

Recall This Book

Episode 12: Jared Green (July 2019)

- [Music Playing]: “Take the shot, count it down, zip it off,
Meet the Swinger, the Polaroid Swinger, the Polaroid Swinger” [lyrics]
- [Speaker 1]: Photography as a hobby can lead to photography as a career. And often does. But professional work calls for a lot more than just snapping pictures here and there.
- John Plotz: Hello, and welcome to *Recall This Book Presents*. A brand new experiment, a very special *Recall This Book*. As you know, our usual format is to center discussion around books from the past that helps us make sense of contemporary problems. But today we have invited a colleague to come in and present, rather than a dusty, old book (cue Foley man throwing dusty, old book across the room) instead, his brand new podcast. We will hear from the creator himself, hear some tempting highlights from the show, and discuss the ways in which he's approached making podcasts. Perhaps even compare them to our own scintillating method of plying our friends with coffee and then locking them in a studio with us.
- John Plotz: So in our lockbox today, as usual, we have the great escape artist and anthropologist, Elizabeth Ferry. Hello, Elizabeth.
- Elizabeth Ferry: Hello.
- John Plotz: And me, John Plotz, and to our great delight, Professor Jared Green of the Stonehill College English Department. Hey, Jared.
- Jared Green: Hello.
- John Plotz: Hello. So Jared, you started your career as a modernist with articles on Faulkner and that ilk, but in recent years you've worked on documentary cinema, on hip hop, and you also have screenplays and theatrical credits, which are very exciting. So with that, that's an amazing resume, and it clearly prepares you to undertake this creative sort of podcast, which we are happy to present, the [Electro-Library](#). So it's great to have you.
- Jared Green: Thank you very much for having me. Pleasure to be locked in here with you.
- John Plotz: Yeah, well, we enjoy it.
- Jared Green: And thanks for playing “The Swinger” as my theme song.

John Plotz: You'll always be a swinger to me, Jared. So we're going to be hearing a couple of substantive pieces out of your recent episode on photography.

Jared Green: Right.

John Plotz: I should say one of your two recent episodes on photography. But can you just kick things off for us by talking about the genesis of the podcast. By which I mean a couple of things. Like, in whose eye was it a gleam? And also what happened to that gleam in the months or years before your actual first episode on Storytelling dropped in December 2017. And I'd like to request that you use words like *dropped* a lot in our conversation...

Jared Green: Oh yes, yeah, as is the parlance of podcasting.

Elizabeth Ferry: We're hip like that.

Jared Green: Well, first, I'd like to make clear that this is not solely my production or my creation. So I work with Professors Amra Brooks and Scott Cohen at Stonehill. And this emerged out of multiple gleams in multiple eyes. It is something that I wanted to do for a while. I didn't really have any of the equipment, I didn't really have a very clear sense of what the show would be. But Scott in particular as we at Stonehill were building the Digital Innovation lab, was also thinking about constructing a podcasting studio, just trying to bring a lot of different forms of digital expression into that space. So I realized we might have an opportunity. And Amra was also thinking about doing something with her creative writing students, and things sort of lay fallow for a little bit with a lot of intention and desire to make something happen, but no clear ideas.

Jared Green: And then I got to thinking. Actually I was inspired by Louis Latpam's quarterly. And I was thinking that could be an interesting format for a show. Is to go at a theme from many different historical periods, different perspectives, cultural perspectives, and different genres as well. And so I kind of proposed that to Scott. We wound up joining forces to think of doing this magazine or anthology-

John Plotz: Maybe with that in mind we can just listen to the first three minutes of the episode. It's called *Photography: Part One*. Literally, this is the beginning that you will hear when... I hope you do. When you go to listen all the episodes of Electro-Library, this is how *Photography: Part One* of Electro-Library actually starts. And we'll be back to discuss it in three minutes.

Speaker 1: Photograph is often called the universal hobby. It is a means of creative expression within the reach of people in all walks of life. And it speaks a language that everyone can understand.

Amra Brooks: What happens when we take a photograph? What happens when we capture light on paper in emulsion or in pixels, and look across a gulf of time at these fragments of the past. What gets in the frame, and what lies just beyond it? If,

as John Berger notes, photographs bear witness to a human choice being exercised in a certain situation, then what can photographs tell us about the choices we make and why we make them?

- Amra: From the Stonehill College English Department, in the conjunction with the digital humanities and creative writing programs, it's the Electro-Library. A podcast, a literary neural network, a philosophical space/time remix. A kaleidoscope of consciousness on electromagnetic waves. Each episode explores a single theme across time, cultures, and disciplines. The Electro-Library, a cabinet of curiosities for your ears. Episode Three: Photography.
- Speaker 1: The camera lens is a mechanical eye, seeing everything and recording everything. It captures actions that will never again be repeated.
- Jared Green: "People were stunned when they heard the two inventors had perfected a process that could capture an image on a silver plate. It is impossible for us to imagine today the universal confusion that greeted this invention. So accustomed that we've become to the fact of photography, and so inured are we by now to its vulgarization, but not so then. There was some who like stubborn cattle refused to even believe that it was possible. What an obstinate race of ill-tempered beings we are! Resistant by nature to anything that ruffles our ideas or interferes with our habits."
- John Plotz: Maybe it's a good time to talk about the fact that you chose to make this podcast about photography. So-
- Jared Green: There's definitely a certain perversity to it! But there's actually something that I really loved about that idea of working with images in a way that had to be described if you were to see anything. And that was suggested to me actually by some things that I teach in the class on photo and literature that render verbal descriptions of visual material, and sometimes don't actually show the material. So I first got to thinking about this from reading Marguerite Duras's *The Lover*, in which she described a photograph never taken, on her crossing the Mekong Delta. And it's a moment where she recognizes she's crossing over into young adulthood, and into sexual realization, and seeing herself seeing herself.
- Jared Green: But there's no photograph because no one would have thought it was a moment to photograph. And I've been really fascinated by that idea. And I started looking for other moments in literature where there are verbal descriptions of photographs that are not embedded. So you don't actually see the photograph. Or maybe didn't exist at all. And by the time we were making this podcast, I thought, *I think that would be perfect*. Let's work with these images but that we can't actually see. We can only see through however we generate that material auditorially.
- John Plotz: That's great. So I want to play in a minute--this is the longest chunk we're going to play, It's an Umberto Eco essay, and I'm going to ask you to introduce it for

us--but also one thing that I really noticed that makes the essay works really effectively, I think, is the way that you guys use background music. So can you talk a little bit about your decision on, what do they call it, the acoustic environment?

Jared Green: Yeah. So this is a really good example of the collaboration that goes into this piece. So this was really driven by Scott Cohen's desire to do the Eco piece. He's taught this in the past, at least. (I don't know if he's taught it recently.) And he wanted to bring that to the show. He said he especially loves. And he actually found the archival sound, which is very hard to find, of the closing down of Radio Alice. This is something he managed to find, I think possibly using the Way Back Machine. Stored on some web 1.0 site, so-

John Plotz: And we're just going to hear a tiny snippet of it. It's going to be very hard for you to place, but that's what it is. Yeah.

Jared Green: So he already began that kind of ability to experience the moment that Eco is experiencing. Bring that into our podcast. And then when he had recorded his piece with that archival sound, he sent it to me, and I was thinking, but what kind of music would feel right for the overall environment that we're building, and for the experience we want to offer? For the idea. So here it was something that was kind of abstract, electronic washes that felt slightly menacing. Like there's a degree of drama to it, but also at the same time, to me almost felt like an auditory equivalent of experiencing the past and the present coming together.

Jared Green: And that sounds very overthought. But when I heard the piece, I was looking through a lot of different music, trying to hear it as it would go with the Eco piece. That's what struck me.

John Plotz: You know, that's such a helpful comment, Jared, because that reminds me of something I meant to say--but I didn't write it down, so I forgot it. Which is that I read really interesting articles about the golden age of radio and the golden age of TV that it made the point that in many ways it's really helpful to think about TV serials as fundamentally radio serials. Like, I other words, rather than thinking of the lineage from film, which is how we normally think about it. Like it's visual, packed into a small box, think of the TV as an expanded version of the radio. So fundamentally the acoustic environment. You know, people often talk about *watching* the TV when they're in the other room, and I do this. When Lisa and I watch trashy spy thrillers, which we do a lot, frequently I'm not watching the screen. I'm just listening. And the mood music, in *Counterpart*, will tell me when I need to turn back.

Elizabeth Ferry: And also it's like it's scaled for the living room, right? So it has this kind of domestic-

John Plotz: Totally, right. Right.

Elizabeth Ferry: Domestic scale that film didn't.

John Plotz: Exactly.

Jared Green: And many of the early TV programs had been radio programs.

John Plotz: Yeah.

Jared Green: So there were literally drifting from one medium to another. It's probably not right to say that it's radio with pictures, but it's the same industrial production model. It's the same commercial production model, and they're often using the same actors and the same writers, and some of those are the same programs. *The Lone Ranger* would be one example of many. So that had already been established...

John Plotz: Yeah, I think you can make that case about TV news as well. Where liveness is the thing that radio and TV have in common, which film by definition doesn't have. So the talking head giving you the news. You know, the [wreck of the] Hindenburg is a radio broadcast, but we remember that so vividly.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right, right. And also that the choice of the TV news model of the desk, and sort of still facing the camera is just one kind of a choice from how radio might....

John Plotz: Yeah, totally. So let us play a long piece, which is an Umberto Eco essay, which has now been kind of curated and scored and presented by Electro-Library. And it makes an argument about how you think about photography in its role within politics, and basically makes the case that a photograph can be an argument

Scott Cohen : "A Photograph." By Umberto Eco.

Scott: The readers of *l'Espresso* will recall the tape, the last minutes of Radio Alice. Recorded as the police were hammering at the door. One thing that impressed many people was how the announcer, as he reported in a tense voice what was happening, try to convey the situation by referring to a scene in a movie.

Scott: There was undoubtedly something singular about an individual going through a fairly traumatic experience, as if he were in a film. There can be only two interpretations. One is the traditional: *life is lived as a work of art*. The other obliges us to reflect a bit further. It is the visual work, cinema, videotape, mural, comic strip, photograph, that is now part of our memory, which is quite different, and seems to confirm a hypothesis already ventured. Namely, that the younger generations have absorbed as elements of their behavior a series of elements filtered through the mass media.

Scott: To tell the truth, it isn't even necessary to talk about new generations. If you're barely middle-aged, you will have learned personally the extent to which experience, love, fear, or hope, is filtered through already seen images. I leave it

to the moralists to deplore this way of living by intermediate communication. We must only bear in mind that mankind has never done anything else. And before the technology of photography, it was other images drawn from pagan carvings or illuminated manuscripts of the Apocalypse.

Scott: And now to another event. These last months within that variegated and shifting experience that is called the Movement, the men carrying .38 caliber pistols have emerged. From various corners, the Movement has been asked to denounce them as an alien body. Apparently this demand for a rejection encountered difficulties, and various elements came into play. Synthetically, we can say that many belonging to the Movement didn't feel like labeling as outsiders forces that, even if they revealed themselves in unacceptable and tragically suicidal ways, seemed to express a reality of social protests that could not be denied.

Scott: Basically, what was said was this: they are wrong, but they are part of the mass movement. And the debate was harsh, painful. Now, last week there occurred a kind of precipitation of all the elements of the debate previously suspended in uncertainty. Suddenly--and I say suddenly because decisive statements were issued in the space of a day--the gunmen were cut off. Why at that moment? Why not before? It's not enough to say that the violent riots in Milan made a deep impression on many people because similar events in Rome had also a profound effect. What happened that was new and different?

Scott: We may venture a hypothesis. Once again, we're calling that an explanation never explains everything, but becomes part of a landscape of explanations in reciprocal relationship. A photograph appeared. Many photographs have appeared, but this one made the rounds of all the papers. It was the photograph of a young man wearing a knitted ski mask, standing alone in profile in the middle of a street. Legs apart, arms outstretched horizontally, with both hands grasping a pistol. Other forms can be seen in the background, but the photograph's structure is classical in its simplicity. The central figure, isolated, dominates it.

Scott: If it is licit and it is necessary to make aesthetic observations in such cases, this is one of those photographs that will go down in history, and will appear in a thousand books. The vicissitudes of our century have been summed up in a few exemplary photographs that have proved epoch-making. The unruly crowd pouring into the square during the 10 days that shook the world. Robert Capa's [dying Militiano](#); the Marines planting the flag on Iwo Jima; the Vietnamese prisoner being executed with a shot in the temple; Che Guevara's tortured body on a plank in a barracks.

Scott: Each of these images has become a myth and has condensed numerous speeches. It has surpassed the individual circumstances that produced it; it no longer speaks to that single character or those characters, but expresses *concepts*. It is unique, but at the same time it refers to other images that preceded it or that in imitation have followed it. Each of these photographs

seems a film we have seen, and refers to other films that had seen it. Sometimes it isn't a photograph but a painting, or a poster.

- Scott: What did the photograph of the Milanese gunman *say*? I believe it abruptly revealed, without the need for a lot of digressive speeches, something that had been circulating in a lot of talk, but that words alone could not...
- John Plotz: Me, I love that turn at the end, where it makes the case that this is the photograph *as argument*.
- Jared Green: Yeah.
- Elizabeth Ferry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- John Plotz: But I do think it goes back to the point, I mean in a way it relates to the Cabinet of Curiosities point. Because it has to do with whether we think of artwork of having this *longue durée* existence where it's always around, and we can bring it up and show it to people. Like, we discovered this marvelous piece of sound from Radio Alice. We can bring it back to you. Or we think about our work in that moment of vivid presentness. Where all of a sudden, people saw this photograph, and *Boom!* It changed their thinking.
- Jared Green: One thing that's interesting, and maybe there are listeners out there who would correct me on this. But I think the thing that Eco gets wrong in a predictive way is I don't believe this image of the Milanese gunmen actually did enter into a broader way of thinking about images that have shaped consciousness. In some way, it really resides in Eco's account. So he seizes on it absolutely at that moment, galvanized opinion, gave a human face to a thing that was on a scale that was beyond imagination, and suddenly made it look like insanity. Right? This was chaos. This was not heroic. And so that did shift that conversation. But he says, *this is going to enter into a future history of very significant images*. And he thinks about the Capa image, right? Or the image of the execution in Vietnam and so forth....And to the best of my knowledge, it has actually dropped out of that conversation, and exists only in Eco's framing of it.
- John Plotz: It seems like there's two thoughts that come out of that. One is whether it mattered. Like, first of all it's always the nature. If you're writing about the present, you're always going to be wrong more often than you're right. Like, it's easy... I talk about this with my friends who teach contemporary literature all the time. Because it's easy for me to pick a bunch of Thomas Hardy and George Eliot novels to teach. And my friends who teach contemporary literature have just struggled with, well, which of the Pulitzer Prize winners should I do?
- John Plotz: But then the other point that I think you're making, Jared, is implicitly is that he's displacing his own cultural influence. Like he's saying the influence is in the photograph, but actually it's more like in his publishing. Presumably that was a well circulated essay at the time.

Jared Green: Yes, and that appears in [Eco's book] *Travels in Hyperreality* in the early 80s, '82, '84, I can't quite remember when that came out. But I think it's true, and the reason that Scott wanted to bring this to the show is not so much because of the significance of that image, but because Eco, who's doing an early shot across the bow of a post-modern account of the image. There's a tradition he's working in from [Walter] Benjamin and [Roland] Barthes, but at the same time, this is fairly early on in terms of thinking about what a media-saturated environment really does towards shaping political consciousness. That still feels very relevant, and I think Scott was right to identify. It feels as though if we just inserted some different reference points, we might be talking about the *Gilets Jaunes*, and representations of, say, the refugee crisis or Antifa. Right? Something like that. The ways in which the political becomes visualizable, and therefore imaginable. And then arguments can get made about it because it circulates on a figure of a human doing a thing.

John Plotz: Okay, so this brings me to one of the main reasons that I wanted to talk about the photographic podcast, which is the question of where we understand the moment of acoustic new video, versus visual new media, because Jared, the thing you're setting up now there with those striking, iconic, visually argumentative things that flood the visual public sphere might lend itself to an implicit counterargument which we've read in the pages of the *New York Times* about "No, but newsprint is the alternative to that. It provides a sober, deliberative space..."

John Plotz: Or you could even imagine, and this is my favorite way to think about this is by way of *Frankenstein*. In *Frankenstein*, when Frankenstein's monster tells his story, it's only the blind man that can hear him and not freak out. Because he's so visually horrific that people have the somatic reaction to his visual appearance, but when they just listen to his words, that is when they listen to the podcast version of Frankenstein's monster, which we should do, by the way. We should totally do. The Frankenstein's Monster podcast. "Hello. I am a sad monster...." But the point is that the acoustic-

Elizabeth Ferry: No fire in the booth.

John Plotz: Yeah. That the acoustic version is meant to be, you know, just kind of innately more moderate. So that's one way of setting this up, where visual, not visual is bad, but visual's on one side of the spectrum, and then the acoustic is kind of on the other. Is that where we want to land? Or do we want to land more on the-

Elizabeth Ferry: That is not bad, but sort of one is more honest or authentic or-

John Plotz: Yeah, like the acoustic provides a space for deliberation or a space for truth or something... Whereas the visual is the just telling stories that snap your synapses.

Elizabeth Ferry: Unreliable.

John Plotz: Yeah, they trigger, like Aristotle talks about *sensation* as being one of the dimensions of the aesthetic experience, and that the visual triggers sensation. Or do we-

Elizabeth Ferry: It's interesting that you're saying the visual triggers somatic sensations.

John Plotz: Yeah.

Elizabeth Ferry: So there's...

John Plotz: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, well I mean-

Elizabeth Ferry: Synesthetic.

John Plotz: Yeah. No, that's true. Right. Because historically sometimes people have said that of the senses, the visual is more distant, whereas something like touch is more immediate....

Elizabeth Ferry: More rational or whatever....

John Plotz: Totally, that's true. But just to keep the other way of thinking about this in play would be that whatever media form is *New* is the form that really grabs people. By which logic, the podcast could also be like....So how do we think about those things? Do we believe there is something more charged about the visual and more safe about the acoustic? I'm asking...

Jared Green: Well why are you doing *Recall This Book* as a podcast as opposed to a video blog...

John Plotz: Because I don't know how to use a video camera!

Jared Green: All right. Okay, that's an unfair dodge.

John Plotz: Because I have a face for radio! Elizabeth Ferry has a face for video. But I have a face for radio.

Jared Green: It surely can't be the case that that's the only reason that you felt this was the medium that was right for having the kind of discussion you wanted to have.

Elizabeth Ferry: Well, I think one of the things is where going back to the Cabinet -of-Curiosities logic, of your podcast. I mean ours kind of follows the logic of the conversation. Right? So, and that clearly in conversations there is plenty of senses that might get engaged. But the vocal is pretty primary....

John Plotz: Totally. Very important to us to do the conversations *live*. Like we like being face to face with one another. We have not liked it when we have tried doing it

remotely we didn't like that. So we do like sharing a space with one another.
But...

Elizabeth Ferry: And also the conversation, there's lots of, obviously there's choices that go into setting it up in the first place, but a lot of the choices also emerge through the conversation. We don't necessarily know exactly how it's going to go. So I think that lends itself to the auditory.

Jared Green: Right. Absolutely. Well, conversation is very different in terms of the energy of its directions, than a much more kind of controlled--*we're going to have this sound at this moment, and we'll cut out that piece that we didn't like*. Right, so our shaping of an auditory experience is a kind of different experience that we offer. Because you're mentioning the sensory registers of the auditory. And I just think back to a time when my daughter Zoe was listening to *Let's Pretend*. Because I was saying, "Oh! I love this. I'm going to play this for her." And we would, on our drive to school, we'd play that. And she did love-

Elizabeth Ferry: Amazing how we tyrannize over our children.

Jared Green: Yes, well, I, exactly, curating their experiences. But I discovered actually that some of them were too intense because they were auditory only. Because what they did was to trigger images entirely in her mind so there was no distance she could get from them. They were in her brain. And I realized that this medium has power that others don't, or that is different. So the ways that we experience visual material, when it's produced only by sound, is a different set of ...probably neuroelectric reactions, even.

John Plotz: So that actually relates to a conversation that we were having earlier, kind of, somewhat off-mike, about the ways in which when you listen to podcasts, you tend not to *look* at the people you're in the room with. And the thing I wanted to connect that to, is that, so my experience in podcast is when biking or when driving. And in certain ways, that is a form of blindness. Because of course you're looking when you drive, (I'm not an idiot!) but you're looking at something *other than* the story.

Elizabeth Ferry: Highly selectively too...

John Plotz: Yeah. Right. Definitely. But so I guess what I'm saying is like in a way, maybe the ideal podcast audience is a *blind* audience, in that broader sense of what blindness means there. Like the blind man in Frankenstein, just being capable of focusing on the ear. But taking into account, Jared, what you're saying: that actually there's an overload version of that too. Like, it can be too vivid.

Elizabeth Ferry: Can I ask you literature dudes about the term *ekphrasis*?

John Plotz: Yes.

Elizabeth Ferry: Which is, as I remember, writing a piece about something that is in some other medium, especially like a painting

John Plotz: I think ekphrasis can actually describe any kind of translation, can't it, from one medium to another?

Jared Green: Certainly at this point, a modern understanding of ekphrasis, absolutely. It begins with a poetic description of visual material. But it gets much broader, and so yeah, absolutely.

Elizabeth Ferry: So, your episode then could be seen as an ekphrastic project?

Jared Green: Absolutely. It's an ekphrastic project on ekphrastic projects. It's kind of a hall of mirrors.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah.

John Plotz: So, okay, so speaking of which, I know we have-

Elizabeth Ferry: And then what is this?

John Plotz: And Jared, I definitely want to hear where you guys are heading with this, but before we do, that just leads me to... I'm still thinking about the form of compare-and-contrast between the sort of beautifully curated acoustical space you do and the kind of *flabby* conversation that we do.

Jared Green: Oh.

John Plotz: So can I ask you guys a question? No, I don't need your pity. It's okay. I *like* my flabby conversation. I'm 51, man. I have to like flabby. Come on!

Elizabeth Ferry: And the aesthetics of not completely knowing what we're talking about!

John Plotz: But the question is this. I just recently read two John le Carré--sorry, I *listened* to two John le Carré novels. One of which was the traditional audio book where somebody just read the whole novel through. And the other was a staged drama version of the episodes. So with people playing the voices. So my question is, do you guys have a preference between those two things? Because I just vastly preferred hearing someone reading the whole book. Like that was my preference. I wanted to hear the book and have it drop into my head. But I understand why would you want to do it as a radio play. I get the appeal of that. So do you guys have a feeling about that? It had Foley men. Like, great Foley men. Like doors *creaked open*, you know?

Elizabeth Ferry: I mean, I feel like I'm so unaccustomed to listening to radio plays that they feel... I don't think I can really get the juice out of them because they feel so strange and stagey to me. Whereas, you know, there's nothing intrinsically less stagey

about reading a book into a microphone. But somehow I'm able to experience that as a more natural medium. But that may just be me.

Jared Green: I guess I would say, and this is perhaps a bit evasive, it really depends on the experience I'm looking to have. If I want to hear a political conversation, I want it direct and live, and I want to hear ideas unfold, and I don't want to have the sense that it's artificial. Which would take me out of that moment, make me feel like it's inauthentic, and that's not what I was seeking. But I can certainly imagine a very well done production. The acting would have to be good and the sound has to be good, right? So imagine a very high level production. If I'm seeking an experience of world building-

John Plotz: World-building.

Jared Green: Yeah, more senses activated, then that's something that I might seek out. So I'm not necessarily going to come down on one side or another-

John Plotz: No, no, no, it makes sense. Your podcast builds a world. And I don't think our does. And I do think that's a difference.

Jared Green: Yours builds the world, the sharing of social energy through conversation. So it's a different kind of world.

John Plotz: Yeah, we invite you to imagine being a part of that conversation. But it is different from building. It's not a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. I mean, you're more Wagnerian. We're more like-

Jared Green: I don't know how to take that.

John Plotz: We're more like Schubert *lieder*. Off on the edge.

Elizabeth Ferry: So I have a question that just occurred to me. So occasionally my kids, I mean every year they have to read a book before the next year of school. And it mostly sucks. Most of them are not very good, I find.

John Plotz: Hat-tip to the Brookline Public Schools, yes.

Elizabeth Ferry: And I always find myself in this sort of quandary because I buy the book, and then I try to get them to read the book. And they're...readers. They read things. But often it's kind of a struggle to read this particular book, and I don't feel very invested in it often. But I feel this, like it's cheating to get the book on, the audio book. So why do we feel like, why do I feel like it's cheating? That's the question. Or maybe it is cheating. Or maybe, I don't know. They're still hearing it, and-

Jared Green: Yeah, they're taking in content, which is different from absorbing, digesting, and thinking about that content. It's not to say that you can't do that-

John Plotz: But the argument is that you wouldn't be. It's not just content, right? Because you still have to decipher the syntax of a sentence that someone reads you.

Jared Green: Sure.

Elizabeth Ferry: And I mean, you know, it's certainly, we've all had the experience of passing our eyes over a page in a *reading-like* activity, without-

Jared Green: But what you can't do or it would require a different way of listening to an audiobook, is something that's the principal pleasures of reading, which is to move away from that page and that imaginary world into whatever it's making you think. Because if you do that when you are listening to an audiobook, you will miss content. You will miss the next set of sentences.

Elizabeth Ferry: Isn't that sort of the opposite of what you just said about your daughter? Being more afraid about *Let's Pretend* because it takes her into-

Jared Green: Well, those are staged performances.

John Plotz: But he's saying it's a command performance also. Like he's saying that you can't stop the drone of the words. But I have two thoughts about that.

Elizabeth Ferry: You could, though.

John Plotz: You could, yeah. First of all, technologically you can, and I think our children are really good at hitting the pause button. I also think-

Jared Green: What I'm trying to underline is a difference between attention and what we do with that attention, and the medium by which we absorb the information.

John Plotz: I was actually thinking we should do a podcast experiment which would be so fun. Which would be to have one person in here reading out an essay or a story or whatever. And the other people should just interrupt with whatever thoughts come into their heads. Like in other words, we should try to document that thing that Roland Barthes says In *The Pleasure of the Text*, which is that the reader's power is to choose when to skip or when to daydream. But we should record it in real time. So it would be like those, you know, Snoopy's train of consciousness.

Elizabeth Ferry: [crosstalk 00:33:08] it's like the MST3K of the reading.

Jared Green: Right.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right?

John Plotz: Is that *Mystery Science Theater 3000*? Oh, okay.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yes.

John Plotz: Okay.

Jared Green: You just gave me a mini-stroke there.

John Plotz: I had to write it down and look at it in my mind.

Elizabeth Ferry: That's what it's called or is that only my-

John Plotz: *Mystery science theater 3000* is MST3K.

Elizabeth Ferry: See, yeah.

John Plotz: Wow.

Elizabeth Ferry: See, yeah, if you-

John Plotz: Wow, R2D2

Elizabeth Ferry: If you listened to more books on tape you would have picked up on that.

John Plotz: Yeah, okay. Okay.

Jared Green: I didn't see that being the major educational moment of this conversation.

John Plotz: I really like the idea of stream of consciousness reading. I would love you to know, Elizabeth, what's going on in my head as you read your favorite... What would you read? What you pick?

Elizabeth Ferry: For?

John Plotz: Like, if you read out your favorite short story or something.

Elizabeth Ferry: With commentary? With my own... Hmmmm. Come back to me on that. Jared, which would you read?

Jared Green: I don't carry an answer to this question around in my head all the time, but-

John Plotz: I think for me it might be Robert Frost poems or something like that. I don't know.

Elizabeth Ferry: I was thinking P.G. Wodehouse, "The Great Sermon Handicap"

John Plotz: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. But that-

Elizabeth Ferry: That just might be my favorite story, so.

John Plotz: No, but that would be... I think people wouldn't daydream while they were listening to that. Because that's so arresting. I think you're right. I mean, that's a great choice, but I don't think people's mind would wander while they were listening.

Jared Green: I might do something from *Dubliners*.

John Plotz: Oh, yeah. Well, that would be perfect.

Jared Green: Like "The Dead."

John Plotz: Yeah, those James Joyce stories definitely kick you off into a different register.

Elizabeth Ferry: Especially with, "The Dead" is the one that has the image of the snow-

Jared Green: That's right.

Elizabeth Ferry: So that also kind of brings you into a visual register where you would be-

John Plotz: Okay.

Jared Green: And a Foley artist for its tapping against the window

John Plotz: Okay, so a podcast of listening. Listening as podcast.

Jared Green: I feel like, just so not to lose this threat, that there's something that we're circulating around. Which is actually a very kind of Frankfurt School kind of question. We're almost right in the zone of critique that Horkheimer and Adorno were in "The Culture Industry" about what kinds of mediums are mono directional. And which ones are reciprocal?

John Plotz: Yeah.

Jared Green: And even though we can hit the pause button on this podcast or on any kind of audio medium, they aren't really reciprocal. In the way, that for instance, reading a book is in a sense. Now, we can't reach to the author and say, don't say that. But we can stop on the page. We can mark the page. We can close that book. We can think differently. We can resist what's being said-

John Plotz: But you know, when I listen to a book on tape-

Elizabeth Ferry: Or we can have a different degree of engagement with it.

Jared Green: It's a different kind of engagement. And when you were saying, John, this is training. That's kind of the issue. What do our expressive mediums train all of us, not just kids, obviously, to expect from a certain mode of address? What

kind of attention do we play when an authoritative voice is coming out over the radio?

John Plotz: So I totally hear what you're saying, but I feel like there is, like when you read the jeremiads against how modern day media are destroying thought, which by the way, have been published from 1150 AD to the present.

Jared Green: Plato hated writing.

John Plotz: Right. So the jeremiads sometimes run along the lines of the problem with the new media is that *they don't allow any space for thought*. But with the contemporary media, I've also heard the other jeremiad: *it's too easy for people to produce content now*. So you can't really have it both ways. Either it's suppressive of content, or it's generative of content, but it can't be, you can't condemn it for both.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, I mean, they used to say that computers made people too antisocial, and now it's like-

John Plotz: It makes you too social. Right. Right. Because all the bullying is cyberbullying. Right. Yeah. That's a really good point.

Jared Green: But I kind of feel like these arguments have always been true. Both sides of that argument have always been true. Plato was absolutely right. Writing did destroy oral culture. Except for what we're doing right now. It took millennia for it to come back.

John Plotz: And here in our locked room only one side is allowed to be right. Sorry. That's just in this room! In the world, yes. But in this world, only one side can be right.

Elizabeth Ferry: There are only two possible interpretations.

John Plotz: There are!

John Plotz: I think Eco would have made a good podcast partner. I'm sorry we couldn't interview him.

Jared Green: I think he would have loved this medium.

John Plotz: I definitely agree. So Jared, this has been great. But as we move to wrapping up, tell us about next steps. Like, where are you guys heading?

Jared Green: Well, I think we'll try to keep refining our ability to create an interesting sound experience. The way the episodes have... I don't know if this is obvious if you listen from the first one on...they develop from the prior episode. So we began with storytelling, which had a great deal necessarily, to do with memory and cultural transmission. And so we did an episode on memory. And there were

issues about photography that came up in the episode about memory. So we did the episode on photography. Coming out of this work on photography, this may seem a little more far afield, but I got to thinking about, because so much of the writing was about black and white photography, got to think about color.

Elizabeth Ferry: Oh, yeah.

Jared Green: That's a future episode. But from this set of materials...

John Plotz: Which is even easier to do on a podcast than photographing.

Jared Green: I like a challenge! I do like a challenge. But the next episode will be about identity, which emerges directly from a lot of the things that we were capturing with this episode on photography. So what I like is a sort of fractal process.

John Plotz: Yeah.

Jared Green: That we keep, I don't know if it's drilling down, or moving outward. Maybe it's-

John Plotz: It sounds more like Brownian motion.

Jared Green: Yeah, okay. Good. I'll take it.

John Plotz: Random walks.

Jared Green: So I like the idea of episodes developing in that way. That's something that we got interested in leads to the next set of questions, and leads us to ask people, *how would you now address this issue? What would you bring to that conversation?* So I think that's how it will continue to develop because that feels the most organic and exciting. That something in an episode touches off a desire for the next one. And hopefully we will have people listening, so that we have a reason to keep going.

John Plotz: Well, I'm sure you will. It's a great show, and if it doesn't yet have a great audience, I'm sure it will increase in due course.

Jared Green: It will now!

John Plotz: Of course! Yes. So-

Elizabeth Ferry: Shall we switch to Recallable Books

John Plotz: Yeah, let's do that. Let's switch. I just wanted to make sure there wasn't... I didn't want to cut you off if you had another final question, but yeah. Let's switch, let's conclude like we always do with recallable books, which is a recommendation for further reading on the topic. Though I have to say, since

the topic is a podcast, I think we're going to have a much broader construal of the recallable. So let's call it *The Recallables*. Like the opposite of deplorables.

John Plotz: So as with the books and podcasts we discussed today, there's going to be links to these on our website, along with other material for folks who want to explore the topic further. So for example, not only the photograph of the Milanese gunman, but also the Eco essay itself will be available. And yeah, so Jared, can as I ask you as our guest just to...recommend?

Jared Green: Sure, I guess what I would recommend. Maybe many of your listeners already know it. But it's such a touchstone of contemporary conversation about photography. I mean it's embedded in the discourse of how people write about photography now, whether they're critiquing it or not. Would be Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*. I think that if your listeners don't know it, it is a magnificent book. It's beautiful, it's heartbreaking. He wrote it after the death of his mother, and a lot of really has to do with... And we have a piece from that on our second part of the photography episode.

John Plotz: Yes, read by friend Daniel Itzkovits

Jared Green: Read by Daniel Itzkovitz. In his wonderful, plummy basso.

John Plotz: Plummy Basso Itzkovitz, that's what they call him. Yeah.

Jared Green: But that book is really magnificent. A way of introducing anybody to think about photography not just about what it delivers visually, but what kind of experiences it offers. And I can't recommend that highly enough.

John Plotz: Plus it has great [Robert] Mapplethorpe photographs in it.

Jared Green: Yes, that's right. That's right.

John Plotz: Armpits. I remember the armpits. Cool, that's great. And, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, so I'd like to recommend the work of Sarah Lewis, who's a professor at Harvard University. And I first learned about her work quite recently because of a *New York Times* Lens Blog article about photographs and race. Sort of speaking about how photographs tell arguments about how the kind of normal baseline of taking photographs became... *baked into* is the wrong term, but sort of baked into film photography, and she talks about this thing that I had never known about called the [Shirley Card](#), which is sort of baseline for measuring skin tone, which was the very fair skinned white woman who was putatively named Shirley. And she also, in particular, I'd also like to recommend an edited issue by Lewis of the magazine *Aperture* from Summer 2016 on vision and justice, which encapsulates a lot of these really fascinating issues about race and argument.

John Plotz: I learned recently she is one of four professors at Harvard who's working on Frederick Douglass photographs right now. Clearly there's the movement afloat. That's great. So, and I'm going to recommend on the other sort of side on our discussion, I'm actually going to recommend a different podcast, just because it has an acoustical environment that I really love. It's called The Habitat. It's I think a Gimlet show. And it follows, I want to say it's six, yes, it's six people who lock themselves up in a Mars dome simulacrum on a mountain in Hawaii. And it's part of the training to figure out what it's eventually going to be like to live on Mars. But so, it essentially allows us to have science-fictional sound, of people living inside a Mars dome, where you get to hear them putting on their spacesuits in order to go out and do walks through the volcanic landscape that they're in. And it's just kind of a paradise of sonic environment. And a total invitation to let's pretend, to imagining. I think it's a wonderful... It manages to be sort of a factual world-building exercise. I love it.

John Plotz: I think that brings us to the close of our very, very, very special *Recall this Book*. Recall this Book is hosted by John Plotz and Elizabeth Ferry. Sound editing is by Claire Ogden, web design and social media is done by Claire and Matthew Schratts. And future upcoming episodes include a conversation with the Chinese science fiction writer Cixin Liu, another with Zadie Smith, and one with the poet David Ferry and the biologist E.O Wilson. So finally if you enjoyed today's show, please be sure to tweet about us, mention the show on Facebook, or write a review and rate us on iTunes, Stitcher, or wherever you get your podcast. And please do check out the Electro-Library, really wonderful podcast. so thank you very much Jared and thanks to you all for listening.

Jared Green: Thank you both.