

Migration to another world is possible / Migration to “Another World is Possible”

Brian K. Murphy, June 2007

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around the courses

Other Worlds, Other Globalizations, and Open Space and Dissent in Movements

<http://critical-courses.cacim.net/twiki/tiki-index.php>

Where I’m coming from...

- Themes of work over 40 years: the politics of experience: literacy and citizenship; poverty and participation; education and responsible citizenship. Focus of book ¹ is the possibility of an “open conspiracy” of citizens working for progressive social change, and the role that inventive education could play in this process. Political Literacy, practice of open space learning and deliberation, have been central. These approaches were quite common once, much less common now (and industrialized — cf. “Open Space Technology”TM), and the history of it is obscured.
- Work in adult literacy in Canada and in West Africa in 1960’s and early 1970s led to study of the theory and practice of Paulo Freire’s radical pedagogy. M.A. thesis (University of Ottawa, 1973) was a critical appreciation that underscored the authentic power and transformative qualities of the methodology, but also warned that Freire himself — in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* — had opened the door to the corruption of the methodology (specifically with his concept of “hinged themes”) on the basis of political criteria and goals. Subsequently, as it turned out, the theory was appropriated and exploited as a “popular education” tool of various political projects — from the left and the right — in ways in which the agency of the adult learner was subordinated to a prescribed and “correct” political and economic analysis. Freire himself ultimately participated in this appropriation, as perhaps most clearly elaborated in his *Letters from Guinea Bissau*. Today “conscientization” is widely understood as a process to make people actively aware of the “way things are” objectively in the world (indoctrinate), rather than to nurture authentic self-awareness and the capacity to subjectively create and re-create the world/worlds we imagine possible (liberate).
- This is only one example of the tension that lies within the dynamic relationship between theory and practice, the theme of this symposium. Much has been done over the years to elaborate and practice critical collaborative open learning. A recent experience, relevant to many papers presented here, and the theme of “open space”, was an international learning circle on migration hosted in late 2006 by the Canadian social justice organization, Inter Pares, which brought together theorists and activists on the rights of migrants to reflect on the lessons of their experience and draw conclusions for future actions. ²

Dilemmas of making theory into practice, and bringing practice to bear on theory

¹ Murphy, Brian K., *Transforming Ourselves, Transforming the World, An Open Conspiracy for Social Change*, ZED Books (UK) and Fernwood (Halifax), 1999; *De la pensée à l’action: La personne au cœur du changement social* (traduit par Geneviève Boulanger), Les Éditions Écosociété, Québec (2001).

² Murphy, Brian K., *Out of the Shadowlands: A Report on an International Learning Circle on Migration & Citizenship*, Inter Pares, 2007, available at <http://www.interpares.ca/en/index.php>.

- Theory is a “closed space”.
- In the exchange between theory and practice, theory more often governs practice than the obverse.
- Theory — and those in a position to “theorize” — tend to dominate, rule, control, instrumentalize. Key issues include the power of the “academy”; its role in thought control and social engineering; as gatekeeper of the correct perspective; as protector of the established “consensus” and of dominant interests.
- Theory is tool of ideology. Theory is never “neutral”.
- Theory tends to be justified by its utility, not by its veracity .
- At one and the same time, theory is a *discipline* (of thinking), and a *disciplining* (of thought).
- Almost all theory is built on an invisible foundation of unchallenged givens: diction, syntax, grammar, hidden assumptions, norms.
- Theory of how things work, or how things happened, is not a description of reality but a *way of describing* reality.
- Much analytic or descriptive theory is rooted in the notion that if something happens, there is an identifiable cause, and a reason; and it is in the capacity of science and “theory” to uncover it. This is a phenomenologically questionable premise (one which I challenge in my book).
- Logic more often forms a labyrinth than a path: the deeper in you go, the harder it is to find your way out (that is, return to the “point of departure”); you end up describing the maze, not the world outside its gate. Theory is the labyrinth, the theoretician the minotaur who protects it, the dissenter escapes on wings of feathers and wax.
- There is not one, perfect method for reading the world and interpreting it. Rationalism, and western scientific method, are only one way among many. Recommended reading on this theme: philosopher of science, Paul Feyerabend’s *Against Method*. Although not — certainly not — working in the mode of Foucault (Feyerabend was a mathematician and physicist, as well as a philosopher of science), his work echoes the observations of Foucault and others about how power is manufactured through the formulation and control of truth (“tyranny of globalized discourse”) which in turn becomes the bulwark of power; the validity of “traditional” knowledge formulated in culture; and the tension between “discontinuous knowledge” and the collected knowledge and “unified theory” of western science.

Space

- Space is enclosed the moment it is “opened”; occupants of a space are enclosed the moment they enter it, or create it. The only open space contained by a sphere is the outer surface; the space inside is closed. (Which is the sphere — the surface, or the emptiness within?)
- Open spaces include inner (interior) space and shared (exterior) space: open space is defined by the extent to which it is open to the meeting of these two.
- Open space promotes not only dialogue between, but among.
- Open space is only a little bit about democracy; it is largely about actualization, freedom, liberty: subjectivity.
- Open space is only a little bit about ownership, which is merely property; and even less about horizontality, which is merely one-dimensional and comes from no where and leads no where.
- Space is spherical: it embraces and is embraced

Movements:

- Movement is an exceedingly troublesome construct. Qualities are every-shifting and functional; there is no coherence or consistency in its use.
 - Movement is a locus of self-actualization and expression, as much as a locus of collaboration for directed change. Change goal is often a proxy

for identity and self-expression (participation), and the quest for (psychic) self-determination.

- There is not one WSF, but many: as many as there are participants. It is also exclusionary of all who do not attend.
- Waves and surges: what we observe are the waves, but the real movement is actually below the surface, invisible and uncontrolled and uncontrollable, in the currents, the undercurrents, the undertow, the lateral flows.
 - Movements: are they a cause of change, or result of change?
 - Flux—> [change] —> emergence—> [change] —> affinity—> [change]—> critical mass—> [change]—> movement/proposition—> [change]—> Movement institutionalizes—> change slows—> change stops...
 - Fact of movement — its place, space, power — is new fact-in-reality; once it becomes a “fact”, a movement’s energy often goes into protecting this fact and whatever change it symbolizes (which is often only the fact of its own existence and place), protecting the group; movements are essentially conservative, instrumentalizing issues, constructs, and subjects.