

Symposium  
**Other Worlds, Other Globalisations, and Open Space and Dissent in Movement**  
Revisiting Critical Courses@Carleton  
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Workshop I: **Drawing Theory from Research and Practice:**

## **Another Knowledge Is Possible**

Notes for presentation

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- 1) **Movements, especially of poor and marginalized peoples, do not produce “theory.”**
  - “theory” in this sense = well-developed systems and schools of thought associated historically with theology, metaphysics and philosophy, and more recently with the social sciences  
<=> stable, well-resourced, elaborately institutionalized, producing sustained reflection/research/meeting/ discussing/writing/publishing/debating/revising
- 2) **Established sites of knowledge production (“theory”) are hostile at worst and indifferent at best to reflections/insights/concerns of “ordinary”/marginalized peoples.**
  - World Bank / IMF (Structural Adjustment Participatory Review International Network (SAPRIN), 2002)
  - corporations: public relations; consulting, marketing, advertising
  - think tanks
  - few on “left”
    - on the “right” network of think tanks = essential to power of neoliberal/neoconservative “right”  
= scholarly work + media + movement building + leadership development + strategizing (= integrating “theory” and “practice”!)
    - media
  - universities
    - “liberal” culture / presumptions / procedures – “Eurocentrism”
      - elite/professional specialists vs popular actors
      - illusions of neutrality, objectivity, universality
      - preference for “theory” over “practice”
      - bureaucratic procedures
      - scholars - activists tensions (Barker and Cox, 2002) / mutual ignorance / conflicting styles, goals, criteria / hostility
    - many movement successes in forging space in universities, scholarly associations, and publishing
    - but also many “academic captivities” of radical thinkers and thinking
- 3) **Most of life for most people is lived beyond the gaze of theorists.**
  - most of history / even today

- scholars arrive late and behind<sup>1</sup>
- “ordinary” people are far more creative in stitching together meaning and strategies for survival in their everyday lives than discourses of “system,” “hegemony” and “orthodoxy” allow!
- historically small circles of “privileged” scholars with limited capacities to address the complexities of life, for growing numbers of people, in a rapidly changing world

#### 4) **Beyond the confines of Eurocentric knowledge—“science”—many other traditions—cultural / religious / scientific / political—have continued to develop, and offer many resources for re-conceiving “history” and the possibilities for the future.**

- “transmodern” traditions
  - Other peoples and their traditions have not been closed or static. They have continued to evolve. So they are not in any simple sense pre-modern. Neither are they modern, or postmodern. Rather, they are transmodern (Dussel, 2002). Without converting to modernity, they have engaged in “transforming tradition in a traditional way” (Esteva, 2001, 122). Traditional communities, as Sardar says of Islam, “reinvent and innovate tradition constantly. Indeed, a tradition that does not change ceases to be a tradition” (Sardar, 2004).
- other futures / visions of inspiring futures (utopias and hopes) / other solidarities and “self-interests”
  - These traditions, with their strong religious and cultural links to the past, do not in any simple sense contain “answers” to questions in a world so profoundly re-shaped by modern developments in human knowledge, technologies and modes of social organization. And they all face profound challenges too. But within these traditions there are many diverse strands, including, in addition to their own forms of fundamentalism, many creative expressions of “critical and open traditionalism that uses the historic past to create a bright future” in other ways (Inayatullah, 2005). These are well springs of other ways of seeing, values and ethical frameworks, modes of collective identity, discipline and solidarity, frameworks of historical change. They represent other traditions of hope for transcending current reality, and, on the terrain beyond certain knowledge, other traditions of faith beside (increasingly blind) faith in linear progress which can sustain such hope in the face of doubt and heavily armed guards of the status quo.

#### 5) **At their best, popular movements and coalitions generate profound new insights, sensibilities, conversions, commitments, practices, and questions.**

- multiple/proliferating epistemological/hermeneutical privileges of marginalized peoples, communities, groups, concerns
- expanding epistemological horizons
- No single scholarly discourse/theory comes even close to addressing/incorporating all the important dimensions of life with which people—individuals, families, communities, institutions, movements—are wrestling in a world

#### 6) **Information Explosions / Knowledge Revolutions**

- crises of scholarly disciplines (Lal, 2002)
- towards transdisciplinarity / multidisciplinary / unidisciplinarity (Farred, 2003)
- coalitions = epistemological necessities (Conway, 2004)

#### 7) **Beyond Methodological Modernism: New Ecologies of Knowledges**

- irreducible diversity of knowledges (Santos, Nunes and Meneses, 2007, xx)

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<sup>1</sup> • “On the one hand, the theory is no longer at the service of the future practices it potentially contains, and rather serves to legitimate (or not) the past practices that have emerged in spite of itself. Thus, **avant-garde thought tends to tag along the rear-guard of practice**. It stops being orientation to become ratification of the successes obtained by default or confirmation of pre-announced failures. On the other hand, the **practice justifies itself resorting to a theoretical bricolage stuck to the needs of the moment, made up of heterogeneous concepts and languages which, from the point of view of the theory, are no more than opportunistic rationalizations or rhetorical exercises**. From the point of view of the theory, theoretical bricolage never qualifies as theory. From the point of view of the practice, a posteriori theorization is mere parasitism.” (Santos, 2006, 161)

- irreducible differences / permanent challenges of translating across traditions
- beyond methodological modernism (Ezzat, 2004; Grosfoguel and Cervantes-Rodríguez, 2002; Nandy, 2006; Smith, 1999)
- epistemological pluralism (Martin and Glesne, 2002)
- new social contract for science (Farred, 2003; Calame, 2000; Institute of Science in Society (ISIS), Scientists for Global Responsibility (SGR) and Third World Network (TWN), 2002; Kates, Clark, Corell, et al., 2000; World Conference on Science, 1999)

## 8) Toward Alternative Modes of Knowledge Production

- popular university of social movements (Santos, 2003)
- First Nations postcolonial university (Battiste, 2005)
- new African educational paradigms (Banqura, 2005; Nabudere, 2002)
- Latin American initiatives (Mignolo, 2003)
- Asian initiatives (Alvares, 2002; Lal, 2005; Parmar, 2006)
- global dialogues (Schugurensky, 2000; Lal, 2005)

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