

# Open Space as a Learning Environment

## Engaging Critically with the Pedagogical Aspects of Critical Courses @ Carleton

Emilie Hayes, Mat Nelson, and Jai Sen, June 2007, finalised December 2007 <sup>1</sup>

Paper presented at

### Revisiting Critical Courses @ Carleton

A Symposium in Ottawa, Canada, during June 20-22 2007, around the work done by participants in two courses at Carleton University, Ottawa, in the Fall Semester 2006 :

Other Worlds, Other Globalisations, *and* Open Space and Dissent in Movement

#### Introduction:

#### **Critical Courses at Carleton University: Other Worlds, Other Globalisations, and Challenging Empires: Open Space and Dissent in Movement**

In the fall term of 2006, Carleton University's Institute of Political Economy offered two graduate level courses, facilitated by one of the co-authors of this paper, activist and independent researcher, Jai Sen. Both seminar courses, *Other Worlds, Other Globalisations* (OWOG), and *Challenging Empires: Open Space and Dissent in Movement* (OSDM), were interdisciplinary approaches to globalisation and movement.<sup>2</sup> Other Worlds, Other Globalisations (PECO 5501) for instance, was cross-referenced with the political science and sociology departments at Carleton, while Dissent in Movement / OSDM, likewise, was offered as a graduate course in sociology (SOCI 5805).<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is the final version of a joint paper prepared by one participant from each course (Emilie Hayes of OSDM (Challenging Empires: Open Space and Dissent in Movement) and Mat Nelson of OWOG (Other Worlds Other Globalisations)) and the Course Facilitator for both courses, Jai Sen, for presentation at the Ottawa Symposium in June 2007. It was prepared as and remains a somewhat rough collage of our respective contributions. In particular, while pages 1-17 constitute the joint paper, Jai alone has prepared the Annexure starting from p 18, titled 'Some Reflections on Facilitation'.

We thank all the participants at the June Symposium for the very stimulating discussions that took place around this paper and for their many comments, some of which we have tried to address in this final version. (See <http://critical-courses.cacim.net/twiki/tiki-index.php?page=RCCSRefractions> for a record of the discussion that took place on this paper – and other papers - during the Symposium.) Finally, and especially where two of us – Emilie and Mat - did not even meet each other till the Symposium, we also thank each other for a stimulating and often fun experience of critical, collaborative engagement with our respective experiences and perceptions of the courses, individually and collectively !

<sup>2</sup> Course Outlines accessible at [www.critical-courses.cacim.net](http://www.critical-courses.cacim.net), respectively @ <http://critical-courses.cacim.net/twiki/tiki-index.php?page=OWOGHome> and <http://critical-courses.cacim.net/twiki/tiki-index.php?page=CEOSDMHome>.

<sup>3</sup> The latter course, OSDM, however possibly suffered some setback in terms of size and range of students attending, first on account of the text of the blurb on it that was made available on the Carleton website being, by mistake, the same as for the OWOG course (thereby leading students to think that it was the same course but under another name) and then by the correction that was to have been announced at the opening / welcome session to the semester, not being made. (As learned by JS from discussion at the Sociology Department admin office.) One student in OSDM observed that it was evident from the relative

The two courses intertwined considerably in terms of their subject matter and content, and also shared similar webspace at [www.critical-courses.cacim.net](http://www.critical-courses.cacim.net), on the site for CACIM, the India Institute for Critical Action: Centre in Movement ([www.cacim.net](http://www.cacim.net)), the base organisation for Jai and from where he developed the courses. Students were encouraged to post their short 2-3 page 'review notes' on the webpage each week, based on their choice of subject in relation to the topic of the week's class.

While the main objectives of the two courses differed - with OWOG exploring and critically exploring the concept of 'other worlds and other globalisations' and OSDM focusing on the concept of open space and of dissent *within* movement (as distinct from movement *as* dissent, which is the normal focus) – in pedagogical terms both courses shared the following sub-objectives :

- 1) To critically locate ourselves, as individuals, with respect to these other worlds;
- 2) To improve our abilities in critical thinking, reading, writing, and presentation;
- 3) To develop a bibliography/bibliographies that can act as a resource for further work by participants in this course and also by others. The bibliography/ies will include written material, webspaces, films, plays, poetry, and other literature, all of which can and should form references for the course itself. Course participants are also welcome to suggest material in all these modes that we could display and look at during the course;
- 4) And – to have fun and to creatively explore the subject!<sup>4</sup>

Both courses attempted to facilitate group or collective processes encouraging students to critically reflect on their own experiences "in relation to the other worlds and to the 'others' whose lives and struggles"<sup>5</sup> were discussed in class. More specifically, the course encouraged curiosity, active engagement, and a willingness to take risks. While students were encouraged to be independent, they were also asked to be open, cooperative, and collaborative in conceptualising ideas.

Due to the focus on the concept of open space, it was attempted to conduct both courses as open spaces themselves. By organising the course as open-ended and with course participants all contributing to its construction, students were able to not only critically examine the concept of open space but experience it as well.

In addition to developing their own research papers, students were also encouraged to critically engage with relevant news and articles; websites and listserves; books, films, plays, poems, music, and other literature; and blogging about the ideas explored in the course or further discussing these ideas with others.

Grading for both courses was based in large part on participation (30%) and a 10-25 page research paper with an outline (50%), with an additional 20% allocated to weekly 1-2 page

---

sizes of the two courses that cross listing clearly encouraged and enabled more students to take part. As is also pointed out in the discussion in this paper however, the upside of the small size of the OSDM class was that good as the OWOG experience also was, OSDM was an even closer, more intimate learning experience for all concerned.

<sup>4</sup> Syllabus for Other Worlds, Other Globalisations (OWOG), p 3. Accessible @ [www.critical-courses.cacim.net](http://www.critical-courses.cacim.net).

<sup>5</sup> Syllabus from Other Worlds, Other Globalisations (OWOG), p 4; and syllabus for Open Space and Dissent in Movement (OSDM), p 4, both @ [www.critical-courses.cacim.net](http://www.critical-courses.cacim.net).

'review notes' and a 1-3 page critical review of the first half of the course. See the *Annexure* to this paper for a more detailed discussion of how this actually played itself out.

### Open Spaces for Dialogue and Enquiry (OSDE)

At one level, the Critical Courses offered at Carleton relates closely to the general spirit of *Open Spaces for Dialogue and Enquiry* (OSDE), or the 'Other Worlds' project, a project developed and conducted by Vanessa Andreotti and her colleagues during 2004-6 at the University of Nottingham in the UK.<sup>6</sup> As a purposely 'different' approach to knowledge and learning, this methodology encouraged a form of "transnational literacy" based upon principles of critical engagement, independent thinking, and global citizenship.<sup>7</sup> The project was developed with activists and academics closely associated with the World Social Forum (WSF). As a way of questioning received knowledge, the main goal of OSDE, as an educational programme, was the development of "safe spaces for dialogue and enquiry".<sup>8</sup> In asking *are other worlds possible?*, the aim was "not to create a single collective vision of another world but to explore possibilities together, relying on individual differences to avoid the reification of a collectively agreed *ideal future*".<sup>9</sup> Through non-indoctrinating forms of consensus, self-reflexivity, and participatory democracy, students and educators alike were encouraged to become 'critical friends' and to create 'open space' or an *educational safe space* that was tolerant of dissent, disagreement, and differences. In this sense, "we were allowed to disagree".<sup>10</sup> The four main pillars of the project were:

- a) Everyone has knowledge – we all have got our own lenses to look through at the world;
- b) Every knowledge deserves respect – these lenses are legitimate, but they are constantly reconstructed and, moreover, bound to particular contexts;
- c) Every knowledge is partial and incomplete – as the lenses are constructed within particular contexts they are informed by particular assumptions and lack information from other contexts and assumptions; and -
- d) All knowledge can, and should, be questioned – the assumptions that inform the construction of the lenses as well as their implications and other possibilities of assumptions should be examined.<sup>11</sup>

In this respect, OSDE sought not to dogmatically impose knowledge on participants, but to challenge common-sense ideas and to "deconstruct universalistic and Eurocentric assumptions about identities, cultures, and globalisation".<sup>12</sup> In this framework, teachers and instructors do not necessarily have all the answers. Critical literacy, as opposed to 'traditional' literacy', refuses to read the text at face value. As an unfinished project, this form of critical engagement encourages participants to question underlying assumptions, structures of power, historical contexts, and the socially constructed or 'ideological' nature of language and knowledge production. As students

<sup>6</sup> See [www.mundi.org.uk](http://www.mundi.org.uk) and <http://www.osdemethodology.org.uk>.

<sup>7</sup> Vanessa Andreotti, 2007 – 'Creating Open Spaces', in Jai Sen, ed, 2007 - *Imagining Alternatives*. The term 'transnational literacy', as Andreotti points out, comes from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 2001 – 'Questioned on Translation: Adrift', in *Public Culture* 13 (2001), p 15.

<sup>8</sup> OSDE Methodology Booklet, p 3.

<sup>9</sup> Andreotti 2007, p 4.

<sup>10</sup> OSDE Methodology Booklet, p 3.

<sup>11</sup> Andreotti 2007, p 3.

<sup>12</sup> Andreotti 2007, p 11.

locate themselves and their own standpoint within broader globalisation processes and 'other worlds', it becomes possible for them to critically understand their experience and location through the 'writing' of "identities, cultures and histories."<sup>13</sup> By endorsing ethical difference and otherness, critical pedagogy refuses to privilege one particular viewpoint or perspective over any others. In this way, it encourages a form of empowerment, by enhancing the communicative skills and self-esteem of all those who participate in the project.

The courses offered at Carleton were inspired and stimulated by these ideas and approaches, and accepted these premises as the broad philosophical base on which it was built. This, in the form of the 'four pillars' of OSDE, was specifically cited in both the Course Outlines, and they in turn therefore also became the pillars for the Carleton courses.

### **Open Space and Critical Pedagogy**

A defining characteristic of the courses that took place at Carleton was the attempt to make them an *open space*. Open space, as Jai Sen argues, represents a new form of politics, "a form of organisation and structure, and a way of doing things, that allows a new form of politics; an *emergent politics*".<sup>14</sup> More inclusive to a much wider range of actors, its horizontal and open-ended structure challenges the linear and programmed nature of traditional hierarchical organisations such as the university, in turn, "blurring the sharp distinction between teacher/student."<sup>15</sup> By attempting to create critical courses as open spaces, the classes at Carleton were intentionally left indeterminate and half structured, so that the remaining sessions could be left open to planning by the instructor and the participants themselves. As a function of Andreotti's pedagogical-ethical framework, collaborative course development and creative curricula were emphasised so that students were given a substantial amount of individual choice - aside from group or class choice - on elements such as selecting their own readings, determining the nature of their weekly review notes, and the topics of their Review Notes and their Research Papers. In this respect, the course facilitator's input was initially very limited. However, to the extent that participants' feedback tended to emphasise this as largely negative, attempts were made to accommodate more instructor input into the second half.<sup>16</sup>

The concept of open space has been applied to such diverse fields as business management, notions of public or common property in urban planning, architecture, inventions in media such as the Internet, the women's movement,<sup>17</sup> and other new social movements since the 1960s, in many parts of the world.<sup>18</sup> In social and political movement - including in the

<sup>13</sup> OSDE Methodology Booklet, p 3.

<sup>14</sup> Jai Sen, May 2007 - 'Opening Open Space: Notes on the Grammar and Vocabulary of the Concept of Open Space' (May 17 2007 version), p 1. Available @ [http://www.openspaceforum.net/twiki/tiki-read\\_article.php?articleId=429](http://www.openspaceforum.net/twiki/tiki-read_article.php?articleId=429).

<sup>15</sup> Judy Meltzer and Jai Sen, November 2007 - 'Drawing Critical Lessons : A Note on Concepts from an Experiment in Pedagogy', @ [http://critical-courses.cacim.net/twiki/tiki-read\\_article.php?articleId=6](http://critical-courses.cacim.net/twiki/tiki-read_article.php?articleId=6), p 2.

<sup>16</sup> For discussion of this, see section in this paper starting on p 10, on 'Strengths/opportunities and weaknesses/challenges in both courses'.

<sup>17</sup> See for instance, Emilie Hayes, 2006 - 'The Waves of Feminism: Explorations in Open Space and Dissent in the Second Wave Feminist Movement and its Contributions to the Emergence of Third Wave Feminism', Research Paper for SOCI 5805, Carleton University, Ottawa ON, Canada, in Fall 2006; now to be published in revised form as : 'Open Space and Dissent in Movement : Understandings and Lessons from the Canadian Feminist Movement' (tentative title) in Jai Sen and Peter Waterman, eds, forthcoming, 2008 - *Facing History : The World Social Forum and Beyond*, Volume 2 in the *Challenging Empires* series. New Delhi : OpenWord.

<sup>18</sup> Sen 2007.

broader struggle against imperialism and the hegemonic politics of neoliberal globalisation - the World Social Forum (WSF) for example, declares itself an "open space", with one of main architects comparing it to a *praça*, or 'square', in a city.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, as Andreotti points out, the conceptual framework for the OSDE methodology was based on "postcolonial pedagogies" and other socio-historical constructivist understandings of the learning process developed by Paulo Freire and other critical theorists including Spivak, Foucault, Bhabha, Said, and Derrida.<sup>20</sup> The organisational theory of open space, much like its application to social and political movement, has many practical implications for critical learning processes.

In pedagogical theory, the idea of open education systems was given expression in Pablo Freire's theory of the 'pedagogy of the oppressed'. Freire's philosophy of education owes considerable debt to modern Marxist and anti-colonial thinkers like Franz Fanon, especially in his analysis of how oppression is justified but can be overcome through a mutual process between the 'oppressor' and the 'oppressed'. His critical pedagogy provides the theoretical conditions for a radical equality through a conceptual shift from student passivity to 'critical engagement' and self-reflexivity in learning. This is one of the few attempts anywhere to dispense of hierarchy in the classroom in order to implement something like democracy or organic, 'open-ended exchange' as an educational method. Freire also wants us to question the traditionally teacher-student dichotomy, and to think instead in terms of *teachers who learn*, and *learners who teach*, as basic roles of participation in the classroom. These concepts and ideas have inspired and influenced many people in education and in social development work in these subsequent years, all over the world, and in turn also influenced and coursed through the courses at Carleton.

The concept of open space explored in the courses also bears similarities to a recent development in political theory, led by post-structuralist theorists such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Edward Said, of what may be called an epistemological 'linguistic turn'. These thinkers set out to deconstruct essentialist notions of 'self' and 'identity' and to question hierarchical power relations in various institutional settings. This project also privileges 'self-reflexivity' in learning through "a social-historical constructivist understanding of the learning process".<sup>21</sup> The post-structuralist objections to hierarchy stem from its dependence on binary oppositions such as 'student' and 'teacher', which are deeply embedded in even the most liberal-democratic societies. The political implications of this position are most apparent in its aim to destabilise such binaries and the authority linked with the dominant term (ie 'teacher'). Like Freire's 'pedagogy of the oppressed', these theorists open up exciting, creative possibilities in a way that bypasses established classroom hierarchies. And in a similar way, open space can be seen as an ethos of permanent critique - a *conscious, ongoing critical practice*, without a distinct end-point or determinate outcome.

In the specific context of OWOG, the goal was to explore the 'incivil' aspects of globalisation and its others.<sup>22</sup> In their critical reviews of the course, for instance, many

<sup>19</sup> Chico Whitaker, 2004 - 'The WSF as Open Space', in Jai Sen, Anita Anand, Arturo Escobar, and Peter Waterman, eds, 2004 - *World Social Forum : Challenging Empires* (New Delhi : Viveka), pp 111-121. Available at [http://www.choike.org/nuevo\\_eng/informes/1557.html](http://www.choike.org/nuevo_eng/informes/1557.html), as cited in Sen 2007, p 1.

<sup>20</sup> Andreotti 2007, p 5.

<sup>21</sup> Andreotti 2007, p 5.

<sup>22</sup> See : Jai Sen, 2002 - 'Civilising Globalisation? Or Globalising Civilisation? Some Reflections Towards Civil governance and Conscious, Critical Globalisation', a Paper for a Presentation for the Opening Session of 'Helsinki Conference 2002: Searching for Global Partnerships' held in Helsinki Finland, December 2-4, 2002. Organised by Crisis Management Initiative (Office of President Ahtisaari), on behalf of the Government of Finland.

participants praised the critical aspects of the course that questioned the 'dominant conforming movement' and its suppression of potential 'other' groups who can challenge mainstream (neoliberal) paradigms. A number of students specifically expressed a particular interest in critically examining the oppressed, poor, and marginalised segments of society. As one OSDM student remarked, the format of the course arguably mirrored the 'challenge of constructing open spaces in mass movements themselves'. And for another participant, "the university should be the institution where concerned human beings can envision an alternative to the status quo of war and oppression, which is outsourced by the West throughout the globe." Aside from the main goal of providing independent learning opportunities for students therefore, one of the main outcomes of the courses was thus the critical questioning of legitimised knowledge and education in the context of the university.

In knowledge and education systems, the idea of 'open space' as a space for learning promotes a critical reflexivity in terms of its aim to make participants themselves more open and receptive. Certainly, the main purpose of the critical courses offered at Carleton was to provide and create stimulating learning opportunities for those who experience them. Through collaborative course development, students were seen not only as learners but 'knowledgeable participants', and 'equal partners' in planning the classes, selecting materials and research projects, leading sessions, and reviewing the course itself.<sup>23</sup>

However, like many social and political movements that draw on an ethic of empowerment and self-actualisation, the notion of open space as critical pedagogy is not without its paradoxes and contradictions. As we have seen, these contradictions are reflected most apparently in the tensions between open space as a theoretical concept and the inherited institutional traditions of the university, or as one participant put it, between the contradictions of 'bureaucracy and popular mobilisation'. As a business, education as a key sector aimed at harnessing human skills and promoting competitive, capitalist economies. Horizontal learning organisations must be balanced against the structural constraints of the university as an institution, its inherited traditions, and the reality of deadlines and tight time restraints.

While many students enjoyed the flexibility, 'uncertainty', and 'unique structure' of the classes, at the same time the open, exploratory structure of the courses prompted many respondents to suggest that the experiment lacked clarity, shape, and form, criticising the 'underlying sense of confusion' that seemed to flow from the first few classes. Others concluded that because of intensive and extensive processes of administrative and course planning, there might have been too much emphasis on the intellectual ethos and theory behind the *process* rather than the *content* of the course itself.

These limits and paradoxes of 'organising' the chaos of open space, however, are inherent characteristics of open space and of what Jo Freeman has called the "tyranny of structurelessness".<sup>24</sup> There is a need to address the contradictions of open-ended processes, and to unravel the ambiguities of certain questions, such as *who* 'controls' open space, and *who* sets the rules? It becomes, as Sen points out, a question of *all or nothing*, which if ineffectively structured, can lead to group "paralysis and alienation".<sup>25</sup> Always subject to power dynamics exclusion and marginalisation, it is illusory to suggest that the application of the politics of open

---

<sup>23</sup> Meltzer and Sen 2007, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Jo Freeman, May 1970/1971 – 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness', @ <http://feminist-reprise.org/docs/structurelessness.htm> and <http://struggle.ws/pdfs/tyranny.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Sen, May 2007, p 11.

space can be entirely open, neutral, and equal. In the course reviews, these sentiments were echoed by students in their call for an effective harmony between openness and a 'more rigorous framework'.

## The Critical Courses Experience :

### Other Worlds, Other Globalisations (OWOG)

As the title suggests, and already touched on above, OWOG was a course about exploring and perhaps challenging the *underlying assumptions* about globalisation, by exploring its *other* worlds and processes. By questioning inherent norms of 'civility' embedded in such notions as 'social' movements and 'civil society', its objective was to better comprehend the idea and reality of globalisation *from below*, rather than just from *the middle*, "through the relentless emigration of working classes, the labouring poor, and religious and ethnic minorities in search of new futures but while also retaining links with their origins."<sup>26</sup> This included examining the globalising impacts of money and human trafficking, religious fundamentalisms, and the drug trade. As a class reflection of this struggle, global 'civil society', whether expressed as state, market, or civil movement, is often uncritically equated with civilisation, or 'civilising the world'. In this respect, OWOG deconstructed the boundaries between 'civil' and the 'uncivil' and between civility and incivility.<sup>27</sup>

Both the syllabus and ensuing discussions encouraged examining globalisation in relation to gender, music, art, and the Internet, as part of the general idea that learning should occur in a manner conducive to "critically examining oneself and one's own experiences in relation to the other worlds and to the 'others' whose lives and struggles we will be discussing."<sup>28</sup>

The following is a breakdown of the course outline, which was divided into three different parts, with twelve different sessions:

*Part 1 : Globalisation and its Contents* : (1) What is Globalisation ? And What is this Course all About ? (2) What are Civil Societies ? (3) Religion, Colonisation, and Globalisation; (4) Imagined Communities : Migration, Memories, and Globalisation Session;<sup>29</sup> and (5) Other Currencies : Human Trafficking and Globalisation

*Part 2 : Defining/Delineating Other Globalisations* : (6) First/Midterm Review Workshop; (7) No seminar / self-defined activity; and (8) First Nations, First Perspectives : The Voice of the Indigenous in the World<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Sen 2002.

<sup>27</sup> See also : Jai Sen, 2007 – 'The power of civility', in Mikael Löfgren & Håkan Thörn, eds, 2007 – 'Global Civil Society – More Or Less Democracy?', special issue of *Development Dialogue*; coming out of the seminar 'Global Civil Society : More or Less Democracy?' organised by the Committee at the World Social Forum in Nairobi, Kenya, on January 22 2007. [http://cacim.net/twiki/tiki-read\\_article.php?articleId=61](http://cacim.net/twiki/tiki-read_article.php?articleId=61).

<sup>28</sup> Syllabus for Other Worlds, Other Globalisations (OWOG), p 4.

<sup>29</sup> Guest Lecturer Brian Given, Professor of Sociology, Carleton University, and liaison in Canada for His Highness the Dalai Lama, on 'The Tibetan Diaspora in Canada'.

<sup>30</sup> In reality, spread over two sessions, 8 and 9, with Guest speakers Jamie Koebel, Métis activist, well known in Canada and abroad; former colleague of OWOG course participant Mihaela Vieru in the MA Program in Canadian Studies at Carleton; and : Lynda Brown, Inuit community representative, of mixed Inuit-Scottish heritage, presently co-researcher with Heidi Langille in a project on Inuit youth and identity in Ottawa; also activist, not only in politics but also in traditional Inuit artistic performance.

*Part 3 : Other Worlds, Other Globalisations – Course Participant Presentations (Sessions 9-12).*

### **Challenging Empires: Open Space and Dissent in Movement (OSDM)**

OSDM addressed the emergence of civil movements and the challenging of empires, and the fostering of greater democracy through the “action and culture of dissent”.<sup>31</sup> This seminar took themes of movement and dissent to a more complex level of analysis by exploring dissent within civil movement. Course participants also addressed the concept of open space (“where ‘everyone’ is said to be welcome and, crucially, equal”<sup>32</sup>), exploring topics such as how open space functions, its strengths and limitations, as well as how dissent is expressed within these spaces.

As with OWOG, OSDM was also organised in three parts:

*Part 1 : Open Space, Civility, and Discontent :* (1) Open space and Dissent : The idea of this course; (2) Movements and the challenge to Empires; (3) A space for dissent ? The architecture and culture of open space; (4) The question of civility; and (5) Open space in civil organisations, political parties, and networks of resistance.

*Part 2 : Exploring Other Opening s:* (6) First / Midterm Review workshop; (7) Plurality and Power in Movement;<sup>33</sup> and (8) Empire.<sup>34</sup>

*Part 3 : Open Space and Dissent in Movement :* Course participant presentations : (9) Dissent in the Women’s Movement; (10) Dissent in the HIV/AIDS Movement; and (11) Dissent in the Anti-Globalisation and Indigenous Movements.

Both courses concluded with a final workshop where participants reviewed the course and made recommendations for future directions related to their research.

### **Comments from Course Participants : Acts of Critical Engagement**

The following section will examine comments made by course participants in their mid term reviews of their courses, but starts with recollections by the course facilitator of other comments made by course participants at different stages.

Many students said – during the introductory sessions in each course – that they had joined the courses because of their somewhat unusual titles and course outlines and, in the case of OWOG, because of the pluralisation of the term *globalisation* – which they had never seen before and seemed, to them, to open new windows.

In both courses but especially in the case of OWOG (arguably because it was listed in more than one department), the number of students who initially enrolled was much larger than those who ultimately stayed on. But a number of those who dropped out made a point of writing

<sup>31</sup> Syllabus from Open Space and Dissent in Movement (OSDM), p 1.

<sup>32</sup> Syllabus from Open Space and Dissent in Movement (OSDM), p 1.

<sup>33</sup> Guest Speakers Janet Conway, Associate Professor, Department of Politics, School of Public Administration, Faculty of Arts, Ryerson University, Toronto, and author of *Identity, Place, Knowledge, Social Movements Contesting Globalization* (Halifax, Nova Scotia : Fernwood, 2004) and Lee Cormie, Faculty of Theology, University of St Michael's College, Toronto.

<sup>34</sup> Session led by OSDM course participant Chris Hurl.

to the Course Facilitator, not only regretting that they had to drop out (for a variety of reasons, including clashes with mandatory language classes, for international students) but also, in some cases, seeking permission to audit the course :

- I wanted to inform you that I won't be taking your class, despite how fascinating it looks. Unfortunately, I have other matters that I must concentrate on this semester and will be really pressed for time. ...With your permission, however, I would like to leave open the option of occasionally attending your class if time permits, as I think that I could learn a lot not only on the subject matter but your approach to the whole notion of a classroom. I praise you for attempting an innovative pedagogical style and hope that it works out well for yourself and the students - it looks like you have a really good lot there.
- I have dropped out this course because I am afraid that I can't afford it during my transition term (the first term as an international student). ... However, I still cherish all the reading materials you sent to me. I will glad to receive and read them.

Another comment that was expressed in different ways by different students, was that they found the course refreshing and challenging because they found the content of the course related to conditions in the 'real world' and to lived experiences outside of academia :

- And thank you for encouragement. I certainly found your class refreshing as it is plugged into a living movement, living theory and practice. I don't think we communicate with living, breathing things much in academia.

All participants of both courses completed, roughly at the middle of the semester, a critical review of the first half of the course. This, in the opinion of the course facilitator, turned out to be a very valuable exercise. We therefore, for this paper, sought permission from students in both courses to examine these mid-term course reviews in order to reflect on the pedagogy of the courses; to determine the degree to which the courses were able to meet their expectations, the goals and aims of the courses as laid out in the Course Outlines, and as well, and more generally, the criteria of the OSDE framework and of the 'four pillars' that the two courses had adopted from OSDE; and also to cite the reviews in this paper. We received their permission and examined thirteen mid-term course reviews, 10 (out of 11) from the OWOG course and 3 (out of 4) from the OSDM course.<sup>35</sup>

While keeping all participants anonymous, the following sections will assess the course reviews against the aims and principles of the OSDE framework. This will be followed by a discussion of the *strengths and opportunities offered* within the courses as well as the weaknesses and challenges presented by the courses. Lastly, we will reflect on the *opportunities identified by course participants* for growth, change, or improvement in the courses, and explore potential future directions.

### ***Critical courses and OSDE***

Based on our review of the course participants' reflections, as expressed in their mid-term reviews, our understanding is that both courses fostered a critical literacy where participants were encouraged to critically engage and think independently. It seems from the reviews as though many course participants felt that the *weekly review notes* that all of them were required to do, in both courses, were a most effective method for fostering critical literacy. Participants

---

<sup>35</sup> For the sake of completeness it is worth recording that while in the case of the OWOG comments, one participant declined to make available comments, in the case of the OSDM comments one could not be taken into account only because it was not available in soft copy (and therefore not easily circulatable among the three co-authors of this paper).

noted that the review notes offered them a useful way in which to “consolidate ideas”, with several noting that it was an important exercise in practicing skills of critical engagement.

The reviews also show that a large majority of participants recognised that the courses succeeded in creating an open space for dialogue and enquiry. In particular, one participant noted a “strange feeling of equality amongst my peers and the facilitator”, reflecting Andreotti’s encouragement of a critical friendship among students and educators. Other comments ranged from praising the open structure of the course in providing opportunities to be “co-collaborators in the development and growth of the course”, allowing students to discover their own ways of learning, providing students with the freedom to find their own methods to engage with the material, to simply enjoying the flexibility and openness of the course. Students also noted the atmosphere as respectful and open, and appreciated the diversity of opinions and perspectives offered by course participants.

Students also noted the sense that they were operating as a ‘team’ and worked together respectfully “with open minds in the spirit of the course’s culture” to explore ideas together. Again reflecting Andreotti’s call for exploring possibilities in the context of individual differences, participants commented on the emphasis placed on the diversity of perspectives offered by participants, which allowed the class to see the world through a new “lens” – which, as one said, “crucial to opening up others’ eyes to alternative possibilities”.

A form of empowerment also seemed to be fostered among some participants through the enhancement of communicative skills and self esteem. This was reflected in comments around the appreciation of the review notes in the development of their critical thinking skills and writing skills, as well as comments on the opportunity to critically engage with themselves. One student also alluded to a sense of empowerment reflected in their excitement around seeing themselves as co-collaborators in the development of the course. Furthermore, one participant noted the course’s role in facilitating the discovery of one’s own modes of learning. Finally, participants noted the small classes, the open structure, and the consequent group dynamics as all contributing to their active participation in the course.

### ***Strengths/opportunities and weaknesses/challenges in both courses***

All students indicated that there was a progression of ideas and concepts, that they developed a greater understanding of the ideas and concepts presented, and that the presentations by the facilitator and other students were clear. Other students added that the ideas, concepts, and case studies offered new perspectives and challenged mainstream ideas and previously held assumptions.

However, students overwhelmingly cited frustrations with logistics and administrative issues in the course. While many recognised the importance of discussing logistics in the class, this seemed to be at the expense of more substantive discussions that detracted from gaining a deeper understanding of the course material. One student noted the sense of underlying confusion from the lack of structure and continued focus on coordinating and planning. Acknowledging the need to dedicate some time to administrative issues, many students advocated for a better balance between logistics and course content through better time management.

As a strategy for creating more structure and providing greater clarity, several students suggested that the facilitator should provide a framework or more direction in the course. One student noted that they were often unclear on the relationship between each session’s readings. Three students suggested that definitions needed to be more clearly defined. One of these

students claimed that there were certain assumptions being made in the definition of globalisation that remained insufficiently explored. Another student felt that the definitions of core concepts of the course and the linkages between these definitions were unclear. Yet another student noted that concepts needed to be more deeply interrogated and unpacked and that more specific definitions needed to be put forward in order to provide a more solid framework for the course.

Feedback and suggestions for course facilitation must be balanced however with the overwhelming sentiment that the role of the course facilitator was useful, re-focusing attention as needed; that his presentations were excellent, clear, and to the point; that he provided useful insight into the course materials, readings, and concepts; and that he made knowledge very accessible. It is within this frame of reference that many students encouraged greater participation from the facilitator. Several students felt that the class would benefit from more emphasis on lectures, observations, or ideas on the topics of discussion from the course facilitator; and that they wanted to hear more about his personal experiences in social movements.

**Review Notes** : Many students commented on the review notes. In both the OWOG and OSDM course outlines, students were asked to produce 1-2 page long review notes each week based on weekly assigned readings or of "watchings, listenings, and/or web participation".<sup>36</sup> These review notes were meant to be a summary and critical engagement with these experiences or readings, and to raise questions for further exploration. Most students had both positive and negative feedback on the review notes. Many students found the review notes a useful way to "consolidate ideas" or "synthesise materials" and an important exercise in "creating common reference points for discussion, developing continuity and a deeper level of engagement with course content". Others found that the review notes helped them to better understand the readings and practice critical engagement and critical writing skills. However, many also felt that there was a lack of clarity of the purpose and expectations of the review notes. At the mid-term point, two students noted that the quality of the review notes was being compromised because they only had one week to prepare each review note.

**Readings** : Comments on the readings were limited, with one student noting the range of readings provided many different access points to the issues presented in the course and another student communicated that the readings challenged mainstream ideas, and "even reversed my perception towards different communities". However, two students felt that the readings were too extensive and that the weekly readings needed to be prioritised for them.

**Open space** : Many students reflected on both the challenges and opportunities of the 'open space' approached used by the course facilitator. Several students noted that they enjoyed the open, experimental, and flexible nature of the courses. Two students appreciated the opportunity to act as co-collaborators in the courses and felt that the open design helped to engage students in the development of the courses. One student felt that this open design fostered the discovery of students' own ways of learning by respecting the diversity of backgrounds in the class and providing students with the freedom to find their own modes of engaging with the material.

However, many students also reflected on the challenges of open space. Some students claimed that the open format made it difficult to develop a clear focus or "clear trajectory for

---

<sup>36</sup> Syllabus from Other Worlds, Other Globalisations (OWOG), p 4; and Open Space and Dissent in Movement (OSDM), p 4.

learning and experience". This lack of clarity subsequently created feelings of confusion and a lack of central agreement on the course aims and goals where students were unsure of course expectations. One student also noted that expecting students to participate in the planning of the course presumes knowledge on the subject that students may not have.

Raising a fundamental question about the power relations of open space, one student also asked why he should answer the kinds of questions that the course facilitator was asking when he did not fully know what he was going to do with the responses; and what assurances there were that he (the course facilitator) would not use his comments against him.

**Group dynamics** : Students also commented extensively on the group dynamics in their respective classes. While comments from OSDM and OWOG participants on the mid-term course reviews were somewhat similar, comments from the two classes on group dynamics were substantially different. This divergence was primarily a function of the fact that the differing sizes and course participants in each course created very different challenges and opportunities. (While there were eleven students in the OWOG course, there were only four in the OSDM course.)

Students in OSDM noted that the small class provided opportunities for all students to actively participate, and that the class operated as a 'team' in the development and growth of the course. Due to the small class size, students in OSDM also brought food in to share each week, which one student noted promoted a "spirit of sharing". However, the small size of the OSDM class also meant that the fact of students leaving the course or joining late had much more impact than in the case of OWOG. Specifically, one student departed, and two students joined only later in the semester. This question of shifting class size was cited as a challenge in defining the group dynamics and developing a sense of continuity in the OSDM course.

Students in the OWOG course felt that the group worked together in a respectful and open manner, with many students noting the diversity of opinions, theories, and experiences within the classroom which was crucial to "opening up others' eyes to alternative possibilities". As already mentioned, one student noted a "strange feeling of equality amongst my peers and the facilitator".

The challenges faced by the students in OWOG were however quite different than the students in OSDM. Their challenges centred mostly on the reality that many of the same students spoke / intervened in each session, implying that such courses need to find strategies to ensure that all participants have a chance to voice their views.

### ***Reflections on suggestions for growth, change, improvement***

Many students integrated suggestions for improvements to the course in their reviews. The majority of suggestions centred on the facilitation or structure of the course. Four participants advocated for a clearer structure to the class. Suggestions to add structure included introducing questions from participants; clearly articulating guidelines and expectations; and providing a "more distinctive paradigm" or "more rigorous framework" to the course.

Three students suggested that there needed to be a more substantive introduction to the course where expectations and workload was clearly articulated by the facilitator; and where basic definitions were offered along with a discussion of why these concepts are contested or controversial. Seven students suggested that each session should entail an introductory or mini-lecture from the facilitator. Many students felt that this would help to provide structure, explain

why the course readings were selected and how they relate to the broader aims of the course, and set the parameters of discussion.

Six students, noticeably all from the OWOOG course and not from the smaller OSDM course, provided suggestions for improving group dynamics.<sup>37</sup> Four students suggested more small/sub-group activities to provide everyone with a chance to participate, especially those students who are not as comfortable speaking in front of a large group. One student suggested that critical questions should be offered in order to focus the discussion and link the readings back to the overall theme. One student also suggested that each student should have to say a few sentences about her weekly review note each week.

Many students advocated and asked for more clear expectations around the review notes, which they felt were changing from week to week. One student suggested fewer but longer reviews notes where each student produced two reviews notes a semester which were 7-8 pages long to allow for a deeper engagement with the material. One student suggested that review notes could be better integrated into the discussion by orienting them around a few key questions.

As authors, we again now step back from the course participants' comments and make a few closing comments on the courses.

In assessing the outcomes of critical courses at Carleton, we feel that especially given the experimental nature of OWOOG and OSDM, they were quite successful from the point of view of many students. The presence of a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives within a shared critical framework is quite rare in academic settings. For example, the very fact that students were given the opportunity to submit a critical review of the class in itself implied that the course was subject to change through the open-endedness of student input. This indeterminate structure, allowed us, in the words of one student, to "build up a network so as to continue our work in the future". In a concrete sense, ongoing work on critical reviews, other projects including this paper, and the Symposium held in June 2007 (where the first draft of this paper was presented) made the dynamics of indeterminate open space a reality. At the symposium, students presented their research papers and received feedback and reflections from other students and scholars.

At the same time, and in relation to our earlier discussion of the constraints and realities of the institutional, bureaucratic, and 'closed' nature of the university, we need to recognise the tension between the open nature of the courses and their lack of structure and the fact that Jai, as course facilitator, was ultimately going to be assessing the performance of all course participants in the two classes. Looking back, our sense is that students perhaps felt even greater anxiety in this course than in a 'traditional' course because they were unsure as to how they would be graded, given this more fluid and open course structure. Moreover, with the pressure of maintaining grades for scholarships, TA positions, and potential PhD programmes that are all part and parcel of the institution in which the courses took place, it is reasonable to think that the open structure made students all the more nervous and hesitant about being able to just 'go with the flow'.

Overall however, while administrative and logistical matters should be improved, we believe that as 'critical courses' OWOOG and OSDM represented a good first step for engaging critically, at several levels: For creating a learning environment where learners can engage

---

<sup>37</sup> See also the section above on group dynamics.

critically with the world around them; for engaging critically with a university by applying concepts of critical learning to advanced education settings; and through this, for changing the very culture of the university from within.

### ***Exploring the next steps***

The implementation of the 'critical courses' at Carleton University provides several potential avenues and clues for next steps. Most importantly, in reflecting on the critical courses at Carleton and in particular, in reflecting on the feedback received from student participants allows us to determine both the potential strengths and challenges in creating open spaces with the institutional structure of the university.

Perhaps most centrally, paying heed to the feedback from students is vital for determining the nature of shape of the critical courses for future implementation. For example, in this case the mid-term course reviews revealed tensions relating to group size. While students commented on the positive group dynamics created by the small class size, there was also a desire to involve as many students as possible in the critical courses. This may point to an important area for further investigation, such as the extent to which the class size impacts on student learning within an open space and a critically reflective learning environment.

Secondly, clearly some attention has to be paid to the tension between the uncertainty of the indeterminate nature of an open course and the more determinate nature and expectations of institutional settings such as universities – and also of the families and social circles from which the participants come.

Third, and as already noted in the conceptual note on the courses by Judy Meltzer and Jai Sen,<sup>38</sup> and as also presented in the Annexure to this paper, the development and implementation of the Critical Courses at Carleton led to the creation of several new assessment tools including the self-assessment matrices and the mid-term and final course reviews. These tools are perhaps useful additions to the formal grading mechanisms of the university and may have the potential to provide important feedback on such courses. These assessment tools could be further explored and developed with the ultimate goal of creating a toolkit for practitioners who wish to develop similar courses within their academic institutions.

Fourth, and drawing here from the discussion in the Annexure, it may be useful to think of making *assessment of the course facilitator* – as distinct from course participants reviewing the courses – a part of pedagogical exercises such as attempted at Carleton. However, the assessment of the course facilitator should not occur right at the end of the course (as happened in the case of the Carleton courses, thereby not providing any feedback to the courses themselves) but during the courses, perhaps along with the mid-term reviews.<sup>39</sup>

Fifth, the Symposium – as an adjunct to and follow-up from the courses - also provided an important forum for student assessment and reflection, and a venue to discuss the future of the courses. This itself might be considered not as an adjunct but as an integral part of such courses.

---

<sup>38</sup> Meltzer and Sen, 2007.

<sup>39</sup> In the Carleton case, and as discussed in the Annexure, even though not part of the pedagogical experiment attempted and even though not following the principles adopted for the Critical Courses, the assessment of the course facilitator nevertheless provided some useful feedback.

Sixth, the potential for critical courses (or something like them) to be used as a template or as an example for similar initiatives at other academic institutions, civil society organisations, and non-formal learning processes was briefly discussed at the Symposium and should continue to be further explored. As noted by Judy Meltzer and Jai Sen in their paper, the very fact that the critical courses were implemented within a formal institutional process demonstrates that alternative pedagogies are indeed possible.<sup>40</sup> And as discussed at the Symposium, the portability of these courses to other sites around the world is certainly an area for further investigation.

And finally, all those interested in developing 'innovative pedagogies' and 'creative curricula' - students, scholars, activists, teachers, and other practitioners alike - could create and maintain a network to explore possibilities for concrete next steps.

### **Some Concluding Remarks**

The idea of 'open space' as a space for learning is reflective of a broader critical pedagogy designed to provide a learning environment where course participants can engage critically with the world around them, and to create stimulating learning opportunities for those who experience them. This degree of reflexivity in educational settings seems to signify a pedagogical ethic aimed at allowing learners themselves to be more open and receptive towards different knowledge systems. In these terms, the two courses offered at Carleton, and their ideal of 'horizontality' in the classroom setting, also facilitated critical engagement with the university itself by applying concepts of critical learning to advanced educational settings. As one student remarked, the format of the courses mirrored the "challenge of constructing open spaces in mass movements themselves". And for another participant in particular: "The university should be the institution where concerned human beings can envision an alternative to the status quo of war and oppression, which is outsourced by the West throughout the globe." Whether or not 'alternative' educational processes should make it their overt and primary objective to question legitimised knowledge, a significant outcome of the courses was also a critical reflection on the closed nature of the university itself as a system of learning.

As we said earlier on, the notion of open space as critical pedagogy is not without its paradoxes. These contradictions are reflected in the tensions between open space as a theoretical concept and the inherited institutional traditions of the university, or as one participant put it, between the contradictions of bureaucracy and popular mobilisation. Education of course is a modern business aimed at harnessing human skills and promoting competitive capitalist economies. In this practical sense, horizontal learning must be balanced against the structural constraints of the university as an institution, as well as its inherited traditions and the reality of deadlines and time restraints. In this experiment, while some students enjoyed the flexibility and 'uncertainty' of the classes, the open and exploratory structure of the courses caused others to suggest that the experimental nature of the courses lacked clarity.

Others concluded that the over reliance on administrative and course planning provided the conditions for which excessive emphasis was placed on the intellectual ethos and theory behind the process rather than the content of the course itself. These limits and paradoxes of 'organising' the chaos of open space are characteristic of what Jo Freeman has called the "tyranny of structurelessness". This raises the point that there is a need in planning and implementing such pedagogies to address the *contradictions of open-ended processes* and to unravel the ambiguities of certain key questions - such as who 'controls' open space and who sets the rules ?

---

<sup>40</sup> Meltzer and Sen, 2007.

It becomes, as Sen points out, a question of all or nothing, which if ineffectively structured, can lead to group "paralysis and alienation".<sup>41</sup> It is illusory to suggest that the application of the politics of open space can be entirely open, neutral, and equal. In the course reviews, these sentiments were echoed by students in their call for an effective harmony between openness and a 'more rigorous framework'.

Our reading is that also keeping in mind the highly experimental nature of OWOG and OSDM, the courses were (nevertheless) quite successful from the point of view of many students. The presence of a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives within a shared critical framework is quite rare in academic settings. Students were given the opportunity to submit a critical review of the class, which in itself implied that the course was subject to change through open-endedness of student input. This indeterminate structure allowed us, in the words of one student, to "build up a network so as to continue our work in the future".

In a concrete sense the ongoing work on critical reviews, other projects including this paper and the Symposium held in June 2007 made the dynamics of open space a reality. At the same time, we have further acknowledged that administrative and logistic obstacles can always be improved in future contexts. As 'critical courses', OWOG and OSDM represented a good first step for creating a learning environment where learners could engage critically with themselves and the world around them. The experiment was also useful in providing the foundation for any future classroom initiatives which seek to provide stimulating learning opportunities for those who go through them, or to engage critically with advanced education settings with the aim of changing the very culture of the university from within.

\*

---

<sup>41</sup> Sen, May 2007, p 11, drawing on Rodrigo Nunes, November 2006 [2005] – 'Nothing is what democracy looks like : Openness, horizontality and the movement of movements', on Interactivist Info Exchange - Collaborative Authorship, Collective Intelligence <http://info.interactivist.net/>, @ <http://info.interactivist.net/article.pl?sid=06/11/21/2032250>. Originally published in : David Harvie, Keir Milburn, Ben Trott, and David Watts, eds, 2005 – Shut Them Down !, The G8, Gleneagles 2005 and the Movement of Movements. Leeds : Dissent, and Brooklyn, New York : Autonomedia [www.shutthemdown.org](http://www.shutthemdown.org).

## Acknowledgements <sup>42</sup>

This paper is of course largely based on the experience of actually running and taking part in the two Critical Courses at Carleton during the fall semester of 2006, during September-December. We therefore first and foremost wish to express our deep appreciation to the course participants of the two courses for their fellowship and for the fullness of their participation, which is what made the courses what they became; and for their willingness to make available to us their often very close and critical comments, and through this paper to the world at large : In OSDM, K Althea Brown, Chris Hurl, Conrad Prince, and Emilie Hayes, and in OWOG, Ajay Parasram, K Althea Brown, Ana Maria Vega Baron McTavish, Andrew Crosby, James Dooley, Mathew Nelson, Mihaela Ecaterina Vieru, Nana Kyeretwie Osei, Sam Cartmell, Valentina Jovanovski, and Vicki Hui-Ling Wang. This act of faith and trust is an important litmus test for the approach that Jai attempted to take, as the course facilitator.

But a large number of other people also played key roles at different times in helping this experience take shape, before and after, and in sustaining it at various stages, and we would like to acknowledge all their various inputs :

- To Cristina Rojas, of the Norman Paterson School at Carleton, for forwarding on Jai's CV to Carleton's Institute of Political Economy, and without which, none of this would have taken shape !
- To Laura Macdonald, then Acting Director at the Institute of Political Economy, for inviting JS to come in to teach the two courses
- To the Institute of Political Economy for hosting JS, and in particular Donna Coghill at the Institute and Ann Carroll at the Department of Sociology for helping JS settle in; and to Rianne Mahon (Director of the Institute), Laura Macdonald, and Jean Daudelin for doing Jai the honour of organising the Workshop 'Civilising Globalisation' in November 2006
- To members of the Discussion Group that Jai set up for the Carleton courses, for their critical fellowship : Anila Daulatzai, Arun Kumar, David Szanton, Emma Dowling, Fleachta Phelan, Giuseppe Caruso, Janet Conway, Jeff Juris, Julia Sanchez, Kari Polanyi Levitt, Kolya Abramsky, Laura Macdonald, Lee Cormie, Madhuresh Kumar, Manju Menon, Stellan Vinthagen, Subramanya (Subbu) Sastry, T B Dinesh, and Vanessa Andreotti; and perhaps especially Anila, David, Jeff, Kolya, Lee, and Stellan for their deep and/or sustained engagement, and Madhuresh and Subbu for their background support throughout
- To all those who came in as Guest Lecturers to the two courses, and added so much by doing so : In OSDM, Brian Murphy, Janet Conway, and Lee Cormie, and in OWOG, Brian Given, Jamie Koebel, and Lynda Brown
- To the IDRC (International Development Research Centre) for their support for organising the June 2007 Symposium where this paper has been presented; to Claire Thompson for steering our project through; and especially to Gisèle Morin-Labatut, for her support and fellowship in suggesting that we could apply to the IDRC for support
- To Charmain Levy and Laura Macdonald for their solidarity and friendship to Jai in this collaboration, which is what has made the initiative of this Symposium become real
- To those among the course participants who have voluntarily helped with organising the Symposium : Ajay Parasram, Andrew Crosby, Chris Hurl, James Dooley, and Sam Cartmell (and also Emilie Hayes, even if she is a co-author of this paper !) – and also Judy Meltzer, Laura Macdonald's research assistant
- To Madhuresh Kumar and Subramanya Sastry of CACIM, for their critical help and support, throughout, and more recently also Bittu Sah, CACIM volunteer, for his help with the website; and -
- For introductions to the Special Guest Speakers at the June 2007 Symposium : David Szanton, for Lungisile Ntsebeza; Deepak Mehta, for Yasmeen Arif; and Jeremy Brecher, for introducing JS to John Brown Childs.

Thank you, all ! (And if there is anyone we have missed out in this acknowledgement, it is hopefully obvious that this was purely inadvertent, and our thanks go to you, too !)

---

<sup>42</sup> This acknowledgement and statement of debt and gratitude comes mainly from Jai.

*Annexure***Some Reflections on Facilitation**<sup>43</sup>

Jai Sen, June 2007, revised November 2007, finalised December 2007

The approach I took to the courses as course facilitator was sketched out in the following passage, which appeared in the Course Outline for both courses :

Important for course participants to note is that I am by background an architect, activist, campaignist, and independent researcher in civil politics and not an academic - perhaps what some term a 'scholar-practitioner'. The entire course will therefore be coloured by this : The reading material I suggest, the style of the sessions (where I come not as professor but as co-researcher and learner, and perhaps as facilitator), and the kind of outputs I am looking for. This course will be no less rigorous, but it may demand rigour in somewhat different ways. It will be a collaborative course, and I look forward to working with you in this exercise.

It was evident from the reactions of participants in both courses that they had noted this passage, and stance, and indeed for some participants was the reason they had taken the course/s – to some degree out of curiosity and to some degree because this approach seemed different to how other courses they knew of were constructed.

In the course of actually conducting the courses, I came to reconceptualise my role, using roughly the following formulation to describe what I was doing :

Now that I have done some of this, I realise that my role is really only that of setting up a stage, a platform, or even just a space, where the 'students' – the course participants – can teach themselves.

In all, there were perhaps eleven stages, or aspects, to building and facilitating the courses. After listing them out, I will review each one briefly :

1. Conceptualising Critical Courses
2. Building and learning from a Discussion Group
3. Preparing and developing the Course Outlines
4. Participatory planning
5. Working on the web : Negotiating and building a virtual dimension and reality for the courses
6. Relating to the community
7. Exploring the possibility of life after the courses
8. Designing and conducting mid term reviews of the courses
9. Tools developed for the courses, and Grading the course participants
10. Grading the course facilitator
11. Giving feedback to course participants on their Research Papers.

I then end with some overall reflections on the experience of facilitating the courses.

---

<sup>43</sup> This Annexure is made up of the personal reflections of one of the co-authors of this paper, Jai Sen, as course facilitator. I have prepared it at the suggestion of one of my co-authors, Emilie Hayes, as a more personal reflection about the more technical aspects of the courses, hopefully complementing the more abstract and conceptual analysis and reflections in the main paper. But I also end this largely technical Annexure with some overall reflections - that we then draw on for the concluding remarks to the main paper.

## Conceptualising Critical Courses

Although the invitation from Carleton to teach the two courses had come as a bit of a surprise – given that I had no experience in the field of teaching full courses at a graduate level, though I had worked with Vanessa Andreotti and her colleagues in steering their initiative in the UK<sup>44</sup> – we at CACIM, a relatively new initiative that had been formed with the objective of creating spaces for critical reflection, decided that I should accept the invitation as an entry to a new world of creating such spaces, as an exercise in creating *critical spaces for learning*.

Taking into account also the work of other members of the group in education and in running courses, we at CACIM came to see this as being perhaps a first step in a longer journey in the field of educational activities, and decided to nest this effort within a wider and longer-term initiative that we named Critical Courses; and for which we also set up a sub domain on our webspace, with an invitation to others to join ([www.critical-courses.cacim.net](http://www.critical-courses.cacim.net)). We also saw this as a way of building CACIM's community and CACIM's work.

## Building and learning from a Discussion Group

Aware of my lack of experience in teaching but being a networker by trade and believing in the value of exchange – and with the good fortune of a fairly extensive network of contacts across much of the world – I reached out to a selection of people for their advice, help, and solidarity in the task ahead of me. The group I approached was made up of teachers, researchers, students, and activists, mostly, and also educational administrators, in India and in other countries. (My other work is quite broadly 'international', with associates in many parts of the world.) For us at CACIM however, and looking ahead to the future, doing this was also one more way of building what we regard as our community.

This took place in 2-3 rounds, during June-August 2006, and of the total of 56 people whom I approached, 18 confirmed that they would like to be on the discussion group (DG). Made up of people from all the above categories, they were at that time based in Britain, Canada, India, Nepal, Sweden, and the US.<sup>45</sup>

The consultations and discussions took place primarily during June and July 2006, with one discussant continuing through till late August. The feedback ranged from sharing outlines for other similar courses to detailed commentary on my draft Course Outlines, to detailed feedback on the culture and politics of teaching in universities in the North / West, to help me get prepared. As happens on such lists, much of the feedback came individually, and I ultimately compiled all the feedback and fed it back to all my discussants.

Drawing and learning heavily from the input I got, I developed the Course Outlines for the two courses during July and August 2006, and sent them to Carleton as draft outlines, requesting them to post them.

We at CACIM also posted the draft outlines, as they developed, at the sub domain we developed for the courses, @ [www.critical-courses.cacim.net](http://www.critical-courses.cacim.net). (See point below, on 'Working on the web : Negotiating and building a virtual dimension and reality for the courses.)

---

<sup>44</sup> Vanessa Andreotti 2007, - 'Creating Open Spaces', and OSDE Methodology Booklet, as above.

<sup>45</sup> See the Acknowledgements at the end of the main paper for the names of members of this group.

From September 1 2006, I started a process of sending out periodic Updates to my discussants on the courses : Update 1, September 1 2006; Update 2, October 11 2006; Update 3, November 17 2006; and Update 4, May 9 2007.

These Updates contained the periodically updated Course Outlines, as the courses developed in consultation with the course participants; summaries of feedback from the course participants; draft tools for assessing the course participants, a task I gradually came to realise was looming; plans for making the Critical Courses webspace a more live space; summaries of the reactions of course participants to the idea of their work being posted; and discussion of the ethics, politics, practice, and privileges of sharing such work / making it accessible even to a restricted group.

In each case – in the case of each Update – I typically got 3-4-5 responses from the Discussion Group, which I attempted to take into account in the further development of the courses.

I had informed the course participants at the outset of the existence of the Discussion Group and of my debt to its members, and in time came to request permission for the members of the DG to have access to the work of the course participants being posted on the website. (See also the discussion below, in the point on 'Working on the web : Negotiating and building a virtual dimension and reality for the courses.)

**Reflections** : I have no doubt at all that building a discussion group and drawing from it played a vital role in helping me fashion and conduct the courses. The input I got not only gave me insights and information but also, coming as much of it did, from 'insiders' within universities in the North – students, researchers, teachers, and administrators -, it gave me much confidence.

While I think I had initially expected a response from a higher number of people, and so also from a higher proportion of all those who I approached, in retrospect I am more than happy with the number of responses I got and, in particular, with their depth and quality of engagement.<sup>46</sup> I was also very glad to find that members of the DG found the Updates interesting, informative, and useful, and that some of them felt that Critical Courses was a significant initiative.

### **Preparing and developing the Course Outlines**

The first steps in what the two courses came to be were in part a result of the free range I was given by Laura Macdonald at Carleton in terms of what the Institute of Political Economy expected me to teach. I was invited to suggest a course each broadly in the field of Political Economy and, initially, Public Administration, which was then later replaced by Sociology.

I chose, perhaps understandably enough, to focus on two of the central problematics that had emerged in the course of my own research during the 90s and through the subsequent years on the dynamics of movement and in particular on the dynamics of the globalisation of civil movement : Of struggling to understand how the world is really being globalised, and not of movement *as* dissent but of dissent *within* movement.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> In particular, I wish to thank Anila Daulatzai, David Szanton, Jeff Juris, Kolya Abramsky, Lee Cormie, Stellan Vinthagen, and Subbu Sastry for their wonderfully close (and often critical !) engagement and embrace through this journey.

<sup>47</sup> My initial studies focussed on the history and dynamics of popular movement in India around a place to live (so-called 'housing movements'). I looked at the movements during the 1940s-70s around the rights of

Given that I had no experience either of teaching at the graduate level or of learning at this level (I remain a simple B Arch), and therefore of institutional practice at this level, getting and studying a range of outlines prepared by others was of outstanding help to me in developing outlines for what I was proposing to do.

At the same time, I also had in mind our experience at CACIM in helping develop and practice the *Other Worlds* courses developed and run by Vanessa Andreotti and her colleagues (available over the years @ [www.voicesfrommumbai.webhop.org](http://www.voicesfrommumbai.webhop.org), [www.mundi.org.uk](http://www.mundi.org.uk), and <http://www.osdemethodology.org.uk>).

The content of the first course I developed, OWOG (Other Worlds Other Globalisations) was initially inspired and guided by ideas I had first mooted during 2002, about the existence of 'myriad globalisations'<sup>48</sup> and also of the critique I had developed of the much-celebrated concept of 'globalisation from below'.<sup>49</sup> The stint at Carleton seemed to offer me an excellent opportunity to myself research and develop these ideas somewhat further, and also to open this ground to course participants with the hope that they too might be interested in doing so.

The content of the second course, OSDM (Open Space and Dissent in Movement), came directly out of my own research work during the 1990s, primarily into the movements and

---

the *kudikidappukaran* (hutment dwellers) in certain parts of Kerala, in south India; the several movements from the 1960s through till the 90s around the displacement being caused by the Sardar Sarovar and other dams on the Narmada River in central and western India; and of *basti* (hutment) dwellers in Calcutta (now Kolkata), in the 1950s and in the 1980s. In the course of trying to understand the 'internationalisation' of the campaigns around the Narmada projects, I then also took on a comparative study of the campaigns during the 1970s and 80s around the Polonoroeste road building and land colonisation project in western Brazil, and through this comparative study, of the emergence of civil international campaigns during the 1980s and of how such sections learned to speak at the global level. From about 2002 on, I have also been involved in intensively studying and writing about the World Social Forum.

For further details, see : Jai Sen, December 1996 - 'Deeper Meanings : Explorations into the history and dynamics of movement around the dwelling rights of the *kudikidappukaran* (attached labour) of Kerala, India'. Paper presented at the International Conference on 'Kerala's Development Experience : National and Global Dimensions', held in New Delhi on December 8-11 1996; Jai Sen, December 1999 - 'A World to Win – But whose world is it, anyway?', Chapter 9 in John W Foster and Anita Anand, eds, 1999 - *Whose World Is It Anyway? Civil Society, the United Nations, and the multilateral future* (Ottawa : United Nations Association in Canada), pp 337-390; Jai Sen, Anita Anand, Arturo Escobar, and Peter Waterman, eds, 2004 – *World Social Forum : Challenging Empires*. New Delhi : Viveka. Slightly reduced version available @ [http://www.choike.org/nuevo\\_eng/informes/1557.html](http://www.choike.org/nuevo_eng/informes/1557.html) and @ <http://www.openspaceforum.net/twiki/tiki-index.php?page=WSFChallengingEmpires2004>; and : Chloé Keraghel and Jai Sen, Editorial Advisers, December 2004 – 'Explorations in Open Space : The World Social Forum and Cultures of Politics', Issue no 182 of the *International Social Science Journal*. Contents of issue available at <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/servlet/useragent?func=showIssues&code=issj&open=2004 - C2004>.

<sup>48</sup> Jai Sen, December 2006 [December 2002] – 'On the myriad globalisations that are happening 'from below' : Towards understanding the contemporary world a little better'. Second draft, 31.12.06

<sup>49</sup> For perhaps the best discussion of the concept, see : Jeremy Brecher, Tim Costello, and Brendan Smith, 2000 – *Globalisation from Below, The power of solidarity*. A Book From Commonwork: A Resource and Strategy Project for Globalisation From Below. Cambridge, Mass : South End Press; and also : Richard Falk, nd – 'Globalisation-from-Below : An Innovative Politics of Resistance'. Manuscript, 23 pp. For my critique, see : Jai Sen, May 2000d – 'Some comments on the March 31 2000 draft of 'Globalisation from below' – henceforth 'GfB' !'. Dt May something [25-30] 2000, 5 pp; and : Jai Sen, June 2000a – 'Some further comments on the March 31 2000 draft of GfB'. Dt early June [3-9] 2000, 12 pp, personal correspondence with Jeremy Brecher.

Open Space as a Learning Environment : Engaging Critically with the Pedagogical Aspects of Critical Courses @ Carleton

Emilie Hayes, Mat Nelson, and Jai Sen, June 2007, finalised December 2007

campaigns around the Narmada dams project in India but also several other movements and campaigns.

I however learned and drew heavily and shamelessly from other course outlines I received and or had accessed from the web, from the readings my discussants suggested – which greatly widened my own range and opened new directions to me -, and in the course of the courses themselves, what I started learning from the course participants.

I was also privileged to have access to extensive bibliographies that my colleagues and I had developed at CACIM and in the years before that,<sup>50</sup> which was then, as above, very substantially added to by lists I received from my discussants.

As already mentioned above, the basic concept behind my design of the courses was that I saw my work as building a stage, or space, on / in which the course participants could learn; where they could comfortably teach themselves. I therefore proposed three phases for both the courses:

- One, where I would open up the subject, through 4-5 sessions, and where we would also together / collectively plan out the rest of the course;
- Two, where we would both start looking at *other*, related processes – including by inviting in carefully selected guest speakers - and also undertake a critical review of the course, with a view to giving me feedback in order to make mid term adjustments in the courses; and –
- Three, where the course participants would in a sense take over and lead the sessions, presenting their own work, culminating in a final review workshop where we would review the entire landscape we had covered in the semester.

In the case of OWOG, these three phases were titled :

Part 1 : Globalisation and Its Contents (Session 1 / S1 - S5)

Part 2 : Defining / Delineating Other Globalisations (S6 – S8)

Part 3 : Other Worlds, Other Globalisations – Course participant presentations (S9 – S12).<sup>51</sup>

And in the case of OSDM,

Part 1 : Open Space, Civility, and Discontent (Session 1 / S1 - S5)

Part 2 : Exploring Other Openings (S6 – S8)

Part 3 : Open Space and Dissent in Movement : Course participant presentations (S9 – S12).<sup>52</sup>

**Reflections** : Although, and as mentioned above, one of the main reasons I proposed these two courses was that offering / running them would be an opportunity to open up and research the subjects – which were ideas I had been working with and had put forward over some years -, and in particular that this would give me the chance to myself to do some of this, I ultimately got very little chance to do so. In short, I allowed myself to be overwhelmed by background

---

<sup>50</sup> In particular, Jai Sen and Peter Waterman, with Madhuresh Kumar, December 2003 - 'The World Social Bibliography : A Bibliography on the World Social Forum and the Global Solidarity and Justice Movement'. Ongoing, 105 pp. Available @ <http://www.openspaceforum.net/twiki/tiki-index.php?page=Explorations+In+Open+Spaces>.

<sup>51</sup> Syllabus for Other Worlds, Other Globalisations (OWOG), p 2.

<sup>52</sup> Syllabus for Open Space and Dissent in Movement (OSDM), p 2.

planning and preparation for the courses, and the constant online planning and adjustment that was required; by the exigencies of speaking engagements and other work, in other cities; and by some other more personal preoccupations and distractions of being in Canada for some time after many years (I had once lived in the country and studied there).

As a consequence of the above, I had no time left for doing much of my own research. This however had a further consequence : That I picked up too little during the course of the semester that I was able to feed into the courses in terms of content – and this is something that I am now shocked by when I look back (because I now realise that I had taken this for granted as being part of the course facilitator’s role). I therefore now realise that if one is to have the time for managing this properly, one has to be – at the minimum – far more ruthless about attending to such things that I was (or am, by nature).

### **Participatory planning**

As mentioned, a significant aspect of my approach to the pedagogical aspect of the courses was participatory planning in the further organisation and development of the courses. As an organiser by background, I believed strongly in the educational value of taking part, both in terms of individual learning and also of building a more robust collective process.

The areas in which I attempted to do this in the Critical Courses included :

- Generally inviting the course participants in both courses to contribute to the finalisation of the course by suggesting speakers for sessions later on in the course, issues we should address, seminars that they would be willing to lead, etc
- Inviting the course participants to contribute to the development of the course by keeping a tab on current developments in the university and the city and suggesting events that we – as course participants – could and should attend, programmes we should see or hear, etc; both in terms of other worlds and other globalisations and of dissent in movement; and -
- In general, using the opportunity afforded by the courses for the course participants to build links and working relations with other people thinking and acting in these fields.

The course participants responded quite well to these invitations and exhortations, and came in with several inputs, including suggestions for additional speakers. On the other hand, and as has come out in the main paper, a very strong feeling shared by many of them – and communicated to me in the mid term course reviews - was that we spent far too much time on the planning and organisational aspects of the courses, which I agree in retrospect must have too often felt like admin activities.

I reduced sharply the share of time devoted to these aspects in the second half of the courses – but I think we must also recognise that to some extent, this was in any case going to happen given the structure that had been given to the courses (where we completed much of the course planning in the first half of the courses). This lesson, and modification, therefore perhaps has more relevance for any further such experiments that I or others might do in this field than it had to the courses I conducted at Carleton. At the same time however, I believe that the minor shift that took place was – and in general, is - in fact almost built into the nature of open-ended activities, where in general the principle that applies is that things do take shape – but they do so gradually, step by step.

### **Working on the web : Negotiating and building a virtual dimension and reality for the courses**

An early decision of ours at CACIM in developing the Critical Courses was to have much of them online as possible, with the idea that this would –

- Provide an additional space or stage where the course participants could act;
- Provide a tool for course participants to do what they wanted to, with the material they were generating (our choice of software for the CACIM webspace, tiki wiki, though much predating the Critical Courses, was specifically based on the idea that it should be as easily accessible and usable by non-technical people as possible); and -
- Make available to as wide an audience as possible, and as quickly as possible, the material generated in the course of the courses and all the exciting exchange that we thought the courses might trigger.

This somewhat pedagogical approach was also consistent with other similar experiments that my colleagues at CACIM and I had been involved with for some time, such as setting up webspaces such as OpenSpaceForum ([www.openspaceforum.net](http://www.openspaceforum.net)) and running listserves around the World Social Forum, and for us this was therefore an opportunity to continue and take forward this experiment.

We also decided to set up the Critical Courses space however, because this kind of facility – a participatory webspace - was not available on the Carleton website. On the other hand, I had also been inspired and encouraged by finding very interesting material and approaches while preparing for the courses, on spaces set up at and by other universities.

And finally, CACIM had already decided much earlier on – based on the experience of some of its members in teaching and/or running short-term courses in other institutions - that it would, in time, be moving towards taking initiatives in terms of education. So the invitation to me to teach at Carleton, and the approach I took to my courses, therefore suggested that we now take this opportunity to start along this particular road.

My colleagues at CACIM therefore set up a subdomain devoted to the idea of critical pedagogy, [www.critical-courses.cacim.net](http://www.critical-courses.cacim.net), which was initially designed and created specifically for the courses taking shape at Carleton. The domain was organised with folders that corresponded to (a) the kinds of *material I made available* to the course participants (the Course Outlines and the Readings, organised by session) and (b) the kinds of *outputs* that the course participants were expected to generate (as per the course outlines – Review Notes and/or Interviews, Course Reviews, Research Papers, other Review essays, as well as anything else they wanted to post). They also offered to course participants the possibility of blogging, creating chat spaces, posting their own material (other than that generated in the courses), and so on.

The webspace has more recently, during 2007 and after the completion of the courses, also been considerably modified to include the tools that I developed during the courses. (See the section below on 'Tools developed for the courses, and grading the course participants'; and for more details, <http://critical-courses.cacim.net/twiki/tiki-index.php?page=CCTools>.)

**Reflections** : The reality of working on the web was considerably different than what we at CACIM had expected. In general, course participants were far less enthusiastic about using the webspace that we had thought might be the case. Only two participants actually took the step during the courses of trying to post even some of their material on the webspace; and only one

(and then too, only much later), finalised his material in time such that it could be posted (by CACIM) on the space.

(This has now changed, following the Symposium held in Ottawa in June 2007 (where this paper was presented). All but one of those who were earlier course participants have agreed that their revised and finalised papers be posted along with other material generated for the Symposium. The only exception to this decided to not do this for good reason, related to the content of his paper.)<sup>53</sup>

One of the issues that arose / seemed to arise at an early stage of the courses (as I understood it) was the question of *privacy* – that course participants were perhaps hesitant to have their work available to the public at large. I am not sure whether this was because they, as students, reacted this way because they were not used to having their work out in public, or for other reasons. (In one case however, of a journalist by profession and therefore someone seasoned in publishing his work, the reason was more specific – that he found his work, when on the web, was often plagiarised; so he avoids putting serious work up there as a matter of policy and professional practice.)

My colleagues at CACIM and I therefore attempted to respond to this by offering the course participants *semi-closed spaces* where they could post their material – folders that would be accessible only to course participants and the course facilitator. But this too was hardly used.

Nor did any of the course participants take advantage of the possibilities offered to them of creating their own blog spaces within the webspace, creating chat spaces, or posting any of their own other material.

In short, the Critical Courses webspace – as practised so far – has not been a very successful initiative !

This outcome is perhaps related to 2-3 further issues, which we might do well to reflect on when planning such courses and also, more generally, the use of the internet as a supportive tool :

- People at large – even young people, and even young people in resource rich contexts such as Canada – are perhaps less used to using the web than we might assume to be the case from the craze that exists around internet being the culture of the present and of the future; and we should not take such activity so much for granted;<sup>54</sup>
- I learned that other than in the case of one person (as above), who was by profession already a journalist, course participants in his courses at Carleton had little or no experience at all in publishing their work; had no expectations of doing this while they were still students; and were perhaps therefore even somewhat bemused by my

---

<sup>53</sup> Since the time of the Symposium in June 2007, we at CACIM have created a new subspace – subdomain – on the Critical Courses page, titled 'Carleton Critical Courses Symposium', and have posted there all the material presented or generated at the Symposium and after, including the Account of the event, a document summarising reflections on the courses, this paper, and so on. See <http://critical-courses.cacim.net/twiki/tiki-index.php?page=RCCSHome>.

<sup>54</sup> We at CACIM have come to a similar conclusion in two earlier but quite different experiments, one to do with setting up a webspace and listserve in relation to the World Social Forum in India in 2005 and the other in building a collective of scholar-activists based in different contexts around the world, also in 2005.

- suggestion / offer at the beginning of the courses that we should aim to *publish* their work, including (but not restricted to) on the Critical Courses webspace; and –
- That despite all the introduction and welcome I tried to give, ultimately speaking the Critical Courses webspace was not 'their' webspace (and perhaps did not even speak a language they were comfortable in); and so course participants were just shy of posting on or taking part in this space.<sup>55</sup>

### **Relating to the community**

A largely optional and therefore only implicit aspect of the courses at Carleton was relating to the community; in hindsight, the question arises as to whether this could and should have been more explicitly stated as a part of the conduct of the courses.

The implicit involvement lay in the invitation (exhortation) to course participants in the Course Outlines to seek out and bring to the courses information on related things going on – in the university and in the city – and also to engage with these events and processes in the form of review notes and, potentially anyway, also their organising visits to them, etc; and it also lay in the invitation to course participants to conduct *interviews* with key people instead of only doing review notes on existing literature.<sup>56</sup>

**Reflections** : The reality in this area is that while some of this happened – some course participants did indeed bring in news of related events taking place, and some of the students attended them – in practice we did not give this act of relating, and its underlying meaning and pedagogical content, as much attention as we might have and should have.

### **Exploring with the course participants the possibility of life after the courses**<sup>57</sup>

The idea of doing a Symposium around the work of the course participants arose in the courses themselves, in the ODSM course. This happened at an early stage, in the course of planning out the course. It was proposed as something that the course participants might themselves organise, at the very end of the semester and in place of the Final Review Workshop that had been mooted in the course outline.

One course participant however emphasised that they could only manage such an event if a sufficiently large number of course participants came together - and since the OSDM course only had four people, this suggested that a number would be needed from OWOG. We tried this, but the idea did not find the same resonance in the OWOG class and so it got pushed onto a back burner.

Although the idea came up in discussion again in both courses, in the course of the semester, it remained the case that we did not have the critical mass to be able to undertake the initiative.

---

<sup>55</sup> This is a very common reason for lack of participation on listserves, where it is frequently the case that people who do not already know each other do not take much part; and so the listserv remains inactive, even if the subject material is interesting.

<sup>56</sup> For instance, in the OSDM Course Outline (<http://critical-courses.cacim.net/twiki/tiki-index.php?page=CEOSDMHome>), on pp 4 and 5.

<sup>57</sup> This section focuses on planning possible further / follow-up post-course activities *during* the courses, and is not related to the section in the main paper, 'Exploring the next steps' – which looks at how we can and should follow up on the courses and on what happened at the June 2007 Symposium.

**Reflections** : Although the focus is the same – to create a space for in-depth critical engagement with the work of the participants in the two courses at Carleton - the Symposium that took place in Ottawa during June 20-22 2007 was a somewhat different animal. It was organised not by the course participants but by the course facilitator along with two willing souls – Charmain Levy (Professor, Department of Social Work and Social Sciences, Université du Québec en Outaouais, Gatineau, Québec) and Laura Macdonald (now Professor and Director, Department of Political Science, Carleton University, Ottawa), though also with the voluntary help of some of the participants in the two courses.

In this sense however, the Symposium as it took place was a major extension of the pedagogical experiment attempted in the two courses, where a significant space was created for the sustained critical engagement we had talked of in the courses. We were privileged, firstly, to have with us at the Symposium some of the Guest Lecturers in the two courses (Brian Murphy and Lee Cormie, and where Brian Given also joined us for a short while); as well as several other members of the faculty at different universities in eastern Canada, two of whom I had met and got to know at the special Workshop that had been organised by Carleton around my work while I was there, Marie-Josée Massicotte and Charmain Levy (who, as already mentioned, also agreed to be co-organiser of the June Symposium),

And beyond this, the recognition and support extended to this initiative of calling the by the IDRC made it possible for us to also bring in a very valuable additional resource – three scholars from around the world, to join us in this engagement : John Brown Childs, of the University of California at Santa Cruz in the US; Lungisile Ntsebeza, Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Cape Town, in South Africa; and Yasmeen Arif, Research Scholar, New Delhi, and for 2007-8, Sawyer Seminar Fellow at the H H Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs and Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, in the US.

As the Account of the Symposium perhaps makes clear, it came to be a truly remarkable event, bristling with electric energy, imagination, and passion; in many ways, although it was perhaps different from what might have happened if it had been organised by the course participants, what took place was also far beyond anything that I had conceived of when I had first suggested the idea; and more importantly, it was just as organic.

### **Designing and conducting mid-term reviews of the courses**

Getting mid term reviews done of the two courses was a key building block in the pedagogical experiment attempted at Carleton, of critical engagement. I saw this as a way of getting course participants to grapple closely with the structure and practice of the course/s they were taking, and through the feedback they would offer, to influence its future directions – and thereby to gain confidence in their own judgement. I also saw it as perhaps the best way of getting feedback on the course, so that I could make necessary online / mid-course adjustments to the courses.

The actual review of the courses was done by the course participants filling in an assessment and feedback form that I designed, that was based on features of the courses and criteria that were explicitly declared in the respective Course Outlines and/or came up in the course of the course planning and modification discussions during the first half of the course. See the section below, on 'Tools developed for the courses', for more details.

**Reflections** : Along with the Review Notes (as discussed in earlier sections of this paper), the second part of the experiment certainly worked – aside from anything else, evidenced by the richness of the feedback that I got and that has been summarised and discussed at length in the main paper. But I would add to this that it was at this point that I felt I saw the course participants beginning to master the skills both of critical engagement and of nuanced, critical expression. Some of them already had strong abilities in the latter area, even from the beginning of the course; but it was for me particularly satisfying – even delightful - to see the others, who had till then been more subdued and hesitant in their expression, coming out in full colour. I really felt that several of the reviews were masterful pieces of writing.

Indeed, given the mostly very positive reception to the Review Notes – as articulated, among other places, in the course reviews -, it is interesting to speculate on how the course participants would have evaluated the exercise and experience of the mid term review itself, if they had had a chance to do this – which, unfortunately, the mid-term review format missed providing space for. This would evidently be a useful addition to the method developed for these courses.

### **Tools developed for the courses, and grading the course participants**

As course facilitator, I developed several tools for and during the Critical Courses at Carleton that I thought would help me more systematically conduct and learn from them, and where each tool was in turn also an attempt at something of a pedagogical engagement, either for the course participants or for myself, or for both. I also used some of the tools as the basis of grading the course participants.

Whereas more experienced educators may perhaps not have needed such tools – precisely because experience has taught them how to handle such situations and to be able to, perhaps, arrive at holistic assessments – I felt this to be an essential aspect of my approach to the courses, not only given my inexperience but also as an open, 'rational' way of talking about things. It was a way – one more way – of putting things on the table, and then talking about them together.

There were two categories of tools I developed :

- A. For the course participants to comprehend the courses better and to develop their thinking and skills
- B. For me as course facilitator to be able to understand and review the work of the course participants.

*For the course participants to develop their thinking and skills, I developed the following :*

- The Course Outlines<sup>58</sup>
- An elaborate and open-ended Reading List, for each course<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Jai Sen, February 2007 – Course Outline, final version, for 'Other Worlds, Other Globalisations', Course no PECO 5501F, cross-listed with PSCI 5501F, and SOCI 5504F, offered at the Institute of Political Economy at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, in the Fall 2006 semester; Tuesdays 11:30-2:30 in Room B842 in the Loeb Building. Available @ <http://critical-courses.cacim.net/twiki/tiki-index.php?page=OWOGHome>; and : Jai Sen, May 2007a – Course Outline, final version, for 'Challenging Empires : Open Space and Dissent in Movement', Course no SOCI 5805 offered at the Sociology Department at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, in the Fall 2006 semester; Thursdays 11:30-2:30 in Room D497 in the Loeb Building. Available @ <http://critical-courses.cacim.net/twiki/tiki-index.php?page=CEOSDMHome>.

<sup>59</sup> Contained within the respective Course Outlines, as above.

- Course *structures*, as presented and discussed in the respective Course Outlines,
  - Where only half the course was laid out and the rest to be developed together with the course participants
  - The possibility of planning together during the first several sessions, to complete the definition of the course, where input from course participants could – and did – influence the content and design of the course.
- Tools for review and reflection :
  - The idea and regime of weekly Review Notes
  - The mid term Course Review itself, based on a format that some of the course participants requested me to sketch out for them, providing a formal point of feedback to me as course facilitator to make necessary adjustments
  - One set of tools for each course, slightly tailored
  - A non-mandatory Self-assessment Matrix, in formal terms for feedback to me as course facilitator but hopefully also useful as a way to reflect on their work
- The concept for (the organisation of) the second half of the course, where the course participants would lead the sessions and present their draft research papers for review in the class as a whole
- The final Review Workshop, held in the last session in each course, where we informally (verbally) reviewed the course and also, in the case of the OWOG course, did the formal university assessment. (See section below, on 'Grading the course facilitator'.)
- A Self-assessment Matrix for the course participants to fill up. (The formal purpose of this was feedback to me, but it also served the purpose of creating an opportunity for some introspection.)

*For the course facilitator to be able to understand, review and assess the work of the course participants :*

I made (or tried to make – I was not able to do so each time) notes at or immediately after each session, and keyed them into a personal log.

I also established a system of being in my office even week at a certain time, to meet students either by appointment or, as sometimes happened, since they knew I would be around, they just dropped in. With my courses being on Tuesdays and Thursdays, I fixed this for Wednesdays from 2:30-5:30 pm or by prior appointment. During these meetings, we typically either discussed their weekly review notes (especially at the early stages of the courses, where they were still understanding what I wanted them to do, and where I was also still working out what I really wanted them to do), or ideas they had for the courses, and so on.

I also suggested that whichever of us was available try and meet for a rap session on Wednesday evenings, from 6 pm on, at the main university graduate bar (Mike's Place), but this was just to get to know each other, not for assessment etc !

*Course Participants Assessment Matrices (CPAMs) :*

A necessary aspect of running the courses at Carleton was grading the course participants. I therefore developed several matrices to help me assess the work of the course participants in each course<sup>60</sup> :

- A Weekly Review Notes Assessment Matrix, for the work of each course participant (A1)

---

<sup>60</sup> All of these are available on the Critical Courses webspace, @ <http://critical-courses.cacim.net/twiki/tiki-index.php?page=CCTools>.

- A Mid-term Course Review Assessment Matrix, for assessing the course reviews that each course participant filled up to fill up (A2)
- A Course Participation Assessment Matrix (B)
- A Research Paper Assessment Matrix (C)
- An Overall Assessment Matrix (allowing a summarisation of all of the above - D)
- As above, a Self-assessment Matrix (E) for the course participants to fill up – but which I made clear was not for the purpose of assessment.

As course facilitator, I elected to undertake this exercise following as closely as possible the criteria that I had explicitly laid out at the outset of the courses, in the respective Course Outlines (and using the language used there) and/or that had emerged in the course of the discussions with the course participants in the two courses – so that the assessment was done within openly known terms.

In practical terms, after the end of the course I filled out a matrix for each course participant in each area. For Matrices A1 – D, I graded the work and/or the other activities of each course participant using the university's grading system from A+ to C-. I then *averaged out* the grades on each of the matrices.

My actual practice of this however was somewhat different to my plans. First, when actually applying the grades, I found – when I came to summing / summarising the grades I had given against individual criteria – that the spectrum of A+ to C- was too restrictive / insensitive, so I moved to using purpose-defined in-between grades for the summarisations, as follows : A+, A/A+, A, A-/A, A-, B+/A-, B+, B/B+, B, B-/B, B-, and so on.

Second, in Matrix B, for Course Participation, I had two problems. One, I realised that it was going to be impossible for me, within the time I had, to apply individual grades against each criterion and for each class session (as the matrix required). There were two issues involved here : One, I did not have adequate data with me to be able to fill up the form properly. (Although I had kept notes for individual sessions, they were not in sufficient detail for me to fill up the forms post facto. I also had not designed the forms at the start of the classes, and so could not fill them as I went.) The conclusion of this was that I ended up doing a collective grading against each criterion, for *all* the classes together (as indicated in a note added onto the template of that form as posted on the CC webspace). And in doing this, I inevitably had to apply a greater degree of subjective and holistic judgement than I would have if I had been able to give a grade to each session – which was, however, not possible for me, by that time.

The second problem was that I found that some of the criteria (especially in one area, 'Contribution' – for details, see the form as posted on the Critical Courses webspace) to be too similar, and therefore meaningless (and in relative terms, excessively time-taking) to assess separately. Therefore, and again as indicated in a note added onto that form, I ended up simplifying the assessment process somewhat by assigning a *collective* grade for the cluster.

I then filled in Matrix D, the Overall Assessment Matrix. I entered in the grades from the four other matrices (A1, A2, B, and C) and then once again attempted to average out the grades. When I did this however, I again myself faced with two problems. First, I found even the 'in-between' grading system I had developed for individual matrices to be too insensitive / inadequately nuanced, so I ended up further refining them with emphases : A+, A/**A+**, A/A+, **A/A+**, A, A-/**A**, A-/A, **A-/A**, A-, B+/**A-**, B+/A-, **B+/A-**, B+, B/**B+**, B/B+, **B/B+**, and B.

(In the cases of these two courses, I found I did not end up with anything below B as the summary result.)

But second, when I used this system in the final assessments, I found myself unsatisfied with it because the final grades as required by the university had to be a much simpler spectrum (as mentioned above, from A+ to C-, and using 'round' grades only), and so here I found it difficult to separate out, for instance, A from A+, which was however essential before I could assign the final grades.

To address this, I therefore assigned *scores* to each 'grade' that I had arrived at in this overall assessment, as below, and then calculated out the individual scores with the formula below, using the respective percentages for the three areas of assessment as per the Course Outlines (Review Notes and/or Interviews 20%, Course Participation 30%, and Research Papers, 50%) and scores assigned to each 'grade' arrived at in the overall assessment :

Name of course participant / (20 x score) + (30 x score) + (50 x score) = Total score.

Summarised Grade	Score	Summarised Grade	Score
A+	17	B+/ <b>A-</b>	8
A/ <b>A+</b>	16	B+/A-	7
A/A+	15	<b>B+</b> /A-	6
<b>A</b> /A+	14	B+	5
A	13	B/ <b>B+</b>	4
A-/ <b>A</b>	12	B/B+	3
A-/A	11	<b>B</b> /B+	2
<b>A-</b> /A	10	B	1
A-	9		

Finally, I then divided up the total scores into slabs marked A+, A, A-, etc, and so arrived not only at a final grading but also a relative ranking among course participants. Not that this appears anywhere in the university's system or otherwise influenced anything that I did, but since this was a comprehensive score taking into account all the criteria and areas of assessment I had defined, the relative ranking also allowed me to see whether this sort of accorded with my subjective perception of how the course participants had fared. By and large, it did.

As already mentioned, I also asked the course participants to fill in Matrix E, on self-assessment, on a non-mandatory basis, purely as feedback to me as course facilitator. I made clear that their self-assessments were not going to be used in computing their final grades, and were only for the purpose of my comparing them with my own results, in order to help me reflect on the results I had got and also, implicitly, on the validity of the tools I had developed and used.

In actual practice, I did not even look at the self-assessments until after I had completed my assessments – and because I was late in completion, in fact until after I had also sent in the grades (which in practice meant filling in the grades on the appropriate page on the university's website). So they did not influence me in finalising the grades.

**Reflections** : This approach to grading, although very time-consuming, and where one member of my DG (discussion group) had warned me would drive me mad (he was right; it nearly did !), allowed me to develop a fine-tune spectrum of scores that I felt was close to being adequately nuanced and detailed.

The experience of doing this was extremely rigorous and demanding, and although going through it provided me with several lessons at many levels, because of the conventional culture of grading and that we in the courses had not discussed this it could not be and was not a shared pedagogical exercise. In this sense, and even if apparently quite normal and conventional, this aspect of the 'course facilitation' contradicted the spirit of the rest of the courses at Carleton.

Grading took place right at the end of (and even after) the course, by which point I had already returned to India (having not anticipated this and planned ahead for this), and at which time the course participants were also extremely busy finishing their other courses and papers. Because the course participants and facilitator had not planned this final evaluation process in advance and because there was a tight deadline involved for submitting grades, meant that it was also impossible to initiate a more open and participatory process, even if that had been culturally acceptable to the course participants.

Several issues arise out of this experience; some tactical, some conceptual, and some practical. Some of the key ones are :

- As mentioned above, I completely failed to anticipate the assessment process as a necessary part of courses in conventional educational institutions and attempting to convert the requirement into further critical engagement.
- When using a tool such as a matrix, and especially when using several matrices, it is difficult to sustain the same values to parameters across assessments and over a period of time (and perhaps especially when working under pressure) – the consequence being inconsistent application of what it is meant to be a tool for consistency.
- Given the relatively small courses and therefore the fact that I as course facilitator got to know the course participants on a somewhat personal and individual basis, my subjective assessment of qualitative performance also kept showing itself, from time to time. I did not see this as being negative or undesirable, but I tried, as far as possible, to use the matrices and systems I had developed – and which also provided space for assessing qualitative factors – as the basis of my assessments.
- The role that cultural factors and biases play is perhaps more important than I had anticipated. It became clear from this experience that some course participants were more able to deal and work with the open, participatory pedagogical culture attempted in the courses, and some, less. But crucially, and generally speaking, the assessment results showed that it was the 'outsiders' – the more recent arrivals in Canada and those coming from the more different cultures – who had the greatest handicap. I am tempted to go on from here and say that this was because they were – precisely because they were outsiders - less attuned to the culture of the approach I as course facilitator had given to the courses; but since I myself am not 'Canadian', and therefore the culture of the courses was not, as such, 'Canadian', it would not be fair to conclude that it was the culture of the courses that handicapped them so much as, perhaps, their just being in a new context and culture in general, and moreover having to cope with several things at once.
- The principle that seems to come out of this is that, as always, those who are anyway disadvantaged (such as by language, and by being outsiders / newcomers) became doubly so, through their unfamiliarity with the culture of working in the ways that institutions ask for. The question therefore arises of whether there should be affirmative action / positive discrimination in grading.

- If assessment is to be done in this way, then one needs also to anticipate and address the practical difficulty of applying very detailed criteria when working under pressure and under tight time frames, and the need to find suitable compromises (such as by collapsing certain criteria into categories).

### **Grading the course facilitator**

While not based on any tools developed by me (and not even mentioned in the Course Outlines, since I had not known of this at that time), and therefore in a sense outside the pedagogical experiment that was attempted and that is being discussed here, the actual experience of the courses at Carleton required course participants to also grade the course facilitator, primarily (or so I was given to understand) for the university's purposes (or maybe, as one person told me, for the Carleton teachers' union's purposes).

On the other hand, since this constituted the only formal mechanism of feedback to the course facilitator other than the course review that he proposed, (a) it was also useful feedback in the larger pedagogical exercise that took place, insofar it provided information that I can take into account when planning any further such courses, and (b) it raises / suggests the possibility of actually making this a part of a pedagogical exercises such as attempted at Carleton.

By the university's rules, the assessment mandatorily had to be done on a specific Teaching Evaluation Questionnaire developed for the Arts and Social Sciences / Public Affairs / Business faculties that had also been approved by the JCAA (the Joint Committee for the Administration of the Agreement between Carleton University and members of CUPE, the university staff union). The rules under which this assessment took place were however not only very different to the culture attempted in Critical Courses but actually contradictory to it, in many ways. As course facilitator, I was required to –

- Appoint one course participant as volunteer administrator
- Hand out the Evaluation Proforma sheets that had been given to me, after explaining the university's requirements and the procedure involved
- Leave the room while the assessment took place, and where the course participants were required to hand in their unsigned / anonymous sheets to the volunteer who put them into a provided envelope, sealed it, and gave it back to me when I returned – and where it then became my job to reach it to the departmental administrator.

I learned from the secretary to the Sociology Department that the university's policy was that once processed, the evaluations were made available to the course facilitators. I also learned that since in the case of smaller classes the course facilitator might be able to recognise the authors of respective comments from their handwriting, assessments were done only in the case of larger classes. As a result the assessment in our case was only done by the OWOG class, and the OSDM course, which only had four participants, did not complete the university's assessment form.

My actually getting to see the assessments was however a little more difficult because the opinion of the acting administrator in the Institute of Political Economy was that there was no reason why course facilitators should get to see the assessments (since in her opinion, this would constitute an invasion of their confidentiality). I however explained and pursued my case over the next month, and finally received the assessment sheets some months after the fact.

**Reflections** : Without going into details here, I personally found that the assessments I received – from the OWOG course participants alone, as explained above – to be educative and revealing. Overall, I found that the comments varied considerably more - ie, over a larger spectrum of opinion, within individual assessments and across all the assessments – than the overall impression that I had got till then, from the comments received in the mid-term reviews, from passing exchange, and from the final session in the course where there was also some general exchange of the experience of the course. Along with several very positive assessments, there were also several quite negative comments, in individual areas and overall.

In particular, given the overall very positive feeling I had been left with at the end of semester, my sudden exposure to negative comments some months after the end of courses – and moreover, to disembodied comments, since there were of course no names given and I indeed could not recognise the handwriting - was at first quite sobering (and even though there were also some quite glowing comments).

But on further reflection, and once the initial shock settled down, I realised that even though I had initially been sceptical of the value of this assessment process, I was left feeling that it was, after all was said and done, worth the while for the course participants to have had the opportunity to be able to give what were in effect anonymous comments. It perhaps gave them a freedom that an open space did not. Given the entire concept of the courses, of the value of open space and of openness, this too was a useful lesson.

### **Giving feedback to course participants on their Research Papers**

The final step in the pedagogical exercise attempted in Critical Courses – other than the Symposium – involved the course facilitator giving feedback to all those course participants who requested it.

While in the case of typical university courses – where, or so I understand, there is little or no particular follow-through to courses – this may not be required, the question of feedback arose in the case of the Carleton courses because of the Symposium that came to be planned and where all those course participants who were attending (ultimately, three out of four in the case of OSDM and six out of eleven in the case of OWOG) were to present their papers there.

One of the three OSDM participants requested comments, and two out of the six OWOG participants. I therefore prepared and sent detailed comments on their Research Papers to these three course participants.

**Reflections** : I think that there is no question that it gave me a very special pleasure to have the opportunity to give comments to participants in the Carleton courses on their research papers. By and large, I had felt that they had done quite significant work, and the whole idea of the Symposium was to recognise this and provide them with an opportunity to properly present their work and defend it. Being able to closely comment on their work, and therefore hopefully also strengthen it, gave me a lot of satisfaction – which was only further reinforced when I saw the very positive reactions those particular papers got at the Symposium.

### **Thinking back : Some overall thoughts**

I have a few further thoughts beyond the above, which try to look at the larger practice of the Critical Courses.

One, while I have of course been delighted that the course participants seem to have, by and large, found the experience of the courses worthwhile (and where this was only reinforced by the comments made at the June 2007 Symposium about the courses as a learning experience and experiment), I am still left wondering whether we should not also be looking at the *content* of the courses and whether they, if at all, contributed to advance in their fields, and not only at the *process* and the pedagogical experience (though where, admittedly, the latter is what this paper is about).

I am, after all is said and done, an activist – someone who is looking for, and working for, change in the world. One (important) dimension of this larger change, of course, is in pedagogical terms, and so in this sense, if the courses at Carleton and reflecting on them can contribute in this direction, wonderful. But what about the *subjects* that the courses were respectively designed to open up? Do we feel that we now, individually and collectively, better understand the dynamics of how the world is changing? Do we better understand, also, the roles of those who we usually regard as ‘the other’ – and where in this case, and very significantly, it emerged that several of the course participants had direct or indirect experience of these processes of other globalisations (and where I encouraged them all to write from this experience if they felt comfortable doing so)?<sup>61</sup>

Are the papers that were completed in the two courses, and in particular the ones that were reworked and finalised for the June 2007 Symposium, significant contributions to their respective fields? And do they, or do they have the potential to, address any of the profound issues that they raise?

This, for me – and also as laid out in the Course Outline – is the litmus test of such work; as was whether we came to understand and explicate the phenomenon of dissent within movement – and through this, whether we can help to strengthen social and political movement everywhere and help it to develop a more comprehensive perspective on the dynamics of movement.

All said and done, I have been left with the feeling that whereas in OSDM, we did begin to explore and open up the subject of dissent within movement, in OWOG this was less so; but that this was the case in particular because the ways in which the course participants seemed to have understood the subject of other worlds and other globalisations was, by and large, somewhat different from my understanding. In other words, this does not mean or suggest that the papers themselves are not significant contributions in academic terms; I am focussing here on my sense that we did not end up addressing the kinds of issues that I feel needed to be addressed; and that this ‘gap’ in turn took place because as the course participants pointed out, I did not give sufficient input at the individual sessions to guide the course adequately.

Second, and on the other hand, this outcome also however raises the interesting and ironic possibility that this apparent ‘deviation’ from what I had expected might also be precisely a function of the course having been open-ended; and where the outcomes of such a process are by definition less determinate.<sup>62</sup> It also forces me to confront myself and my expectations; because although I formally said I wanted the course to be open and cloud-like, I am – by having

---

<sup>61</sup> In particular, see the OWOG Research Papers by Ajay Parasram (available at <http://critical-courses.cacim.net/twiki/tiki-index.php?page=RCCSHome>); Nana Kyeretwie Osei (‘On the Illegal Migration of Sub-Saharan Africans to Europe’); and : Ana Maria Vega Baron McTavish (‘Spiritual principles, changing realities : Can Christian Values inform social change?’).

<sup>62</sup> Sen, May 2007.

expected a certain kind of output – also acknowledging that I was wanting the course to be more like a clock than I perhaps like to admit.

Third, I have been provoked by a contribution to a book that I have been working on, by Oishik Sircar,<sup>63</sup> to wonder whether, in a curious and ironic way, the very fact of my trying to make the courses open spaces did not, in some ways, end up contributing to making them somewhat conservative in their approach, at least in some ways.

One aspect of this was the role of the *insecurity* that at least some course participants felt, as has come out so strongly in the main paper, and the tension between the apparent freedom of the spaces offered by the courses and the formal requirements of the institutions and cultures within which they were taking place, as well of personal career trajectories.

Another aspect is as reflected in the hesitation that almost all course participants showed – at least initially – regarding not wanting to make their work public (and where I see not making one's work public as a conservative act; not necessarily negative, but conservative nevertheless). Aside from the specific case of one participant initially not doing so as a function of professional policy (and another not wanting his paper for the Symposium posted on account of reasons of political sensitivity for some of the actors mentioned), could it be that it was precisely the exploratory nature of the work that the course participants felt they were involved in in the courses that also contributed to their hesitation ?

That they, as Sircar argues in his paper, started policing themselves, as a function of the panoptical effect of open space ?

Fourth, and on the other hand, I think I did not perceive, and therefore did not consciously enough explore and comprehend, the fact that exploratory, open-ended work creates – or has the potential to create – insecurity for the course participants. I did not sufficiently comprehend the experience of the courses *from their point of view*. I was fortunate enough to get some feedback on this from the participants during the mid-term reviews, but it is only now, much later, that I am beginning to comprehend the dynamics of this issue, as discussed in the main paper : The question of asymmetrical power relations; the question of sharing personal thoughts or preliminary explorations, to unknown audiences – or even among peers; the question of what 'going public' means; and the question of what being in an open, indeterminate process means for those whose entire experience till then has been in linear, programmed courses, with hurdles set at fixed intervals and with clearly defined parameters.

And finally, I feel that the courses lost something – maybe even a lot – by being as unrooted as they were in Carleton as an institution; and not only 'being' unrooted (which might be expectable enough given that I was there only as a visiting scholar) but that they *remained* so because of how I conducted the courses in relation to the university. I did not, for instance, and relating here to the field of public advocacy, advertise or advocate the courses within the university community in any way, nor network the university community; nor try in any way to look into how I could hook the courses into the mainstream of the university's functioning.

Given my lack of experience of working in a university, I have no idea if doing any of this would have changed the situation (and I was told at the June Symposium that I was probably

---

<sup>63</sup> Oishik Sircar, May 2007 – 'Open Space and Liminality : Notes on Sexualising the University', chapter in Jai Sen, ed, forthcoming (2008) - *Imagining Alternatives*, Book 3 in the *Are Other Worlds Possible?* series. New Delhi : OpenWord.

lucky that no one in the university paid any attention to the courses because if they had, then I might well have ended up having less space to function than I did !), but some of the dimensions of the 'loss' I refer to are : The minimisation of a likelihood that they would be repeated or replicated within Carleton, and the minimisation of the possibility even of contamination – of horizontal / lateral spread of the ideas contained in the courses as a function of exposing others to them and therefore of influencing them. A simple manifestation of this, for instance, would have been to lobby for some space on the Carleton website for the courses (and for all courses to be more visibly available) – and perhaps even for a more participatory webspace,.

On the other hand lies the fact that by virtue of being unrooted in the university, and of my having no experience either as a teacher or within such an institution, I perhaps had unreal expectations of course participants in terms of how much they could do and manage (which is feedback that I got through the course reviews).

This experience and reflection suggests that when undertaking such courses, especially by activists, we should also perhaps pay conscious attention to (a) attempting to reading and understanding the institutional community and culture within which the courses will take place, and (b) attempting to reach out within the institutional community, in carefully thought out, strategic ways, both to learn from and to contaminate, and therefore to more sensitively, respectfully, and strategically do what one does.

---