LAND, LANGUAGE, LOCATIVES

The interdisciplinary mandate of the Theory Centre arises out of the standpoints of faculty and students from multiple home disciplines who ground their common interests in widely diverse theoretical traditions that must work to attain mutual intelligibility of concepts and methods of analysis. Since 1990, my own engagement with the Centre (also anthropology, women’s studies, ecosystem health/one health and public health) has taken a somewhat different track. Interdisciplinary in much of the academy is an uphill battle in which vested interests favour established discipline boundaries. When results of social science theory are applied in the real world, however, it is always already obvious that things the academy must work to integrate are in fact interconnected in everyday experience. We can test our theories in praxis.

LLL addresses a current impasse in legal reasoning and practice. This is the working title of a manuscript I am assembling and framing for publication. It began with a conference here in London in 2018. The question proved more complicated than first envisioned, resulting in follow-up regional conferences in Winnipeg and Vancouver in 2019 with at least one more planned. The seminar will engage students with the process of pulling together how relationship to land, understanding of environment as a broad ecology of social and natural interactions, and specification of location in linguistic structures widely shared across the languages and language families spoken in Canada.

Persistent miscommunication between the adversary-based British common law system conducted in English and Indigenous relational systems of governance creates a double bind that constrains effective presentation of Indigenous concepts of sovereignty, personhood and community, property, self-government, and land claims to traditional territory. The recent explosion of scholarship on Indigenous law has not bridged this divide because expertise in Indigenous and “Canadian” law remain separate in practice. This divide implies that cultural sensitivity would require 630+ separate protocols for indigenous bands in Canada, obviously an unrealistic goal. My hypothesis is that the polysynthetic (compounding) structure of traditional languages as spoken by elders and other fluent speakers cannot be translated directly into English because personhood, both individual and community, entails location in relation to land/space. Speakers are not conscious of the grammatical distinctions that cause their frustration and impede expression in English. The breakthrough is that the entailment crosses language and language family boundaries although it takes quite different surface forms. The self is literally inseparable from location in relation to land.

Cross-cultural evidence of alternative epistemologies and ontologies underlying the LLL entailment are grounded outside modernity as a product of Enlightenment thought. I argue that these alternative traditions are not incommensurable with the relational Indigenous thought-worlds of the First Nations peoples with whom my fieldwork-based research has occurred over the past five decades in Alberta, Ontario and B.C. Some theorists have raised
arguments that resonate well with Indigenous positions, such that a larger consensus of
effective communication is possible. We will seek such bridges across theoretical traditions as
indicated by possible readings as below.

**Familiar theorists:**
Bruno Latour ("We have never been modern")
Deleuze and Guattari (rhizomes and nomadology)
Narrative (Bahktin, Benjamin)"
Hayden White (history as trope)
Benedict Anderson (critique of his ethnocentric beginning with the nation-state)
George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (metaphors we live by)

**Ethnographic Evidence**
Keith Basso (metaphors are not universal; wisdom sits in places)
A.I. Hallowell (Ojibwe ontologies)
Regna Darnell (animacy in Algonquian languages)
Selections from James Tully, John Burrows, Michael Asch eds. (reconciliation and resurgence)
Selections from Adriana Link et al. ed. (language revitalization, Darnell introduction)
Selections from Janice Graham et al eds (medicine wheel/public health and environment)
Bernard Perley (translocality and home as the centre of the world)
Joseph Gone (intergenerational trauma; PTSD, historical trauma)

John Borrows on Indigenous law (plenary speaker for original LLL conference)