a kid. And my mum rented a tape recording of Orson Welles 'War of the Worlds', which for those who might not know of it, I'm sure most people do, is a radio broadcast. So Orson Welles was hired by a radio station to produce radio plays. And for the radio play 'War of the Worlds', he decided to make it out as if it was a real broadcast. So they kind of started it where they had like a symphony or a sort of live musical band playing...

War of the Worlds clip  21:34

We take you now to Grover's Mills, New Jersey. Ladies and Gentleman, this is Carl Phillips again, out at the Grover's Mills Farm, New Jersey that Dr.Pierson and myself made the 11 miles and Penson in 10 minutes? Well, I hardley know where to begin? Thank you, for your word picture, the strange thing before my eyes, but well I just got here, I haven't had a chance to look around yet. That's the thing directly in front of me half varied and the vast tip must have struck a terrific force, the ground is covered with splinters of a tree and let's just talk on its way down. But I can see the object itself doesn't look very much like..

Nina Davies  22:11

and as that set was going. It was interrupted by by news broadcasts slowly kind of becoming the impending doom kind of like starting to gradually build throughout the radio play. And the show was introduced as the as what it was, but loads of people would tune in later, and ended up becoming in this sort of huge, phenomenal event. After I made the pod- the fictional podcast, I kind of thought, oh, maybe this is something I don't want to put myself in the same, like, canon as Orson Welles. But I think that that was something that I was, I've quite enjoyed about the work that it was kind of doing that as well.

Niamh Schmidtke  22:58

Yeah, I think we've talked before, like this slow creep of the fiction, kind of starting off by believing you're still within kind of the world as you would live it. And then ending up more and more in the fiction that the writer has given to you.

Nina Davies  23:16

Yeah.

Niamh Schmidtke  23:17

Which, I guess leads me on to another question, which is, how do you think this work then, relates to the present, if you are making this version of the future, especially in thinking about social interactions using masks? So a quite specific thing of using facial expressions in the fictional podcast, how significant that becomes? You know, what happens to that when you only see people's eyes? And then, I guess part of that question, as well, as do you think in the speculative future that you've made? Do you think it needs to be quite closely related to the present?

Nina Davies  23:57

There's one thing that I think is actually quite deceiving about the work is, with the title Beyond the Virus, and the sort of premise being about post COVID. That actually, like wasn't the that wasn't the driving force behind the work that kind of just arose. So basically, I had all this research that I had made about various different things that have nothing to do with COVID. And then I kind of put all of that research into, into that setting. Basically, I kind of put it into the present. But speculating on where that will go forward, if that makes sense. It's kind of a mash up of a few different things. I was thinking about, like the present moment right now. And then I just linked it to my research. And then I thought, okay, if I put those two things together, where do we end up in 10 years? Because I think the one thing that does link the pandemic to my research, is that there was a lot of stuff that I was thinking about before Coronavirus ever came out. So, when I was looking at Tik Tok quite a lot before we even knew about COVID. And I remember thinking, oh my gosh, tik tok has become like this online nightclub. And people are dancing and I was going to the gym and seen loads of young teenagers at the gym dancing on Tik Tok. And I thought, This is so different to what my teenage years were like. And then when COVID happened, suddenly, everyone was.. you know nightclubbing or dancing at home.

Music clip  25:38

Club music clip

Nina Davies  25:48

And so maybe that was kind of where the speculative fiction part kind of naturally was interesting to me. The pandemic basically, like accelerated a lot of the things I thought were kind of going to already happen. And but that was probably going to happen, I thought would have happened 10 years from now. And then suddenly, like, with within a month of having that thought about it being the future, suddenly it was happening, like a month later. And I thought that that was so strange.

Niamh Schmidtke  26:18

Yeah. Well, I guess there's always that thing in speculation, where you're speculating, you don't know if this is actually going to happen. You're just taking different things you have in the present. And yeah, fast forward, fast forwarding them in a way.

Nina Davies  26:30

Yeah. And I think, I think we're like living in a really strange time right now where like, everything has been a bit scrambled like, as I said, like, there's things that I thought wouldn't have happened until 10 years from now and now they're actually happening. And so to speculate from that, from that standpoint, is a really interesting position to take or to be in.

Niamh Schmidtke  26:56

Well, then maybe we can kind of delve a little more into the work itself, where you're speaking about these zombie communities, coming from these kind of concept houses or so on?

Nina Davies  27:12

Oh, yes, of content houses

Niamh Schmidtke  27:13

Content Houses. Yeah. And then, I guess part of me is wondering how much of like, what's the line between the work being fictional and factual? So for instance, is Jamie Lewis, a real person?

Nina Davies  27:28

That's a good question. But I'll start before I start maybe talking about Jamie Lewis, because he is actually loosely kind of, like very very loosely based on a real person. But the before I go into that, the process of writing, the process of writing it, actually wasn't as planned and like I kind of wrote it, I think I wrote it in like one day. And it was just all these things that I had been coming across and thinking about just kind of went onto the page. So like, my research had nothing to do with content houses, but I'd become really interested in content houses. And if people don't know what content houses is, it's a house where people live together and basically, create content. So I think like the first the earliest ones were of kind of big YouTubers, and it's kind of like a house where you work and everyone in the house also does that similar kind of work. But there were a few big ones for tik tok, I think one of the bigger ones was called hype house. And now some of those people who are part of hype house or some of the biggest tik tokers are, I think they've even maybe gone beyond tik tok now. But um,

Niamh Schmidtke  28:40

sounds a bit like an academy or something almost.

Nina Davies  28:43

Yeah, it is kind of like a it's like an academy slash cult slot. It's like, yeah, it's really weird. Anyways, I won't go into that because, it's not that super interesting. But like something like that just just like kind of came up into onto the page when I was writing the script. But to go back to Jamie Lewis. So I was reading a case, case study. A while back about a man named John Lewis, who was on trial for the murdering of a police officer in Pennsylvania in 2009, I think. So he, he did shoot the police officer. And what was on trial was whether it was first degree murder or second degree murder, which means what they're what they're looking for is whether there's intent behind his action, so the the action of him noticing the police officer to shooting him happened in two seconds. And the only evidence that they had was surveillance footage of the, of that action. But instead of playing it in real time, they played it in slow motion. And the case study that I was reading was titled, was sort of proposing that you can't really see intent. When you slow something down, it's like you can't really see, see consciousness because consciousness exists in in its real time. Basically, his verdict was guilty of first, he was guilty of first degree murder. But because it was based off of this footage that didn't actually represent the time, I was thinking about how this technology can play around with our consciousness and can create like a heightened sense of consciousness. And that's sort of what happened in this trial. So that mixed as well, with some research that I was doing about all that research. This wasn't research, I was just on tik tok just like, just scrolling through

Niamh Schmidtke  30:55

That's still research.

Nina Davies  30:56

Yeah. And there was also there was also these loads of videos of these kids moving in slow motion. So one of the really famous ones or the one of the viral ones, is people looking like they're walking on the spot. But they're walking in slow motion.

But it's all happening in real time. It's not a, there's no technique, there's no technology behind it. It's just like, what it is. And I was thinking about, about how connected to this case, where the technology for slow motion is harnessed to kind of insert intent or extra consciousness into this. I was thinking about how these teenagers were moving in slow motion, and wondering whether they were kind of regaining their consciousness back, if that makes sense.

Niamh Schmidtke  31:59

So I guess I'm also thinking about the length of a tik tok clip, usually as well. There's that sense of like, the time becoming more precious, because, as opposed to, like a YouTube video, which might be, you know, five plus minutes, a tick tock clip is 30 seconds, Max. Yeah, yeah, there's like this kind of duration of time. Well, then, I guess there's that sense of using Jamie Lewis in a way to kind of explore consciousness. So in terms of this, like hybrid character, or at least I'm viewing Jamie Lewis as being this hybrid, because he's become a spokesperson for these zombie communities. But he's not, he isn't fully one.

Nina Davies  32:44

Yeah. So I think that was sort of part of how I wrote the character. So maybe going back to how it's related. He's related to this guy, John, well, not related to John Lewis, but in my mind, like the characters are related. And I was kind of thinking so kind of cast cast him or wrote him as a as a NHL hockey player, because I wanted to take his, I wanted to take John Lewis's situation, and take it out of like a maybe more politically charged situation. Cause I thought that that would become the focus of the work, which I didn't necessarily want it to be. And I was imagining that he might be a player that was penalised or expelled from from the league that he was working within. Because slow motion footage made it looks like he had done something more violent than he that he actually intended to do.

Piece  33:43

Another look at it, Tuesday wanted him piled on him. And you can see that his head hits the ice and everyone else piles on it, and that doesn't help.

Nina Davies  33:57

Unfortunately, like, this was a lot of backstory, which I was trying to fit in to the to the podcast, but I really wanted to sort of like stay true to the podcast form. And I really wanted it to. If I'd explained the whole thing in the podcast, it could have ended up being like two hours. So I tried to write it, and that I think it's why I wrote it so quickly. I was like, I'm just gonna write it like it's a conversation. So I almost kind of had the conversation in my head. And I said, if his backstory comes up, then then I'll include it. And I think that's part of, I sort of was imagining, if John Lewis had been in a situation where it wasn't about murder. What would he have? What would he have done if he was expelled from something but he wasn't given the death sentence and he felt like he had been wronged by by the jury or by this technology. And what would he, what would he go out and do? And that's why I think it was basically like I kind of put him in this setting made him into this character that also is existing in the time that is happening now where kids are starting to not use language as much and, and he sort of gets drawn, drawn to those kids who are resisting language, they're resisting the way that people read into them, basically.

Niamh Schmidtke  35:29

yeah, it feels like they've already kind of moved on from whatever society rejected. Jamie Lewis. And so he's, or at least from listening to the podcast feels like he finds a kinship with them, because it can't be in what was his world before. So he has to move to this new world.

Nina Davies  35:48

Yeah,

Niamh Schmidtke  35:48

and then he sees their struggles and tries to.

Nina Davies  35:50

Yeah, and I think maybe, so maybe I kind of confused it by saying that, you know, these kids are resisting language, the kids aren't really resisting language, it's kind of more of like an almost like an evolution that's mixed in with technology that's happening to these kids. And he. And for Jamie Lewis, he's sort of got all this like, pent up energy that he that he needs to expel somewhere. And he sees this happening to his kids. So he kind of comes in and tries to lead them are their situations, in a way that will that will make them integrate into society or survive on their own. So not quite a cult leader, but I could see how someone could see that maybe, is a bit of a cult figure, but I think he's, he's trying to do the right thing.

Niamh Schmidtke  36:42

He feels more like the cool uncle to me. Yeah,

Nina Davies  36:45

yeah.

Niamh Schmidtke  36:46

I guess, as you're talking about the way that you, in a way constructed the podcast, it sounds like speculative fiction was really a tool to sort of combine and put a narrative to your research. What do you view speculative fiction as doing for you? Is it a tool? Is it a way to provide narrative?

Nina Davies  37:12

I think, yeah, I guess it is sort of a, it's a tool. But it's a tool that I'm kind of like still, I'm still figuring out, I'm not so sure exactly where I want it to go. Because I guess as I said before, like I kind of expected it to be this moving image work in that now it's a, it's a radio play, or not a radio play, how it's a fictional podcast. I think what what surprised me the most was the ease that I had with writing it. And it basically, it kind of helped me formulate my views on what's happening right now. But in a, you know, it's not my, it's my opinion, it's not fact, obviously. And I think it's a really nice way to explore what you think is happening right now, basically, and putting it into a future setting, or, or it could be it doesn't have to be future it could be in the past. When I think of a speculative fiction, I sometimes think about dystopias, like I feel like a lot of people who do speculative fiction, not all, usually kind of presenting like a utopia or a dystopia, like I'd say, like quite heavily on the dystopic side. And I think for this, I kind of really wanted it to sit, not like right in between utopia and dystopia. I didn't want it to fall either way. So you know, I kind of present the situation that could be seen as, you know, these kids are losing language, oh, poor them, what's going to happen to them. But then also, I kind of offer like a, maybe like a hopeful kind of future for them. But and then also, it's not, and then what's happening to them also isn't bad. It's like that they see it as good. But people from the outside might see it as bad. And I think I kind of enjoy the mundaneness of it. And I actually find speculative fiction, the speculative fiction that I think interests me the most is actually when it's kind of a bit mundane.

Niamh Schmidtke  39:15

Yeah, well, I guess there can be this all or nothing. effect. I'm thinking for instance, when political parties get elected into office, and let's say you don't agree with their politics, in some cases, it is an all or nothing. But there can be such a sense at the end of it that like everything's going to crash down, like people are still living their lives. Life is still going on. And the feeling I get from your podcast is, there is still this sense of 'life continues'. This is the mundane, there are people who don't communicate verbally anymore. They communicate through facial expressions through tik tok, through dance, through body movement.

Nina Davies  39:53

What I enjoy about it being so mundane is that it's like, I think we can constantly be going back and forth in real life of feeling like we're in a utopia or a dystopia. And I think, when I look forward, like or if you think to the past, there's always been moments in past for you, where you read about people thinking that it's the end of the world, or people thinking that they're living at the best time ever, that they're living in a utopia. And I think I was kind of looking forward. And I was thinking, that's probably what will happen in the future. Like, we'll always be living in both a dystopia and a utopia. So I think to present the future in, in that sort of binary way, is never going to be I mean, that none of it will ever be close to the truth, because it's fiction. But I think it's like, it's kind of denying the fiction, any sort of reality.

Niamh Schmidtke  40:54

Yeah, cause I guess what becomes quite clear from our conversation is that even though this is speculative, it's all very much based in your research, and it's based, in fact, from the present and the past. And while it's building something newer as you go into it more and more, it kind of, it situates you through the present?

Nina Davies  41:19

Yeah.

Niamh Schmidtke  41:20

One thing I'm quite interested in, in terms of speculative fiction, or science fiction, in general, is the lens it creates on the present. So for instance, thinking about even the way we portray the past, but based on what decades, it's in, so I'm thinking of like The Great Gatsby movie, the 1970s version of it, the costumes look very 70s, the 2010s version of it. There's a very, like 2010s cinematic glam on top of it.

Nina Davies  41:47

Yeah.

Niamh Schmidtke  41:49

How would you think your kind of future version is both impacted by the fact that you wrote this sort of like, in the middle of the pandemic, in a way? Because I think you were saying before, like, you wrote this sort of, like, after around this time last year no?

Nina Davies  42:07

Yeah, I think it was. Oh, no, I think it's like maybe it was six months ago. Like, I think it was when we were in the second lockdown that I wrote it.

Niamh Schmidtke  42:14

Yeah. So I guess I'm wondering how both you think your perception of that moment in the present, shaped it? Like, do you feel you would have written it very differently if you wrote it right now, as we're opening up?

Nina Davies  42:27

Yeah. I mean, that's, I think that's something that I, I do, I was thinking about, on my way here, I was actually thinking about what our relationship to the pandemic is now, like, you know, listening, listening to that podcast six months ago, is very different to listening to it now. I mean, like, we're not completely out of out of the pandemic. But there is kind of an end in sight now. And I guess there aren't these reintegration schemes, and kids aren't kids aren't losing language. But actually, I should mention, and it's kind of going on a bit of a tangent. But the first time I actually showed this podcast to a group of friends, which was all on Zoom, I kind of played it to some people on Zoom. A guy had to leave earlier, earlier, and he messaged me later to say that he had to leave. He said, Sorry, I had to leave. But I had to go tutor, a 19 year old kid who actually doesn't know how to read and does a lot of stuff on tik tok. And it was the first like, oh, it was almost like a piece of evidence. Like to me, I was like, this is like the first thing that I was like, Oh my gosh, it's not it's not real. And nor do I, like I'm not expecting it to become real. And I don't think that the work will be more successful if this becomes real or not, but I felt like it was exciting that there were even more links to the present than there actually, than I thought there were, it was like, it's kind of like adding is bringing more into it.

Niamh Schmidtke  44:09

Well I guess that's part of the joy in making work and sharing work with people as you get these little.

Nina Davies  44:15

You get feedback. Yeah,

Niamh Schmidtke  44:17

Yeah you get these funny stories of like, oh, you realise that's actually that is happening in a way? Yeah. I mean, are there any elements in Beyond the Virus that you hope don't happen, or?

Nina Davies  44:31

Jamie Lewis mentions how he doesn't want the thing that's happening in the States, which is kids being thrown out onto the streets or these communities being thrown out onto the streets because they don't know how to integrate into society. They don't know how to get jobs or make money, and so they get kind of thrown onto the street like vermin. That little bit is something I hope doesn't happen, but it's also a kind of a little nod to a piece of work. Like a book fictional story that I've been reading already, which I come across a kind of when I was doing the research and thinking about this, I came across this book, which was about kids who were losing the ability for language, and based on a, based on a virus actually. But it was a virus that was within them. And and that's the book starts kind of at the end of the story. And that's basically what's happened is that the, these people that don't speak are kind of turned into pasts. Like they're basically pests. And they're they, they're similar to raccoons or coyotes or foxes.

Niamh Schmidtke  45:44

Yeah. Can you share the name of the book with that?

Nina Davies  45:46

Yes, of course, it is called The Silent History. By I've written down the names here. So don't forget, because by three authors called Eli Horowitz ,  Kevin Moffett and Matthew Derby. The book is actually, so I bought the book version, but it actually is a post print book, which was originally a an app. So the app takes you through these field reports, which are all sort of fictional field reports that make up the story. And there's also a, there's also the sort of function on the app where you can go to a map, which has GPS installed in it. So you can see where you are on this map. And you can go to any of the locations that they have on the map. And you can access. You can access field reports if you're actually there. So those field reports aren't in the book. And I did go to a couple of the locations in London, but then I just, I ended up buying the book. And actually, funnily enough, I'm actually not someone that it's a massive book, and I just don't enjoy reading massive books. But it was this weird thing where it was like, where you go, Oh, I'm not going to read the book, I'll just watch the film. And it was like, I'm not going to read the, read the app I'm just going to buy the book it like kind of like, like tricked me into buying this massive book and reading the whole thing, I felt like I was cheating.

Niamh Schmidtke  47:11

Yeah, I guess, when you're looking at post, post print books, and they're trying to play between the two mediums. I think before we were talking before about this book, and part of it is that new sections of the book get released, or it gets released over time. I guess there's always that bit of play in speculative fiction of what time are you actually in? Which leads me to another question about your work? We don't know when it's set, is that deliberate?

Nina Davies  47:43

Yeah. Well, I. So this is something that I think is kind of interesting, because it's like the the work is set 10 years after the pandemic ends. So I feel like the so there actually isn't like a date yet. of like when it is because the pandemic isn't over.

Niamh Schmidtke  48:02

Or will there be a date?

Nina Davies  48:03

Yeah, I mean, I think that's the, there might not be a date. So maybe like this, maybe it never happens.

Niamh Schmidtke  48:09

Like, yeah, not to be too pessimist.

Nina Davies  48:12

Yeah. I think that's yeah, I mean, so it's, yeah, 10, 10 years after the pandemic.

Niamh Schmidtke  48:23

My last question, then, that I want to ask you about the podcast is, within the interview with Jamie. They talk about cinematic effects in Tik Tok, and also sort of, I guess, I'm thinking of like, how cinema sort of frames and condenses things in certain ways. When you're writing about that cinematic effect, what were you thinking about it in relation to?

Nina Davies  48:50

So the line that he talks about, there's one specific line where Jamie Lewis kind of goes back to the kind of response to the interviewer response to Pete and says, Well, you live in a new sort of living in a cinematic world as well. I was thinking about how people talk like they're in a movie, sometimes it's like, and you can almost like hear the hear the music in the background, as they're telling like a really like heartfelt story. And you can tell it, they think about it in a sort of cinematic way. There is a bit that relates to the, to the John Lewis case study, or that sort of area of research. And I just wrote an article recently about slow motion technology and how it was initially meant to be used for for scientific purposes, or for people to improve their craft or skills like gymnasts and scientists to be more accurate with the information that they're getting. But then film like early filmmakers started to use slow motion to kind of almost inject, an extra kind of narrative within slow motion. And so some one of the earliest uses of it, use slow motion to encapsulate the last dying breaths of a character. And it's this moment where like the, where the soul leaves the body, and you can almost see the soul leaves the body. And that's kind of I mean, it's not completely related, but it's kind of related to this, like, if you can, if consciousness is something you can see, then you might be able to see it leave the body. But then, of course, like that, it became part of cinematic language, which is now used in advertising, or music videos. And as kind of part of this language that I'm thinking about these kids, using. It's kind of this like, mediated language that doesn't require spoken words, or like sort of common language.

Niamh Schmidtke  51:01

So the slow motion becomes a way to, I guess, I mean, you spoke before about it almost bringing back I guess I'm thinking a form of autonomy or consciousness to your movement, rather than being part of this large. I mean, Tiktok in a way is suddenly, like a broadcast centre, if you make your video you broadcast through it, yeah. So in this way, kind of feeling your way through things, just kind of trying to regain that consciousness, like giving the time to process in a way perhaps?

Nina Davies  51:29

Yeah, it's also sort of, I guess, maybe what I'm saying is that, not very eloquently, saying that there's kind of this, there's, this language, a sort of cinematic language that we all understand now and is used so heavily day to day now like on tik tok, but it's also, we use it in the way that we talk and but it's like kind of this like, the fact that I know that someone's telling me about their, their hardships, but they're kind of maybe just telling me a really mundane story, but I know that there's a, I know that there is like a another thing behind it. I know that what they're trying to get through is like a feeling. There's a feeling that they're trying to express to me. I know that because I can almost hear the music in the background. And I think that yeah, and I think that's kind of that's not it, but that is the, the language that I think is that I'm kind of starting to see and carve out more.

Niamh Schmidtke  52:44

Well, that's about all we have time for. Thank you so much, Nina

Great, Thank you.

Great. So thank you for listening. This has been future artefacts FM with your hosts Nina Davies and Niamh Schmidtke. This is a monthly radio show about speculative fiction, mostly through RTM radio.

Nina Davies  53:03

Great, and next, next month, the next broadcast we will be talking about Niamh's radio play. So we'll see you back in a month's time.

Niamh Schmidtke  53:18

Bye

Nina Davies  53:19

Bye Me You Let's just start

War of the Worlds clip  57:49

we are chick Wales bit to call we've just been. On the theme of recruitment and then tell him when he will get close and just

Piece  59:28

you you bored with

War of the Worlds clip  59:31

the lines up here we've got the boy