EXHIBITION, FILM, AND NEW MEDIA REVIEWS

Below the Radar: An Engaged Knowledge Democracy
Simon Fraser University's Vancity
Office of Community Engagement

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*B**elow the Rada*r is a podcast that begins many episodes by reminding listeners that it is a knowledge democracy podcast. A production of Simon Fraser University's Vancity Office of Community Engagement, the podcast claims to "encourage the meaningful exchange of ideas and information across communities" (https://www.sfu.ca/sfuwoodwards/community-engagement/Below-the-Radar.html). Although both the claim and the phrase "knowledge democracy" are lofty goals, when viewed through the lens of community engagement, *Below the Radar* seems to accomplish both while making a valuable contribution not only to higher education community engagement but also communities as a whole.

In exploring how best to define community engagement, noted community engagement scholar Marshall Welch (2016, 38) describes "activities related to an institution's academic mission of generating, disseminating, applying, and preserving knowledge that can directly benefit external groups." Using this description, *Below the Radar* is an interesting example of community engagement. Through its existence and focus, *Below the Radar* is both disseminating and preserving knowledge by making a variety of ideas accessible in a way that allows for preservation beyond the time of the recorded conversation. The podcast

as a whole is a wonderful example of community engagement work on the part of a higher education institution. However, the contribution of *Below the Radar* to the field of community engagement goes beyond serving as an example of dissemination and preservation. Throughout its more than one hundred episodes are numerous explorations of how to go about and deepen the practice and thinking around engaged scholarship, or the space where "academic knowledge interacts with and is shaped by community-based knowledge" (Sandmann, Saltmarsh, and O'Meara 2019, 137).

Simply sharing the knowledge of the university through a podcast could be seen as a form of community engagement. Yet, *Below the Radar* deeply participates in an ongoing conversation on how to continue expanding thinking related to engaged scholarship, how to "do" community engagement, and what role the university takes in society. By enabling us to hear from scholars like Timothy Eatman and Mohamed Farge (Episode 121), Angela Kaida (Episode 101), Barbara Holland (Episode 93), and Kari Grain (Episode 89), *Below the Radar* adds to and extends the conversation around how engaged scholarship and institutions that seek to practise and value it can continue to grow and improve their work. At times, extending this conversation involves pushing the very boundaries of what is considered scholarship, something that is explored deeply in Episode 72, when Hannah McGregor takes a deep dive into the idea of podcasting as scholarship. Additionally, *Below the Radar* allows for ideas that seem to be contradictory yet further extend the ongoing dialogue around community engagement and engaged scholarship. This can be heard in the podcast's discussion with Stuart Poyntz and Joanna Habdank, who suggest that the language of engaged scholarship often communicates the "stamps of institutional authority" (Episode 47, 20:30), while another episode hears Andrew Petter (Episode 43) using the very language that Poyntz and Habdank seem to critique. This contradiction is far from a weakness in the podcast, though. Instead, it allows the listener to more fully explore and consider ideas related to the work of community engagement that have yet to be settled. It is this breadth and depth of ideas that allow *Below the Radar* to make a meaningful contribution to the discourse of community engagement.

While its contribution to community engagement is both the focus of this review and my primary interest in *Below the Radar*, the podcast aims for something greater than contributing to community engagement: it aspires to be a part of the knowledge democracy. This is no small task. Current co-chair of the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research

and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, Budd Hall (2013) explains that "a knowledge democracy movement is an action-oriented formation that recognizes, gives visibility to and strengthens the knowledge created in the context of, as Marx said, people trying to 'change the world'" (9). In its ability to shine a light on the work being done in and by community, *Below the Radar* appears to be part of the knowledge democracy movement that Hall describes. While this may seem like an overstatement of the value that a podcast offers, as Hall further explains, "neither access to information development nor community-university engagement advancements form a knowledge democracy movement by themselves, but are part of the necessary conditions for knowledge movements to gain footholds and to flourish" (10). So while neither community-university engagement like this podcast, nor the access to information that it provides, creates a knowledge democracy by itself, *Below the Radar* seems to both understand and honour its role in being part of the conditions that are needed for knowledge democracies to flourish. For this, *Below the Radar* and the people behind it should be commended and encouraged as both the field of community engagement and the efforts to create knowledge democracies are better for the work they do.

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Podcast. https://www.sfu.ca/vancity-office-community-engagement/
below-the-radar-podcast.html

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*B*elow the Radar is the voice of Simon Fraser University's community engagement initiative. The host, Am Johal, has been a fixture in Vancouver public affairs for several decades. He is currently director of SFU's Vancity Office of Community Engagement and is a central nexus in an extensive network of Vancouver-based arts, cultural, and community organizations. The podcast employs an interview format in weekly episodes, with guests drawn primarily from Vancouver and, especially, from the SFU community. This is fitting given that the implicit purpose of the podcast is to give voice to the role that SFU supports in community engagement. The tone of the podcast, set by Johal, is inviting to the listener. He has a relaxed and attentive style that puts his guests at ease.

The focus of my review is on "urban issues" content, one of several areas of interest identified on the podcast. My review is based on twenty-two out of 107 episodes that were available in February 2021 and that, according to their capsule summaries, focused explicitly on urban issues. Most episodes fall into one or more of the following categories: urban policy (especially housing), Indigenous urbanism, and community-engaged research.

Not surprisingly given that the podcast is based in Vancouver, housing inequity is a dominant theme. The interview with British Columbia's current minister of housing, David Eby (Episode 102), provides a summary, and defence, of the province's approach. There is room here for a constructive critique of public policy, and Johal *does* raise the issue of tenant rights. However, for better or for worse, confrontation is not the style of the host – or the podcast. Instead, Johal uses his extensive experience on the ground to join his guests in exploring the meaning of their cutting-edge research, much of it informed by critical and post-colonial theory.

In addition to Eby, Johal talks housing policy with Leilni Farha (Episode 74), former UN special rapporteur on adequate housing; Stephanie Allen (Episode 11), associate vice-president of BC Housing;

and Geraldine Dening and Simon Elmer (Episode 24), members of the London, UK, Architects for Social Housing. The interviews offer a good balance between critique of existing local, provincial, and national approaches, and suggestions for improvement.

Policy issues also appear in episodes focused on Indigenous urbanism in Vancouver. Efforts towards the implementation of Indigenous planning are recounted by Kamala Todd, Vancouver's first Indigenous arts and culture planner (Episode 36), and Ginger Gosnell-Myers, Vancouver's first Indigenous relations manager (Episode 14). Related themes of decolonization and Indigenization are embedded in the podcast, especially with regard to recreating urban space, both interior (e.g., libraries: Episode 38) and exterior (e.g., urban parks: Episode 20).

Presentation of community-engaged academic research is most closely connected to the mission statement of the podcast: knowledge mobilization and empowerment of both the subjects of the research and, presumably, the listener. A fault of the podcast is scant coverage of the *impact* of community-engaged research. A notable exception is the work of Scott Neufeld and Nicolas Crier in drafting "Research 101: A Manifesto for Ethical Research in the Downtown Eastside" (Episode 34). The document is a response to residents in the DTES being "researched to death." The research-focused episodes also often fall victim to the fault that Stuart Poyntz of SFU's Community-Engaged Research Initiative (CERi) identified as one to avoid: "jargon-filled community research language" (Episode 47). This is not to denigrate the quality of research presented. It's just that, in its present form, it will likely remain academics listening to academics.

In sum, *Below the Radar* provides essential listening for the urban studies community and for anyone wishing a critical perspective on the nature of urbanization in Vancouver.

Porcupine Podcast

Marrell-Anne Phare and Michael Miltenberger,
Porcupine Media

Podcast. https://porcupinepodcast.ca/

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"How do porcupines hug?" Merrell-Anne Phare asks.
"Carefully," Michael Miltenberger responds.
This old joke is the disarming beginning to every episode of *Porcupine*, a podcast hosted by political consultant Michael Miltenberger and lawyer Merrell-Ann Phare. The image of hugging porcupines is an apt metaphor for the prickly process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, and *Porcupine* puts a human voice to the ways that governments, organizations, and individuals are (and are not) responding to the ninety-four calls to action published in 2015 by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

Porcupine is a valuable digital resource. In addition to recordings of engaging conversations with a wide range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who are living reconciliation every day, the website for the podcast (https://porcupinepodcast.ca/) includes transcripts for each episode and extensive show notes about the speakers and projects in which they are involved. Seasons 1 and 2 include a total of twenty interviews with guests, ranging from First Nation Elders, Members of Parliament and former provincial premiers, Indigenous economists, Indigenous and non-Indigenous scientists, lawyers, water managers, health practitioners, a young rapper, and a couple of seasoned CBC broadcasters. Episodes address social issues like economic development on Indigenous land, Indigenous and Aboriginal legal rights, environmental protection, health parities, and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

The hosts have leveraged their extensive experience with Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments and community groups to bring this array of guests to the microphone. Phare is legal counsel and advisor to several First Nations and other governments and founding executive director of the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER), a national First Nation charitable environmental organization. Miltenberger spent twenty years as an MLA in the Northwest Territories legislature and currently provides strategic political advice to Indigenous and Crown governments, NGOs, industry, and the private sector.

Porcupine's first episode, "CLI Elders Discuss Reconciliation," sets the tone for the podcast. The episode features three Elders that Phare and Miltonberger work with at the Collaborative Leadership Initiative (CLI), which is "an ongoing process that has seen elected leaders join in partnership with CIER, the Southern Chiefs' Organization and the Winnipeg Metropolitan Region to implement a process that ensures enhanced relationships and good decision-making" (CLI website https://yourcier.org/cli/). Garry McLean (Lake Manitoba First Nation), Rodney Burns, and Stan McKay (Ochkwi-Sipi, Fisher River First Nation) are emblematic of what substantive reconciliation looks like on the ground. McLean declares that bringing a Cree, Ojibwe, and white person to the same table at CLI is exciting. McKay adds that he believes "it's possible for people who have historically been separated to become friends and share stories" (*Porcupine*, Episode 1, 17:03). Reflecting on McKay's words and the value of initiatives like CLI, Burns admits to feeling apprehension about reconciliation at first and in the end realizing that "we have to talk with each other and we have to try and see if we can get along" (*Porcupine*, Episode 1, 18:44).Reconciliation is not easy. It is, as Miltenberger says, "very prickly, a tough subject. And when you get a lot of porcupines together, it takes a very careful approach to have anything constructive happen" (*Porcupine*, Episode 0, 2:35). Phare and Miltenberger successfully navigate this prickly space of reconciliation with compassion and levity, creating a valuable resource for those interested in the many ways that Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians are, as Phare says, overcoming barriers "and actually doing the great big porcupine hug" (Porcupine, Episode 0, 2:46). In this podcast listeners can indeed witness the ways that porcupine hugs are building the relationships necessary to achieve true and substantive reconciliation.