

## **The uses of imperfections: Communicating affect through the lo fi podcast**

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### **Abstract:**

This essay considers podcasting as arts-based media capable of communicating the affective dimensions of active body contexts to listening audiences. We argue that the incorporation of arts-based forms of music and soundscape expands the opportunities for listeners to be *moved* by the podcast production, increasing the possibility of an affective listening experience and helping the listener experience the sensual dimensions of embodiment through a non-representational mode of communication. To substantiate this argument, we draw from our personal experience developing an arts-based podcast series on research on sport, physical activity, and physical culture. We embraced low fidelity or 'lo fi' production methods, using reverberating and noise-based aspects of the recording process to enhance each episode's affective potential and affectively complement discussions of sport and physical activity. Approaching podcasting as sound art, we interwove interview audio, recorded ambient sound, and lo fi music to produce an affective aural atmosphere as well as communicate critical research on contexts of sport and physical activity. We argue that a lo fi, arts-based approach to podcasting, alternative to the traditional text-based publishing formats of the academy, can help academics and researchers communicate research through a more an affective relationship with listeners.

**Keywords:** Podcasting, Arts-Based Methods, Sport, Music, Affect

This essay explores podcasting as an arts-based method for communicating the affective dimensions of embodied experiences to listening audiences. Our goal is to consider certain aspects of the podcast production process that present opportunities to experience affect in

ways that are unavailable through the traditional written and textual formats of academic research (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010). We approach podcasting from an understanding of ‘sound as affect’ (Gallagher, 2016) and a recognition that sound involves ‘mechanical waves moving matter—a process of bodies being moved, changed, affected...There is no sound that does not affect bodies of some kind’ (p. 43). Bodies are moved by the vibrations of sonic waves and the waves engender ‘motor responses, feelings, perceptions, meanings, memories and so on’ within those listening to the sounds (p. 43). This is not to claim that affective responses can be predicted through the strategic deployment of certain kinds of sound. Rather, digital audio formats like podcasts can create an affective soundscape through which the listener, subjectively feeling the sounds, becomes entangled in a participatory relationship with the produced sound. Moreover, we argue that podcasts can be utilized as a form of sound art (Wang, et al., 2017), emboldening the affective power of sound through the methods of the creative arts. As Leavy (2019) argues, artistic expressions ‘can grab hold of our attention, provoke us, or help to transport us’ and elicit a response that is ‘visceral, emotional, psychological, before it is intellectual’ (p. 3). In this essay, we argue that the arts-based podcast is a uniquely capable vehicle for affective soundscapes through which the listener is immersed with the sound and helps to constitute its meaning.

To explore the podcast’s ability to generate an affective experience for the listener, we draw from our personal experience developing a low fidelity or ‘lo fi’ academic podcast series titled *Somatic Podcast*, in which we used interview-based narratives, ambient soundscape, and recorded music to communicate critical knowledge on sport, physical culture, and the body. In contrast with professional, studio-produced podcasts—prominently illustrated in the U.S. by popular public radio series like *This American Life*, *Serial*, and *Radiolab*—lo fi refers to recordings that sound ‘as if it were produced in a non-professional setting’ and that deliberately preserve the imperfections of the recording process, ‘whether in the recording media (clicks, hisses, limited frequency response, abrupt tape cuts) or in performance (amateurish mistakes, irregular tone production)’ (Jones, 2019, p. 351). It refers not to the quality of the content in each episode, but a particular artistic aesthetic that embraces and valorizes the audible imperfections resulting from the non-professional production process. We also engaged with ‘lo fi’ production styles in part through a personal affinity for lo fi music and musical acts, which, as Harper (2009, p. 5) explains, is ‘less a genre or mode of music-making’ than a discursive construction of various ‘aesthetic currents’ that center on ‘a positive appreciation’ of perceived imperfections in the recording technology and process (p. 6). In this essay, we argue that the specific aesthetics of lo fi audio production, as illustrated in our personal case study of *Somatic Podcast*, necessarily include the audible presence of imperfections (feedback from musical instruments and amplification, mistakes that occurred during recording interviews, sounds of physical movements during musical recording or field recording, etc.) which enhance the podcast’s capacity to be an affective, embodied experience for both the listener and the producer.

Using *Somatic* as our empirical site, we explore specific aspects of the lo fi production process that generate opportunities for an affective listening experience. Following Gray's (2013, p. 6) suggestion that '[s]ound and hearing are powerfully linked to the experience of emotion,' we consider the specific ways a lo fi aesthetic can help listeners *hear* the embodied experience of producing a podcast as well as be *moved* by the reverberations of both the produced sound and its imperfections. By considering the affective dimensions entailed in a lo fi podcast production, we seek to advance Llinares, Fox, and Berry's (2018, p. 2) contention that 'the processes of production and the creation of content' related to audio formats like podcasting 'affords new freedoms with regard to the communication of knowledge.' Our goal is to illustrate that the lo fi podcast, and by extension artistically-driven audio productions, can be used by academics and researchers to help listeners experience the 'emotional, sensual, and aesthetic sense of embodiment' in ways that are difficult to articulate through words and texts (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2010, p. 1269).

### **Affect, Embodiment, and Sound**

In 2015, with one of us beginning their academic career and the other in the midst of their doctoral candidacy, we decided to start our *Somatic* podcast project as a vehicle for linking our personal interests in audio production with our academic and research interests in theories of affect and its relation to sport and the active body. Following Leavy (2020, p. 2), we entered the academy hoping to do work that is of some benefit to others and fearful of becoming disillusioned by the 'institutional pressures' and 'publish-or-perish dictates' of the typical academic career. Multiple factors provided us with an impetus to explore podcasting as an alternative or supplementary form of research and communication, including the issue of 'gatekeeping' within academic publishing (Gough, 2012), the limited reach of academic publications protected by 'paywalls' (Schekman, 2019), and the seemingly limited nature of the written word as a means of conveying the unavoidably sensual and physical dimensions of contexts of sport and physical activity. With our dual personal interests in digital audio and music, the notion of a podcast seemed like an interesting way of engaging with questions of affect and embodiment as well as our creative interests in the production of sound.

Our engagement with questions of embodiment and affect is based on a relational understanding of affect where the moving body is always embroiled in an assembled web of co-present actors or objects: how we affect and are affected by our interaction with others who are also in their own affective states, as well as other actors of multiple agentic registers (Bennett, 2005). An assemblage of these various actors, actants, or objects 'brings into play very different regimes of signs and even nonsign states' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21). Therefore, our capacity to affect and be affected as we move through assembled relational networks is a capacity that Massumi (2001) suggests is extra-cognitive and existing outside of or before cognition. Grusin (2015) describes this affective capacity as operating 'autonomously and automatically, independent of...cognition, emotion, will,

desire, purpose, intention, or belief' (p. xvii). These extra-cognitive capacities are embodied and felt (Andrews, Chen & Myers, 2014). In describing an extra/pre-cognitive forms of interaction, we approach affect as something that describes bodily engagement, a level of experience that the mind can only engage from a distance, whether temporal or spatial (Evers, 2006).<sup>1</sup>

As academics who study contexts of sport, physical cultures, and the active body—and have developed a podcast series to promote critical research on sport, physical cultures, and the active body—we have been influenced by scholarship in sport-related fields on the physical experience as importantly an affective experience (Thorpe and Reinhart, 2010; McDonald, 2020; Clark and Thorpe, 2020; Andrews and Silk, 2018). 'Affects,' as Evers (2006, p. 232) suggests, 'are what we feel at the bodily level,' and physical acts (for example, surfing) elicit bodily responses. As people are physically active, they *feel* their experience of being physically active: pain, sweating, bleeding, exhaustion, and the elements of the weather, to name only a few. As Henriques (2010, p. 57) writes, '[m]ovement and affect are widely thought of as being embodied together...To feel...is to feel moved.' Certainly, we are influenced by social constructivist analyses on embodiment, which shed important light on how the physical body is a discursive 'system of signs which stand for and express relations of power' and is often marked by the operations of power (Turner, 1996, p. 27). However, the affective registers of bodily performances spill out over social signification and conscious consideration (Grusin, 2015). As Andrews, Chen, and Myers (2014) state,

Whilst initially affect is a purely physical non-cognitive event, it gives rise to less-than-fully conscious experiences. These are felt sensations or 'feeling states' that, preceding full cognition (thoughts and emotions for example), manifest on a somatic register as vague but intense 'atmospheres' or 'vibes' which impact on an individual's capacity for engagement and involvement (and thus for themselves to affect others). (p. 214)

Thus, in our engagement with the issue of affective embodiment we focus on the non-cognitive dimensions of one's experience of being physically active, leading us to question the various forms of media available through which audiences can engage with those dimensions of affect.

Through our engagement with theories of affect and the affective dimensions of the moving body, we have come to question the effectiveness of written and linguistic forms of expression as mediums for communicating those dimensions of the experience that are fundamentally felt, pre-cognitive, and 'non-representational' (Thrift, 2007). Though all research practices entail bodily action in that a person must physically engage in processes of research, reading, or writing (Ellingson, 2017), 'naturalized norms in the academy privilege prose in which bodies appear irrelevant to the production of knowledge' (Harter, 2019, p. 126). The broader 'turn to affect' that has occurred in social and cultural research has been partly a result of scholars and researchers recognizing there are important limits to

using textual representations to convey the multivariate aspects of embodiment (Wetherell, 2013), since there are aspects of the physical experience that cannot be fully captured by the spoken or written word (Markula, 2015). As much of the recent scholarship and theorizations of affect keys on processes that occur beyond the realm of discourse, scholars have increasingly called for new methods for capturing and communicating the complex entanglements of the discursive and the affective in social life (Wetherell, 2013, p. 350). Since '[t]he substance of the body, its very flesh, interacts with the fabric of the social world' (Hockey, 2006, p. 198), we have sought an approach to exploring research on the moving body that can entail both discursive (i.e., verbal) and non-discursive forms of communication to help the receiving audience better understand the specific entanglements of discourse and affect that occur in contexts of embodiment.

In recent years, scholars have increasingly highlighted sound as a conduit for affective transmission (Gallagher, 2016). Sound, following Thompson and Biddle (2013, p. 5) can create 'a particular ambience or atmosphere, via the induction, modulation and circulation of moods, feelings, and intensities,' which are 'felt but, at the same time, [belong] to nobody in particular.' There is no 'subliminal command' through which people respond in specific ways to specific sounds, but sound can produce a vibrational 'energy' or 'aura' and become, in this way, a producer of affect (p. 5). For example, Eisenlohr (2018) studied the vocal recitations of na't poetry in Mauritian Muslim religious practice, arguing that vocal performances produce a 'sonic atmosphere' through which the vocalizing sounds 'affect felt-bodies' and 'feelings that are difficult to render into discourse' (p. 111).

Some scholars have highlighted the podcast as a medium through which the human voice can engender an affective experience. Copeland (2018, p. 210), studying the Canadian podcast *The Heart* and the way its episodes challenge heteronormative and gendered expectations through the 'affective use of sound,' argues that the podcast is an 'intimate aural medium' that can facilitate 'a deep affective experience for both the creator and the listener' (p. 209). Thompson and Biddle (2013, p. 5) contend that music, like podcasts, has a 'capacity to transmit an "energy" or an "aura"' which can result in the transmission of affect in ways that are not necessarily in direct correspondence with the music or the musician's intent.

Further, the experience of listening to sound is an embodied and participatory experience. Colling and Thompson (2013, p. 197) assert that listening to music is an 'embodied experience' because it 'engages sensory-motor processes': listeners of music can be emotionally moved when the music triggers memories or images which then trigger feelings such as melancholy or happiness. Music possesses an 'emotional power' without itself serving as the 'primary object of the emotional experience' (p. 197). More than this, and as Voegelin (2010, p. xii) explains, listeners are unavoidably placed in a participatory relationship with sound because the listener is 'immersed in [the] auditory object, which is not its source but sound as sound itself.' The listener cannot observe sound from a metaphysical distance because the listener is embodying and sharing the same time and place as the sound: as Voegelin puts it, 'However far its source, the sound sits in my ear' (p.

xii). This means that the act of listening to sound entails the bodily participation of the listener within the process of sonic production. It suggests that podcast listeners can be affectively moved by a podcast's sonic atmosphere and capacity to communicate a diversity of sounds, including but not limited to voice, music, and ambient recordings.

### **Podcasting as Sound Art**

As we explored the potential of podcasting as an affective, participatory media form, we also found that the podcast allows for some flexibility in terms of communication. First, Llinares, Fox, and Berry (2018, p. 2) suggest that the 'space' of the podcast is slightly peripheral or autonomous from the 'culture of instantaneous reaction, soundbite reductionism and anonymous mudslinging' commonly associated with the multiple forums for social interaction available on the Internet (Twitter, Facebook, and Reddit being three prominent examples). Though popular news podcasts like *The New York Times's The Daily* are produced and posted online at an expedient rate to keep up with current events and consumer demand, the podcast as a media form does not necessarily require this kind of approach. One can engage with podcasting with the intention of, say, creating content specific to their artistic vision and not necessarily in response to the news cycle or the whims of a marketplace. Second, with the Internet's ability to provide consumers with a seemingly unlimited choices of consumer products and media (Anderson, 2006), listeners can search for and consume podcasts according to their specific and niche interests (McHugh, 2016). Listeners can find podcasts through relatively accessible sharing platforms like SoundCloud, Apple Podcasts, and Google Podcasts, which also means a podcast producer has 'the freedom to release a product out into the wilds of the Internet, and watch what happens' (Markman, 2015, p. 242). Further, and specific to the research practice of academics, there is a general absence of editorial standards for podcasts, as opposed to the review, revision, and editing process of the traditional text-based outlets for academic research (i.e., journal articles, books, and chapters). One can produce a podcast as a digital space for creatively communicating a physical affectively, felt within the bodies of listeners, to a potentially wider range of audiences than traditional academic scholarship.

The notion of the podcast as a vehicle for creative expression also speaks to its potential as an arts-based research method (ABR). Academics in a range of fields have come to advocate ABR methods as ways of creatively and generatively responding to challenges of doing qualitative research (Douglas & Carless, 2018). According to Leavy (2020, p. 4), ABR refers to using the tools of the 'creative arts' to 'address research questions in holistic and engaged ways in which theory and practice are intertwined.' The ABR practitioner draws upon a variety of creative and representational forms which help bridge the gaps between the researcher, their potential audience(s), and their 'artist-self' (p. 3). As one example related to sport, researchers used mandala drawings as an artistic method in their participatory action research as a way of 'generating locally-resonant knowledge about the sport experiences of marginalised community members' (Blodgett et al, 2013, p. 313). ABR can be mobilized as what McNiff (2008, p. 29) calls a 'systematic use of the artistic process,'

in which artistic expression becomes ‘a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies.’ Rather than simply including artistic activities in one’s otherwise conventional research process, ABR disrupts assumptions as to what constitutes ‘good’ research in the academy and what tools are available to the researcher for generating knowledge (Eales & Peers, 2016, p. 57; Blodgett et al, 2013; Phoenix, 2010). The notion that ABR can be a participatory form of research also suggests that ABR-styled podcasts can contribute to an understanding of podcasting as participatory, particularly in terms of eliciting affect from the act of listening.

One form of arts-based research that dovetails with the present discussion of podcasting is ‘sound art,’ in which ‘artist-researchers explore the collection and application of sound in research projects’ (Wang et al, 2017, p. 25). Sound art can take a variety of forms—for example, researchers have developed radio programs in collaboration with their participants, helping ‘to communicate ideas and create knowledge’ through collaboration and discussion (McKenzie, 2008). Music, as Daykin (2004) explains, can be a generative arts-based supplement to research projects. Though forms of music may be unable to ‘speak for themselves’ in the sense of the meaning-making activities of academic research, ‘the use of music in particular forms of research may be useful, not just in enhancing representation but in considering new elements and dimensions of data’ (p. 15). More than this, artistic forms such as music can explore ‘aspects of life that cannot be expressed in other ways, such as subjective experiences and strong emotions’ (Ledger & Edwards, 2011, p. 313). Sound, in short, is affectively charged and can be creatively harnessed through ABR methods in ways that potentially multiply its potential for affect. Influenced by scholarship on affect and ABR, we approach the podcast as an arts-based media form through which listeners can become enmeshed in a more participatory relationship with producers through the podcast’s affective soundscape.

The podcast is particularly relevant to the study of affect and physical activity, as it can be harnessed not only for artistic and creative expression, but as a more embodied form of scholarship. Harter (2019, p. 126), in her research on health communication, suggests that the podcast ‘stretches the tendencies and capacities of academics toward multi-sensorial forms of inquiry’ while also providing academics with an alternative, more ‘engaged’ medium for connecting with a broader audience. Non-verbal forms of communication and what she calls ‘invisible speech’—silences, pauses, vocal cadence, intonation, laughter, and background noise—‘produce meaning beyond words uttered’ (p. 127). More than this, the listener and their embodied experience listening to a podcast is implicated in the meaning-making process. With a portability that allows listeners to ‘choose their own sonic space,’ podcasts become ‘social activities that involve dialogue between hosts and guests and include the presence of spectators who enter the conversation to learn, feel good, be moved, entertained, or motivated’ (p. 127). The ability for listeners to affectively engage with the podcasts suggests that the media form has the capacity to be a social activity, stimulating dialogue between the producer and the listener through verbal, non-verbal and creative expressions. In fact, non-verbal forms of

communication (i.e., music) can be prominently emphasized in the podcast production and used to cultivate a listening atmosphere that is charged with potential affect and conveys an experience that is difficult to convey through words.

### **Somatic Podcast - Lo Fi Podcast?**

In the following section, we detail our personal case study of developing *Somatic Podcast* and examine the multiple aspects with the lo fi production process that we see as conducive to generating an affective listening experience. To date, we have produced and posted online a total of seventeen *Somatic* episodes, generating a total of about 8,000 listens. The need to attract a listening audience at the beginning of the project means that, to date, most of the episodes are based on recorded interviews with scholars and graduate students. With each episode, however, we have endeavored to incorporate recorded ambient sound and original lo fi music to create an immersive, affectively charged sonic atmosphere surrounding each interview-based narrative (*Somatic Podcast*, n.d.). In this section, we highlight the specific aspects of the lo fi production process that we consider useful in evoking affective listening, with particular attention to the ways in which audible noise, feedback, and imperfections in the music recording result in an embodied experience for both the producer and the listener.

Though our focus has been primarily on the artistic production of lo fi music, we utilized multiple forms of recorded sound to further the goal of producing an aural atmosphere of feeling for the listener. This included field recordings, either recorded by ourselves, our collaborators, participants, or found/sampled sounds. These forms of sound were interwoven into the resulting episodes in order to enhance the possibility of listeners being moved by the podcast. In understanding field recordings in terms of affect, we follow Gallagher's (2015) argument that field recordings are sonic representations of a space and performative: a replaying of the sonic vibrations of a past time and space as well as a performance of playing back that sonic representation. Field recordings, Gallagher notes, have 'affective qualities': they 'represent the vibrations of the world but they also performatively reiterate these vibrations,' and the vibrations 'literally move beings' (p. 561; Grosz, 2008). Along with developing original music using lo fi, we explored the artistic use of field recordings not only as a way to enhance each episode's production quality but to create an aural atmosphere where various affects, including that of indifference or irritation, would be possible.

Our use of field recordings figured perhaps most prominently in an episode on the embodied experience of riding on an Amtrak passenger train (*Somatic Podcast*, n.d.). The soundscape was anchored by a continuous recording by the first author as he traveled on an evening train across the American Midwest. The listener can hear the train whistle, the shaking of the train car, other passengers walking past and speaking softly. Recorded music arises at multiple points of the audio narrative, complementing but not overriding the ambient train sounds and providing opportunities for climatic, emotional moments. By using a continuous field recording throughout the episode, the listener is invited into an

embodied listening experience as they share the time and space of the train trip and feel the vibrations that once also moved the producer of the sound. The field recording, in this way, became a sonic nexus linking the embodied experience of the original train trip with the embodied experience of listening to the sounds of the trip.

The act of creating lo fi music is key to understanding not only podcasting as sound art, but its ability to generate a sonic ambiance for affective listening. First, a lo fi production aesthetic preserves audible traces of the embodied act of artistic production. In addition to music's capacity to 'move' humans and 'stir up feelings and emotions' (Ball, 2010, p. 255; Church, 2017, p. 316; DeNora, 2000), the act of playing and *doing* music is an embodied practice. Lo fi aesthetics, premised on the value of the imperfections in the recordings, also preserve the sounds and vibrations that were generated in the time and space of making the music. To create and record music, the musician—in our case, a mildly capable guitarist—must use their body (their arms and fingers) to produce the sound from the instruments. The recording process is performative and requires multiple bodily acts: physically moving oneself and the guitar closer to the amplifier to augment feedback from the electrical signal; crouching on their knees and use their fingers to manipulate vibrations by adjusting the various knobs on the pedals to produce different musical effects. By adhering to a lo fi aesthetic, listeners of our episodes could hear not only the crafted narrative, field recordings, and recorded music, but the traces of the music recording process: the squeaking sounds of fingers rubbing against guitar strings; the ambient sounds of the musician moving around the recording space; the sounds of clicking, strumming, and other sonic minutia. There is no guaranteed relation between the sounds of the lo fi music and the listeners' affective response(s). As Daykin (2004, p. 7) explains, 'music may be evocative for many reasons unrelated to the sources of its inspiration.' However, the lo fi aesthetic provides multiple opportunities for the listener to hear, without verbal cues, the felt and embodied process of making music and link their embodied listening experience with the embodied production experience.

Lo fi music production also preserves sounds that are typically eliminated during higher quality audio production, theoretically expanding the range of affective registers available to the listener. First, lo fi musical creation necessarily involves preserving traces of accidents and incidental mistakes that occurred in the embodied and artistic act of making the music. Following Voegelin's (2010, p. 4) contention that listening is a 'mode of exploration, a mode of "walking" through the soundscape/the sound work,' the retainment of traces of imperfections brings the listener the auditory remnants of the embodied experience producing the sounds. The listener is reminded that they are participating, in an embodied and felt way, in the production of the auditory: they are part of the sound because 'there is no gap between the heard and the hearing' (p. 5).

The mistakes can even potentially enhance the affectivity of the sound by increasing and complicating the vibrations and waves. In the case of guitar playing, a note can be plucked with a greater or lesser intensity than the previous note, leading to variations in intensity in the audio signal and variations of affect transmitted to the listener (Church,

2017). For example, lo fi musical methods include opportunities to manipulate feedback and noise created during the use of musical instruments, effects, and amplification. The majority of the original music was recorded with musical equipment prone to typically unwelcomed news: an electric guitar with pickups that generate microphonic feedback; an aging acoustic guitar with cracking wood; a tube amplifier prone to microphonics and unintentional electrical signals (i.e., noise); guitar effects pedals designed to distort or alter the audio signal and generate sounds with increased reverberation or reminiscent of noise. As Hegarty (2007, p. 4) explains, noise is physically affecting: they can generate very high or very low frequencies, can have real effects on the body, and can be perceived as unpleasant or irritating to the listener. The noises can be significant to the listener and potentially possess emotional power because noises ‘always pertain to a complex of sources, motives, strategies, gestures, grammars, contexts, and so on’ (Kahn, 1999, p. 20).

With *Somatic*, the use of noise and feedback became a useful artistic device for creating a brooding or uncertain sonic atmosphere. One episode detailed two academics’ research on the controversial environmental and social politics of the Trump International Golf Links, Scotland development. To help create an aural space in which the listener could potentially be moved in various ways by the uneasiness of the research topic—the creation of the golf course involved not only Donald Trump as a controversial figure but the destruction of a fragile and important natural environment (BBC News, 2020)—we incorporated the feedback noises from the recording session to encourage a feeling of unpleasantness and anxiety in conjunction with the narrative. The episode consisted of a few long pieces of somber, repetitive music, each with prominent sounds of feedback generated by the electric guitar and the amplifier. The inclusion of the feedback noise allowed for sonic atmosphere in which listeners could be potentially affected by the narrative, the music, as well as noises that are typically removed from the finished production.

One particular technique we utilized in multiple episodes was the inclusion of ‘breaks’ in each episode, typically averaging between fifteen to twenty seconds, to provide space for the listener to simply be present and potentially moved by the affectively charged sounds. During each break, the soundscape was audible without an overlay of narrative or interview audio, resulting in an opportunity for the listener to be immersed in the soundscape and not focus on any verbal communication or narrating of information. In one episode, for example, we focused on women’s embodied experiences with running in urban environments. There is an extended section consisting a field recording of a female participant’s daily run combined with music of delayed and repeated notes producing an echo effect (Clevenger & Rick, 2015-present). In that section, the intention was not to elicit a prescribed or determined emotion from the listening experience, but rather to engage with the listener with at least two audible layers of potential affect: the soundscape of the participant running in a city—her breaths, her steps on sidewalk and street asphalt, the sounds of wind and nearby automotive traffic—and the musical signal produced by the imperfect playing of a guitar and the use of effects pedals. Further, the resulting soundscape

does not include any verbal referent, leaving the listener to experience the multi-layered soundscape without verbal cues or gestures to its discursive meaning: they simply hear the running experience and the runner's attempt to retrospectively understand the feelings and senses involved in their particular running experience. The use of breaks in the narration was useful in drawing out the emotional power of the music and soundscape and allow the listener to be present with the sounds.

The podcast deliberately relied on the use of repetition in the music's structure, timbre and tone color as a technique for the transmission of affect. In a recent study, Scott (2017, p. 322) studied the affective qualities of repetition or what he calls 'repeated sound textures' in glitch music, another form of digital art based on sounds of technology malfunctioning. As Scott explains, glitch music, similar to Baroque classical music, uses repetition to transmit affect by taking the sounds of technological malfunctions and repeating them 'in a multitude of layers until the error or failure becomes the aesthetic itself' (p. 322). For us, the notion of repetition represents, at a minimum, a superficial point of comparison with the experience of sport and physical activity, in that participation in sports often necessarily involve repetitive physical movements and strength conditioning programs involve the repetitive training of muscles. As part of the soundscapes of *Somatic* episodes, the repetitive pieces serve dual purposes of musically reflecting the repetitive embodiment of the sporting experience and transferring affect through the repetitive vibrations and audio signal of the music. In the case of the episode on the construction of Trump International Golf Links, Scotland, the crafted soundscape consisted of collected news clips and slow interwoven with somber music pieces with repetitive notes and echoing imperfections. The intention behind the music was not necessarily to guide the listener towards feelings of somberness in relation to knowledge about the destruction of a fragile sand dune system by a commercial golf course (Campbell, 2018). Rather, the music was a key part of an overall soundscape conducive to affective listening, manifesting in feelings specific to the listener and their experience of the episode.

Each of the previously described techniques to generate affect through the podcast constitute non-guaranteed *opportunities* for affect. By including music or field recordings in a podcast episode, we could not and did not guarantee a particular affective response within the listener. Nor did it guarantee that our intentions behind the artistic act of creating the music and sounds would be the transmitter of affect. The ability for listeners to experience a podcast episode in a sonic space of their own choosing underscores that the listener's affective experience will be contextual and specific to their conditions of existence. One's condition of '[b]eing conditioned,' Barnett and DeLuca (2019, p. 100) write, 'neither guarantees nor determines responses, but it does prime us to respond in particular ways. In case of musical expression, 'the intention of the artist' is not necessarily 'essential in creating affective responses in the audience' (Church, 2017, p. 319) due to the presence of multiple transmitters of affect in the episode, including voice, ambient sounds of various places, and silence/pauses. We believe, however, that this condition of unpredictable affect further highlights the possibilities in lo fi podcast production: the preservation of

imperfections in the audio multiplies, rather than hinders, opportunities for affective listening.

## **Conclusion**

In this essay, we have argued that the lo fi podcast is a generative arts-based approach to crafting affectively charged soundscapes. As academics and researchers studying contexts related to sport and the active body, the necessarily embodied and felt dimensions of those contexts have compelled us to search for ways of conveying the affective dimensions of the embodied experience that are themselves affectively charged and alternative to the text-based formats predominantly used to disseminate knowledge in the academy. With the affective qualities of sound and the embodied process of arts-based methodologies, we have come to embrace podcasting as a digital mode of communication whereby listeners can be affectively moved by what they hear and engage with the sensual through the aural experience. We are convinced that the lo fi aesthetic in particular, with its emphasis on the imperfections, noise, and the remnants of the recording process, offers a more generative avenue for exploring affect than more polished, professionalized digital sound that remove the traces of sonic production from the finished product. Thus, our essay is a theoretical approach to interpreting potential listener responses to podcasts, with attention to the ways in which artistic sonic methods (i.e., lo fi recording and music) multiply the affective registers available to the listener.

The lo fi podcast is just one approach to podcasting that we believe can create a listening experience defined by bolstering the bodily dimensions of producing and listening to sound. The communication of knowledge through textual and visual formats allow reader(s) or audience(s) to maintain a distance between themselves and their object (in the form of a book/journal article, or visual media such as film). In listening to sound, there is 'no gap between the heard and the hearing, I either hear it or I don't, and what I perceive is what I hear' (Voegelin, 2010, p. 5). The experience of listening is a corroborative part of the production of meaning about the sound. Theoretically, the lo fi sonic aesthetic can enhance the participation of the listener because it forces the listener to hear traces of the production experience. Whereas the process of publishing an academic essay involves eradicating traces of the author's writing and revision process, the lo fi audio production leaves the traces of the production process audible to the judgment and perception of the listener. The listener, sensing the sonic production in all its imperfection, is reminded that the process of producing the sound is as embodied as the process of listening to the sound. For those researchers of affect looking for more artistic and flexible ways of communicating with their audiences, we suggest using the podcast form and preserving the imperfections of the production process.

Because podcasters can produce and disseminate episodes online without being subject editorial standards or a standardized peer review process, researchers can use podcasting to experiment with how they communicate their work and how they interact with various audiences. As our experience developing *Somatic* illustrates, podcasting can be

a kind of digital canvas for artistically expressing research without the need for visual, textual, or otherwise discursive supplements. The artistic flexibility of the podcast allows the researcher to explore, say, the emotional power of music and sound through a creative mode of communication that does not rely on or necessarily require the textual and visual formats dominating academic discourse. Indeed, our own interests in affect, embodiment and non-representation theory is increasingly leading us to experiment with creating podcast episodes based entirely on non-verbal forms of expression, as well as consider the utility of podcasting beyond the dissemination of research, information and commentary. Because podcasting is not yet widely recognized along with text-based publications as a measure of research productivity in the academy, researchers still must engage with podcasting in what spare time is available to them, potentially further burdening academics who are already struggling with their research and teaching workloads. Though we do not want to discount the difficulties and obstacles that preclude many from engaging with podcasting, we do think it is important to recognize that the podcast's compatibility with arts-based sonic methods and relative autonomy from editorial and peer review thresholds means that it can arguably be more creative and generative means of exploring critical topics like the affective dimensions of our everyday embodied practices.

Our hope is that this essay can contribute to the burgeoning area of academic research on the possibilities in podcasting as what Llinares, Fox, and Berry (2018) term a 'new aural culture.' When approached as a form of sound art, the podcast form affords researchers with an opportunity to link studies on affect with the creative tools of ABR and engage with publics beyond the typical readers of academic scholarship. Certainly, the present essay is limited in its ability to provide qualitative data on the emotional power of artistic podcast productions (through, say, interviews or surveys of listeners). However, we suggest that our present study offers multiple reasons why arts-based audio forms like lo fi podcasting can be productive avenues for researchers of affect who are trying to articulate the affective dimensions of life in more creative, participatory ways.

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## Note:

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<sup>1</sup> Researchers and scholars have articulated affect in a variety of ways and for a multitude of uses across academic fields (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010). Some have focused on affect in terms of the idea of arousal and its directional cognition as part of scientific inquiry and discourse (example: Keil et al, 2008 and Rhudy et al, 2008). Others have advanced concepts, informed by feminist theories, of affective 'economies' in which emotions are central to the construction of subjectivities (Ahmed, 2004). For our starting point with the concept, we follow Navarro-Yashin's (2012, 168) approach, which emphasizes that 'the reference point for affect (which used to be, singularly, subjective) has been radically altered and multiplied.' Rather than working from the subject outwards, we start with the relational, the spaces that exist between objects or actors.