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The Amplify Manifesto: Rewind, Replay, Reflect

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Abstract

We are the Amplify Podcast Network, a research project working to develop sustainable models for producing, peer-reviewing, and publishing scholarly podcasts. The Amplify Manifesto aims to capture the spirit of our network: playful, experimental, and multi-voiced. As a radically political written form, the manifesto provides a creative ground to communicate a set of ideals, goals, and intentions with purpose. In revisiting the manifesto for Radio Doc Review, we unpack the construction of the manifesto as sound-first multimodal scholarship.

Keywords

academic publishing, podcast scholarship, open access, soundwork

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Today, many universities are championing the cause of engaging the public and exploring alternative avenues for research dissemination, yet the conventional written text – especially when peer-reviewed and published in a prestigious (and often paywalled) journal – still overwhelmingly represents what is considered thorough academic work. Leading thinkers on multimodal publishing, like Douglas Eyman and Cheryl Ball (2022), see this prioritization of closed-access research articles as a continued gatekeeping of knowledge within the academy, contrasting it with the possibilities of fostering accessible and collaborative pedagogical communities. Similarly, scholars such as Wulff-Wathne (2021) and Fábos and Haddad (2014) have called for a feminist critique of how power and privilege influence academic bibliometrics and the progression of academic careers. How might we communicate our research by centring accessibility and sound-first creativity? While we recognize this route is not always fitting for every research project, we hope the greater *RadioDoc Review* community, reading our reflections here, might find resonances with the possibilities of transformative scholarly communication and sound-based scholarship.

We are the [Amplify Podcast Network](#), a research project funded by the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, working to develop sustainable models for producing, peer-reviewing, and publishing scholarly podcasts. The Amplify project has been an ongoing experiment since 2019 to discover the challenges and the possibilities latent in new media scholarly communication in general, and digital soundworks in particular. In our work on podcasting as scholarship through Amplify, we have written widely on the importance of sound-first and multimodal approaches to academic publishing (Beckstead, Cook & McGregor, 2024; Copeland & McGregor, 2020; Copeland & McGregor, 2021).

As part of the discovery process for this project, Amplify co-director Stacey Copeland has been conducting a series of interviews since 2021 for the [Amplified](#) audio blog series. We first featured project collaborators and, more recently, the series expanded to a broader range of podcasters and open-access advocates, including open-access expert Juan Pablo Alperin (Simon Fraser University), rapper and hip hop scholar A.D. Carson (University of Virginia), and *Academic Aunties* host Ethel Tungohan (York University). Through these interviews, Copeland created a

sound archive that documents our collective and networked thinking as we consider how scholarly podcasting might create space for academia done otherwise.

These interviews became the building blocks for our network manifesto, a collaboratively voiced soundwork articulating the core values of the Amplify Podcast Network: *we believe that scholarly podcasts create new knowledge, out loud and in conversation, by embracing experimentation, making space for different voices, and building new communities through collaboration and openness.* The structure of the manifesto treats this sentence as a thesis statement, but also as a trunk out of which many branches can emerge and many perspectives blossom.

Why a manifesto? As a radically political written form, the manifesto provides a creative ground to communicate a set of ideals, goals, and intentions with purpose. We wanted to articulate Amplify's core values, and we wanted that articulation to model our argument – that is, we wanted it to be a soundwork itself. As a multimodal work, the Amplify manifesto also became a generative way to put our words into action by thinking about accessibility, creative experimentation, and interdisciplinary audiences right from the start.

In revisiting the manifesto for *Radio Doc Review* alongside our newest network member, sound artist and Master's student Natalie Dusek, we unpack the construction of the manifesto as sound-first multimodal scholarship. First, Hannah rewinds to the initial writing and multimedia brainstorming process. Second, Natalie replays the manifesto through their fresh perspective. Lastly, Stacey reflects on audio production and the challenges encountered in that process. We invite you into this open space to garner interest and support for alternative forms of scholarship that embrace the playful, experimental, and multi-voiced.

[Listen to the Amplify Manifesto here](#)

Hannah McGregor: Scrolling back through the [google doc](#) in which the manifesto first took form, we arrived at three questions that shaped everything that followed: What is scholarship for? *Who* is scholarship for? And how do we decide what counts as scholarly? These questions, broad as they may seem, also get to the heart of the intervention the Amplify Podcast Network is seeking to make – or perhaps it's more accurate to say it's an intervention that we're seeking to contribute to as part of a

vast range of scholarly initiatives challenging traditional definitions of scholarliness. These are inherently political interventions rooted in a commitment to public, accessible and creative approaches to scholarly communication that break down conventional barriers between university and community. Not all of these interventions are rooted in sound, of course, but at Amplify, we believe digital soundworks can be particularly effective mediums for breaking down conventional barriers.

As we began to piece together the manifesto's text, we moved interview quotations around to see what might fit our claims while also pleasing our ears. And very quickly, we began to discuss exactly how this soundwork should, well, *sound*. In the margins, Hannah and Stacey added sound notes. Next to "create new knowledge," for example, Hannah wrote: "Sound: aha moments. People realizing things in real-time. Kind of 'oh, oh, oh, that makes me think of this' energy" (hear one of the ways Stacey interpreted these notes at 1:09). Next to "different voices" Hannah wrote: "Sound: idiosyncratic modes of expression, people's unique verbal tics or turns of phrase, vocal fry and multiply accented English" (heard at 3:48). These notes then guided Stacey's production process as they began to turn our document into a soundwork.

We also asked ourselves how the manifesto might circulate through our various communities. Transcription would be essential, we knew, because the layered and multi-voiced soundwork we were imagining tended more towards the expressive than the communicative, creating a potential barrier to access for some listeners. Accessibility is a core value of Amplify as a project. We were also familiar with the challenges of circulating an audio file, particularly in an increasingly fragmented and noisy digital landscape. We imagined speaking to a colleague at a conference and saying, "Hey, you should check out our manifesto." In that moment, what would we hand them? A business card with a QR code on it? A flash drive?

We decided both to create a plain-text transcript for accessibility and to remediate the manifesto as a zine, a physical object we could more easily carry around, hand out, or even leave in coffee shops or libraries. It was important, though, that the zine capture the spirit of the manifesto. To realize this vision, we approached Lauren Jeanneau, then a student in SFU's Master of Publishing program, now the Production and Design Coordinator at Fernwood Publishing. Working with the

established styles of Amplify, including our fonts and colour schemes, Lauren crafted a booklet that visually and typographically reproduces the aesthetics of the manifesto. Natalie, who you'll hear from next, is the newest member of the Amplify team. We asked Natalie to share their thoughts on the manifesto as a way to get familiar with the Amplify project, and as a chance to have fresh ears approach the work in dialogue with my and Stacey's practice of listening back.

Natalie Dusek: In coming to this manifesto as a first-time listener and sound studies student, I was immediately drawn into the manifesto's powerfully emotional and energetic tone. The lush multifaceted layers of voices and music bring about the feeling of stepping into another world.

The use of audio as a mechanism for dispersing ideas is here an accessible one. For those who don't have academic backgrounds in the typical sense, audio methods can be a more accessible way to understand ideas. Traditional academic texts are often inaccessible due to language and style choices, making them unapproachable for people not trained in academia or whose first language is not English. In Amplify's manifesto, accessible and understandable language is used, paired with editing choices, making it an engaging and clear way to share disseminated information. Additionally, the choice to make both a zine and a PDF transcript available increases the accessibility of this manifesto. These choices to increase accessibility hold up many of the reasons Amplify Podcast Network's podcasters, myself included, came to the format of podcasting itself— for its accessibility to the public.

As listeners, as opposed to solely readers of the manifesto, we are placed into a collective audience. Through the manifesto's chorus of voices, the listener feels themselves as part of this chorus. As opposed to traditional scholarship, where papers are read silently and alone, the act of listening to Amplify's manifesto creates a collective environment. When listening back to the audio manifesto alongside the printed zine, I can see and hear the synchronicities between the printed work and the audio itself. As Hannah mentions above, unique and varied voices are used to model the arguments of the manifesto. The phrase "making space for different voices" is accompanied by many people saying the phrase together. In the first half of the manifesto, a curious and playful soundtrack lies behind the voices, showing the sense of exploration and wonder that is being discussed. The music is paired

with explanations of the "why" of scholarly podcasting, showing that scholarly work can simultaneously be both serious and whimsical. Laughter is also present in this section, showing that there can be joy found in this approach to scholarly work. The multifaceted, layered vocals used throughout invoke strength in community, exemplifying the Amplify Podcast Network's playful power, potential, and momentum.

Stacey Copeland: What does community 'consensus building' sound like? How about 'expressions of failure' or 'moments of realization and connection'? The polyvocality of the Amplify Manifesto, noted by Hannah and Natalie and essential to the project, was also one of the biggest challenges in the production process. Each of our core network team members recorded themselves reading our manifesto statement and choosing their own vocal performance. While some recorded in a studio, others were on the go and had to use their phones. For me, this variation in sound and place sparked play with the idea of Amplify as a community across geographies. I led with Hannah's voice as an original co-director behind the network. From there, it was about finding a balance where the words were still clear while also playing with the sound and personality each network member brought to the work.

With the manifesto phrases in place, I began to choose processing effects to help accentuate each one. For example, I chose to use a tempo-based reverb and varied speed delay on a selection of phrases to help evoke the idea of scholarly podcasting as a way of hearing each other across time. The outlining process Hannah and I used to choose phrases from the *Amplified* interviews resulted in 24 voice clips for use in the manifesto. Sequenced under a portion of our core thesis, voiced by our core membership – such as "by embracing experimentation" or "and building new communities" – I carefully arranged the guest clips across the stereo audio field to mimic the dualistic experience of listening to a podcast while also thinking your own thoughts or recalling the past words of others.

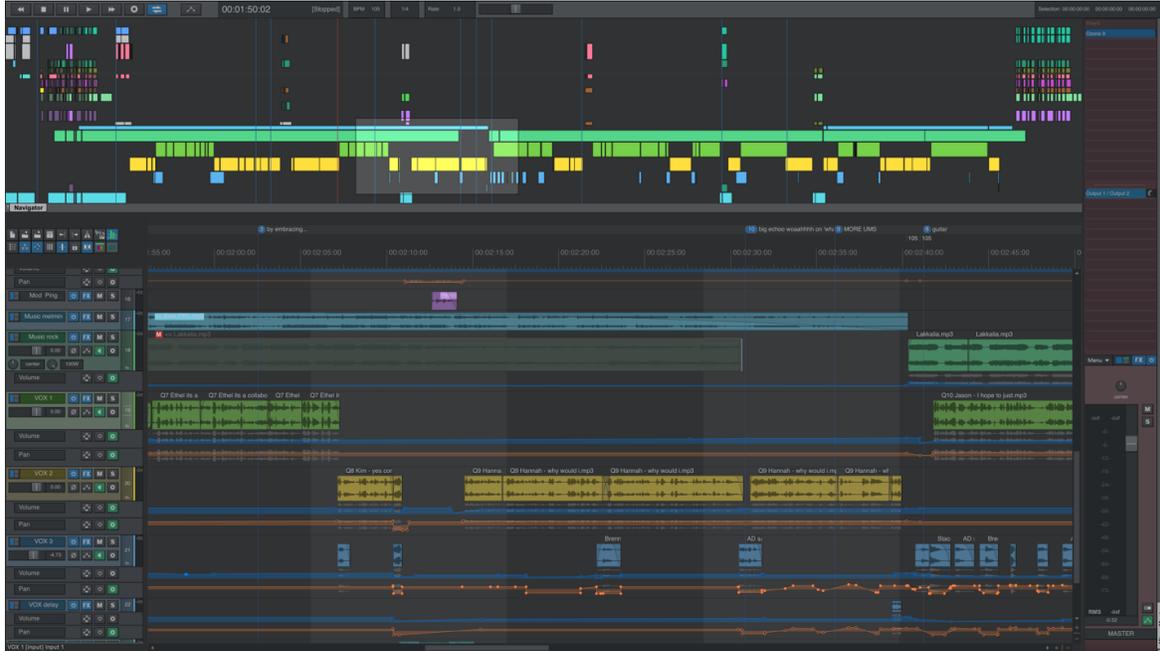


Figure 1. Reaper screenshot of Audio Manifesto Production Process

Assembled in Reaper (a sound editing program or DAW), this careful blend of processing and music placement to accent words throughout the manifesto was a meticulous and joyful process in equal measure. I audio edit with our network's feminist and queer roots always present, negotiating a balance of voices, reflecting on who takes up space, and assessing how to best bring us all into conversation in a way that celebrates both our individual and collective work. If the Amplify manifesto gets one thing across, it is this love for community through sound.

There is a truism amongst those who produce experimental scholarly communication that, for each experimental output, you must produce something more traditional – a journal article or a monograph – that legitimizes that more experimental work, framing it in a way that our institutions and disciplines can understand. We believe that scholarly podcasts produce rigorous scholarship in and of themselves and bring something new into scholarship, something that cannot be fully expressed outside of the soundwork itself. Listen to the Amplify Manifesto and see if you agree.

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Hannah McGregor is co-director of the Amplify Podcast Network. They are an Associate Professor of Publishing at Simon Fraser University, Canada, where their research focuses on the intersections of publishing and social change, with a focus on scholarly podcasting. She cohosts *Material Girls*, a pop culture podcast that

uses critical theory to understand the zeitgeist, and *The SpokenWeb Podcast*, a collaborative research output of the SSHRC-funded SpokenWeb partnership. Their books include *A Sentimental Education* (WLUP 2022), *Podcast or Perish: Peer Review and Knowledge Creation for the 21st century*, co-authored with Lori Beckstead and Ian M. Cook (Bloomsbury 2024), and *Clever Girl*, a queer feminist reevaluation of *Jurassic Park* (ECW 2024).

Natalie Dusek is a Masters student in Communications at Simon Fraser University focusing on the interactions between sound, queerness and technology. Dusek is Amplify Podcast Network's project assistant and an Associate Editor of *Stream: Interdisciplinary Journal of Communication*.