

Audio Nasty: Uncanny Sounds in The Work of Peter Strickland

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Introduction: A Hauntological Filmmaker?

If you listen to those sounds on loops they become spell-like. You look at the tape boxes, and they start to look like sigils or some kind of pagan symbol, especially if you are up too late. You can see why some of the sound mixers and engineers became alcoholics or turned to the occult.

Peter Strickland (Cummings 2012)

The work of filmmaker Peter Strickland provides an opportunity to discuss the connection between horror and sound in depth, specifically the manifold technologies that allow us to record, manipulate and replay sound. This paper focuses on his second feature film *Berberian Sound Studio* (2012) and *The Stone Tape* (2015), one of his works in radio drama, a field that has often been neglected by critics and scholars but which is now experiencing something of a rebirth due to the popularity of fictional podcasts (Brooks 2016).¹ Through a close examination of Strickland's work across two different media, I intend to show how sounds and their attendant recording technologies are used to manifest different aspects of the uncanny. Following the work of Mark Fisher (2012; 2017), I will divide these uncanny properties into *weird presences* and *eerie absences*, ultimately demonstrating how these sounds lead to an encounter with the unknown—perhaps the unknowable, a state I describe as being hauntological—for the protagonists of each story.

Strickland's three films released since 2009 have cemented his reputation as a cult filmmaker who reinterprets imagery and ideas from the far fringes of film culture—usually from the 1970s—using ‘trash’ to create art. *Katalin Varga* (2009) takes place in the Hungarian-speaking part of Romania, and is entirely in Hungarian. This is a revenge drama that references both the trashiest exploitation films of the 70s and the new waves that were

peaking in Eastern Europe at around that time. *Berberian Sound Studio* (2012) will be discussed at length here; it takes place within the claustrophobic confines of a film studio's post-production house and evokes the mood of the many Italian horror films of the period. Strickland's most recent film, *The Duke of Burgundy* (2014) melds the arthouse melodramas of Rainer Werner Fassbinder with the low-budget erotica of Jess Franco. In 2015, after the previous year's *The Duke of Burgundy*, Strickland turned away from filmmaking to make two radio dramas for the BBC: *The Len Continuum*, which re-teamed him with Toby Jones, the star of *Berberian Sound Studio*, for an awkward comedy of manners, and a new version of the classic horror story *The Stone Tape*.²

As the above attests, Strickland is a filmmaker of eclectic interests. Eclectic genre mash-ups such as those of Quentin Tarantino, Edgar Wright and many others are routinely called postmodern due to their eclectic cross-pollination of genres such as Kung-fu films and Westerns. Matthew Melia, author of one of the very few full-length English-language academic articles about Strickland's work, has described Strickland's work as postmodern (2017). I argue instead that Strickland's films are distinct from the genre-bending play of postmodernism, and are better seen as hauntological, which is to say they belong to a broad cultural movement that, in Simon Reynold's memorable phrase, 'doesn't leach off the past but allows the past to leak into it, to pass through in an almost mediumistic way' (2006: 32). Hauntology began as an academic inquiry, which, following on from Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* (1994), aimed to focus on the ways in which, in contrast to the then-fashionable notion of 'the end of history', past events and ideologies continue to inform and control the present, often shoring up absences such as injustices that are yet to be set right. As Avery Gordon puts it in her influential book *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*: 'Haunting is a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither premodern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is generalisable social phenomenon of great import. To study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it' (1997: 7).

Musicians and other artists began to agree, to probe the ghostly aspects of music and popular culture, and to use everyday sounds (such as the library music commonly used in public information films, schools' television programmes and other quotidian audiovisual products) and imagery from the recent past to evoke memories in their listeners, offsetting these sounds with a sense of unease or dischord. Many such musicians release their work through the record label Ghost Box Recordings.³ Julian House of Ghost Box designed many of *Berberian Sound Studio*'s posters, and also contributed to the title sequence of the film-within-a-film *The Equestrian Vortex* (Bonner 2012). But aside from this literal connection,

much if not all of Strickland's work can be described as hauntological, as it mines the far-flung corners of film culture to create a pastiche that is melancholic. His engagement with hauntology gives his work an in-between-ness that is primed to unleash the uncanny in a way that more clearly defined as high or low film culture work cannot.

Berberian Sound Studio exemplifies this interstitial way of working: it uses tropes from Italian *giallo* film but combines them with an increasingly abstract narrative more commonly found in high modernist filmmaking of the same period. In the film, Gilderoy, a mild-mannered British sound engineer from Dorking, arrives in Italy to work on the sound mix of a new film. He soon discovers that the film is a horror film filled with violent and disturbing scenes, none of which we the viewers are ever subjected to. Gilderoy expects his flight to be reimbursed, but everyone at the studio is either oblivious or unhelpful, creating a Kafkaesque sense of impenetrable bureaucracy. In this stifling atmosphere, Gilderoy meets the producer Francesco, the director Santini, and various voice actors, and soon finds himself chopping fruit and vegetables, recording human screams, mapping every sound effect, and observing the intrigues of the sound studio. References to mysterious reasons as to why the production company chose Gilderoy to work on the film, and the fact that the flight he arrived on seem not to exist (compounding problems with his reimbursement) add an unsettling level of unreality. One of the voice actresses, Silvia (Fatma Mohamed), accuses Santini of using her, and leaves, unravelling many of the tapes in an act of revenge. This forces the sound studio to hire Elisa (Chiara D'Anna) whose screen test—for a voiceover artist—confirms for us that Francesco and Santini's intentions are less than professional.

Eventually, as Gilderoy's mental state worsens, the film itself becomes more abstract; we become less sure of our sense of time. Unable to sleep, in his nocturnal ramblings Gilderoy enters a screening room and sees himself on screen, dubbed into Italian. The film burns up in the projector in an avant-garde sequence before giving way to a pastoral documentary (with sound, we presume, by Gilderoy). After this, things seem even more eerie. Gilderoy seems changed, and can speak Italian. In this new reconfiguration, he finds himself going from bemused observer to willing sadist, torturing Elisa with a deafening high pitched tone in her headphones.⁴ The film ends with Gilderoy staring at a blank screen, eerie sound effects and music playing.

The Stone Tape originated as Nigel Kneale script given TV play direction by Peter Sasdy in 1972, and has recorded sound and repetition at its heart: in the original version, a team of sound engineers working on new recording techniques, decamp to a country mansion where they intend to house their new research facility. The place is haunted, and the team

realise that the recurring disembodied woman's scream haunting is less a malevolent spirit than a recording of a traumatic event, a maid falling to her death a century earlier, which they set out to study with the aim of monetising it in order to trounce their Japanese competitors. The trauma caused by ghost's presence, and perhaps more importantly the constant pressures of the male dominated work environment, lead to the worsening mental state of Jill (Jane Asher in the original, Romola Garai in the updated version) the team's sole female member.

Experimenting with the room, the engineers wipe the scream from the 'tape', which unlocks a terrifying primal sound recorded underneath. When Jill hears this, she falls from a flight of steps in the haunted room, repeating the death of the woman who became the original ghost. Jill's boss and lover Brock (Michael Bryant), is tortured by both the primal rumblings and of Jill's scream, added to the tape. As in *Berberian Sound Studio*, there is a central character having a mental breakdown while surrounded by audio technology, a claustrophobic working environment hostile to women, and an uncanny, unseen object or event at the heart of the story: while in *Berberian Sound Studio* all activity is clustered around the unseen film *The Equestrian Vortex*, *The Stone Tape's* characters are obsessed over a sound for which no source is ever witnessed.

Because *The Stone Tape* deals directly with traumatic events being replayed, and ultimately with palimpsests of trauma, a remake seems fitting, and as it deals particularly and precisely with sound, a radio remake was apposite. In this later version, the characters aren't audio technicians but miners working on new sonic techniques for breaking rocks. It's still the 1970s, but later, just a few months before the start of the 1980s, and the link to mining recalls the coming conflict between the British government and the miners which proved death knell of the postwar settlement. Strickland's *The Stone Tape* is scaled back to a handful of characters, backstories removed, and the most significant change is the ending: after Jill's death, Leo Cripps (an updated Brock, played by Julian Rhind-Tutt) isn't tortured by the sounds recorded in the room. In a melancholy gesture, he plays his own recording of Jill's final scream back into the room, cumulatively adding more room tone each time until the scream becomes abstracted.

Uncanny, Weird, and Eerie Sounds

Freud's ultimate settling of the enigma of the unheimlich - his claim that it can be reduced to castration anxiety - is as disappointing as any mediocre genre detective's rote solution to a mystery. (Mark Fisher, *The Weird and The Eerie* 2016)

Since Sigmund Freud consolidated ideas about the term in 1919, the *uncanny* has been used to refer to a wide variety of media phenomenon that play on the tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar, from its literary ur-text, E.T.A. Hoffman's *The Sandman* (Nicholas Royle unpacks Freud's analysis of the Hoffmann story in his book *The Uncanny*) to contemporary ideas about realism in robotics and AI (In the Anglophone world, these have been steadily growing in number since Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori's work on "the uncanny valley" was translated into English in 2005 (Lay 2015). Angela Tinwell (2014) has used the notion of the uncanny in relation to computer games and animation as they are capable of producing yet more realistic representations of people that nonetheless remain somehow unrealistic. In the hard sciences, work is being done that attempts to explain the uncanny feelings that many people experience day-to-day (Ananthaswamy 2014) in terms of our information processing abilities. Freud's own definition, a haunting experience that allows repressed anxieties or traumas to return, which can therefore expose them to study and therapy, and which are, for Freud, ultimately sexual in nature and based around castration anxiety, has recently lost ground within the humanities to other definitions of the uncanny that resist this narrative.

Rather than seeing the uncanny as a riddle that can be solved, Mark Fisher's book *The Weird and the Eerie* (2016) considers the uncanny as something that resists settling, that sits outside explanation. Since Fisher emphasises what he calls the outside, implicating things that are to us unknowable and which are, or verge on, the sublime, he points out that better translation of the German term Freud used, *unheimlich*, would be 'unhomely'. He goes on to argue that Freud's influential work has 'crowded out' the weird and the eerie. He treats the weird and the eerie at times as something apart from the uncanny, and at other times as subdivisions of it. For Fisher the weird denotes things that are present that should not be there. When something new, or something that defies understanding, appears in the midst of the everyday, creating a sense of wrongness, then we are in the realm of the weird: 'if the entity or object is here, then the categories which we have up until now used to make sense of the world cannot be valid. The weird thing is not wrong, after all: it is our conceptions that must be inadequate' (loc. 105). Examples of the weird from film and literature that Fisher cites include writers H.P. Lovecraft and Phillip K. Dick, and the filmmaker and artist David Lynch.

In contrast to the weird, the eerie is defined by unsettling absences. Imagine a once-busy town, deserted, emptied of people. If the weird is fairly easily apprehended by considering the work of the artists listed above, then the eerie is a somewhat more slippery

concept, and is presented as such by Fisher. Examples Fisher discusses include Nigel Kneale and Joan Lindsay, and the filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky. In addition, Fisher notes the particularly eerie effects of architectural ruins, and comments: 'whether there was an agent behinds [the ruin's] construction or not does not arise; what we have to reckon with are the traces of a departed agent whose purposes are unknown' (2016: 33). I link this notion to audio recording/playback technology, and to what film theorist Michel Chion (2009), following the composer Pierre Schaeffer, calls a 'sound object', a thing or place whence the sound originated. Recording technology mediates between the two, effectively removing the sound object from the equation, making it a departed agent, as the player becomes the source of the recorded sound.

As David Toop points out in his book *Sinister Resonance: The Mediumship of the Listener* (2010), the uncanny has usually been conceived of as a visual mode; things that look out of place, unsettling, grotesque, and so on. As a result the uncanny properties of sound and of recording technology have often been neglected. 'The propensity for sound to summon or accompany uncanny sensations or atmospheres only fitfully in the extensive literature devoted to Freud's essay ... invariably its significance is set aside for more ocular concerns' (2010: 126). He argues that 'the intangibility of sound is uncanny' (ix), and like Fisher, finds Freud's attempt at settling the uncanny to be unsatisfactory. Furthermore, he insists that sound is a kind of haunting, a play between presence and absence.

Jeffrey Sconce (2000) suggests that we often perceive media technology as having some kind of power or indescribable presence, and that this perception allows spiritualistic, metaphysical, and philosophical ways of thinking to come to the fore. 'Why is it, after 150 years of electronic communication, we still so often ascribe mystical powers to what are ultimately very material technologies?' he asks (2000: 6). Strickland too frequently evokes such powers, notably when he compares looping tapes to spells and the symbols on tape boxes to occult sigils. Sconce calls the invention of wireless radio a 'bittersweet presence, one that evoked a [...] melancholy realm of abandoned bodies and dispersed consciousness' (14). This is particularly relevant to *The Stone Tape*, a radio play about a disembodied scream featuring at one point radio with a life of its own.

The two works discussed in this article turn on phenomena that resist explanation, and play with presences that don't belong and unexplainable absences. Following Toop's notion that there can be something especially uncanny about sound, especially when it appears disembodied, Sconce's suggestion that we frequently perceive electronic technology as sinister, and Fisher's division of the uncanny into weird presences and eerie absences, I will

closely read *Berberian Sound Studio* and *The Stone Tape* for weird presences and eerie absences, and discuss the sublime terrors that these works evoke in their protagonists.

Weird Presences

The world of sound awaits you ... a world that requires all your magic powers...

(Francesco, *Berberian Sound Studio*)

The weirdest presence in *Berberian Sound Studio* is Gilderoy, the film's protagonist. As a fish out of water, a shy Englishman plunged into the subculture of Italy's then-thriving horror film industry, he is a presence that doesn't belong. But he's also the only man for the job; the film's producer and director adamantly but mysteriously insist. Furthermore, Gilderoy is presented as having an unusual affinity with sound, such as when he turns a broken lightbulb into a haunting, theremin-like musical instrument.

In *Berberian Sound Studio* both the film and the eponymous setting have a claustrophobic feel. Almost the entire narrative takes place in (and just outside) the eponymous studio. There are no establishing shots of Rome; the metropolitan glamour of *La Dolce Vita* (Fellini 1960) is not something Gilderoy was fated to experience. Instead he arrives, a weird presence, suitcase in hand, to find a series of antiseptic corridors where distant sounds reverberate. The screams from other horror films in post-production reverberate down these corridors, and every small movement creates jarring sounds. These disembodied screams are the first clue that something is out of joint in Gilderoy's world, since the screams are without a clear sound object. At this stage, Gilderoy believes that the horror film he has come to Italy to work on, *The Equestrian Vortex*, is a documentary about horses, which is understandable since he usually works on public information style-films with pastoral themes. In the opening scene, a clear outsider with distant, disembodied screams reverberating around him, he is presented as a consummate weird presence.

As Melia points out, the camera lingers on the analogue recording equipment at the studio: spools of tape, chunky plastic buttons, arrays of knobs, and Gilderoy's detailed diagrams for the film's sound. Melia calls them 'alchemist's tools' adding that 'Gilderoy has almost occult mastery and power over sound' (2017) and noting that after Gilderoy seems to change, these same fetishised machines will become the torture apparatus used on the female voiceover artists. In addition, Gilderoy's mastery of sound extends to spoken language, as towards the end of the film he suddenly gains the ability to speak fluent Italian. Further, the

change in Gilderoy seems to come after he sees himself (another weird presence; Freud (2003: 161) noted the significance of the doppelganger for the uncanny) on-screen speaking Italian, his non-screen self soon has that ability, and he is changed; more desperate and sadistic.

There are two more weird presences in *Berberian Sound Studio*: the inclusion—or perhaps the intrusion—of the ‘Box Hill’ documentary which Gilderoy worked on prior to his trip to Italy, and Gilderoy's breakdown, during which the film takes on more avant-garde characteristics and sheds its commitment to narrative,. The two presences/intrusions are intertwined: the documentary is only seen towards the end of the film, after Gilderoy sees himself dubbed into Italian on the screen, and the film explodes into more abstract territory. Jerky images coupled with analogue distorted noise flicker across the screen; bits of Italian dialogue that at times seems to be playing backwards are heard on the soundtrack. Then the film itself seems to burn up, directly on a picture of Gilderoy, before giving way, as if the "true" film were somehow lurking directly beneath the one we'd been watching, to part of a nature documentary, the kind we're given to understand that Gilderoy is more comfortable working on. The narration, bucolic sound effects (by this point, and given the surrounding context, it's hard not to pay attention to the birdsong and babbling stream as being meticulously chosen, constructed and overlaid) soon give way to another weird, intrusive presence: a too-loud pealing of church bells, which drown out the narrator, before our suspicions seem confirmed (close-up of a reel-to-reel tape recorder with the reels in motion) and we see Gilderoy reading the final, unsettling piece of correspondence from his mother, in which she tells him that the birds nesting in her garden, a major component of her previous letters, have all been killed by magpies.

In the context of what has gone before, Gilderoy's Box Hill film seems every bit as sinister as *The Equestrian Vortex*. Further, as the camera pans along the banks of a stream, we come to the realisation that the babbling water and chirping birds we hear aren't contiguous with—or don't originate with—the bucolic landscape we see on screen. What we are hearing is precisely the expert foley work that Gilderoy has been hired for. Even the sound effects that Gilderoy uses to simulate of homeliness are now unhomely and weird.

From its outset, Strickland's *The Stone Tape* announces its theme of the manipulability of sound. As with *Berberian Sound Studio*, the play begins in an editing suite, presaging the collapsing of the non-diegetic into the diegetic, which happens moments into the production as the theme music is soon revealed to be background music for a promotional film being made under Leo's direction. Leo's confident, paternalistic tone and assured

vocabulary as he narrates, evokes the Public Information Films of the 1970s - the kind we can imagine Gilderoy constructing the sound for. Meanwhile the music is precisely the sort of bland library music beloved by hauntologists. As his aide Cleft (Tom Bennett) bursts into laughter and the tape comes crashing to a halt, we realise the thinly constructed veneer of professionalism and the time-sensitive use of such music. 'I don't want something that says 1979', Leo says, wishing instead for grander, more timeless music such as Strauss or Orff—invoking the big budget science fiction of Stanley Kubrick, with its once-eerie sense of grandeur become camp with the passage of time, while it is precisely the quotidian nature of library music that has given it an eerie power with time's passing.

In *The Stone Tape*, the ghost is less an undead entity seeking revenge or rest and more a disembodied entity. It's through technology that the entity foreshadows its own entrance into the drama; the radio is twice left on by an unexplained presence. The second time, Acker Bilk's 'Strangers on the Shore' drained of its presence, like something from James Kirby's Caretaker music project (see in particular *An Empty Bliss Beyond This World* 2011) can be heard. Once again, the presence/absence of music that Toop invokes is being played with. Another technological presence added for Strickland's version is the sonic drill, which we hear twice before the ghost appears. The sound it makes provides a kind of tension that's both mechanical and supernatural. It drowns out the voices of the actors with its rumbling, undulating sounds, in a foreshadowing the drama's abstract ending. In fact, the tape player in the opening scene, the ghostly behaviour of the radio, and the sonic drill all foreshadow the central weird presence in *The Stone Tape*: the ghostly scream that the engineers hear in the basement of the building where they work. In Strickland's version the scream is 'wild': we don't know how where it originated or if it really is a human scream. In contrast, Nigel Kneale's version has a spectral servant whence the scream originates, and who we see on screen. The film gradually reveals a rap sheet of hauntings; two exorcisms, centuries apart, a note from a scared child to Father Christmas, an African American GI who visited the building during World War II and found it infested with 'duppies' and a child who played in the building while it was abandoned, committed to a mental hospital as a result of what he saw there. Finally, the maid, the most recent addition to the tape, possibly falls to her death in fright at all the previous things recorded onto the tape. The scream doesn't, as we initially assume, originate with the supernatural entity; it's merely another effect of it.

Shorn of this genealogy, the scream in Strickland's *Stone Tape* is just *there*, without explanation; it is a weird presence. Because of this lack of history in Strickland's version, the objective of the research team becomes to 'tame' the scream, to understand it and to place it

in context. Discussing how to capture the scream, Cripps comments that ‘Nobody gets spooked by the voice of someone deceased when on tape or on the radio. It’s archived and organised, whereas what we have in that cellar is wild and unknown.’ Cripps’s attempts to archive the scream result in the tragic denouement of the play - and in an eerie absence.

Eerie Absences

‘What we have in that cellar is wild and unknown’
(Cripps, *The Stone Tape*)

The flipside of these presences (Gilderoy, the scientists and their equipment, and the strange intrusions of the scream and the Box Hill film) is the eerie absences that they create. Strickland’s *Stone Tape* takes the notion of a sound object to an intertextual level—the object is the original, audiovisual version of *The Stone Tape*, now semi-present, semi-absent in relation to the new version. Further, while Kneale provides a long history for the ghost in his original version, Strickland presents the ghost as even more unknowable, cipher-like.

Kneale’s *The Stone Tape* cued the scream with a superimposed image of a nineteenth century maid ascending the stairs and falling. Thus, initially the scientists (and especially Jill) see the ghostly presence and the maid’s death scream as synonymous. When their meddling wipes the tape they create an absence, but this absence is merely a void that allows something else to creep in. Fisher’s reading of the original *The Stone Tape* stresses the ‘senseless repetition’ of the story, humans directed against their own agency to repeat their mistakes (2017: 44). In contrast, Strickland’s version shows how an initially weird presence leads to the eerie absence of Jill, which Cripps can only attempt to replace with more and more spectral sounds. This absence is facilitated by technology and deterioration. Strickland claims that his version of *The Stone Tape* is as influenced by experimental composers and performers such as Cathy Berberian and Alvin Lucier as it was by Kneale’s original teleplay. While Berberian has been described in terms redolent of the uncanny by critics (‘what Berberian did was to make the unnatural natural’, in the words of critic Mark Swed 2013), Lucier’s work was a particular influence.

The Stone Tape’s final scene was inspired by Lucier’s ‘I Am Sitting In A Room’ (1969), a piece in which Lucier did something similar: he recorded himself reading a short text, then played that recording and recorded it, and again, until the spoken words were no longer audible but rhythm and tone take precedence. Lucier’s experiment was generally seen in its time as a formal - yet highly sensuous, almost tactile—experiment in an undervalued

property of music and sound: room tone. Strickland adds a thematic charge: Unable to cope with his emotions and transgressions, he resorts to recording technology to repress and bury them. However, in doing so, he hopes that each repetition will soothe his nerves. The sudden intake of breath, no longer deteriorated by room tone, implies that this repression is ultimately impossible.⁵

While in the original, the adulterous Brock gets a kind of comeuppance when he is exposed to Jill's final screams added to the 'tape' playing on a loop, Strickland's version has a different take on it: Aware that his wife will see him break down at the funeral, Leo plans an alternative funeral of his own - playing the recording of Jill's death back into the room so that the room tone will 'bury' her. As a result, the final sequence, in a highly abstract move for a narrative radio drama, is Jill's scream repeated, with more room tone added each time until it becomes a distant, abstract noise. In response to being told that Jill's body is with the coroner, Cripps retorts: 'That's not a body; that's Jill.' Leo fixates on the idea that that it is Jill's voice that needs to be buried. He says wants to 'pay his respects' by playing her final tape back into the room, so that 'the room will bury her.' His aural idea of a burial results in what must be one of radio drama's most chilling and experimental sequences—an almost two-and-a-half-minute sequence in which Jill's death throes repeat several times, each time deteriorating, changing. This feels less like a respectful act and more like one of control and distance. As Miriama Young (2016) notes, 'even under severe manipulation, the voice tends to sound its presence' (2016 n. pag.); this means that we are all too aware that we are hearing Jill's voice, even as Leo tries to distance himself, and the dialectic of presence/absence continues to assert itself.

Meanwhile in *Berberian Sound Studio*, the film-within-a-film *The Equestrian Vortex* is largely an absence, apart from the tantalising glimpse we get of the film's title sequence. What we get instead is the labour that goes into creating the illusion of the sound/sound object relationship in film. Watermelons are hacked up in place of bodily dismemberment, leeks are pulled apart as a stand-in for scalping. Beyond this, *Berberian Sound Studio* is less concerned with absences than it is with the disjunct between sound and its sound object.

This leads us to consider the film's roots in the world of giallo and what later became known as 'video nasty.' Italian horror films were sometimes exhibited on British screens in the sixties and seventies, jockeying for attention alongside other fare. However, it wasn't until moral panic about what became known as 'video nasties' from 1982-1984 (Petley 2011) was underway that these films came to the attention of a wider audience. The new medium of home video allowed violent horror films and other unregulated content into people's homes,

and concerned forces marshalled to ban them. Several Italian horror films were on the list. As Italian cinema scholar Stephen Thrower notes, the Italian approach to film sound was a contributing factor. He comments:

That so many of the titles on the banned list were Italian is no accident...the Italian horror films, full of foreigners whose lips couldn't speak proper English even if their voices did, were easily defined as 'other'. (1999: 21)

The dubbing, the disjunct between the character's mouth movements and the sounds that appear to be emanating from them, and the unnatural speech patterns caused by the voice actors attempts to fit their dialogue round the mouth movements of the actors. Yet despite *Berberian Sound Studio* dealing with a milieu used to dealing with eccentrically synched sound, Strickland has claimed: 'We did cheat and extend a bit, but every single sound in the film comes from a source, the whole paradox being that we're making a film about non-diegetic sound' (Cummings 2012).

Conclusion: The Weird, The Eerie and The Hauntological Sublime

What is important about the figure of the specter, then, is that it cannot be fully present: it has no being in itself but marks a relation to what is no longer or not not yet.

(Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*)

As Fisher has argued, there is more to the uncanny than Freud's insistence that the phenomena can be put down to castration anxiety. Audio technology, with its power to spook us with replayed voices and chill us with manipulated and replayed sounds, will continue to remind us of this, particularly with contributions of artists such as Strickland, with their intensely reflexive films and audio works. The weird presences in *Berberian Sound Studio* and *The Stone Tape* create eerie absences that have uncanny effects on both the viewer and the protagonist; in both works, scientifically-minded people with mastery of technology eventually discover, through their encounter with uncanny audio, that there is something outside of their knowledge and control, something that ultimately overwhelms the narrative. Throughout both works, sound—and the technologies that allow for its replication and manipulation—facilitate strange presences, eerie absences, and uncanny disjunctions. These

allow us to creatively engage with the past, re-working it as we replay it, and to produce works that, while haunted by the past, might progress ever differently.

¹ Many such podcasts have a strong horror and/or uncanny element. Of particular note is *Akiha Den Den* (Neil Cargill, 2016-) which describes itself as ‘a story woven from the very fabric of radio’ in which a ham radio enthusiast begins to pick up strange signals from people trapped in an abandoned amusement park.

² In addition to his work in film, Strickland has been a member of The Sonic Catering Band since 1996, a group that uses kitchen-based field recordings to create unsettling soundscapes.

³ See Sexton (2012) for a detailed discussion of hauntology, Ghost Box Recordings, and the sense of alternative heritage created by these musicians. It is worth noting that Strickland too creates an alternative heritage through his reconfiguration of often-forgotten yet crucial moments in film history.

⁴ This sequence recalls certain parts of the original *The Stone Tape*: both Jill's initial discovery of the ghostly sound, and the film's ending, in which Brock is tortured by Jill's scream.

⁵ Cripps hints at this when he calls the phenomenon in the basement ‘wild’; it's wild in the sense of a malevolent presence, but also wild in the sense of a ‘wild track’, the room tone that is recorded separately and then added to create a smooth aural atmosphere.

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