

Presentation at *Presentación del Centro de Investigación  
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## **MIRCo and the collective and collaborative construction of knowledge**

Monica Heller  
(Universidad de Toronto)

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to be asked to speak at this official launch of the MIRCo Research Centre. I will try to be brief, even though I have a lot to say.

I have been working closely with the research network that has blossomed into MIRCo for twenty years: I've come to Madrid, and most of the initial members have spent long research stays with me in Toronto. We have worked together at conferences and in publications. I have been consistently impressed with a number of things.

First, from the beginning this network has been collaborative and collective. These are not empty words: the mode of work and of decision-making is structured that way. This is one of the few centres I have encountered in academia which structurally takes into account the fundamental fact that knowledge is collectively produced, it does not spring fully formed from the heads of individual geniuses. This mode of working allows for rich, deep, solid analyses.

Second, this structure is consistent with central values of democratic science and education. It provides the kind of training most new scholars can only dream of. It brings into conversation scholars from around the world, and ties research tightly into the concerns of the communities and the institutions involved – because this structure is not only collective, it is an open network.

Third, the openness of this network is attentive to another foundational aspect of knowledge production: it is richest when it is not siloed into separate disciplines. The approach has been resolutely interdisciplinary, harnessing as many aspects of the humanities and social sciences as possible to understanding issues of social inequality and social change.

Because the group has had the courage to take on some of the most pressing issues of social change in our time. They ask: how does inequality work? Where does it happen? And then they ask: where are the spaces for wiggle room, for making things even a bit more equitable? Who is imagining new ways of doing social relations? What alternative spaces can we open and what can we do there?

And finally, fascinatingly, unlike most research groups addressing these questions, this one places communication (language, discourse) at its centre. It fully restores communicative expression and interaction in social relations to social processes.

Together, these features have now crystallized in the form of a research centre at the forefront of an intellectual paradigm shift marrying social engagement to an integrated theory and practice of the social sciences and humanities and to reflexive practice. It has the courage of its commitments to equity and social justice. It shows us what we can do when we take both academic freedom and responsibility seriously – at a time when both are called into doubt.

I am excited by the prospects this centre has before it, and grateful for the support it has received. We will be hearing from it.