

To Open a Door

*Ahhh, so easy to say, but another matter to open a door, step out,
and close it behind me. Leaving what I know to explore what I don't.
That takes more than just a simple wish or a passing thought.*

—*Hiromi Goto, Chorus of Mushrooms (1994)*

Many people believe that innovation does not exist in the social sciences, even less so in the humanities. The questions are always the same, the answers change but little, the truths are eternal. In contrast, in the performing or visual arts, we generally acknowledge both the existence of progress of a technical nature and the periodic emergence of new perspectives. But new research methods in the humanities and the social sciences are often met with scorn, and many a result is ignored if it diverges from the canon established by the tradition's great authors. As pointed out by Lord Bryce in a foundational text of modern political science, we even choose consciously to overlook obvious errors (those of Tocqueville, for example) because long-held intuitions reinforce our ideas about democracy. This should not be seen as the simple triumph of ideology, since humanities or social science discourse usually remains subject to the requirements of scholarly conversation, with its assumptions of consistency, reason and experience. However, it is difficult to perceive any movement or advanced thinking.

A foundation such as ours cannot ignore this problem. Do we exist only to disseminate proven ideas, known solutions, formulas,

certainties? Even in the “applied” humanities can be found people who believe that all solutions are already known and should suffice to overcome any resistance in coping with the worst calamities, to resolve the most complex and difficult problems. Instead of being focused on the research, the difficult formulation of new knowledge, they say we should dedicate ourselves exclusively to knowledge transfer, when it is not to social and political action.

There are also those who believe that new knowledge, when it emerges amid the noise and repetition that Thomas Kuhn famously called “normal” science, has no origins in intellectual exchange. Few concrete examples support this hypothesis; the great scientific revolutions have all been carried out by men and women with superior command of all the science of their time. Yet it is true that some cultural ferment does affect the changing of perspectives. The histories of disciplines such as physics or biology are full of such coincidences.

Of course, it is far too early to say whether the four texts featured in this edition of *The Trudeau Foundation Papers* contribute to a genuine insurrection in our world view. The authors were invited to open doors and to take risks. Perhaps one day we will say that the adventure was worth it and that our world has gained in intelligibility. We also may say that some of the ideas expressed here, despite apparently leaning toward slight abstraction or excessiveness, ultimately contributed to make things happen in the areas of social justice, peace, and respect for the environment.

The text by William Rees that opens this collection is a good example of the foregoing. The author does not hesitate to advance into the landscape of one of the more established social science disciplines and courageously plant new guideposts. What if the economy, he seems to ask, is a smokescreen to hide the brutal and systematic destruction of the ecosphere? And what if in our somewhat morbid fascination with measures that allow action in the social and (especially) physical worlds, we have forgotten the real cost of our manipulations: destruction, waste, and exclusion? To be

fair, it should be added that Professor Rees, a 2007 Trudeau fellow, did not wait for our invitation to attempt this incursion.

It will come as no surprise either that the 2005 Trudeau fellow Will Kymlicka, political philosopher of Queen's University, has chosen to pursue a reflection begun years before with an ambitious aim of nothing less than the redefinition of civic identity in democracy. The door was flung wide open long ago, but here we find the elements of an original research program designed to support an unstinting conception of societal life.

The reflections of Taylor Owen, 2008 Trudeau scholar, will certainly make a lasting impression. He reveals realities about which little is yet known—shadows, reflections, possibilities. The approach is all the more daring in that it applies to a reality that ever boasts of being the most tangible of all: the relations between states, of war and peace. As illustrated by the author's conclusion, we do not yet know how we must consider this universe of networks or how power within it is concentrated or distributed.

May Chazan, 2006 Trudeau scholar, and Laura Madokoro, 2009 Trudeau scholar, chose to let disorder and oppression, injustice and violence and discrimination enter the established categories of social theory, which they accuse of being disembodied and inoperative. It is a text at once militant, engaged, and critical that calls for action beyond indignation or protest. It reflects a strong desire to see thought serve something, and do so on the side of justice, human rights, and human dignity.

We know the shortest chapter of *The Spirit of Laws* is one of few words, through which Montesquieu exhorts his readers to continue reading: "I shall not be able to make myself rightly understood till the reader has perused the four following chapters." I agree wholeheartedly with this invitation.

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