CONVIVIAL RESEARCH

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As a small collective dedicated to collective pedagogies, the CCRA currently claims a number of interconnected projects that weave together innovative, community-centered research, learning, and local capacity-building. The CCRA's investment in co-learning spaces generates critical analytical skills, research tools, facilitation techniques, and community service strategies able to address the intersections of environmental regeneration, community well-being, community safety, food sovereignty, and community health. For more info: ccra@mitotedigital.org

1.0 The Convivial Research Process

Research, according to Raniero Panzeri, should address a "situation of great transformation and conflict;" therefore it must "be carried out in the heat of the moment and on the spot." Most importantly, it must be understood as essential to the "labour of building political relations and political training." This pamphlet is intended as a brief introduction to what we have been calling convivial research, a research approach carried out in the "heat of the moment."

Convivial community-based research approach is a grassroots collective investigative effort that fundamentally refuses to objectify groups, organizations, or communities in struggle and promotes facilitating spaces for on-going encounters of collective knowledge production put in service of self-organized constituencies seeking to address specific problems impacting them. By convivial research we mean a collective investigative approach that refuses to objectify communities of struggle, engages multiple sites of knowledge production, and generates new strategic, conceptual tools, while also promoting what the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) calls "direct action casework" as part of an on-going process of community regeneration. Emerging from a renewed commitment to participatory, horizontal, and militant approaches to knowledge production, convivial research prioritizes the intersection between engaged research, insurgent learning, and direct action as a fundamental dimension of a radical democratic praxis.

Attempting to go beyond more traditional participatory action research approaches and drawing from more recent militant research strategies, convivial research promotes collective, distributed investigative strategies that amplify local, situated, and poetic knowledges through *transdisciplinary* open source technologies. Thus, convivial community research relies on collectively organized reflection and action spaces and commitments that promote facilitated activities for co-generating knowledge that reflects a shared analysis about the actors, projects, networks, and strategies operating within a situated relation of force.

In response to criticisms directed at the Black Power movement C.L.R James put forward a critical approach to research. James countered dismissals of Black Power and its prominent intellectuals by suggesting a framework of inquiry that situates struggles in a process of transformation. James' approach not only succeeds in asking of Black Power how it advances the efforts of liberation more broadly, but it also reminds us that research can have a strategic purpose. James' critical reading of Black Power and social movements more generally makes critical use of Kant's questions:

what do we know;
what must we do;
what do we hope for?

Following James' approach and, more specifically, his appropriation of Kant's key philosophical apparatus there are a number of critical elements and commitments we must attend to in order to insure research unfolds as a collective and strategic process. First, we suggest that the research should be generated from an initial refusal. Specifically, "the researcher" must reject strategies and practices that objectify a group, organization, or community of struggle for some other purpose. Second, we will argue that a convivial research effort should be imagined as an on-going intervention that disrupts Western epistemologies, or a Western way of knowing. Our strategy will be to engage already existing, or situated, ways of knowing and facilitate the emergence of new or locally constructed reflexive epistemologies. In

this instance, it will be important to be critical of dominant positivist or empirical approaches. Third, we will propose that a successful convivial project facilitates a dynamic collaboration across a wide number of constituencies, organizations, and communities of struggle. Thus, our goal will not only be to break down the barrier between "the researcher" and "the community," but also to facilitate a number of strategic encounters and dialogues that host a wide-variety of participants as part of an emerging collective subject as researcher. Fourth, the collaborations possible when convivial approaches are embraced should generate new conceptual and investigative tools that both uncover and convey unanticipated information about a particular situation or problem. Fifth, drawing on a number of scholarly advances that have problematized how "subaltern" groups have been represented and with what consequences, convivial research efforts actively deconstruct specific technologies of representation while negotiating the tensions in producing a formal scholarly document. Our goal should be to facilitate a more complex interactive and regenerative system of information in service of specific situated community struggles. Sixth, and lastly, convivial projects necessarily are inspired by and advance direct action; research without direct action, and direct action without research will necessarily lead to a limited strategy of engagement against oppressive forces.

What follows are the essential components of a research project. The critical building blocks of a research essay include a) objects of study, b) examination of "evidence," (primary and secondary sources), c) abstract, d) literature review, and e) claim. We describe an approach to writing a proposal, or prospectus, since a proposal can be a very effective tool to assist in clarifying research interests and focus investigative efforts.

2.0 Objects of Study

At first glance what we generally refer to as an "object of study" appears relatively straight forward. It is usually treated as something easily understood and readily available for use, either as a goal of research or a tool to advance the project. But, what exactly is an "object of study" is rarely fully defined. We will argue that an "object of study" is a cultural tool constructed by a researcher working in a specific context. The device, researcher, and context all

intertwine to determine to what uses the object of study, and, by extension, the research as a whole, will be directed. A consistent locally grounded convivial research project generates a collectively named object of study rather than one that is devised and imposed by a small coterie of investigators from the outside.

Drawing from the work of Jorge Gonzalez, we introduce here the objects of study components as a specific tool for collective horizontal research. The object of study tool presented here is comprised of nine essential components. Each component can be examined and modified as necessary. More importantly, the components should work together

1. Title announces an area of interest; points to a research question; suggests major claims.

2. Area of Interest states a research focus that reflects the struggles that define a community.

3. Topic describes a research focus specific enough to be investigated in the amount of time and with resources available.

4. Research Question states a topic worthy of investigation by noting where or how the state of knowledge is somehow flawed or incomplete in such a way as to suggest the significance of an answer relevant to a specific community.

5. Practical Problem states a condition in the world and experienced universally with a sufficient cost to require new knowledge towards its solution.

6. Research Problem expresses a conceptual problem in relation to a larger practical problem. Although related to a practical problem, the solution of a research problem does not completely solve a practical problem.

7. Technique a "complex tool used to formalize information co-generated between observed and observe and makes explicit how the researcher will treat or manipulate the information produced.

8. Information Produced organizes the representation of observations organized through a variety of systems of Information.

9. Glossary introduces key terms or concepts generated in the research process.

mutually reinforcing one another in order to construct a coherent *transdisciplinary* intervention. Taken together all nine of the components frame a research question, articulate a claim, facilitate strategies to co-produce knowledge, and archive new information through a variety of interconnected system(s) of information. Thus, a successful object of study articulates the epistemological, theoretical, methodological, and social dimensions of engaged research. These components should be viewed as modular, underscoring how a research agenda can shift in relation to the persistent incorporation of new information. A convivial tool that is modular makes it possible for the entire collective to monitor the unfolding process and contribute at each moment.

The components can be further divided into three key areas. The first three components, including 1) Title; 2) Topic; and 3) Area of Interest represent the epistemological scaffold that precedes and informs the research project as a whole. Here we would note that the scaffolding for the project has two dimensions —an epistemological framework that already pre-exists the interest in the topic and the epistemological scaffold that emerges as a result of the research. A critical element of the epistemological scaffold is the theory that informs the research, including both dominant and oppositional theoretical formulations. Our goal will be to begin to interrogate the theory that informs the topic and to develop our own theoretical framework. How do we know what we know about our topic?

The additional three elements, including 4) Research Problem; 5) Practical Problem; and 6) Research Question invite the researcher(s) to engage the history of the topic and interrogate the established knowledge, including popular information and scholarly investigations, by stating a problem worth investigating. Wayne Booth and his colleagues remind us that a problem always states a condition and a cost: if x than y. Both the practical and research problem, like any problem, states a condition and a cost. The document or portion of the essay that assesses the history of a particular topic is the literature review. This portion of the process should begin to critically evaluate how the arguments about the topic have been constructed. What has been said about the topic?

The remaining three components, including 7) Technique; 8) Information Produced; and 9) Glossary state the methodology, or research strategy, and the system of information produced by it. What did we learn and understand about the issue at hand?

3.0 Research Question

Critical interpretive work begins with the question(s) one asks about a specific problem or issue. It also requires an ability to refine the question(s) in dialogue with an existing body of knowledge that is in constant flux due to the actions of a community of struggle. A research question according to Wayne Booth names what the researcher does not know or fully understand but wants to know. Thus, it articulates incomplete or otherwise problematic knowledge that remains relevant or of interest to a community of researchers. Booth offers the following format to assist in framing a research question:

Because I want to find out who/ what/ when/ where/ why/ how _____.

In order to understand how/ why/ or whether: _____.

Name your topic (what you are writing about): I am studying _____.

Imply your question (what you do not know about): Because I want to find out who/ what/ when/ whether/ how/ why _____.

State the rationale for the question and the project (what you want your reader to know about it; your rationale): In order to understand how/ why/ what _____.

The immediate cost of not solving a research question is the continued ignorance of the community. The research question should be focused enough that it can be answered convincingly in the time frame allowed and with the resources available to the researcher. A well-conceived research question indicates the context in which the question emerged. In other words, it makes explicit some of the issues that both motivate and inform the investigation.

4.0 Abstract

At early stages in the research process (often to secure funding and other types of approval) scholars are asked to provide an abstract or brief summary of the project. Some journals and academic competitions ask that an abstract accompany the final submission. The abstract should answer:

what does the research project do?
how does it do it?
what does it contribute to the field?

An abstract alerts readers about the work being presented by indicating the purpose, or what the research is attempting to achieve; the method, or the strategy used to gather, evaluate and report information; the finding or results; and the significance of the research or the contribution to the field. An abstract allows other researchers to determine the potential usefulness of a proposed or completed research project.

5.0 Literature Review

The literature review is usually included in the first part of the essay. A more thorough examination can be submitted as complete essay. In all cases, it presents the researchers examination of the topic's history. A successful literature review presents and evaluates how the topic has been researched by analyzing the key issues related to the topic, assessing the criticism of work on the topic, and discussing the key theories and methodologies associated with it. The literature review should be written with a sense of purpose, an effort to further understand the theoretical or methodological tradition of the field, intervening in the most salient debates associated with it.

A successful literature review provides an analysis of a sufficient amount of scholarship on the topic such that you can make a proposal and develop a strategy for your own project. On a practical level, the literature review can aid in the progressive narrowing down of a topic and the refining of the research question. Thus, the literature review should indicate the likely success of continued research of the topic selected. The process of critique should be respectful, acknowledging agreement, highlighting major achievements, and demonstrating an analysis that carefully evaluates the success of previous studies and their contribution to the field.

6.0 Sources

In a similar way that no text, or cultural production, is innocent, there can be no disinterested research. All investigations reflect the bias and the desires of the researcher. Similarly, what stands for evidence or "data" also bears the scars of power. We should be critical of technologies designed to manage information generated as part of a larger struggle. We must burn and loot the archive. Thus, convivial research implies critically distinguishing between different types of sources as well as constructing new ones. Each convivial project will necessarily invent its own mechanisms and concepts for investigation and representation as well as construct archives based on specific contexts.

Scholars generally distinguish between primary and secondary sources. Primary sources enable researchers to get as close as possible to what actually happened during an event or a time period under review. Primary sources can include newspapers, magazines, and other official government documents produced by people in the moment under investigation. In addition to more official documents of the period, scholars, especially mainstream historians, agree that diaries, personal journals, letters, speeches, and interviews are the most common and accessible form of primary source once they have been archived. Identifying and selecting a document or artifact from an established archive regarding an event, issue, institution, or person connected to a specific historical period requires a visit to the university library, local history center, or a research collection, making extensive use of the inventories, documents, and collections they have available.

Secondary sources, on the other hand, refer to the published opinions of researchers who have met certain scholarly conventions as determined by peers in their field. Secondary sources usually take the form of journal articles, essays, theses, dissertations, monographs, and edited volumes. Thus, secondary sources comprise interpretations by scholars about the topic.

Increasingly scholars have been concerned with recovering non-elite voices have begun to develop a variety of tools to uncover statements and interpretations of agents not recorded by official sources. One fundamental strategy committed to expanding dominant archives has been oral testimony, statements that provide accesses to everyday popular views. through interviews or excavating other deposits of popular memory. Photographs as well as audio and video recordings also provide important access to attitudes, perceptions, and

interpretations by popular voices. A commitment to oral testimony requires one to think carefully about the questions that will be asked during an interview. Interviewees require ample time to answer questions. It is important to note that memory is not stored in neat, easily accessible storage "files." On the contrary, memory is always accessed in specific social contexts — memories are triggered and in every instance they are shared according to the circumstances or context in which they were summoned. Thus, memories are fluid requiring researchers to be cautious when generating statements

No matter which primary source is examined, analysis should place the interview/event/document in its proper historical context (e.g., answering the who, what, when, where, why, and how questions). In addition, it is necessary to situate selected primary sources into debates in the field. The overall assessment of the selected source should indicate its significance by drawing from additional or related evidence as well as available secondary literature.

There is no magic number for the number of sources that are sufficient for a research project. Given the limited scope of a project, it is often useful to concentrate on the most recent secondary sources related to the topic.

If "data" like an object of study is a social construction we must take care as to how we construct evidence that is, as Booth and his colleagues warn, evidence should be accurate, precise,

Questions that should be asked of a source:

what was the immediate occasion or context for this source?

who produced it and what was their motivation?

through what process?

was it individually or collectively produced?

what competing documents or articulations were produced contemporaneously?

who are the main actors/agents involved in this incident or event?

whose voices and experiences are privileged by this source?

what voices and experiences are silenced or celebrated in this source?

sufficient, authoritative, consistent, and representative. The construction of evidence must begin from and reflect an ethical position. In other words, it should make sure not to claim to be an exclusive, authoritative source in such a manner as to deny other views and experiences. Most importantly, it must not participate in a strategy of representation that encourages or facilitates the marginalization of the group or community in question. Thus, it should not, according to bell hooks, contribute to interlocking systems of domination that maintain oppressive conditions. A first step towards interrogating dominant sources and to engage already active subaltern voices is to acknowledge and interrogate the subject position of researchers.

In addition to recognizing ethical dilemmas in constructing evidence and situating ourselves as researchers, a convivial project must recognize what Foucault labeled as the "endless play of dominations" in the process of representation. In order to uncover hegemonic forces in establishing "data" to identify, explain, and narrate a "subaltern" group we must also develop conceptual tools to uncover discursive formations and practices that from the outset can potentially determine a research agenda. Given that the very naming of a problem is a socially constructed process, it is necessary to note that much of what is accepted as "primary" evidence results from already established effort at counter insurgency. In other words, dominant interests have an investment in defining community struggles as "problems;" narrating insurgency as criminal, excessive, and reactionary; and insuring popular voices are mediated by experts or "objective observers." Thus, what stands for official or formal archives already reflects what Ranajit Guha warns is a "prose of counter insurgency," or a counter code that narrates rebellion as criminal. In opposition to a prose of counter insurgency are the daily lived experiences of communities struggling against oppressive forces which at times can only be accessed by those from within the communities themselves through what João Costa Vargas refers to as an observant participation. The popular memory of lived struggle can also be reclaimed through dynamic efforts of collective remembering such as through the relational *testimonio* taken up by the Latina Feminist Working Group. Making use of these four conceptual tools we should be cautious how issues are framed as problems and what determinations are established as acceptable solutions or arenas of work. Thus, these four conceptual tools will enable researchers to

excavate the ideological sediment of what Guha referred to as "a committed colonialism."

Activist ethnography can be a very useful research tool as well as a political device. However, our investment in ethnography is only possible after considerable critique. As a consequence the ethnography we claim must reflect major revision as both a strategy of research and as a text. A convivial approach recognizes that ethnography is an unmarked category. Therefore, it requires a greater effort to make its operations as a text, space, and praxis of knowledge production more explicit in order to highlight the competing knowledges that are present as well as the impact of the formal knowledges that result from the active presence of an authorizing agent. In short, we are concerned how an ethnographic praxis can either undermine or advance a prefigurative politics. Our first commitment must involve what constitutes the architecture of an ethnography. Our goal will be to make ethnography as a process and a text available to the entire community as it emerges from collective critical reflection and action spaces that co-generate knowledges in specific contexts of struggle.

The starting point of ethnography begins with an active observing subject. However, we prefer not to limit the practice to only observing but to add listening, engaging, negotiating, explaining, analyzing, and narrating. At any given moment a researcher must negotiate these tasks as part of the everyday demands of an investigation. An observing subject, either as participant observer or "observing participant," must proceed with some degree of reflexivity that accounts for the strategy of representation, the multiple subject-positions of the observer, and the obligations required or perceived in relation to the relevant communities of struggle. In other words, the practice of ethnography conducted by an observing agent is always situated in a constellation of "mediated actions," that is it results from a specific situated agent relying on a determined set of "cultural tools" and operating in a number of intersecting contexts.

All ethnographies are produced or generated in specific contexts. In other words, we are required to make the contexts that inform knowledge production more explicit. A context would include the political moment (that is the conjuncture or *coyuntura*) as well

as the situated environment or locale specific to the site of the ethnography. Additional contexts include the academic and political debates that might inform or determine the ethnography by way of motivating it as a deliberate project.

A successful ethnography examines cultural formations, political projects, social processes, and the rhythms of everyday life in either micro or macro articulations. However, these processes and formations, while considered emergent, are also refracted through specific theoretical frameworks that often precede the investigation. Consequently, a critical ethnographic praxis would necessarily need to expose competing analytical frameworks that inform the questions or issues present. It would also encourage new conceptual frameworks to emerge as a result of specific problems identified by the community of struggle.

A critical approach to ethnography also notes how the production of field notes and the final ethnography as a text are determined by several "cultural tools," such as narrative, motifs, or themes all of which would be relevant to the observer and somehow shape the observation and presentation throughout all stages of the research. As a writing device, the ethnographic vignette allows the researcher to highlight the critical tension he or she observed during their "fieldwork." Moreover, as a device to introduce the essay the vignette allows the author to situate the study in relevant scholarly debates, present the themes explored throughout the essay, and suggest the intervention the essay makes in the field. It can also be an opportunity to present the researcher's bona fides of fieldwork.

7.0 Attribution

It is necessary to always acknowledge the work of others that precede one's own efforts. Researchers can accurately and consistently document the work of others through diligent use of footnotes or endnotes. Unfortunately, like much of the research process, footnotes and endnotes are taken for granted. Antony Grafton explains that although the footnote is "essential to civilized historical life; like a sewer, it seems a poor subject for civil conversation, and attracts attention, for the most part, when it malfunctions." As a complex literary technology the footnote "enables one to deal with ugly tasks in private; like

the toilet, it is tucked genteelly away – often, in recent years, not even at the bottom of the page but at the end of the book."

Generally, there are three kinds of footnotes or endnotes, including notes for attribution, explanatory notes, and suggestions for further research. Attribution requires that key ideas or specific quotations must be attributed to their original authors. Explanatory notes are used to offer more background on the origins of a concept or present additional information not required in the main text. In some cases a lengthy explanation for further research might interrupt the flow of the text. In such cases more detailed information about a key debate or a source can be placed in a note. The bibliography and a bibliographic essay are other useful strategies to acknowledge the work of others and to direct researchers to additional resources.

Citations follow general rules of documentation. There are a number of accepted approaches to reference the work of others, including APA, MLA and Chicago. We suggest the use of the Chicago style as found in the *Chicago Manual of Style*. The bible for those who work in the publishing industry, the Chicago style lends itself to more complex footnotes or endnotes.

8.0 Proposal

A proposal is a persuasive argument as to why an intended research project deserves funding or otherwise should command the attention of other scholars or researchers in any given field. It should be considered a device that can clarify the most recent achievements towards completion of the research project and provide guidelines for continued research and writing, opening up new vistas for investigation. According to Sydel Silverman, a research proposal answers three basic questions: a) What is it you want to do? b)How are you going to do it? c) Why is it worth doing? In order for the proposal to be a compelling argument about the research project it must address a number of elements. In what follows we will examine the construction and strategy of writing a successful proposal.

A proposal should state clearly what you intend to complete and how you plan to complete it. Your essay can propose a journal article, book chapter, manuscript, or simply describe specific research conducted at a specified site. For our purposes we will focus on a

clearly defined research project. It is often useful to include a calendar. Setting target dates for specific tasks can help to convince your readers of the likelihood of your success and provide a timeframe to help stay on task.

A successful proposal clearly states your argument or the intervention you are making in the field. Thus, it is necessary to summarize the key debates related to your topic. Moreover, the proposal should make explicit the research strategy, or methodology how it is that you are able to make the argument you are asserting in relation to the field. It is often useful to summarize key sections of the project. The summary of proposed sections or chapters should indicate how each fits into the overall argument of the research project.

Every statement addressing key elements of the research process should be presented in a way to convince the reader of the significance of the completed and or anticipated research. Similarly, any statement or summary regarding the research project's research focus, research question, methodology, and the significance of the research project should reinforce how the proposed research substantiates the claim or argument offered. Thus, it should explain how it contributes to the field in important ways.

Your reader should not need to be an expert in your field in order to recognize the sophistication and relevance of your intervention. The objects of study, including the theoretical framework and methodological approach, should be accessible to uninformed readers as well as experts. Consequently, it is advisable to avoid jargon, or undefined terms peculiar to your field or topic, by explaining and demonstrating how key concepts work together. Your reader should have a clear sense that your proposal is compelling, coherent, innovative, and significant because it is well organized and a clearly written presentation.

9.0 Writing

There is a sense that writing begins once the research has been completed. We recommend that writing take place throughout the project as part of a consistent discipline. Thus, it should advance at

each stage of the research process, building on previous work through periodic editing, revision, summarizing, and free writing.

Writing should be viewed as both sacred and abundant, keeping in my mind the Oxford English Dictionary definition of sacred, as something "dedicated" or "set apart... to some person or some special purpose." Reserve a part of the day exclusively for writing, either free writing, editing, revising, or summarizing. Often novices approach writing as something finite, assuming that they will be able to squeeze out a word, sentence, or paragraph only once. Writing should be imagined as emerging from abundance. Successful writing is always about re-writing; it should be assumed that anything you submit will undergo a number of revisions after careful editing and revising. Certain writing tasks, when done well and systematically can generate new thinking, and, as a consequence, new writing.

Formulate an overall title for the essay as well as titles for chapters or sections early in the process. These can help in the conceptualization. Subject headings can also provide a guide or map of the project for both you and later your reader. In each case, the title and subject headings can suggest the contribution the study makes to the field.

Get into the habit of properly identifying your work with a proper heading, including your name, title, institution, and date so that it can easily be shared with a clear sense of authorship and a time stamp indicating at what stage in the process this particular thinking emerged. Key portions of the writing and the research should be organized by a calendar, establishing realistic goals for each stage of the process. Naturally you are expected to meet the highest standards of written English, meaning your work should be free of grammatical and spelling errors. It is a very good idea to ask colleagues to read, edit, and comment on the work.

For more information:

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