SOUNDING OUT ON RECONCILIATION: COMMUNITY RADIO AND DISCOURSES OF REDRESS IN WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

by

Nick Smith
B.A., University of Winnipeg, 2011

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the Degree of

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Abstract

This thesis considers how the concept of reconciliation is being made meaningful through the media in Winnipeg, Canada. It contrasts institutional discourses of reconciliation at the national level with those happening at a community level in Winnipeg. It does this by focusing on community media in Winnipeg, and the CKUW radio station in particular. CKUW has been a platform for community members to be critical of, and give meaningful form to, the often ambiguous concept of reconciliation. Community media are frequently used by local activists and organizers whose work on social, political, and environmental issues intersects with discussions of redress in the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the city. They are not only conduits for the transmission of information about reconciliation, but are a means by which grassroots engagement is happening.
Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee ................................................................. ii
Abstract ............................................................................................. iii
Table of Contents ................................................................................ iv
Acknowledgements ............................................................................... v
Introduction .......................................................................................... 1
Chapter 1 – Navigating the Ethos of Reconciliation ............................... 13
Chapter 2 – Media and Reconciliation ..................................................... 39
Chapter 3 – Tuning in to Community Radio ............................................. 63
Chapter 4 – Voice and Reconciliation ...................................................... 83
References ............................................................................................. 106
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Introduction

This thesis explores the overlaps between community radio, community organization, and conceptions of reconciliation in Winnipeg MB. It is the product of the time I spent in Winnipeg over the summer of 2015 talking with community radio producers and community organizers, spending time at the CKUW radio station, and participating in community events. From the outset I was interested in the role that media is playing in discussions of reconciliation. Media are seen to have a capacity to shape reconciliation discussions, and to bring these discussions to people who might not otherwise be engaged with them. But there is likewise an understanding that talk cannot stand in for substantive action targeting the social and material inequities which continue to disproportionately affect Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Among other things, the governmental issues related to reconciliation in Canada include land claims, treaty rights, the child welfare system, access to clean drinking water, missing and murdered Indigenous women and children, resource extraction, environmental destruction, and the criminal justice system. There is a balancing act in conceptions of reconciliation, between prioritizing action on substantive forms of redress, and facilitating the immaterial processes of decolonization and education that are often seen as necessary for facilitating that action in the first place.

There are two bodies of literature that this thesis brings into conversation: 1. Literature on the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in
Canada, including discussions of reconciliation, resurgence, and allyship, and 2. Literature on media, radio, and sound. This second body of thought, especially a focus on the embodied aspects of sound, has helped me to understand how abstract discourses about reconciliation contrast with and are made meaningful within localized contexts of lived experience. This linkage underscores a prevalent theme in thesis: the importance of scales of space to discussions of redress in the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Reconciliation is varyingly framed with national, local, and individual connotations. These framings matter for what it is understood to be, and who it is understood to apply to. National framings of reconciliation sometimes prefigure the terms in which we imagine reconciliation to be possible. Such framings can be both distancing, in their propensity to distract from forms of redress that are relevant locally, and latently assimilationist, in their propensity to re-iterate the logic of state sovereignty. While nationalized discussions of reconciliation can be problematic, it is important to foreground the systemic and institutionalized nature of colonial wrongs. It is this tightrope that I try to walk in this thesis, foregrounding local circumstances in Winnipeg in which the term reconciliation is gaining meaning, while trying not to lose sight of the broader systemic circumstances which give rise to a relationship in need of redress.

The media are seen to bridge distances between people, but might likewise be seen as a means by which distance, in this case between Indigenous and non-
Indigenous people is perpetuated. When institutions of media are tacitly granted the authority to tell the stories of others, engagement with media easily comes to stand in for more localized engagement with the communities who are the subjects of media attention. This is to say nothing of the way that media are selective in the kinds of stories they run, or the ways that media rendered consumable news items out of lived experiences. But media are helpful to the extent that they can provoke meaningful discussion and engagement with issues of reconciliation, and are not conceptualized as merely fulfilling a quota of reconciliation coverage. I was interested in community media that prioritizes the voices of those not normally heard in institutional media and which often overlaps with forms of community organization and activism. I was drawn to community radio specifically through an interest in sound and music as well as an awareness of the prevalence of radio in Canada’s community media landscape.

“Community” is an important word in this thesis that I use in two different ways. First, I use community to refer simply to Winnipeg as a geographic locale. Winnipeg is home to the highest number of Indigenous people in the country and is a locus of discussion on issues related to reconciliation. Secondly, community refers to the groups of people who are associated in various ways with the CKUW radio station and other forms of community media in Winnipeg. These are the producers, consumers, and activists whose work furthers critical discussions of reconciliation in Winnipeg. In both cases, it is not an all-encompassing configuration of community that
I present, but one which is influenced by the circumstances which I, as a researcher, came into contact with. It is also important to acknowledge that the community framing itself can be problematic when it uncritically implies a kind of positive homogeneity that whitewashes difference and disagreement. In this thesis I try to be attentive to whose voices are taken to represent the community and whose are not.

One of the primary goals of this thesis was to understand how the concept of reconciliation is gaining traction in Winnipeg. This meant asking questions about how reconciliation is being critiqued, how it is being mediated, and importantly, how these discussions are being had. I am less concerned with programmatic, institutional conceptions of reconciliation than I am with how it can be a means to unsettle the narratives that normalize the violence of colonization, and how it might lead to substantive forms of redress. In part, I chose this approach because programmatic roadmaps towards a teleological “reconciled state” can be a symptom of disengagement when reconciliation is relegated to the realm of governmental politics and out of the purview of personal or community responsibility. This is not to say that conceptions of reconciliation should exclude material goals or governmental reforms, but to highlight the fact that material inequality is continually reproduced through processes of normalization which we may all be complicit in.

In addition to reconciliation, the second major theme of this thesis is media, and radio as a sonic medium specifically. Institutions of mass media have a lot of power to
influence thoughts and actions through their privileged position of being able to tell the stories of others. Different kinds of media are often grouped together under the homogenizing title of “the media”, a generalization that glosses over the different ways media are produced and the different forms that it takes. I was interested in how community radio differs from institutional forms of media like the CBC and the corporate broadcasting sector in its governing philosophy and organizational structure. Community media places an emphasis on supporting the voices (quite literally) of community members who are not heard from in mainstream media. In this regard, it has much in common with reconciliation discourses that emphasize the necessity of listening to (and acting upon) Indigenous perspectives that are marginalized in mainstream conceptions of Indigenous people in Canada. Community media outlets in Winnipeg are venues for these discussions, localizing, and giving material form to conceptions of redress in the relationship between Indigenous and non-indigenous people. There is a metaphor of empowerment that is conveyed through the trope of “voice” that is paralleled by “listening” as the act of receiving voices. Both of these sonic metaphors are often used to frame the relational predispositions necessary to change the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, one which puts an onus on non-Indigenous people to participate in unsettling the often taken for granted narratives which allow us to feel comfortable in colonized spaces. This thesis
explores how community radio, as a platform for raising voices, is participating in this process.

As much as this thesis is a critical reflection on discussions of reconciliation in Winnipeg, it is also a part of those discussions. I primarily position myself as a researcher in this thesis, but I am also a resident of Winnipeg and an able bodied white man with a middle-class upbringing. It is fair to say that the academic content of this thesis cannot be considered in absence of its political implications as a contribution to discussions of reconciliation. Nor would it be easy to distill an academic truth in the absence of its entanglement with my personal background and the self-reflections which shaped my learning process as the project unfolded. There is, as Menzies (2001) and many others have explored, a long standing affinity between research in the social sciences and the reproduction of structures of oppression which marginalize Indigenous people. Research regimes that extract knowledge about so-called “others”, rather than working with them, subjugate Indigenous perspectives to the interpretive authority of the researcher. Working against these kinds of one-way research relationships is often theorized as a process contingent on relationality.

Relationality is a concept with a lot of different academic usages. Here, I use it to refer to the ways that researchers form relationships with their research participants, with the places they are researching in, and with the various agents of action (human and non-human) which shape senses of place that are not easily captured by the
reductive logic of traditional research methodologies. A concern with relationality also plays into conceptions of ally-ship and solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (see Corntassel, Dhamoon, and Snelgrove 2014), as well into writings on the ways people confer meaning on the physical places they occupy (be it an urban setting like Winnipeg or, as is more common, relationships with the living earth). As many have pointed out, there is an inseparable link between the ways we confer meaning on the physical places we occupy and our ability to effectively contribute to processes of decolonization.

Here, there is an overlap between my role as researcher and my personal life as a resident of Winnipeg. I chose Winnipeg as a research site because it is my home. Working from home was a convenience in many ways, but throughout the course of my summer last year I saw new sides to the city which, with my upbringing in a largely white neighbourhood, I may not have otherwise been exposed to and which has been the genesis of an ongoing learning experience. It has been an experience not only of learning about the Indigenous experience in Winnipeg, but about how to contribute in a way that will have a positive impact on the community. As much as this thesis is about reconciliation, it has also been a process of questioning how, or what I, as a researcher and a person can contribute to such a process through my research and through actions in my personal life.
Methodological approaches to media anthropology vary greatly depending on the objectives of the research and the limitations of the research context. In addition to engaging with media about reconciliation and listening to CKUW, my approach consisted of semi-structured interviews and participant observation. My focus was as much about the media and CKUW as it was about the community of people working to create change on issues related to reconciliation in Winnipeg. It is about the space where these things overlapped, where the work of community members on political issues became mediated and broadcast out to indeterminate audiences. These overlapping concerns necessitated an adaptable set of research methodologies and a flexible schedule of research. In this sense my approach was ethnographic, though not in the traditional long-term sense. Over the summer of 2015 I attended community events, protests, public forums, and political announcements on a variety of issues ranging from water security to a commemoration of the signing of treaty 1. I also had the chance to spend some time at the CKUW radio station itself, culminating in the creation of a one-off 2-hour radio show with Chris Reed, the former producer of the *Eagle Staff Nation* at CKUW. Finally, I was able to spend time around town with Chris, driving or walking to various places that he deemed important for Indigenous people in the city. Among other places, we visited the Indigenous Family Centre, the Ma Mawi Chi Itata Centre, and the University of Manitoba’s North End satellite campus for inner city social work. We also went to some of the housing projects in the North End of the
City where a lot of Indigenous people live and where the racial disparities in the city are most evident. In addition to these times spent out and about, I conducted semi-structured interviews with community members and media makers in Winnipeg. These included both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people whose work in media and/or in the community overlaps with the topic of reconciliation. I was focused on a longer-form, semi-structured interview style with a line of questioning that was adaptable to the experiences of the participant. This kind of approach was helpful given that many of the people I spoke with already had a lot of experience discussing the topics at hand. Keeping things flexible allowed us to go deeper into the conversation than would otherwise have been the case if I had been using a strict line of questioning. Some of my interviews were formally planned and recorded, others came about as a result of more impromptu circumstances where I could not record, and so, were jotted down in my field notes as they happened. All in all, my approach was qualitative rather than quantitative. This is consistent with the focus on relationality and place that have emerged as important themes in discussions of reconciliation. It is also a product of the fact that I am positioned in this project not only as researcher, but as a resident of Winnipeg as well.

This thesis is structured as four distinct chapters, each with its own topic, approach, and conclusions. There is no, summary conclusion at the end of this thesis, but four separate conclusions for each chapter. My decision to write my thesis this way
was a product of the different experiences I had throughout the course of my fieldwork and the different ways they related to the literature I was reading. In writing about making a radio show at CKUW (Chapter 3), for example, I had the opportunity to reflect on some of the literature on sound and technology I had been reading in an ethnographic style of writing that was new to me, and would not necessarily work for other themes in my thesis. This chapter would not have been possible in directional methods → analysis → discussion → conclusion kind of thesis. Though the chapters might be read separate from one another, I believe there are still links between them that make them more than the sum of their parts when considered together.

I begin with the larger macro-themes of reconciliation and media and end with more specific considerations about community radio in Winnipeg and the trope of “voice” as a marker of empowerment. In the first chapter I consider the concept of reconciliation at its most general, framing some of the discussions I have had with people in Winnipeg about reconciliation within larger ongoing discussions about the utility of the term, what it means, and who it applies to. Many scholars and activists have critiqued the concept of reconciliation as a part of a “politics of recognition” which substitutes acts of memorialization and an elevated level of discussion for forms of substantive redress. Here, an emphasis on healing from the atrocities perpetrated against Residential School students is substituted for a wider concern with the impacts of colonial imposition, not least of which is the dispossession and exploitation of
Indigenous lands. In addition to exploring these critiques, the primary question which this chapter considers is: what would it mean for reconciliation to be a decolonizing experience and not merely a means to perpetuate colonial mindsets? In the second chapter I turn to media. I begin broadly with a discussion of media theory and conceptions of media power. The media can have a powerful influence over the way people in Canada conceptualize their history and the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. But not all people feel represented by the mainstream media, and not all media are used to further meaningful discussions of reconciliation. In the second half of the chapter I discuss how community media are an alternative to mainstream media. At CKUW, discussions about what reconciliation means locally are accompanied by opportunities to act on those discussions through community events which the station promotes.

The third chapter is a reflection on the experience I had co-hosting a radio show at CKUW with former producer, Chris Reed. This chapter is written in a first person ethnographic style, which I thought would be helpful in bringing the literature on technology and sensory experience that I was reading, into the context of my experience making radio at CKUW. As a newcomer to radio production, the process of learning how to produce radio was a chance to reflect on what makes radio, as a certain kind of media, unique. In the final chapter, I reflect on the usage of sonic metaphors like voice and listening, in discussions of reconciliation. First, I consider the links between
voice as a physical sonorous phenomenon and its prevalence as a trope of empowerment (e.g. when someone “finds their voice”). Next, I explore the usage of voice and other sonic terms like “listening” in discussions of reconciliation. These terms speak to a conception of how relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people might be changed. In the concluding section, I argue that the term transduction is useful in making us attentive to the impedances which keep voices from being heard. These impedances point to the everyday processes and ongoing work of decolonization efforts which continue to be driven by grassroots efforts at the community level.
Chapter 1 - *Navigating the Ethos of Reconciliation*

**Introduction**

To talk of an “ethos” of reconciliation in Canada is to recognize that the word is used in contexts other than those of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC) formal proceedings. In the summer of 2015 Murray Sinclair, the chair of the TRC commission, stressed that reconciliation is generational work which must extend far beyond the mandate of the TRC. He was not alone in voicing this sentiment, and considering the way the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples’ (RCAP) report of 1996 were largely ignored by the Canadian government it can be taken as a warning not to lose sight of the necessity of action in the midst of media buzz (*TRC The History, Part 2* 2015, 559). The invocation of “reconciliation” in academic and political spheres might thus be seen as the continuance of a dialogue initiated by the TRC and the necessary step towards effecting change. A prevalence of discourse has been accompanied by prominent acts of memorialization and artistic creation which collectively have brought reconciliation into the public conscience. These actions have given rise to what Henderson and Wakeham (2013) call “cultures of redress,” or, patterns of governance and community engagement which arise as communities confront historical injustice. Optimism about the prevalence of this attention has been accompanied by the critical awareness that reconciliation can be used as a point of leverage for actors with a diversity of motives. With so many possible
meanings the word allows for a high profile narrative with a low level of accountability. It can easily become a rhetorical tool that can be dressed up (or down) to suit the needs of a particular project or political goal. This is a dangerous ambiguity that points to the limits of reconciliation as a generalized sentiment rather than a particular project with material objectives.

As Freeman (2014) notes, reconciliation is a politically charged concept. Some see reconciliation as another tool for the state of Canada to assert its illegitimate sovereignty. Haudenosaunee scholar Taiaiake Alfred (2013) foregrounds resurgence over reconciliation, as a framework for strengthening Indigenous communities and resisting the unchallenged imperatives of neo-liberalism which certain conceptions of reconciliation latently reproduce. Others see potential for the concept to have transformative impact, especially for non-Indigenous Canadians, but only when it encompasses broader histories of dispossession and ongoing forms of neo-colonialism.

Reconciliation provokes discussions of violence, sovereignty, nationhood, and imperialism. These topics are often unsettling, but as Regan (2010) emphasizes, they carry the potential for positive change when they are happen in the right way. In this chapter, I explore critiques of reconciliation in more detail. I begin with a historical lens by briefly tracing the development of the TRC and outlining key issues which continue to inform discussions of reconciliation today. I then turn to discussions of reconciliation and resurgence, including the pitfalls of the reconciliation concept and the questions of
who it is meant for, and what it should mean moving forward from the conclusion of the TRC. In addition to theoretical and historical sources, this chapter is drawn from my experience conducting interviews and attending community events in Winnipeg, Manitoba over the summer of 2015. This experience has shown me the importance of seeing reconciliation not only from a national or systemic perspective, but from a community and individual perspective as well.

**From Assimilation to Reconciliation?**

Church operated boarding schools for Indigenous children date back to pre-confederation times in the form of missionary schools established by Roman-Catholic and Protestant settlers. Shortly after confederation in 1867 the residential school system was expanded with the support of the federal government, taking the form of the programmatic national institution now known as the Indian Residential School system (IRS). While it is important to acknowledge the good intentions of many residential school teachers and administrators, the schools themselves were more than just educational institutions. They were, as the executive summary of the TRC emphasizes, “an integral part of a conscious policy of cultural genocide” (*TRC Executive Summary* 2015, 55). The over-arching purpose of these schools was the assimilation of Indigenous children into Canadian and Christian society and the extinguishment of First Peoples’ cultural, religious, legal, and linguistic practices and rights. This assimilatory motivation afforded the Canadian government a solution to the so-called “Indian
Problem” wherein Indigenous Peoples stood in the way of settlement and the seizure of lands. Originally articulated by John A. Macdonald in 1883, this goal was famously reaffirmed by Duncan Campbell Scott in 1920, and again by the White Paper in 1969.

Although these assimilatory sentiments are no longer so overtly present in institutional discourse, they remain an ingrained aspect of bureaucratic operations and on the ground realities. From the Indian Act to the educational system, latently assimilationist pretexts of governance continue to marginalize Indigenous people in Canada. It is also easy to still find pro-assimilation sentiments expressed in news editorials and comment sections of major national media outlets. For many people, these expressions, and other forms of racism are not confined to the media, but are a part of their everyday lives. There is a long history of assimilation in Canadian political discussions, and with this context in mind, many have pointed out the dangers of the reconciliation concept. As Alfred (2009) notes, reconciliation may be thought of as latently assimilationist when it seeks to reconcile Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples under a common bond of citizenship rather than pursuing a nation to nation relationship which would lay the groundwork for substantive forms of restitution.

Outward expressions of assimilationist ideas are often premised on an ahistorical de-racialized assertion of universal human equality which excludes systemic structures of oppression. That is to say, the argument for assimilation makes use of a de-contextualized premise that “we are all equal” as a means of whitewashing history and
ignoring the oppressive premises of colonization and inequalities currently maintained by capitalism (De Costa 2009; Harris 2004). In short, asserting equality where there is none. As McCready (2009) notes, these assimilatory discourses are often accompanied by an appropriated sense of injustice at being victimized by so-called “special interest” groups. Late in 2015, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) shut down commenting on all its online articles related to Indigenous Peoples due to a prevalence of “hateful, vitriolic, and ignorant” remarks (Office of the GM and Editor in Chief 2015). This action is both an example of the institutional change of course that has taken place in the last 20 years in its approach to assimilation discourses, and a sober reminder that racism and ignorance still thrive in encounters between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada.

The IRSS and the TRC are partly responsible for initiating a change in institutional dialogue away from assimilation and integration to talk of recognition and a renewed relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The second part of its IRS history report, traces the multiple movements, events, and community mobilizations which cumulatively brought greater public awareness to the harms suffered in the IRS system and their ongoing effects. While the TRC is often a focal point for discussions about what reconciliation means and what it requires, it was the mobilization of Survivors, advocates, and activists in the first instance which were responsible for its creation (TRC The History, Part 2 2015, 551-581). The protracted court
battles, denials, and blame placing which transpired in the years preceding the IRSSA, speak to the fact that a culture of institutional redress institutional redress has not been self-imposed and has not come easily (James 2012, 199-200). While decolonization efforts have, in various forms, manifested at the governmental level, it has often been a struggle against the government and not a working relationship with it. As James (2012, 200) notes, the impediments and struggles faced by Survivors in the pursuit of justice give a new meaning to the word truth in the TRC: “It means Survivor knowledge of what authorities and the dominant society have refused to hear and then denied.”

Understanding the history of the TRC itself is thus key to understanding how the reconciliation concept is being used today and how it is being put into action at the community level.

_The beginnings of the “era of reconciliation”_

The closure of Indian Residential Schools happened gradually throughout the latter half of the 20th century and was not immediately followed by a national outrage or sense of wrongdoing. The TRC report cites broader processes of global decolonization, and changing church attitudes towards Indigenous Peoples as reasons for the decline of the IRS system (TRC _The History, Part 2_ 2015, 551). These international trends coincided with the emergence of Indigenous political organizations in Canada such as the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) (now known as the Assembly of First Nations) and the Canadian Metis Society (later to become the Congress of Aboriginal
Peoples) in the late 1960s. Both organizations grew from the community level to represent the rights of First Peoples in many high profile negotiations and court cases with the federal government. In addition to political organization, Survivors of Indian Residential schools began to tell their stories in memoirs and literature which found its way into the public realm.

In 1990, in what is now seen as a breakthrough moment for Survivors, Phil Fontaine, then Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, spoke on CBC television about the abuse he and fellow students had suffered at the Fort Alexander school in Manitoba (The History, Part 2 2015, 556). As Niezen (2012, 30) notes, Fontaine’s CBC appearance helped to relieve the stigma that prevented many Survivors from telling their own stories. In conjunction with an increased public awareness about the legacy of the IRS system, two other important events in 1990 led to the emergence of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). The first was Oji-Cree chief, and then member of the Manitoba parliament, Elijah Harper’s opposition to the Meech Lake Accord, a series of constitutional amendments which recognized Quebec as a “distinct society” within Canada but failed to do the same for Indigenous Peoples. The second was the Kanesatake Mohawk resistance to the development of a golf course on a burial ground in the town of OKA Quebec. Both of these events received widespread media attention and are seen as responsible for the commencement of the RCAP, a commission whose overarching mandate was to study the evolution of the relationship
between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada (Russell 2014, 155-156). The RCAP report, which came out in 1996, highlighted the need for a full investigation into the impact of the IRS, among other far reaching governmental changes.

The RCAP, in conjunction with the government of Canada’s response, the Gathering Strength report (1997), mark the emergence of the reconciliation concept on the national stage, foreshadowing the “era of reconciliation” which we are said to currently be in. Though the government response to the RCAP included a statement on reconciliation and the establishment of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF), it failed to substantively address most of the RCAP recommendations. As the TRC report (TRC Executive Summary 2015, 186) highlights, the RCAP “saw reconciliation as placing a heavy onus on the Government of Canada to change its conduct and to see the validity of the Aboriginal perspective of how the relationship should be in the future.” The twenty year timeline which the RCAP set for the implementation of its recommendations has now passed. Paul Chartrand, one of the RCAP commissioners, was recently asked to reflect on the impact of the RCAP, saying, “there is a very powerful lesson there, which is that today still, I don’t think it’s changed much” (as cited in Trojan 2016). Elaborating on the frustration of this governmental failure, Leanne Simpson (2013) highlights to the historically cyclical nature of sentiments of reconciliation, which have followed a predictable cycle of “intimidation, force, violence, media smear campaigns, criminalization, silence, talk, negotiation, “new relationships”,


promises, placated resistance, and then more broken promises. Repeat.” In Winnipeg, many of the people I spoke with expressed similarly guarded views about reconciliation, emphasizing grassroots organization over the top-down overarching mandates of reconciliation which have failed to materialize in tangible ways.

Niezen (2013, 27) notes that “resistance to residential schools corresponds closely with basic conditions that enabled aboriginal people to pursue grievances.” Though I believe it would also be accurate to reframe this quote with the opposite attribution of agency (i.e. that Indigenous people have largely been responsible for the reformation of Indigenous related laws), it is true that the IRSSA and the governmental response to residential schools have been a result of court action. By 2001 there were approximately 8,500 IRS related law suits brought against the federal government and Church organizations by Survivors (TRC The History, Part 2 2015, 560). The impediments to justice which faced Survivors included both their capacity to act within the Canadian legal framework and the difficulty of bringing their stories into the public discourse. The initial public response to these suits not only questioned the accuracy of the allegations, but the basic premise of their truthfulness (James 2012, 199). The judicial process itself has been a deterrent to Survivors who have been required to relive the trauma of their abuse in great detail and in a very public manner. As legal pressure continued to grow throughout the 1990s both the government and church employed tactics of denying responsibility for school operations, and therefore, for reparative
justice (Feldthusen 2007). The government argued that it should not be held vicariously responsible for the actions of an individual, particularizing each case of abuse to avoid acknowledging the problem as systemic. Nevertheless, in 2005 as a result of a class action suit, the government entered into the negotiation process, which was to result in the IRSSA and the formation of the TRC.

Over the course of its 6 year mandate (2008-2015) the TRC held many national and community events and sponsored many commemoration initiatives. At many of these events, statements were gathered from Survivors who came forward to talk about their experiences in the IRS system. These events also served to promote awareness and public education about the impacts of the IRS system. The TRC did not have punitive powers and instead took a victim centered approach which placed emphasis on bearing witness to Survivors’ stories and promoting public awareness. In conjunction with its ten part full report, the TRC released a list of 94 calls to action which together comprise the actionable components of its reconciliation vision. On December 15th 2015, with the release of the TRC’s Final Report, Commissioner Sinclair declared the beginning of a new era in Canadian history (Mas 2015). In the media and in political discourse, conceptions of a current “era of reconciliation” are now common place, but the exact meaning of this formulation is still ambiguous. A key tension in discussions of reconciliation has been the extent to which the concept is linked to broader histories of colonialism and dispossession. The historical frame of reference which undergirds
discussions of reconciliation determines the path of action which is envisaged. As many have argued, the mainstream version of reconciliation largely fails to contend with broader colonial contexts which continue to structure the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. Reconciliation then becomes a counterproductive concept when its emphasis on creating a sense of new beginnings glosses over deeper injustices and colonial histories.

**Unpacking Reconciliation**

Critical discussions of reconciliation in Canada often revolve around the question of what (or who) needs to be reconciled. In its most general form, reconciliation is often understood as a process of creating a better relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The TRC’s *Calls to Action* (2015) document offers some answers to how this better relationship might be achieved. It outlines a diversity of issues that range from healthcare and education to media and the roles of archives and museums. It is a wide-ranging roadmap, but it is by no means an uncontested definition, nor is it reflective of the way reconciliation has come to be used in public discourse. Because it is so broad, and relates mostly to governmental policy change, it is difficult to summarize the concept succinctly without resorting to sweeping statements or generalized sentiments of good will. This is a part of the difficulty of the reconciliation concept: it is both a set of material objectives and an immaterial process of decolonization. It is both specific and general. Complicating the
discourse is the assertion that reconciliation must mean radically different things for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. At the very least, it is something which requires the engagement of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It can only be detrimental if, as Corntassel and Holder (2008) warn, reconciliation simply means Indigenous Peoples becoming reconciled with the loss of their culture and homelands. Following James (2012, 196) “if the weight of colonial wrongdoing is duly considered, it is difficult to conceive of any route to better relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people that would not place the burden of introspection on the latter”.

Reconciliation is a concept that is used in reference to both individuals and groups at both local and national scales. It is also used in very different venues of dialogue, from the Royal Winnipeg Ballet’s “Going Home Star” production to the websites of resource extraction companies. While over-generalizing conceptions of reconciliation can produce an unproductive ambiguity, there is also a risk of over-particularizing and downplaying the systemic nature of colonial harms.

One of the primary discussions about reconciliation is the extent to which broader colonial histories of dispossession are a part of the dialogue. For many people, land dispossession and ensuing processes of cultural genocide are the irreducible starting point for any meaningful form of reconciliation. But these broader understandings are often absent from discussions which emphasize latently paternalistic and assimilationist conceptions of forgiveness and moving on. Academics
and activists have captured this division of meanings in a variety of ways. For Corntassel (2012) there is a fundamental difference between practices of resurgence, which emphasize Indigenous cultural revival at the community level, and reconciliation, which can work to suppress resurgence by legitimating state and corporate authority. For James (2012) the distinction is one between “substantive” and “symbolic” forms of reconciliation with the latter conception relying on political talk and commemoration, and the former premised on a deeper confronting of structural injustice and colonial history. These divisions can be related more generally to Fraser’s (2000) analysis of the shifting emphasis of social justice movements away from redistribution and towards recognition. Coulthard (2007) brings this critique into the Canadian context, drawing out the ways that recognition politics eclipse the need for substantive redress and re-affirm the neo-liberal imperatives at the heart of Canadian sovereignty.

In general, it is the deep structural roots of colonialism that are often missing from discussions of reconciliation, an absence (or erasure?) which has been noted by Indigenous and non-indigenous scholars alike (Alfred 2009; Corntassel 2012; James 2012; Simpson 2008). This absence is exemplified in reactions to the findings of the TRC. From the beginning, public outrage over the IRS has largely been centered on the sexual abuse of children. No one is discounting the legitimacy of this outrage. It is telling however, that when this institutionalized violence is contextualized within a larger
history of colonialism, it becomes the subject of debate. Such was the case when Murray Sinclair described the IRS as a process of “cultural genocide” at the TRC’s closing ceremonies. The outcry over the abuse of children in the IRS has not been accompanied by similar outrage at the systems of colonial oppression which facilitated that abuse.

In a conversation broadcasted on the radio as a part of the Resonating Reconciliation project, Michael Cachagee, an IRS Survivor and Indigenous politician, voiced his thoughts on the reconciliation process: “when you look back and you see the biggest percentage of those participating are from First Nations people or the Aboriginal community, who are we attempting to reconcile with when there is no movement from the other side?” Later, while discussing whether reconciliation was about healing, Cachagee said, “using that word “healing,” I object to that because as long as we use the word healing there is a suggestion there that we are sick. We are not sick, we are on our way to reclaiming, it is a reclamation, it’s a rebuilding that I look at as more appropriate language, if we’re going to use the English language.” Cachagee’s critique speaks to the TRC’s emphasis on “healing” within Indigenous communities as a form of reparative justice. This is a focus that has translated more broadly into the public discourse which tends to focus on the inter-generational trauma suffered by many IRS Survivors. Recognition of, and healing from, intergenerational trauma caused by the IRS system is a crucial component of any meaningful form of reconciliation. There is a risk, however, that in pathologizing the Survivor condition, the narrative of
reconciliation becomes one of disempowered Indigenous peoples in need of state administered healing. Evidence of this trend in TRC related media is found in the much discussed concept of “residential school syndrome” (Chrisjohn et al. 2006), as well as Radmacher’s (2010) analysis of federal government apology in 2008 and the subsequent outpouring of paternalistic sympathy in the media. As James (2012, 197-198) notes, the prevalence of the residential school syndrome trope goes hand in hand with assumptions that reconciliation is about forgiveness, healing, and closure. It is a highly selective conception which builds on stereotypes of Indigenous helplessness. As scholars of Indigenous resurgence are quick to point out (Alfred 2005; Coulthard 2007), this form of reconciliation works within a paradigm of state sovereignty wherein the perceived problem is limited to the trauma of the IRS system, and the proposed answer is a form of recognition politics that seeks to pacify Indigenous resurgence. This is an example of what Rigby (2001, 142) has called “cheap reconciliation”, which follows a logic that goes something like this:

There were two friends, Peter and John. One day Peter steals John’s bicycle. Then, after a period of some months, he goes up to John with outstretched hand and says ‘Let’s talk about reconciliation.’

John says, ‘No, let’s talk about my bicycle.’

‘Forget about the bicycle for now,’ says Peter. ‘Let’s talk about reconciliation.’

‘No,’ says John. ‘We cannot talk about reconciliation until you return my bicycle.’
In other words, without a widening the scope to include issues of colonization and governance, reconciliation can easily be construed as the victim being ceremonially asked to reconcile with their losses. Symbolic gestures must be accompanied by mechanisms of redress, if not, they become a way to elide responsibility. The politics in recognition, in this case, acts as a system of symbolic placation. In the words of George Balandier (1970, 41), “The supreme ruse of power is to allow itself to be contested ritually in order to consolidate itself more effectively.” This is not to suggest that the TRC has been a result of some conspiratorial government plot. Critiques of reconciliation have as much to do with the possibility of a wasted opportunity as they do with potentially regressive outcomes. Instead, it is to recognize that reconciliation is work which must extend far beyond the institution and into the everyday lives of Canadians who, according to a 2008 Environics Research survey, are often not aware of the issues or believe that reconciliation is about forgiveness and moving on (2008 National Benchmark Survey 2008, ii-iii). To speak of reconciliation in these terms is to hold ourselves and each-other accountable along with the decision makers we elect.

There is a seemingly easy association to be made between the pitfalls of the “recognition as reconciliation” formula and empathy based, affective approaches to reconciliation more generally. For James (2012) symbolic reconciliation is a kind of reconciliation which is framed at the individual level, aimed at psychological or
emotive transformation in the absence of a broader political or economic focus. Through acts of commemoration and recognition, symbolic reconciliation often manifests as artistic work that draws on the affectivity and empathy of the audience. Thus, art and affective approaches to reconciliation become identified with an absence of discussion about colonialism and dispossession. James (2012, 199) expands upon this, saying, “conceptions of reconciliation that emphasize face-to-face understanding, healing and forgiveness may be unable to do justice to the political and economic concerns of indigenous communities.”

It would be wrong, however, to think that a broader understanding of colonialism is going to be achieved in the absence of emotion or empathy. Conceptions of reconciliation are not exclusively shaped by academic or political discourse. To a much greater extent I believe it is the affective work of relationship building and art that is responsible for shaping public memories and facilitating political change. The problem is not with art or affectivity as tools of reconciliation, but with the uses to which they are put. While artistic work is not necessarily responsible for direct action, it does have a particularly powerful effect on the way we conceptualize ourselves and relate to one another. David Garneau (as cited in Hill and McCall 2015) builds on this point in the context of art:

Art moves us but does not necessarily move us to action. Gestures in the aesthetic realm may symbolically resist the dominant culture, but there is little empirical evidence to show that art leads to direct action or that viewing it makes us
better people. And yet some of us do feel changed, and we continue to make and enjoy the stuff as if it mattered, as if it made a difference. What art does do – and what is difficult to measure – is that it changes our individual and collective imaginaries by particles, and these new pictures of the world can influence behaviour. Queer pride parades and Idle No More round dances do change how we see and treat each other and ourselves.

*The Land We Are* (2015) is a compilation of work by Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists which critically engages with the recognition-as-reconciliation formulation. This work is representative of the ways affectivity come into play in discourses of reconciliation and challenges the simplistic assumption that affective conceptions of reconciliation are counterproductive. Robinson & Zaiont’s (2015) photo essay, for example, explores the limits of recognition politics and the way integration has become “laminated” onto reconciliation in Vancouver’s built environment and public art. A similar counter narrative is presented by Decter and Isaac’s (2014) *(official denial) trade value in progress* in which responses to Stephen Harper’s infamous G20 statement (that Canadians “have no history of colonialism”) were sewn into Hudson’s Bay blankets. The pervasive question of these and many other artistic collaborations is: who benefits from a politics of recognition?

Counter-narratives such as those presented in *The Land We Are*, are critical engagements with recognition based reconciliation. They are artistic accompaniments, and not inimical challenges, to commemorative works like the *Witness Blanket*. These
approaches to reconciliation raise key questions about how energy is best directed when it comes to creating a better relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. As Corntassel and Alfred (2005, 601) highlight, “there is a danger in allowing colonization to be the only story of Indigenous lives. It must be recognized that colonialism is a narrative in which the Settler’s power is the fundamental reference and assumption, inherently limiting Indigenous freedom and imposing a view of the world that is but an outcome or perspective on that power.” Academics focused on Indigenous resurgence Alfred (2009) Simpson (2008) and Corntassel (2012) stress the importance of everyday practices of decolonization which cumulatively contribute to the revitalization of Indigenous communities. Contesting recognition politics requires action within venues predetermined by the state. In contrast, practices of resurgence prioritize the growth of Indigenous communities themselves. Among other things, Alfred (2009:56) lists the revitalization of land based practices, the re-emergence of cultural and social institutions of governance, and the transmission of Indigenous culture as everyday practices which are integral to the regeneration of Indigenous communities.

*The Eternal Question: Education or Land?*

The deceit of recognition politics is that they are tools of distraction from substantive forms of political redress. It is state or corporate placation of Indigenous resurgence. But the elision of land and water issues in reconciliation discourse does not
mean that immaterial engagements with reconciliation are inherently counter-productive. As Corntassel himself points out (2012, 97), resurgence is as much a material connection as it is a matter of controlling the narrative and “giving voice back to the community as an alternative to the institutionalized narrative that is so vested in state and corporate interest.” Here the emphasis on truth as well as reconciliation is important to keep in mind. In addition to the testimony of IRS Survivors, truth in this context means facilitating an understanding of past wrongs and the way we conceptualize the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples as it proceeds into the future. It must foreground the issues of land and water which are conspicuously absent from the bulk of institutionalized reconciliation discourse. This kind of redress is often referred to as “decolonizing” work, or conversely, as “Indigenization”, and it takes many forms.

In Winnipeg, many of the people I spoke with emphasized the importance of education to reconciliation. These discussions were often premised on a basic distinction: for Indigenous Peoples education is a means of revitalizing cultural histories, traditions, land based practices, and languages; for the settler population education is a means of countering ignorance and fostering an understanding of our shared colonial histories. The University of Winnipeg, for example, has recently approved a mandatory Indigenous Credit Requirement (ICR) for all undergraduate students. This initiative, as an interview participant told me, was born in response to
the ignorance and racism on display in online comment sections. It grew with goal of providing students with a “fundamental understanding of our collective, shared histories, so that these histories are told uncensored and not only from a Eurocentric perspective but from the Indigenous lens as well.” The ICR seeks to make up for critical absences in our educational system. This kind of truth telling is not about forcing people to think a certain way, it is about presenting a suppressed understanding of Canadian history, a process which necessarily unsettles what used to be taken for granted.

As former community radio host and now Winnipeg MP Robert-Falcon Ouellette pointed out to me, education is also particularly important for Indigenous people living in cities:

“Living here in Winnipeg you don’t see eagles flying very much above this city. You don’t feel the grass between your feet on the concrete jungle downtown. And we might say it is Indigenous land… [but] looking around us, there is nothing Indigenous about this neighbourhood… I think a lot of Indigenous people who live in the city, it’s very hard for many of us to have that connection to the land and to even understand it. So the only way to gain that is through education. But what type of education?”

Robert framed this discussion to me as a longstanding question of what comes first: land or education. It is a phrasing which importantly does not foreclose on the necessity of both and instead asks: under what circumstances can restitution happen?

For urban Indigenous people who are spatially and economically limited in their ability
to engage in traditional land based practices, Indigenizing our education system is one way that the dichotomy between material and immaterial conceptions of reconciliation are bridged. Robert’s framing complicates hard and fast distinctions between reconciliation and resurgence as mutually exclusive processes.

In a conversation with Ojibway elder and educator Florence Paynter, she emphasized that the push for this kind of reformation is not new. Florence has spent much of her life working in Indigenous education in Manitoba, writing curriculums, advising on content, and building Indigenous teaching pedagogies. Alongside her hope for the future she voiced her exasperation with the ways bureaucratic process and governmental control limit efforts to change the education system. Her experiences re-emphasize the fact that reconciliation work builds from long standing and ongoing struggles. Contextualizing reconciliation in this way means tracing colonial impacts from historical contexts into the present day in an unbroken line, working against the idea that reconciliation is about making up for past wrongs only.

From my experience in Winnipeg it became clear to me that there is no prescriptive form of reconciliation. It may mean different things for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and for people with varying living circumstances and backgrounds therein. To draw strict lines over what constitutes the right path towards reconciliation in Canada is to risk reducing the question to an opposition of essentialized actors: those who are Indigenous and those who are not. In reality the
lines between forms of reconciliation and between the people to whom these form are most relevant are not predetermined by Indigeneity. In short, bringing discussions of sovereignty and land back to the forefront does not require us to write off work that is currently being done in the name of reconciliation. It points to a lack in reconciliation discourse but does not mean condemning that discourse in its entirety. In settler colonial states like Canada, where the colonizers never leave, the process decolonization requires them to be transformed (Freeman 2014, 216). Effecting this change involves emotional, discursive, and otherwise immaterial forms of redress that deconstruct the settler imaginary.

*In Defense of Reconciliation*

Authors writing in a framework of Indigenous resurgence are writing primarily for and about Indigenous communities. Given the responsibility that non-Indigenous peoples have to decolonize our relationships with the land and with each other, how might settlers in Canada benefit from engagement with own communities? Such a focus is not to discount the importance of solidarity work or to undermine relationship-building between Indigenous and non-indigenous communities, but instead to acknowledge that Indigenous people often bear much of the workload of decolonization while non-Indigenous people benefit from it. A central question, then, is how settlers can learn to be effective allies and practitioners of decolonization without appropriating the terms of discussion. As De Costa (2009, 14) notes: “In the absence of
any collective strategies for reconstructing – not just deconstructing – non-Native identities, the business of reconciliation will remain over-determined by those who are able to represent settler identities in their broadest, that is mainstream media and political actors, and they will do so with their own imperatives of spectacle, national unity, simplistic notions of equal citizenship, or simply to defang Native claims.” How then, are settlers to proceed with such a task?

In *Unsettling the Settler Within*, Paullette Regan (2010) formulates an answer to this question. Regan, a non-indigenous scholar and former TRC senior researcher, calls on settlers to confront what she calls the “peace-maker” myth of Canadian history. The peace maker myth is the idea that Canadians are (and have been in the past) benevolent bringers of “progress,” “heroes on a mythical quest to save Indians” (2010, 34). It is the conception of a Canadian national history which is implied by Harper’s outright denial of our colonial legacy. A deconstruction of this myth requires, as I have already elaborated on, linking the residential school system to the broader system of colonial violence, which the schools were a part of. Listening to Survivor testimony is an opportunity for non-Indigenous people to confront the fact that the institutional structures which gave rise to the IRS system were fundamental to the formation of Canada and have been carried with us into the present day. As Regan states: “violence against Indigenous peoples is woven into the fabric of Canadian history in an unbroken thread from past to present that we must now unravel, unsettling our comfortable
assumptions about the past.” Coming to terms with settler colonialism is a process that is necessarily discomforting. It requires non-Indigenous Canadians to dislodge the narratives that allow them to feel comfortable in colonized spaces, and to confront complicities in ongoing colonial realities. The way people approach this process is as important as the truths which are learned. Settlers must not be paralyzed by guilt or vulnerability, but likewise must work to avoid the pitfalls of settler allyship which threaten to reproduce the very forms of structural oppression which we seek to challenge (see Corntassel, Dhamoon and Snelgrove 2014). It is a process which prioritizes “counter-narratives of Indigenous diplomacy, law, and peace-making practices...as told by Indigenous peoples themselves” (Regan 2010, 2).

At first glance, Regan’s approach seems oriented to “truth” rather than any substantive form of reconciliation. Her emphasis is on redressing our collective memory via the retelling of Canadian history. Critically, however, it is a conception of reconciliation which does not foreclose discussions of ongoing colonial violence. Education is an enabler of action and not an end goal in and of itself. In this sense, it is a bridge between the internal empathy based conceptions of reconciliation and those which prioritize the land and restitution. It is also an approach which acknowledges the necessity of productive and respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people into the future. Regan’s emphasis on the testimony of IRS Survivors and the importance of process speaks to the fact that reconciliation, in all its meanings,
has been a distinctly mediated concept. As James (2012:196-197) notes, “the means of mass communication are largely controlled by corporations representing the settler elite, while the state, with its vast command of personnel, information and resources, has formidable agenda setting and framing powers of its own.” In this context, the importance of community engagement and community media becomes evident, for it is here that counter-narratives of decolonization stem, and where the voices of those excluded in mainstream discourse are heard.
Chapter 2 – The Media

Introduction

This chapter explores the overlaps between community media and community organization around issues related to reconciliation in Winnipeg. I begin with an overview of the anthropology of media, arguing that an approach that is attuned to both local nuance and larger structural issues is essential to understanding how the concept of reconciliation gains meaning through the media. I then move to a discussion of media power and kinds of influence the media can have on the way we conceptualize the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. Advocates for media reform point to a democratic deficit in mainstream media that is shaped by inaccessibility and neoliberal agendas. Community media offers an alternative to the mainstream by prioritizing open access to the means of media production and control of media platforms by community members themselves. CKUW is a community radio station in Winnipeg which has close ties to Indigenous community initiatives who are working on issues relevant to reconciliation. One example explored in this chapter is the issue of racism in Winnipeg and responses to the highly publicized Maclean’s magazine article that labelled Winnipeg as Canada’s most racist city. CKUW, and other community media producers, not only report on these issues as stories for consumption, but actively encourage people to become involved in community work which challenge local injustices.
Theorizing Media Power

In colloquial use “the media” implies something close to the OED definition as “the main means of mass communication”. This includes a constellation of different forms of media (e.g. newspaper, radio, digital media) and their associated practices of production and consumption. I think it is also helpful to think of media as a medium, that is, as “an intervening substance through which a force acts on objects at a distance or through which impressions are conveyed to the senses.” Though “subjects” might be more appropriate than “objects”, this definition foregrounds the material side of media. Media are not just informational content but a milieu of technologies and embodied processes of creation and consumption. The “force” referenced in this definition is a transductive conveyance of energy to the senses. A radio set, for example, picks up electromagnetic signals through its antenna and turns them into audible sound through a series of energy transfers which culminate in the vibrating diaphragm of the speaker that our ears can hear. Audience members themselves might be thought of as transductive agents as well, insofar as people are interpreters of media content and not simply its passive recipients.

Luhmann (2000) highlights efficiency, accessibility, and reach as driving constants in the development of mass media technology and practice. The “massness” of mass media is a framing with political and economic undertones. “Mass” is not only
the latent potential of a widely accessible media form (i.e. the ability to consume at one’s choosing), but the process by which disparate peoples are viewed demographically and rendered together in the form of a prospective audience. Media anthropologists, as with media theorists generally, often grapple with questions of agency and hegemony. Is western media westernizing the world? Does technology structure the ways we engage with and make meaning of media? Through the popular work of scholars like Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer ([1944]1997) and Noam Chomsky ([1988]2010), “mass media” has gained certain nefarious connotations of homogenization and control. In conjunction with the view that mass media absorb, aestheticize, and ultimately negate systemic criticism (which in a globalized context extends beyond the boundaries of the nation-state) is the view that technology, and not people, are the primary structuring forces of social relations. Both cases emphasize the curtailment of a media receiver’s ability to act autonomously within a technological and symbolic framework that is predetermined by politic goals and market imperatives.

One of the mechanisms by which media work to undermine agency, as Hall (1997) emphasizes, is the way its representational strategies implicitly fix the meanings attached to media content, invoking an idealized audience member and a single authoritative way of understanding a text.

But media anthropologists have been quick to point that audiences are not just passive recipients of ideological doctrine. This is both a critique of theoretical
abstraction as well as an assertion that “audiences interpret media texts in ways other than what has been intentioned in the strategies of those who control the production of the media text” (Majumder 2010, 288). Media anthropologists who foreground local nuance through ethnographic inquiry, are often engaged in work which fleshes out in practice what is discussed in theory. Postill (2008) for example, emphasize that the contribution of media anthropology to media studies more generally is its ability to decenter Western-centric theory and prioritize local engagement and thick description. As a field of study with a long standing attachment to the subtleties of lived experience outside of Euro-Christian West, it is not hard to see why anthropologists would oppose overly reductionist assumptions that the spread of globalized media necessarily entails coercive homogenization. But an emphasis on individual agency, subjectivities and a political focus on pluralism do not replace macro-theory as a goal. Engaging with reception studies is no reason to disengage with knowledge claims that seek to contextualize experience in broader frameworks of understanding. As Ellen Wood (1990, 80) says, “We should not confuse respect for the plurality of human experience and social struggles with a complete dissolution of historical causality, where there is nothing but diversity, difference, and contingency, no unifying structures, no logic of process, no capitalism and therefore no negation of it, no universal project of human emancipation.” Coman and Rothenbuhler (2005, 9) point out that the presumption that all knowledge is local itself entails a generalized theory of knowledge, as do research
methodologies designed to prioritize local knowledge. Instead, as Majumder (2010, 5) emphasizes, media anthropology must be “bifocal” attending to both “the institutional structures and the agency and circumstances of cultural producers.”

This bifocal approach is relevant to discussions of reconciliation in Canada. A national level dialogue about Indian Residential Schools and histories of dispossession must be accompanied by localized understandings of how these histories are carried with us into the present day. Reconciliation has been a distinctly mediated concept which has taken on a variety of meanings in different venues of discussions and contexts of use. It is also a word that connotes action and change, meanings which blur the lines between media’s role as a conduit for the transmission of stories about reconciliation, and its use as a tool of reconciliation in its own right. As a tool of reconciliation, media have educational capacities to shape broader public discussions and conceptions of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Community media often intersect with activism and community organizing on a range of issues that are related to reconciliation. At CKUW in Winnipeg, there are many talk shows that foreground the work of community organizers and activists as a means of encouraging participation in local community events. This is a feature of community media which is often absent in the discourses of institutionalized mainstream media. It underscores the capacity of community media to work towards the goals of
reconciliation not only as an educational tool, but by involving people more substantively in their communities.

**Media Power**

As Couldry and Curran (2003) elucidate, media power is often understood in one of two ways. For some, media power comes from its ability to amplify reality and act as an intermediary for the forces at work in the world. For others, media power is better understood as the capacity to amplify certain realities, in certain ways. In this latter understanding media is a constructor, and not just a reflector, of social worlds. Media’s capacity to construct social reality is a result of what Thompson (1995, 17) refers to as its “symbolic power”. Symbolic power is the ability to influence thought and action by means of symbolic transmission. Understanding media to be powerful in this way means seeing it not simply as a watchdog for external forms of power (e.g. economic, political), but as means by which we position ourselves in relation to those perceived forms of power. Media create understandings of the social, political, and economic circumstances which identify with/against. As Schein (2002, 231) notes: “the way the people understand who they are and how they belong is never anterior to, indeed is inseparable from, the kinds of media they use or consume” Media are venues for the ritualistic re-affirmation of our self-understanding, and our understanding of the stake we have in larger systems of identification: “community”, “country”, “political party” etc. Ritual, as an action word, underscores the fact that media are
emergent and in need of re-enactment to remain relevant. Identity and self-understanding are not accessible as static formations, they are always produced and re-affirmed in relationships of domination and power (Majumder 2010, 288). In this sense, one of the key tensions in mass media is between the drive to fix meaning in media texts on the one hand, and the need to continually re-create these texts on the other. In relation to reconciliation, a conscience of redress might be said to exist when audience members position themselves positively in relation to discourses of decolonization and restitution. Media have the power influence, but not to actualize cultures of redress in the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. That agency and responsibility always rests with the people receiving media, though we are not always attentive to it.

Symbolic power is not exclusive to the media but it is concentrated there. The media are in a privileged position to tell the stories that shape our social realities. They give us the soundbites, images, and quotable information which help us constitute and re-affirm the ways we conceive the world beyond our immediate surroundings. The distribution of this representational authority is not naturally given to institutions of mass media, it is the product of longstanding struggles over who has the power to tell the stories of others and who’s voices are heard (Couldry and Curran 2003, 41). We tend to take it for granted that a few institutions have so much control over representational power. When this division of labor is justified it is often in relation to
basic premises of economics: media is concentrated because specialization correlates with quality. There is no question that institutions of mass media have greater resources to tell and distribute stories. These means are the pre-requisites of creating and distributing national-scale discourse. The basic truthfulness of the events these stories relate to is likewise not in question (at least not usually). It is rather a question of how events are (or are not) turned into stories, and who determines what meanings are meant to be fixed to certain events. All mass media is not a result of editorial machination designed specifically to indoctrinate audiences. The concentration of Media power is in many respects a harmless thing to be naturalized to, an inertial predisposition to audiencing, consumption, and production which we all take part in and take for granted. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with being entertained by mass media. It is only to foreground media’s complicity in systems of oppression that expository arguments about media power are necessary. It is unlikely after all, that media power will be made explicit by those who benefit from it.

Media democratization has the basic goal of enabling all people, groups, and social sectors to circulate ideas and cultural elements to a broader public, and to facilitate participation in the construction of public truths. To the extent that reconciliation foregrounds the experiences of those who have been marginalized in mainstream discourse, the goals of media democracy are in line with those of reconciliation. Efforts to democratize media have often been a result of social
movements that seek to raise the voices of oppressed peoples. The impediments to more democratic media are what Carroll and Hackett (2008:1) call the “democratic deficit”, which consists of:

- the media system’s failure to constitute a democratically adequate public sphere;
- centralization of political and symbolic power inherent in the political economy of media industries;
- media’s complicity in maintaining inequality through exclusions of culture and class that include the ‘digital divide’;
- media’s role in homogenizing social viewpoints – narrowing the diversity of public discourses;
- media’s failure to help sustain healthy communities and political cultures, due to factors ranging from insufficient localism and excessive national chauvinism, to commercially-driven audience fragmentation and content trivialization;
- media’s participation in the corporate enclosure of knowledge through expansion of ‘intellectual property rights’;
- elitist processes of communication policy-making, which exclude the public from shaping mandates of the cultural industries;

Community media, as Carroll and Hackett (2008, 4-5) further explain, are particularly well suited to the goals of media democratization. By encouraging public participation and prioritizing diversity over marketability, community media is structurally built around precepts which confront the democratic deficit. For these reasons, activists and community organizers with ties to broader social movements are often connected to community media organizations, either as direct contributors or through mutual acquaintance. There are a range of different forms that community media might take. Though social media platforms are increasingly communicative hubs for public discussion, traditional forms of media like radio and newspaper continue to
thrive at the community level. In Canada there are well over 100 community radio stations, many of which are the primary media outlets in smaller communities.

**Radio and Medium Specificity**

The consolidation of media in digital form raises questions about the importance of form (i.e. technologies of deliverance and production) and means (i.e. practices of creating and receiving) to our understanding of what affordances different kinds of media might have for producers and consumers. Is radio streamed online still radio or does it belong under the more general catch-all of “digital media?” Questions of definition easily lead to overdetermined yes/no answers. The introduction of new technologies expose the assumption that media have at some point been technologically or culturally stable. 1920s newspapermen sought to discredit radio’s ability to capture the nuances of musical performance (Falk and Gordon 1967, 41), and musical purists now fetishize the hiss and pop sounds that are missing from digitized audio. As Bessire and Fischer 2013, 36 emphasize, the boundaries of a media form “cannot be assumed a priori but must be located within the contours of a given social milieu.” This kind of instrumentalist emphasis on the ways media are used/understood in situ is not to say that there aren’t technological constants but rather that these constants are variable, even when “radio” as a term is somewhat universal. In my discussions of radio I refer primarily to terrestrial AM/FM radio, which was the focus of my time spent in Winnipeg.
The transition of TV, Radio, and Newspaper into online form has made them all accessible through the interface of a computer screen. These changes, and the concurrent emergence of web 2.0 and the user-generated content of social media, are well represented in media studies discourses that are often dominated by the “digital”. Conceptions of a digital revolution and an epistemic break with the past create an aura of mystery and potential that has undoubtedly been helpful in creating a marketplace for new technologies. The degree to which academia is likewise caught up in this aura is a matter of debate (Dinsman and Moretti 2016). The cachet of digital technologies, both from a market and academic perspectives has certainly had an impact on the status of other forms of media, which are often seen as antiquated and in inevitable decline.

For radio, these conceptions of decline have been present for a long time. Since the 1950s, when TV supplanted radio as the primary domestic technology of entertainment, the death knell has been sounded. But radio has proved adaptable. Podcasting, internet radio and satellite radio are examples of how it is being made meaningful for new generations. AM/FM based terrestrial radio is also still prevalent and continues to have the greatest reach of all media forms in North America (Nielsen 2016). The reasons for radio’s perseverance are many, but primary among them is how cheap it is. The transmission costs of AM/FM radio are a fraction of the costs associated with downloading digital audio. For consumers, radio sets are readily available and the
content is free. For producers, radio stations require minimal technical expertise to keep running and radio ads are easy to produce. Radio sets are also simple technologies that aren’t delicate and don’t take up much space. For the billions of people on the other side of the global digital divide, who face barriers to digital media access and use, radio technology is a primary source of information and entertainment. In addition to these economic factors, there are the affordances of radio as an aural medium. As Berland (1990, 179) notes, radio is often thought of as a secondary medium, something which does not require full-body attentiveness but which allows you to move through it to accomplish other tasks while listening. The image comes to mind of a driver on their way home from work, or a cook in the kitchen. Its uses range from being a barely audible acoustic backdrop, to transmitting critical information in warzones. Radio, in short, affords a spectrum of different kinds of production and consumption which, in addition to making it resilient, make it adaptable as a tool of community media.

**Radio and Media Democratization**

Decentralizing the means to create media through efforts of media democratization, says nothing about the narratives which are produced. There is a distinction between the form and content of media which is not always clear. Does community radio qualify as “alternative” media simply because it doesn’t have national reach? The Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), a nationally syndicated network, challenges simplistic equations of “national” with “mainstream”
and “local” with “alternative”. So too does Berland’s (1990) observation that commercial radio also represents itself as a local medium that seeks, if only because of the geographic constraints of radio transmission, to produce a sense of local relevance in its audience. Most radio stations for example, are identified by their local call sign (e.g. CKUW), their local frequency, or by their locally given names which often themselves reference their geographic location. As with radio in most cities and communities, most of Winnipeg’s radio stations have slogans with “Winnipeg” in them. In addition to diegetic spatial references of radio show hosts (e.g. “here in Winnipeg”) these slogans are repeated multiple times an hour in the form of “stingers”, short station identifications which tell the audience what station they are listening too. Despite this emphasis on localization, most radio stations are not considered alternative or community media.

From my experience at CKUW, I see community radio as a combination of structural and content markers. Structurally, it prioritizes access to the means of production over and against the profit-driven motives behind labour specialization and hierarchy which occlude equal participation. Anyone can host their own show at CKUW provided there are enough timeslots. In addition to access it often entails the freedom to engage in production without conforming to brand and genre driven format regulation. Radio formats are designations which describe the content that a radio station produces. For example, “Hot Adult Contemporary” (think: The Eagles, Cher,
Madonna, and Sting) is the most popular music format in Canadian cities with almost 8% of the market share. Formats are designed to target certain demographics and listening publics, they are markers of consistency for audiences. Though a radio station may occasionally cross into the territory of a related format straying too far risks alienating audiences and losing advertising revenue. Community radio lacks these constraints and instead prioritizes a diversity of community voices and consequently, many different kinds of radio shows. As the website of the National Community and Campus Radio Station states: “Community-based radio stations are community-owned, democratically-governed, non-share not-for-profit corporations; therefore they are not subject to acquisition/relocation, they are structurally bound to the communities that they serve."

Many of the community radio producers I spoke with valued the editorial and creative control they had over their own shows. Chris Reed, a Winnipeg radio show host and producer of CKUW’s contribution to the Resonating Reconciliation project, emphasized that format free radio and creative control were critical in allowing people to speak frankly and openly about the issues which mattered to them. Facilitating media access and control are the primary motivations of community radio’s structure and governance. This highlights an important distinction between access and content control that defines community radio: it is not simply a matter of having the means to produce, but the freedom to produce what you like.
In a conversation about the differences between commercial and community radio a former community radio host explained to me that it is actually fairly easy to get your own show at a commercial station. Given slim profit margins and a heavily skewed payroll system, many commercial stations are willing to take on new shows so long as producers are willing to conform to format requirements and work basically for free. When this is not the case, community radio fills in as an equalizing force in a media landscape otherwise dominated by state and commercial interests. As the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) describes it on their website: “Campus and Community radio should meet the needs and interests of the communities served by these stations in ways that are not met by commercial radio stations and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC).” Besides being an acknowledgement that commercial and state media do not encompass public interests this quote hints at the fact that community radio is defined not only by its democratic structure but by the kinds of content it produces. It would not be accurate or very informative to say that community radio content is simply an amalgam of everything that didn’t make it onto commercial or public broadcasters. As CKUW program director Robin Eriksson emphasized to me, community radio is not simply a springboard for launching careers in professional journalism but a community with objectives that are tangential to those of institutional media. CKUW encompasses many different kinds of radio shows and through this pluralism there is a sense of collectivity
and affirmed values. This feeling may vary from person to person and the makings of it are diverse, but in part it stems from an understanding that community voices (literally) represent an alternative to commercial and state media. Because community radio producers are not required to represent the interests of the station and are not at risk of losing their job if they don’t live up to expectations, there is a sense that simply by being themselves on air producers shirk industry norms, providing something authentic in the midst of fabrication.

A seemingly counter intuitive yet fundamental component of community radio is the preservation of individuality and difference. The emergence of a collective identity through plurality, and not by way of its negation, is a feature of community radio that makes it amenable to broader goals of media democracy. This contrasts with commercial and state media’s subordination of individuality to the furtherance of goals established by owners, executives, and board members. Interestingly, the easy association between conservatism and commercial (rather than community) media is contradicted by the preservation of liberalism’s focus on individuality in the latter and not the former. CKUW’s underlying philosophy is to foster cultural plurality, and in practice this goal also works to promote the uniqueness of its individual hosts. As I write this ‘Peg City Groove is hosting a local folk band live on air at CKUW, later this evening the DJs on Quadrafunk will be spinning bass and techno, and from 12-6am, Manitoba Moon will take over the airwaves to “keep things weird” throughout the night.
CKUW and Community Activism

As Carol and Hackett (2008, 4-5) discuss, there is a natural affinity between community media platforms and social movements which prioritize the voices of those who are not normally heard from in mainstream discourses. At CKUW, some producers are activists themselves, others don’t self-identify that way but are sympathetic to certain causes, and there are also non-producer activists who are involved at a community level and often featured on the radio as guests. It is difficult to draw clear lines between CKUW and external social movements in Winnipeg, both because producers are often involved in those movements and because those movements are so much a part of the communities which CKUW serves: primarily the inner city. In any case, the intertwining of community radio with activism is not the result of dogmatic mandate but an outgrowth of the issues that are relevant to community members. Approximately 30% of airtime at CKUW is dedicated to talk radio. Many of these shows touch on national or global politics but the primary content is local, hosting informal and in depth discussions with community members and covering community events as they happen. Two long-running talk shows: People of Interest, and Inner City Voices (ICV) spend a significant amount of time discussing local politics. Over the summer of 2015, a handful of issues occupied a significant portion of airtime on these shows: The Energy East Pipeline proposal, CFS and child welfare, missing and murdered Indigenous women, racism in Winnipeg, freedom road to Shoal...
Lake 40, and the implementation of the Indigenous Credit Requirement at the University of Winnipeg. These were by no means the only stories but all were driven by the grassroots initiative of community members, Indigenous people primary among them. They are also issues which are linked by a basis in discussions of neo-colonialism and the marginalization of Indigenous peoples. As such they are localized instances where the reconciliation concept might gain substantive meaning. In particular, the issue of racism in Winnipeg was a frequent discussion point in the local media in the summer of 2015. This is partly because of a highly publicized Maclean’s magazine article which explored the cities deep racial divides. The responses to this article were varied and came from many different media sources and community organizations. In the last section of this chapter I discuss the Meet Me at the Bell Tower (MM@BT) community group and its relationship to community radio in the context of these discussions.

**Meet Me at the Bell Tower**

MM@BT is a weekly gathering open to everyone at the corner of Selkirk and Powers, a few blocks north of the rail yards which divide Winnipeg’s Downtown-core from the North End. The Bell tower, a twenty five foot structure topped by an onion dome, is located in a little public square between a corner store and a housing complex across the street from the Indigenous Family Centre. MM@BT’s longstanding slogan is “Stop the violence,” a reference to the groups origins as a youth led movement against
violence in the North End. Since its birth in the fall of 2011 where it was initially intended to be a one-off gathering, it has become a locus of community engagement and a forum for a range of grassroots initiatives. Each week focuses on an issue or concept that is relevant to the group’s overall goal of community wellbeing. Over the summer of 2015 the group hosted a bicycle safety/bike helmet drive, an activist 101 session, and its most popular event to date, a welcome evening for newcomers to Winnipeg. In addition to supporting community needs, MM@BT has been a locus for discussion on issues like decolonization, racialized violence, and reconciliation. Though the gatherings are open to everybody, the majority of participants are Indigenous. There is a strong emphasis on creating space for discussion and hearing from community members whose experiences are marginalized in mainstream narratives. These goals operate at metaphoric levels as tropes of empowerment (e.g. “raising a voice”), but they are also very literal reclamation of space, where community members gather to talk, plan, and share time together in what are all too often felt to be dangerous public places.

The MM@BT community overlaps with other movements and community institutions in Winnipeg such as the Bear Clan Patrol, a community safety group, and the Indigenous Family Centre, a cultural learning centre which often hosts MM@BT events. It is also closely affiliated with Aboriginal Youth Opportunities (AYO!), a movement spearheaded by young Indigenous community members who facilitate a
variety of actions and events primarily in Winnipeg’s North end and inner-city areas. Though MM@BT was originally focused on violence in the North End, it has since become a community fixture and a nexus for discussion and action on a variety of issues and social movements. It is difficult to separate the MM@BT gatherings from these overlapping movements, both because the bell tower is a venue for growing these movements and because many of the MM@BT organizers are involved in multiple causes throughout the city. The underlying goal of building community is embodied by these overlaps in the way organizers work to bridge movements, building momentum for a diversity of causes by bringing people together. There are cross-overs between community members from the North End and those from other parts of Winnipeg, between environmental and social justice activists, and between Indigenous people, new-comers, and non-Indigenous people. As with CKUW, there is an emphasis on welcoming diversity and opening up space for marginalized voices.

Though the MM@BT community is grounded in the physical space of Winnipeg’s North end and Inner city neighbourhoods, it is also a discursive or conceptual community with porous borders, welcoming of all who would like to participate. Michael Champagne is one of the core organizers and founders MM@BT and is also a co-host of the *Inner City Voices show* (ICV) on CKUW. ICV has a focus on local politics and community happenings and has been a platform for community organizations such as MM@BT to host discussions and get the word out about
upcoming events. MM@BT has always been welcoming of people from all parts of Winnipeg and ICV is one way that that broader public awareness is fostered. These overlaps, between media and community organization, are a critical component of a mediascape in Winnipeg which is not always a friendly place for marginalized communities.

In 2015, Maclean’s magazine published a cover article naming Winnipeg Canada’s most racist city. The article, which was written by Nancy Macdonald, gained national attention and was the source of much discussion in Winnipeg, prompting a formal response from Winnipeg’s mayor Brian Bowman and prominent members of the Indigenous community. Reactions to the article were varied. Some, like a local talk-radio host Dave Wheeler, sought to discredit Macdonald’s arguments by particularizing instances of “Indigenous on Indigenous” crime as a pivot away from the systemic nature of racial inequality which the article sought to expose. As Wheeler proclaimed in his interview with the article’s author Nancy Macdonald: “Someone who loves this city doesn’t write ‘Winnipeg, where Canada’s racism problem is at it’s worst’, someone who loves this city goes to bat for this city, and doesn’t paint it in a horrible light.” Wheeler’s sentiments underscore the degree to which civic pride can amount to the erasure of systems of issues like racism from the public discourse.

Many community organizers in Winnipeg had a different response to the article. Rather than discussing whether or not racism was an issue, they were focused on how
racism in Winnipeg can be addressed. In a CBC editorial published 7 months after the Maclean’s article was released, Champagne (2015) highlighted the work that he and other inner-city activists had been doing on the issue of racism. He called on Winnipeg’s suburban communities to take part in MM@BT events and to take initiative in starting their own: “Winnipeg’s inner city has not been waiting. If you want to connect with the indigenous youth leaders and primarily North End resident-led activities, for three and a half years, Fridays at 6 p.m. at the North End bell tower has been the place where you will find us.” Champagne’s piece highlights a number of important points. It argues that community is not necessarily predetermined by race or geographic proximity but grows at sites of collective engagement. Champagne also asserts that this community building work need not be authorized (and must not be compelled by) government authorities. We choose to take action, and if we do not, we are choosing not to. As much as institutional actors are responsible for systemic redress, they can also be scapegoats for those who are not acting individually, whether because they hope to evade accusations of wrongdoing or because they fully believe that individual efforts are unhelpful. Most importantly, Michael, and other members of the Indigenous and ally communities in Winnipeg, emphasize that talk must not stand in for action on issues like racialized violence and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.
On Friday August 14th, MM@BT hosted a welcome evening for new immigrants to Winnipeg. The event was open to everyone and sought to gather people from Winnipeg’s different ethnicities and nationalities to talk about race relations in the city and to share a dinner together. The organizers were strategic in using the Maclean’s article as means of calling on Winnipeg’s largely white, suburban populations to attend, and to host similar events of their own. But to say that the article was responsible for the evening would not be true. The MM@BT community had hosted discussions of racialized violence before the article was published, and has continued to do so many months after the media buzz has died down. The attention that mainstream media garners can be fleeting and often casts a negative light on Indigenous people in Winnipeg. ICV and other community media organizations in Winnipeg, like the newly formed Indigenous led Red Rising magazine, continue to foreground Indigenous voices and serve as a platform for progressive action.

Conclusion

Perhaps the biggest difference between institutionalized state and corporate media and community media is the degree to which the latter seeks to involve its audience as active participants in the stories it reports on. CKUW places an emphasis on local stories, foregrounding issues relevant to community members by providing the means of media production to those community members. Shows like ICV and People of Interest often blur the lines between simply reporting stories for an audience’s
consumption, and calling on that audience to become a part of the story. This is true not only of the MM@BT movement but a myriad of other ongoing community initiatives as well. It is indicative of strong and growing Indigenous and ally community in Winnipeg who, despite the negative associations the city often garners in national media, are at the forefront of decolonization efforts in Canada.
Chapter 3 – Tuning in to Community Radio

Introduction

I enter the CKUW studio 20 minutes early for my meeting with Chris, a local radio producer who invited me to fill 2 hours of un-occupied air time with him. It’s not my first time on the radio but it is my first time with hosting responsibilities. I have no experience in live studio production so I’ve had to take Chris’ word that the process is easy enough to learn on the fly. Despite his admonitions to relax I feel the kind of nerves I get before speaking in public. I’ve told family and friends to tune in for our segment and as I take stalk of all the knobs, dials, and chords in the studio space I’m beginning to worry that our show will sound like an extended training session that was accidently broadcast on air.

Chris hasn’t arrived yet so I take a seat on the couch about halfway down the hall. There are three production rooms running along the wall opposite me. The first is the “on-air control room” where live broadcasts happen and the third is the “production control room” used for pre-recorded interviews and editing. In between these rooms is “studio B”, a multi-purpose space wired for live interviews and musical performances as well as for pre-recorded content. The rest of the station is open, with two partitioned offices, a music library, and the lounge area where I now sit on a leather couch opposite studio B. The space is small, borderline cramped, and windowless, which gives the impression of being in a basement despite the fact that it’s
on the University’s top floor. The wall behind me is covered with posters and leaflets promoting local shows, events, and other community initiatives. It resembles a telephone pole or neighbourhood message board with older posters partially covered by newer ones. Each new poster seems to have become an addition to the station’s built space. It is both a stratigraphy of the community’s media history and a mosaic of the station’s diversity. The wall seems to say: “This is not a format radio station.” There is no streamlined brand image to uphold, no prescribed rules about what music should or should not be played. With its menagerie of clashing colours, fonts, and graphic design styles, it is a display of the station’s emphasis on unity through difference, over and against the dominant model of commercial media.

Beside the door to the on-air studio there is a light in the style of a hockey goal light mounted to the wall. Its red glow indicates that there is a live broadcast in progress. The light’s specific purpose is to keep people from opening the door or making noise outside that might be picked up by the broadcast inside. It also serves as a reminder that sound is the medium of currency in radio production, and that the process of creating radio requires us to be aware of our sonic surroundings. Chris arrives about 5 minutes before we are scheduled to begin. To me this seems to be cutting it close. After all, time is not about to wait for us and there will be dead air if we’re not on the mics in time. As I soon find out however, this casual approach to show transitions is the norm. Show producers will often end their shows on a track that
bleeds into the next timeslot to give the next host some leeway in getting settled. It’s a form of time-management that contrasts with the formal hourly demarcations and sonic markers used by the CBC and other commercial broadcasters. Today, the previous host has left us with a long experimental music track that gives us some breathing room to get things sorted out. We talk briefly about what we will do: take turns leading the conversation and picking out tracks to play. The rest will have to work itself out. Just before our scheduled start time of 3:00 pm, we squeeze into the studio space and get ready to go on air.

Outside the on-air room the station is bright and there is an air of sociability. Inside, the lighting is dim, there is sound absorbing foam on the walls and the space is dominated by microphones, computers, soundboards, and various other radio-enabling technologies. Chris and I take our seats on the same side of a table that holds the computer and sound board, the primary interfaces we’ll need to control levels and switch between different audio inputs. The desk also anchors three retractable microphones which we pull towards us. Chris gives me some pointers: try to keep your mouth a hands-width from the mic when you’re talking, be aware when your mic is live and that you’re broadcasting and just talk normally, people will know if you’re trying to fake a radio voice. I have many questions but we’re now almost ten minutes past our scheduled start time so they will have to wait. We put on headphones to monitor our voices, do a quick mic check to make sure our voices are at an appropriate
volume, and then Chris pushes button on the control panel, illuminating a red light. We are live on the air.

_Tuning in to community radio_

In conjunction with the show itself, it was the times I got to spend in and around the radio station that made my experience at CKUW memorable. The actual content of the show was not pre-arranged, and in hindsight feels secondary to the time I got to spend in the station talking and learning the how-tos of radio production. In this chapter I want to transition away from a focus on media content to consider the technologies, practices, and material spaces associated with radio production. These things comprise radio’s medium specificity, its limits, affordances, and engendered practices of production and consumption that differentiate it from other media forms. My account draws on theorizations of technology and audition, but acknowledges that a multiplicity of different uses has given rise to a variety of “radio-fields” which are not reducible to a singular explanation (Bessire and Fischer 2013). I focus on CKUW as a community radio station, and more specifically on my experiences there as a researcher and radio enthusiast. By offering a grounded account, I want to avoid conclusions that are overdetermined by technology, following Franz Fanon’s (1959, 73) assertion that radio technologies can never be assessed in their “calm objectivity” alone and are always cross-hatched with larger circumstances of economy and politics. It is the co-constitutive relationship between materials and practices that I’m interested in. Radio’s
objectivities are inextricable from contexts use, and through this entanglement collective sensibilities emerge. Where “media” ambiguously refers to a certain kind of symbolic content, this chapter discusses how materials and practices of production act together to constitute radio as an irreducibly sonic experience. It is an approach based in varying scales of space: the studio, the lounge, the University of Winnipeg, The Downtown-Core etc., which at the same time are accompanied by processes of de-territorialization that constitute radio as media in colloquial use: the use of transmitters, satellites and receivers which facilitate radio dispersal to unknown audiences. Radio is an ever emergent site of meaning production not reducible to a single collective sensibility, even, as I was to find out, in the same show.

Technologies of Inclusion

I understand technologies of sonic reproduction as devices which transduce soundwaves into an alternate form of energy for storage or transmittance. This includes commonplace consumer technologies like radio sets and ipods, but also encompasses producer technologies such as the soundboards and amplifiers of a recording studio. These second kinds of technologies are the primary focus of this chapter. During my time at CKUW an important tension was brought to light for me between the mandate of openness and inclusivity that CKUW fosters, and the ways that technology can work against these goals. Technologies are expensive and often out of reach for all but those who have the money to dabble, or those whose livelihood depends on it. There is also a
kind of exclusivity to the fact that processes of sonic technologies are invisible to the
naked eye. Inner wirings are concealed by metal chassis, and even when they aren’t the
electrical processes they facilitate are beyond our ability to perceive without recourse to
metaphor. An input goes in and an output comes out, and what happens in between is
necessarily conceptual. It is designed to be used through interfaces of knobs and
buttons whose functions are themselves accessible only to those with the appropriate
knowledge.

From a wide angle point of view, there are also linkages to broader systems of
global capitalism. The alloy’s, synthetic plastics, and precious metals which comprise
technology’s physical existence, and the associated global industries of mining,
engineering, R&D, marketing and distribution all link technologies of sonic
reproduction to systems of global exchange. Those who produce technologies of sonic
reproduction are reliant on exclusivity through the need to create markets for products
on the basis of their perceived worth relative to other products. As Meintjes (2003)
explores in the context of a music studio, this culture of exclusivity is often carried
forward into the production room through specialization and a division of labour
between actors with different skill sets.

For a prospective user, these interwoven cultural and material barriers present
an immediate obstacle. At CKUW, where accessibility and inclusivity are mandated
goals, these obstacles must be consciously resisted. Through practical means like
training sessions and volunteer orientation days, and through the non-judgemental atmosphere that CKUW fosters, the aura of exclusivity that surrounds technology is worked against and the uses of technology as an enabler of diversity and inclusivity emerges.

As technologies of sonic reproduction go, radio is particularly well suited to accommodating new users. This accessibility has given rise to a multiplicity of kinds of use, from pirate radio as a form of civil disobedience and resistance (Moyo 2013; Soley 1999) to its use as a tool of cultural revitalization by Indigenous communities around the world (Alia 2004; Fairchild 1998) to its more commonplace status as an entertainment fixture of the modern “(i)home” (Tacchi 2012). The appropriate technologies are, of course, pre-requisites of radio production and consumption. For commercial radio there are microphones, transmitters and receivers, the spaces which house them and the electrical energy which runs through them. But once these things are in place the ease with which a producer can broadcast, and listening audiences tune-in, is unparalleled in other kinds of mass media.

Engaging with radio technology is often co-terminus with the process of production, there is very little pre or post broadcast work required for producing live radio. At the same time it is able to accommodate specialization and the development of new kinds of genre and technique. The rise of narrative based podcast radio in the last 5-10 years exemplifies how radio continues to make itself relevant in a Western
world otherwise dominated by digital media. On the opposite side of the producer-
consumer dichotomy, studies of radio reception highlight radio’s capacity to act as a
“secondary medium”, one which listeners are free to move through with greater range
of proximity to source than is allowed by screen or print based media (Berland 1993;
Tacchi 1998). Radio fills spaces already occupied by listeners, allowing for attentive
listening but not requiring it. Sound often functions as an acoustic backdrop in
domestic and public spaces, contributing to what Feld (2004) calls the “sonic habitus” of
those who are exposed to it. Radio is thus an accommodating medium from both a
producer and consumer perspective. As Bessire and Fisher (2013) point, it is this
flexibility which facilitates radio’s continued relevance as well as the diversity of uses it
is put to. These aspects of flexibility are particularly relevant to community media
where financial resources are at a premium.

**Studio Fetish and the Sonic Marketplace**

As Chris and I pass through the door to the on air-studio there is a distinctive
feeling that we have entered a different kind of space, one which demands respect for
the technologies and practices of broadcast which it is meant for. The room is a point of
contact for transductive processes that push voices through Winnipeg’s air to
indeterminate listening audiences. It is also a space where listeners are brought
inwards, and where the live studio mic becomes an audience’s collective ear. The studio
feels like its own insulated sonic temple, with microphones, soundboards, and playback
devices taking centre stage. In addition to these conventional technologies which are the pre-requisites of actually being able to produce radio there are design elements of the built space which function to contain and isolate sounds of valued kind. These are the sound absorbing foam on the walls, the soundproof door, the thick glass window into studio B, the lack of vents, and even the carpet on the floor. As we shut the door to get settled, the white noise and sound of voices fades behind us, sealing us off in our own acoustic bubble from the world outside. Our casual discussion is now muted by the sound absorbing foam on the walls and punctuated by a kind of silence we don’t often experience in day to day life.

Though Microphones and speakers often ichnographically represent radio, it is the more quotidian design elements of containment and isolation which cumulatively give the space an aura of purpose and potential, differentiating it acoustically from surrounding rooms. In “the Soundscapes of the Car” Michael Bull (2003) writes about how cars can create sonic interiors, splitting drivers from the auditory world outside. Helmreich (2007, 626) likewise discusses the ways that the research submarine Alvin is sonically distinguished from the deep sea environment, where a transduced inner soundscape provides a sense of cultural familiarity in the midst of an “alien world outside.” These accounts and others like it (Hosokawa 1984; Rath 2003; Thompson 2002) link sound with our spatial apprehensions of the world around us, moving us to consider “the modulating relations that produce insides and outsides, subjects and
objects, sensation and sense data” (Helmreich 2007, 622). As Sterne (2003, 6) notes, hearing is often tacitly associated with interiority and immersion where vision gives rise to metaphors of objectivity and distance. Accounting for these assumptions is not a matter of reversing associations we make about sound and vision or of one sense supplanting another in hierarchical ascension. It is rather to account for the process of “moving into sound and the opportunities provided by thinking with our ears” (Bull and Back 2003, 3). Helmreich, for instance, posits “transductive ethnography” as an accompaniment to the traditional metaphor of ethnographic immersion. Transduction, the process by which energy is converted from one form to another, is a way of becoming attuned to impedance and resistance in ethnography, the imbalances and embodied capacities of the ethnographer confronted by heterogeneous realities not immediately given as seamlessly immersive.

Reflecting on my experience in studio at CKUW, I remembered Meintjes’ (2003) discussion of how studio technologies point to “interiors within interiors.” That is, the inner workings of studio technologies create a sensation of further interiors, invisible sonic worlds and magical processes at work in the studio space. At the risk of extending the metaphor too far, the idea of multiple interiors could be extrapolated to include my journey to get to the on-air control room itself: into the University up the stairs to CKUW and into the on air room where technologies are primed to expand voices back outwards to the entire city.
Meintjes (2003) describes the studio space as a site of fetishization, characterized by "the coupling of the promise of the revelation of its secrets with the knowledge of their infinite unknowability" (98). The fetishization of the studio space, studio technologies, and the sounds produced relies on a sense of mystery, magic, and potential that is fostered in the studio production process. It is a sense of unknowability and power at the confluence of artistic aura and its commercialization that is at the heart of the production process. Meintjes speaks, for example, of the iconicity of studio technologies, drawing links between gleaming panels of knobs and dials in the production room and other products of industry: the spaceship, the sports car, the control centre. These centres of control and power channel fetishized conceptions of sound and science, demanding respect for the technologies which are capable of capturing artistic aura and are often understood to be its source. Fetish and exclusivity in this case, go hand in hand. It is not just any person who can channel these sonic currents of "infinite unknowability." If this were the case, the unknowable would quickly lose its mysterious allure.

Meintjes conception of studio fetish is closely linked with the containment and commercialization of musical sound, where post-production practices of sonic manipulation are integral to the final product. In live radio there is no post-production phase, it relies on the in-the-moment skills of the radio producer. Not all content comes from the "hot" (i.e. live) mics in the on air studio (e.g. pre-recorded songs, stingers, and
interviews) but perhaps more than any other media form, engagement with radio technology is coterminous in time with the creation of broadcasted content. There are a number of reasons that liveness is the norm in radio: minimal technology requirements, no visual preparation required, 24 hour a day broadcast schedules, the ability to cover events in development. These features of radio might be seen as components of its market niche over other kinds of media but they are also enablers of community engagement. At CKUW volunteer producers generally do not spend time editing their work before broadcast, preferring to take to the airwaves live with a flexible plan and without a script. Radio technology is simple enough that producers control the equipment without assistance from outside specialists. One person could, theoretically, operate the station indefinitely. The CKUW studio space is thus much different from the fetishized world that Meintjes’ described. There are still sonic and aesthetic markers of difference in the on-air studio room, and the soundboards and microphones do provoke imaginings of mysterious sonic worlds, but the accessibility of radio technology, and CKUW’s non-judgemental norms work against the kinds of commercially driven hierarchy and exclusivity which Meintjes describes. This resistance to commercial norms is not only manifest in CKUW’s mission statements, it is continually re-enforced through practice, from the recruitment of new volunteers, to its self-promotion as “listener driven radio”, to the casual atmosphere in the station itself, and the no-holds-barred kind of content it fosters. Conceptualizations of
community radio which focus on pejorative characterizations of its amateurism miss a central point: that it consciously resists the hegemonic models of commercial and state media in favor of community interests. This resistance occurs not in spite of its amateurism, but because of it.

Nevertheless, community radio is often conceived as springboard for work in professional media. CKUW’s program director Robin Eriksson explained to me that people often assume her work is a part of a career path towards commercial media. There is resistance to the idea that community media is a goal in and of itself and not simply the bottom rung of a media hierarchy. To the extent that CKUW relies on volunteer work, the stepping-stone conception of community radio rings true. Producers are not paid and commit their own time to creating the station’s content. In addition to providing the community with a broadcasting platform, community radio provides knowledge and skills that are applicable to the professional world. Shelagh Rogers, a long time CBC radio host, told me how she got her start in community media, beginning her broadcast career hosting a country music show at her local campus station before transitioning to CBC where she works today. Current Winnipeg Centre MP Robert Falcon Ouellette also found the skills he learned in community radio transferable to the workplace, albeit into the realm of politics and not professional broadcasting. Before beginning his political career, Robert hosted a show at the UMFM (at the University of Manitoba) interviewing academics whose work was relevant to
Indigenous people. In contrast with Chris’ advice to “just be yourself” on air, Robert emphasized the importance of voice control and pacing, communicative skills which he brought with him into the political world. There is truth to the idea that community radio is a springboard for professional and personal development. For some it is a venue to hone communication skills, for others it is a source of self-confidence.

Regardless, these benefits are at the heart of community radio’s mandate and speak to the valuing of process in addition to the content produced. It is when process and content are understood to be mutually exclusive that community radio is seen as inferior to the “professionalism” of institutional media. CKUW is undoubtedly an amateur station in the sense that many producers are new to the process of making radio. When this newness gains a connotation of negativity and is extended to the belief that the content is equally bad, it is being judged by the dominant terms of institutional media and necessarily occupies a bottom rung.

**Voices on Air**

Chris takes the mic to begin with and introduces us and our show. We’ve decided that he will take on primary hosting duties for the first hour, playing his music and leading the conversation in between songs. I will take the second hour. He starts with an anecdote about how we came to be doing the show together which leads into a question to me about my research: “why are you down here in the peg?” I answer as best I can, describing my interest in his radio show and the cross-over between media
and reconciliation in Winnipeg. After a couple minutes of back and forth conversation we are off to our first musical break. Once the “on-air” button is switched off a tension is released and we can have more casual discussion (I have many questions about how things work) without worrying about having to accommodate the listening audience. As this process is repeated we begin to develop two parallel conversations, one on-air and one off-air, each punctuating the other every 6 minutes or so. Sometimes the end of a song sneaks up on us and there are a few moments of dead air. Other times we struggle to keep the conversation flowing smoothly.

The structure of our conversation is designed always with the listener in mind and at times it seems like Chris and I aren’t even speaking to each other. This feeling is affirmed when, after asking me a question, Chris turns his back and starts to prepare the next song. I know that he isn’t listening to my answer but I need to convince the audience that he is. There is some comfort in this flexibility, and a muted excitement at the way radio paints a picture of reality for its listeners that isn’t necessarily true. It’s as if our voices are thrust out on stage while the rest of our bodies are hidden behind the curtain. There is also some comfort in the structure of our conversational style. It feels like we’re working together to construct something tangible for the audience. Neither of us have notes or prepared questions, and do our best to keep awkward silences or meandering lines of thought to a minimum. We are not interview experts and most of
our questions get one-off answers. It keeps things simple (and probably boring) but it helps move the show along.

When I speak on air I try not change my tone of voice or vocabulary too much. This is partly out of a desire to take Chris’ “just be yourself” advice, and partly because I can’t imagine any other radio voice for myself that wouldn’t sound stereotypically bad. I soon find out that it is more difficult than it sounds to just be “yourself” on air. The premise of radio-show hosting feels contrived, it puts pressure on the host to keep the show moving and to make the audience feel like they want to come along. Rather than simply resorting to my “natural” way of talking, I feel more like I’m just trying not to sound unnatural. There is also some anxiety at the idea that I might be speaking to thousands of listeners. I can’t imagine being so unprepared to speak publically in person, but Radio provides a kind of technological buffer between the producer and the listening audience that makes it easier to get over the nerves of public speaking. While the idea that my voice is being broadcast to all of Winnipeg is at the forefront of my mind, the immediate reality that there is no one in the room but Chris and I makes it easier to feel relaxed.

Along with the way radio isolates voice from the rest of the body, it is its capacity to alter spaces between producers and audiences that empowering for radio show hosts and listening audiences. Radio both bridges and creates distance between producers and listeners, two conceptions which carry different implications of agency
and empowerment. The first entails the ability to spread the voice to disparate audiences, getting the message out, so to speak. This is a common framing, one in which media connect people who are otherwise seen as distant, socially or physically. It is not bodies which are moved by media but products of embodied experience which can have embodied effects. But media not only bridge distances they also render space as conceptually tangible, relying on distance as the pre-condition of media relevance.

As Berland (1990, 188) says: “space is collapsed because access to it is expanded.” These space creating capacities of media are often taken for granted in favor of the content that media conveys (and rightly so). Radio is normally thought of as a practice of “broadcasting out” to audiences, the capacities which distance itself creates take a back seat to content analysis. For those who might be less inclined to address an audience in person or on tv (myself included), the way that radio creates distance between producers and audiences is empowering. Thinking of distance as a source of agency questions the latent assumption that the most valuable media are those which most closely approximate reality. Radio’s capacity to create distance is not a technological limit to be overcome in the future. The picturephone of the 1960s, for example, was ostensibly designed as a way to enhance the purely auditory nature of the telephone call. Its failure on the market and subsequent discontinuation was not a problem of cost but of convenience. People value the ability to talk without having to maintain visual customs of conversation like eye contact. As a 1975 study of the picture-phone
concluded: “adding visual to audio may actually inhibit the final value of the communication” (Noll 1992). Nor is radio distance simply a stepping stone to creating content. In the process oriented atmosphere of CKUW there is distinct value placed on the practices of radio production in addition to content created. Radio technologies are as much in service of content distribution as they are sites of productive engagement in and of themselves.

**Conclusion**

As Chris and I talk our voices are relayed back to us through headphones, allowing us to monitor input levels in real time and to hear ourselves speak over fading music, station id’s, and stingers. The headphones physically link us in to a feedback loop which runs from our mouths to the microphone, to the soundboard and into our ears. What we hear is not the radio broadcast itself but it nevertheless serves to approximate what the audience might be listening to. It is a system of self-correction and auditory conditioning that makes it all the more difficult to feel like I can just talk normally. We are linked in to the transductive processes of circuit boards and speakers, an interweaving of organic and technological materials similar to Haraway’s (1991) conception of the “human cyborg”. The feedback loop of our own voices that Chris and I hear allows us to manipulate the ways our voices encode our embodied existence in the studio to those listening outside of it. As Ira glass, the host of “This American Life” has said: “radio is the most visual medium.” While print media tends to standardize

voices in the service of semantic communicability, the affectivity of radio and other sonic media provoke listeners into their own acoustically stimulated visual imaginings. It is this process which the headphones sharpen my attention to, making me wonder reflexively about how the audience might be imagining me. It is a feeling of which composer Murray Schafer (1994) termed “schizophrenia”, a product of the separation of sound from its source. In this case the source is me and my discomfort as a newcomer to radio feel stems specifically from the fact that my voice is louder in my ears than I feel like I am speaking. The voice appears to at once be my own, and to belong to some other source, perhaps, to the speaker itself.

As our two hour slot comes to a close I remember that I had brought an album that a friend had recently produced and released in town. Up to this point Chris and I have been playing music off our computers, but I know the station is equipped to accommodate all storage formats. Chris directs me to the CD player and I pop in the disc. As the title track “Like a Noise” plays out the end of the show I am struck by how organic the process of radio broadcast can feel. Local producers can play local music without first getting clearance from station managers or having to consider the implications of their choices on advertising revenues. All the barriers of media production (the job market, the technological know-how, the social anxieties etc.) which hold some people in seemingly natural positions of being able to tell the stories of others, feel bridgeable now that I’ve spent some time producing radio. Berland (1990)
emphasizes that commercial radio’s status as a local media form is overstated, better understood as an appeal to local advertisers but nevertheless dependant on standardised international playlists. I would not go so far as to say that community radio is the antidote to this kind of market driven locality. It relies, after all, on the work of those who are in a position to volunteer their time producing a radio show. But there is a strong feeling of locality at CKUW that links the station with its location in downtown Winnipeg and the diversity of people who live in the city. This is a feeling born from the different kinds of voices heard on air, the different styles of show, and the way the station supports local music and arts scenes. In short, it is a localization which occurs through diversity and not in spite of it.
Chapter 4 – *Voice and Reconciliation*

*Introduction*

The focus of this chapter is “voice”, as both a prevalent concept in reconciliation discourse and a sonorous phenomenon. Conceptions of reconciliation in Canada are often premised on raising up voices that have been silenced. This is happening through institutional channels like the TRC, but it is also happening through activism, art and community organization. In this chapter, I focus on what it means to raise a voice in discussions of reconciliation between Indigenous and on-Indigenous people. I am especially interested in how sonic terms like voice, hearing, listening, and silence, are used in reconciliation discourses to connote a kind of relationality that is seen to be integral to the process of reconciliation. I begin by exploring the linkages between voice’s metaphorical associations with empowerment and its physical existence as a phenomenon that is often seen to have deep ties to self-expression and personhood. Voice has figured prominently in Western philosophical thought as a marker of self-presence and internal truth. Such assumptions have been critiqued for re-iterating a latently theological conception of sound. In this chapter, the linkages between the different registers of voice emerge as a consequence of their usage in reconciliation discourse and not as a result of an innate connection between the physical voice and empowerment. I am concerned not only with the amplification of voices at CKUW, but with the way voice and other sonic metaphors gain traction in a variety of mediums in
reconciliation discourse. Feld’s (2015) conception of *acoustemology* is helpful in moving away from universalized conceptions of sound and orality, towards a relational approach premised on situated understandings and the localized circumstance. Voice and listening are relational to the extent that they refer to a sharing of experience between two or more people. A similar sense of relationality is present in discourses of reconciliation which foreground storytelling and listening as ways to transform the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in Canada. In this process, the question of whose voices are raised, and what stories are told is all important.

**The Double Register of Voice**

As Weidman (2014, 37) points out, “voice” is both a “sonic/material phenomenon and culturally elaborated metaphor.” On the one hand there is the material voice that resonates in physical space and whose attendant particularities (what Barthes (2012) calls the “grain”) encode it with political and social relevance that is external to the semiotic content it conveys. Lippi-Green (2012) for example explores how people who deviate from standardized speaking norms of the English language experience social and economic discrimination. The prosodic aspects of voice: intonation, stress, rhythm etc. which are studied by linguists, are not only indexical descriptors of voice but performative qualities which make voices more than the neutral conduits for linguistic meaning that they are sometimes understood as. In
conjunction with the sonorous voice are understandings of voice which foreground empowerment and agency. These associations are found in go-to catchphrases of empowerment, we “find our voice”, “discover our inner voice”, “have a voice” or “give voice to” thoughts and feelings (Weidman 2014, 38). In these instances, the voice is not necessarily a sonic thing, but a feeling of self-expression, or collectively, the expression of shared understandings. It is these two meanings of voice: one physical phenomenon, the other discursive trope, which form the double entendre that anthropologists have been working through in ethnographic contexts. Feld and Fox (1994, 26) for instance call for projects linking a “phenomenological concern with the voice as the embodiment of spoken and sung performance, and a more metaphoric sense of voice as a key representational trope for social position and power.” Such a project brings into conversation two pre-existent bodies of literature which correspond to the two understandings of voice outlined above. On the one hand there is the work in the field of sound studies like the influential concepts of soundscape (Schafer 1994) and acoustemology (Feld 2012 [1982]), which foreground the phenomenological and material aspects of sound and embodied experiences of listening. On the other hand there is more abstract, and political literature in which voice is used is an explanatory trope to describe individual or collective positioning within broader systems of domination and power. Here voice is associated with resistance to hegemonic
structures of power or oppressive cultural norms (Couldry and Curran 2003; King 2012; Scott 1990; Sinha 1996; Spivak 1988).

One of the simplest questions that arises when considering the links between voice’s two registers is: what does the sonorous voice have to do with empowerment and agency? The commonly assumed answer is that the metaphorical understandings of voice gain traction through the sonorous voice’s perceived ability to externalize internal truth and self-presence. The physical voice is often understood as a unique marker of selfhood, a characteristic which puts it in active opposition to larger homogenizing structural forces like patriarchy and colonialism. This is not to say that voice is always used with this association in mind. It has certainly become a productive tool in its own right as a means of framing anti-oppressive struggles. But if the overlap between sonorous and metaphoric usages of voice is fertile ground ethnographically localized work, then latent assumptions about the nature of voice and its association with empowerment ought to be foregrounded and not simply projected into the conclusions we draw.

This discussion is not new. Derrida (1976) famously described the latent phonocentric bias in much of the history of Western thought. This phonocentrism, as Dolar (2006, 37) explains, was premised on the idea that voice is “the basic element of language, its natural embodiment of language, and consubstantial with it, whereas writing presents its derivative, auxiliary, and parasitic supplement.” For Derrida, the
voice offered the illusion that one could get unmediated access to self-presence. The
voice, as he says, has been presented as “the absolute effacement of the signifier: pure
auto-affection that necessarily has the form of time which doesn’t borrow from outside
of itself, in the world or in “reality,” any accessory signifier, any substance of
expression foreign to its own spontaneity” (Derrida 1976, 20). The assumption that
voice is related to self-transparency has been re-iterated throughout the history of
western thought, serving as an ontological anchor of meaning amidst symbolic systems
of opposition and difference. Importantly, Derrida sees this linkage between presence
and voice, which he calls the “metaphysics of presence,” as a product of creeping
Christian theology. The voice as a window into subjectivity and divine existence is,
according to Derrida, “essential to the history of the West, therefore metaphysics in its
entirety, even when it professes to be atheist” (1976, 323).

In addition to the deconstructionist arguments about voice’s privileged
relationship with self-presence in western thought is the argument that conceptions of
sound often carry similar trans-historical, and ontotheological implications. Sterne
(2003, 14) explores how sound is often latently understood to have unique
phenomenological characteristics related to interiority and presence. This appeal to the
“natural” and universal phenomenology of sound is then linked with different
experiences of reality and social formation under the assumption different forms of
mediation (i.e. oral vs. textual) engender fundamentally different ways of being in the
world. This formulation, as Sterne (2003, 14) notes “sets up experience as somehow outside the purview of historical analysis,” a claim to truth which, as in Derrida’s critique, positions sound as the privileged site of pure interior truth. These naturalizing understandings of sound and voice often latently reproduce centuries old Christian understandings of the difference between seeing and hearing. Sterne (2003, 15) offers an “audio-visual litany” which summarizes these assumptions. In this litany, sound/hearing are spherical, immersive, subjective, affective, temporal, and concerned with interiors, whereas vision is seen as directional, perspectival, objective, intellectual, spatial, and concerned with surfaces.

The audio-visual litany exemplifies the way dichotomous oppositions are often a basis for discussions of the senses. Hearing is opposed to seeing in this formulation, and the characteristics attributed to each sense gain meaning through this opposition. Feld (1986) explores the implications of this dichotomous way of thinking, showing how it becomes associated with a host of other value-laden distinctions when “hearing/seeing” as phenomenological experiences are extrapolated to cultural levels as a distinction between “oral and literate” societies. As Finnegan (1980 as cited in Feld 1986, 20) expands upon, some of these dualisms include: nonindustrial/industrial, small-scale/large-scale, organic/artificial, homogenous/heterogeneous, stable/turbulent. These distinctions are analogized with one another in what Feld calls a “confounding of typologies”(20) and the weight of these broad generalizations taken together becomes
an explanation for social and psychic difference. The effect of these amalgamized dualisms is, as Feld (1986, 20) says, to “push aside social detail, historical accuracy, and the complexities of oral-literate interactions for the sake of sweeping generalizations that do not provide real evidence for the assertion that oral/literate are fundamentally different states of mind.” Feld brings this critique to bear on media scholars Marshall Macluhan and Walter Ong, for whom sensory modes of apprehending media were the departure point for radical cultural difference. Ong (1974, 167), for example, writes that “Changes in the media of communications restructure man’s sense of the universe in which he lives and his very sense of what his thought itself is.”

In Ong’s argument, sound’s phenomenological and material attributes are used as explanatory mechanisms of cultural difference. The universal and immutable characteristics of sound as a medium of communication are said to predispose listeners to certain modes of thought and action. A cultural framework is abstracted, and predetermined by mode of sensory apprehension. This formulation rests on a universalized conception of what it means to hear and to speak, a conception which flattens local histories and artificially extricates the senses from one for the purpose of cross-cultural comparison. In seeking to make linkages between the sonorous qualities of voice and its metaphoric usages in discourses of empowerment, there is a risk of drawing similarly reductive conclusions that are overdetermined by the presumed ways that sound predisposes certain ways of being in the world. In this project, which
discusses the linkages between community radio and reconciliation discourses in Winnipeg, this would translate into an emphasis on the utility of aural media over non-aural media for projects of mediation related to reconciliation. From my experience at CKUW I see no reason to make such a claim. To do so would risk exploiting the novelty a linguistic overlap to draw an academically overdetermined conclusion. There is, however, a relational aspect to the use of voice in discourses of reconciliation that was made clear to me during my time at CKUW. Here it is not only voice, but the stories that voices tell, and the question of who is listening and how. “Voice” in this context, implies the relationships between people whose voices are a part of multisensorial embodied experiences and complex social and political contexts. In this wider relational framework, the isolated attributes of disembodied voices matters less than ways that voices evoke situated understandings and empathy through common experience. These contingencies and the interdependence of voice on practices of listening, were made clear to me during conversations with radio producers and while spending time at CKUW. It is an understanding of voice and media more generally which bears resemblance to Feld’s (2015) concept of acoustemology and Helmreich’s (2007) argument for a transductive anthropology.

**Relationships in Sound and Research**

The opposition between sight and hearing has been key to the formation of an anthropology of sound. Bull and Back (2003, 1) explore the epistemological privileging
of vision in conceptualizations of the Western ways of knowing. Gaining knowledge is a process of “illumination” or “enlightenment”, we “shed light” on things and start to “see” them clearly. Sight, light, vision, and seeing tend to metaphorically represent the logic and objectivity of the modern age, whereas sound is associated with an antiquated past. This is the basic premise behind the “hierarchy of the senses” which has been a key formulation of sound studies. The idea that sound is a subordinated sense gives rise to the idea that it is therefore fruitful ground for boundary pushing academic inquiry. But, as many have pointed out (Bull and Back 2003, 2; Feld 2015, 15), there is likewise a risk of replacing ocularcentrism with sonocentrism, re-iterating the hierarchy of the senses, albeit by turning it on its head. When the prominence of visual anthropology is used as a foil for the creation of a sonic anthropology, the opposition between these two is once again foregrounded as the primary focus of debate. It is this concern which Bull and Back (2015, 2) address with their call for a “democracy of the senses”, a way of thinking about embodied experience in which “no sense is privileged in relation to its counterparts.” This does not foreclose on the possibility of productively focusing on the ways we understand the world through our senses, but it does caution against taking different sensory epistemologies as the exclusive mediators of universal truth.

Feld (2015) expands upon this heuristic through the concept of acoustemology, a joining of “acoustics” and “epistemology”, which encompasses Weidman’s (2014)
aforementioned emphasis on the double register of audible sound as inextricably material and social. The point of prioritizing this overlap is not simply to back up cultural accounts with the explanatory power of science. Instead it is focused on the audible, or, the ways that sound is made meaningful in socially contingent ways. Feld (2015, 13) foregrounds “knowing-in-action” as a way of understanding the social and material enmeshments of sound which “insists that one does not simply ‘acquire’ knowledge but, rather, that one knows through an ongoing cumulative and interactive process of participation and reflection.” Acoustemology is thus associated with recent theoretical work on relationality (Haraway 2003; Latour 2005; Strathern 2005) through an emphasis on the “between-ness of experience”, which is never finalized or fixed, but continually negotiated (Feld 2015, 13). An acoustemological approach is one which centralizes situated learning and numerous sources of action and agency that are variously “human, nonhuman, living, nonliving, organic, and technological etc.” (Feld 2015, 15) It is a tool for ethnographic thinking that works against the objectification of sound in concepts like “soundscape” and instead foregrounds the predispositions of listeners who do not uniformly relate to sound or space in the same ways.

Feld’s emphasis on the contingency of listening and vocal practices is useful in overcoming prescribed explanations of how voice operates as a metaphor of cultural empowerment. Key to an anthropology of voice is not taking for granted that it means the same thing everywhere. As Weidman (2014, 38) points out, there is a tension in
balancing “the usefulness of voice as an analytic category with an awareness of the host of naturalized meanings and assumptions that the term voice, in English, carries.” In addition to this is the fact that voice is often a deeply personal and/or politically charged subject. There is an ongoing ethical responsibility on the researcher who seek to represent the voices of others. Much of theoretical literature on voice is framed in a depersonalized way, with voice as a disembodied object for analysis. If, as Pink (2010, 331) suggests, sensory anthropology is “essentially an interdisciplinary approach,” then anthropologists must be aware of the implications of transporting de-contextualized theories of voice into ethnographic work where the voices we reference are those of real people and communities. A relational approach is thus not only a means of transforming the questions we ask about sound as researchers, but more fundamentally, about working with and for people, and not simply about them. Not coincidentally this kind of relational emphasis is also an important aspect of reconciliation discourses.

Chilasa (2012) and Smith (1999) both take on a framework of relational epistemology as a means of decolonizing research with Indigenous peoples. Both authors explore the objectifying implications that social sciences work can have for Indigenous Peoples when knowledge extraction is legitimated through the denial of colonial histories and ongoing contexts of marginalization. Methodologies that privilege the researcher as the prime mediator of cultural truth often work to solidify
power imbalances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. By instantiating the truth-value of western ways of knowing over those of Indigenous peoples, academic research can be complicit in the imperatives of the colonial state, creating the “otherness” necessary to justify cultural and material dispossession in the name of benevolent assimilation. As Smith (1999) explores in the second half of her book *Decolonizing methodologies*, deconstructing latent academic imperialism is a process not only of imagination and empathy, but of action and politics as well. It has the goal of deconstructing naturalized forms of oppression as well as of effecting transformative social change. Such action might be academically focused, but often carries forward into everyday life through community engagement and activism. In this way, hierarchical divisions between research participants and the researcher are blurred, so too is the distinction between the products of research and the ways this research happens.

*Voice and Reconciliation*

The relational approach to research that is advocated by Chilasa, Feld, and Smith has much in common with discussions of reconciliation in Canada which foreground a new relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. “Voice”, and “listening” have figured prominently in these discussions as means of outlining the basic conditions necessary for a new relationship to emerge. The introduction to the TRC’s final report, for example, states that “Canadians have much to benefit from
listening to the voices, experiences, and wisdom of Survivors, Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers” (TRC Executive Summary 2015, 8) Survivor and Vitaline Elsie Jenner emphasized a similar feeling, saying, “I’m quite happy to be able to share my story…..I want the people of Canada to hear, to listen, for it is the truth…..I also want my grandchildren to learn, to learn from me that, yes, it did happen.” (TRC Executive Summary 2015, 12.) The importance of voice and listening to Survivors’ stories is significant considering the literal silencing of IRS students in the schools, and the subsequent stigmas which continued to keep their stories from being heard in the lead. But as Jenner’s comments hint at, having a voice is not only about being listened to by non-Indigenous Canadians, it is likewise about the revitalization of languages, ceremony, relationships with the land and traditional modes of governance. At a Traditional Knowledge Keepers Forum sponsored by the TRC (TRC Executive Summary 2015, 9), Anishinaabe Elder Mary Deleary spoke to this aspect of reconciliation: “We can still hear the voice of the land. We can hear the care and love for the children. We can hear about our law. We can hear about our stories, our governance, our feasts, [and] our medicines…We have work to do…Our relatives who have come from across the water, you still have work to do on your road.” Sonic metaphors as a form of relationality extends from more individualistic, empathy based conceptions of reconciliation, to those which emphasize the resurgence of Indigenous languages and governance, and further, to conceptions of reconciliation based on a transformed
relationship between humans and the living earth. Tully (2014) conceives these different forms of reconciliation to be inextricable from one another. In each case, sonic metaphors of relationality (i.e. listening, speaking, storytelling etc.) work to identify the conditions necessary for these transformative changes to take place.

In a conversation I had with long-time CBC radio host and TRC honorary witness Shelagh Rogers, she reflected on the importance of stories to the healing process: “many of the Survivors that I have witnessed and that I know have felt like telling their story and giving their statement has helped them...because they are sharing that story and other people will help to carry it.” Shelagh expanded on this by using the analogy of a venn diagram. She drew two overlapping circles on a piece of paper and continued: “this is you, and this is me and we’re meeting right here...and I think that’s what happens when we tell each other stories.” Shelagh emphasized this relational aspect of speaking, listening and storytelling as being key to the process of reconciliation, a transformative experience for listener and speaker alike in which each learns from the other. Shelagh’s emphasis on storytelling has been important for her as a radio broadcaster, but there are also long traditions of storytelling in Indigenous cultures. At a TRC event, Elder Reg Crowshoe explained that these traditions of storytelling expand conversations of reconciliation outside of the approach taken by the TRC: “When we talk about stories, we talk about defining our environment and how we look at authorities that come from the land.” (TRC Executive Summary 2015, 17) As
Tully (2014) emphasizes, redefining settler relationships with the land to be in line with Indigenous ways of knowing is intimately linked with the reconciliation process. In this regard, storytelling and listening might be seen as the way that this can happen.

In tandem with voice and listening, silence is likewise an important concept in reconciliation discourse. Raising a voice is sometimes seen as the logic antidote for the oppressive ways that colonialism has worked to silence the viewpoints of Indigenous people. In this dualism, voice is opposed to silence, but there is also a sense in which silence itself is an important feature of the reconciliation process. A conversation, for example, requires some to silently listen while others talk. For many survivors, silent and solitary contemplation has also been an appropriate response to harms suffered in the IRS system (TRC Executive Summary 2015, 17). As the TRC report says: “reconciliation cannot occur without listening, contemplation, meditation, and deeper internal deliberation” (TRC Executive Summary 2015, 17). Here silence is an attentive and engaged process which is neither the result of oppressive silencing, nor a matter nonparticipation through “staying silent.” With an increased emphasis on having a voice in discourses of reconciliation it is also important to remember that there are those who may not want to raise their voice or tell their stories, for any number of reasons. The antidote to systems of oppression is not merely “unsilencing” the oppressed, but changing the conditions which create the oppression. This acknowledgement is reflected in fears that a politics of recognition and discussion of
reconciliation may stand in for substantive forms of redress. To speak literally about sonorous voices, it should also be emphasized that not all people can speak or hear. In using auditory metaphors of empowerment we should be aware of the basic bodily conditions which enable those metaphors to become meaningful. Deafness and mutism should make us attentive to the often unacknowledged privileges of being able bodied. This is not to say that auditory metaphors are counterproductive, but that audism (what Sterne (2012, 20) calls “the chauvinism of hearing”) is often a product of our normalization to sonic experience.

As discussions of reconciliation have expanded outside of the formal proceedings of the TRC, an emphasis on voice and listening has been carried with it. The media, who have been partly responsible for bringing reconciliation into the public conscience, are often themselves understood as tools to amplify voices. Through their ability to broadcast stories to dispersed and diverse audiences, media are in a unique position to foreground reconciliation in the public conscience (TRC Calls to Action 2015, 9-10). But the question of what reconciliation means and whose voices are heard is all important. As many have already shown (Chrisjohn et al. 2006; Henderson and Wakeham 2009; McCready 2009; Wilkes et al. 2010) there are many pitfalls to media portrayal of Indigenous Peoples, ranging from biased reporting of protests and collective action, to the reiteration of paternalistic narratives which frame IRS Survivors as disempowered subjects in need of state administered healing. Through this
selectivity the difference between metaphors of voice in discourses of reconciliation and
the conception of media as a platform for amplifying voices becomes clear: the media
are not neutral conduits for the transmission of Indigenous voices. This is not to say
that institutions of media in Canada do not have a role in reconciliation processes, but
to emphasize the seemingly obvious point that Indigenous people themselves are the
best representatives of their own voices, experiences, and interests.

At an anti-racism event held on January 22, Winnipeg mayor Bryan Bowman
declared 2016 to be the “year of reconciliation”. This announcement came on the first
anniversary of the Maclean’s cover story which highlighted Winnipeg’s racism
problems. As with previous political events on the issue of racism in Winnipeg, such as
a the 2015 National Summit on Racial Inclusion that had a $50 registration fee, there were
questions about whose voices were heard and who would be listening (see AYO! 2015).
Throughout the mayor’s event there were several unplanned instances of audience
members standing to voice their feelings. A mother and Somali refugee rose and
tearfully questioned the mayor about Child and Family Services (CFS) and the
whereabouts of her children who she had not seen in 6 years. Another woman stood up
to speak about how the city had failed refugees. Senator Murray Sinclair also spoke at
the event, saying it was important to recognize these interruptions as examples of “that
sense of injustice that so many people feel about the way that they are treated by
society, and their inability to be able to express themselves in a full way to be able to
achieve their ambitions, and be part of this nation” (Taylor 2016). But the event itself was primarily a series of presentations featuring the voices of authority figures, and not those of community members. This is not to say it is hypocritical every time a politician speaks about reconciliation, but it does underscore a feeling of wariness related to high-profile politicized declarations of reconciliation. They can eclipse discussion of more grounded forms of redress and do not in and of themselves represent the relational discussion based kinds of reconciliation that they gesture at.

Community media in Winnipeg is one place that the voices of community members are foregrounded and where discussions of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can be found. This is both the case in the content of the media and in the way that community media is cross-hatched with other forms of community organization and activism that can draw people in to become more actively engaged with issues related to reconciliation in their communities. Red Rising magazine is a non-profit magazine run by young Indigenous community members in Winnipeg. The magazine released its first issue in the fall of 2015 and, as of June 2016, produced three issues in total. As one of the core organizers of the magazine told me, the idea was to foreground the voices of Indigenous and ally community members:

“It would be our stories, unfiltered, told from our perspectives with no holding back on how we see Winnipeg. Media sometimes have their own agenda in terms of sensationalism and making money, really focusing on the hard-core stuff is going to sell and often that hard-core stuff is negative stuff about who we are. So we want to focus on the positive stuff,
the youth that are working really hard to create a change in Winnipeg, we want to give them a spotlight.”

The kind of stories that Red Rising tells are not like those of the media. For one thing they foreground a kind of long-form, narrative based story telling that contrasts with the way news outlets generate a daily bulletin of easily consumable news items. They are also written in different individual styles and do not all conform to a journalistic format. There are poems, auto-biographical stories, essays, artworks, and music, all of which combine to give a sense of the people behind the writing in a way that is often missing from professional journalism. By featuring the stories of Indigenous people that are written by Indigenous people, Red Rising is a way that Winnipeggers can engage in building the kinds of relationships that metaphors of voice and listening evoke.

Red Rising, like CKUW and other community initiatives, foregrounds the voices of community members themselves, over and against the way that those voices come to be represented/silenced in institutions of mainstream media. Acknowledging the importance of hearing from community members is likewise at the heart of the “Resonating Reconciliation” project (RR). RR is run by the National Campus and Community Radio Association (NCRA) which sponsored dozens of Indigenous community radio producers across Canada to create a radio-documentary on the ongoing impacts of Residential Schools in their communities. In Winnipeg, three documentaries were produced by CKUW, UMFM, and NCI. They featured discussion
of the ongoing legacy of CFS in Manitoba and its relationship with IRS (the province has over 10,000 children in care, the vast majority of whom are Indigenous). There was also critical reflection on Stephen Harper’s 2008 apology, and a discussion about the meaning of reconciliation in Winnipeg. In each of the RR documentaries, the means of production and creative control over content were controlled by volunteer Indigenous radio producers from the community. They feature, quite literally, the voices of Indigenous community members, and like Red Rising foreground the perspectives, stories, and life experiences of people who are often marginalized in mainstream accounts.

**Conclusion**

Stefan Helmreich (2007) argues that the concept of “transduction” is a productive conceptual tool for anthropologists of sound. Transduction, as a physical process, is the process of turning one form of energy into another through use of a transducer. At CKUW, for example, radio transmitters act as transducers by converting electrical energy into radio waves through electromagnetism. Radio receivers do the opposite, converting radio waves into electrical current and eventually into sound. This process is a fundamental component of telephony and radio. Sterne (2003) argues that the concept of transduction has been read back into understandings of the nature of hearing, where the ears themselves are understood as transducers that turn sonic impulses into actionable conceptions of selfhood and social positioning. The ears, in this
sense, mediate between the material sonic and the abstract semiotic, becoming a point of interplay between the two. With its grounding in physical processes of signal transmission, transduction calls attention to the infrastructures and embodied aspects of communication. It brings to the fore the impedances and modulations which occur in processes of mediation, where signals are not seamlessly propagated to neutral listening audiences but subjected to interpretive and physical transmutations. As a metaphor attuned to these impedances, transduction is a more heterogeneous framing of ethnographic context than “cultural immersion,” with its implications of a reified homogeneity. As Helmreich (2007, 633) notes, “to think transductively is thereby also to consider ethnography as a kind of transducer.” This is not to say that the concept is applicable everywhere, but it is helpful in thinking through the relationship between media and relational conceptions of reconciliation.

Discourses of reconciliation which make use of sonically inspired metaphors like voice and listening, do so as a means of foregrounding the conditions necessary for relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to change. They evoke a kind of relationality based on a mutual willingness to learn and be changed by one another through the sharing of experiences. To speak of transduction, however, is to acknowledge the impedances to this relational ideal that must continually be worked through or against. It is to nuance the teleological evocations of reconciliation that are a fixture of political speeches, with discussions of what reconciliation looks like locally,
and a practical awareness of the stumbling blocks that can make reconciliation such a problematic and contested term. These stumbling blocks include individual things like personal bias, ignorance, or media access, as well as more material circumstances like the continued exploitation of Indigenous lands for resource development. It is difficult, for example, to interpret Prime Minister Trudeau’s promise of “true reconciliation” as anything but political lip-service when the Liberal government has broken its promise to change the National Energy Board (NEB) review process and allowed pipeline planning to continue under a review process which effectively marginalizes dissenting Indigenous voices.

Transduction is useful in underscoring impedances to reconciliation work only in so far as it can help strengthen our resolve. It is also helpful to think of the process of transduction as one which contains a possibility for change. It is the locus of translations which, as Mackenzie (2002, 18) writes, “place heterogeneous realities in contact.” This, I believe, is a function taken on by CKUW and other community media outlets in Winnipeg in relation to discussions of reconciliation. They are focal points of discussion and action related to reconciliation where the voices of Indigenous community members are foregrounded, and where issues like racism, pipelines, CFS, and any number of others that are relevant to reconciliation in Winnipeg are discussed. Sonic concepts are more than ways of understanding radio, they offer a means of bridging the material and semiotic divide in discussions of reconciliation through the
notion of relationality. As both sonic phenomenon, in the form of radio waves, protest
chants/speeches, stories told, discussions had, and as a metaphor for the transformative
potential of these occurrences, the double register of sonic terminology is a means of
understanding how discussion translates into action, and how these two things build
off of each other in a long process of reconciliation.
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