

## Ian Angus, in Conversation with Bob Hanke

### Abstract

In this interview with Ian Angus, professor of humanities at Simon Fraser University, Bob Hanke poses a number of questions about *Love the Questions: University Education and Enlightenment* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2009). The public university is in crisis, which explains why we must attend to the idea of the university once again. Angus makes the future of the public university a matter of public relevance and concern. This conversation considers some of the major issues and stakes, and seeks to stimulate further discussion and debate.

### Keywords

public university, critique, corporate university, enlightenment, technoscience, phenomenology, identity, liberal arts, community, media, academic freedom, public

Bob Hanke: From the very beginning, your book is marked by a deep ambivalence about the university and its future. You begin by recounting the story of the chronic underfunding of Canadian universities but an unusual teaching experience with Rilke's *Letters* sparked a deeper reflection on your student's lack of, or fear of, commitment. Was there anything else that gave impetus to writing about the idea of the university?

Ian Angus: I first entered university in 1967 which was a time of protest and change around the world that profoundly affected universities. At that time I discovered the politics of the left and social movements and simultaneously I discovered philosophy. These two passions have largely come to define my life. With that background I assumed that it was natural that the university should be in the forefront of social change. Step by step I realized that this is simply not the case, that it was rather a special time in the 1960s which put the university at the forefront. Meanwhile I had myself become deeply attached to what I understood to be the mission of the university itself: the university is an/the institution of thought and as such is committed to individual and social enlightenment even if it is at some distance from practice. In fact, this distance has its advantages too. Even though the university operates in a capitalist environment, it nevertheless has had different principles working inside it that were essential to social criticism and social change. While this understanding percolated my teaching and writing, as it were, I didn't really reflect on it any further than that.

Then, in 2001 I became caught up in the controversy at Simon Fraser University over administration interference in the proposed hiring of David Noble for the J.S. Woodsworth Chair of the Humanities. During this controversy and in a number of public meetings afterwards I had to articulate more clearly the issues involved—academic freedom, the right to criticize, the role of free thought in democracy, etc.—as well as the problems with hierarchical decision-making, the creation of a managerial class in the administration, corporate connections, etc. in the university as it actually functions. That's when I started to speak and write about the university as an institution.

The experience teaching Rilke's *Letters* happened during the same period though it wasn't

connected to the Noble events. As I tell the story in the book, I was struck by the way in which the radical claim of Rilke to put enlightenment at the forefront of a properly lived human life just didn't resonate with the students at all. They just took it for granted that compromise is the order of the day; they didn't seem to expect to live full lives determined by themselves. This seemed to me then, as it does now, more important than the fact that they could appreciate some valid points in *The Communist Manifesto*. At that point I began to ask deeper questions about my commitment to enlightenment as a teacher and a thinker, about the undermining of the university's institutional commitment to enlightenment through its submission to the corporate agenda, and about the necessity of free thought to both individual enlightenment and democratic culture. This story, and my reflections on it, seemed like a good place to start the book.

BH: You define the university as an institution of thought whose essence is "loving the questions." As James Côté and Anton Allahaar's *Ivory Tower Blues: A University System in Crisis* and Christopher Newfield's *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class* have shown, the public university in Canada and the U.S. is in crisis. The contemporary university as a place and time to think is in jeopardy. Why do you think that a critique of how the university works must deploy a "moral," rather than political philosophical, language?

IA: The phrase "love the questions" comes from Rilke and is, I think, a wonderful description of the basic dilemma of a philosophical life—which is the kind of life that the university should stimulate in every student. We all have to live without final answers but we also have to live on our own responsibility. This means that a full, free and thoughtful life requires learning to live without answers or, to say it better, with answers that are built into the questions themselves, so that the values of free inquiry, commitment, solidarity, etc. are found within radical questioning. In this sense they are not answers like other answers. They are answers that preserve the questions, not commitments to a final framework but commitments to keep looking, to the path rather than arrival at a destination. This is what is meant by enlightenment and for this reason it is not just another value but a value that is rooted in the practice of inquiry itself.

I don't separate a moral language from a political or a philosophical one. Of course, I don't mean a 'moralizing' or sermonizing language. Rather, I mean to emphasize that a political or a philosophical critique needs an evaluative, ethical component because the university has an inherent connection to 'the good life' which is the question of politics in the classical sense. Every social arrangement can be looked at in this way, of course. Economic institutions, private property for example, can be evaluated with respect to how, and to what degree, it promotes or impedes the good life. But the situation of the university has an additional component. It is not only a social arrangement like many others but is also an institution with a specific mandate, a mandate rooted in its history and organization, a mandate of intelligence, teaching, scholarship, writing, self-understanding—all of which I sum up in the philosophical concept of 'enlightenment.'

It is at this point that I would want to point out that even though political and philosophical critiques overlap to some extent because enlightenment is a part of the good life, they are not identical. First of all, some conception of the good life is implicit in the totality of social institutions, whereas the philosophical concept of enlightenment is not so rooted. Thus, any

institutionalization of enlightenment will always be partial and there always remains the possibility of critique of institutions. A political critique will point to social groups, point out who benefits and who does not, will reveal both the obvious and the hidden workings of inequality and oppression. This is important. It must mobilize the moral forces of language and draw on the sedimented ethical impulses of ordinary life and popular struggle. But an exclusively political critique can fall into a merely partisan point of view if it loses its connection to philosophical justification.

BH: The contemporary public university, in Canada and elsewhere, has been characterized as the corporate university. Your discussion is framed by a battle between the public university and the corporate university in which corporatization, commercialization, managerialism, and commodification are winning. While these political-economic processes are real, their analysis has sometimes contributed to a narrative of decline in which external factors impinge upon internal actors and a picture of control in which upper-level management controls lower-level faculty-managers. Are there any aspects of the Canadian public university, as a center of knowledge culture, that remain non-capitalist or anti-capitalist? To put the question in Boudieusian terms, are there any ways in which Canadian academic fields remain relatively autonomous from the state or the market?

IA: I had encountered, and used, the phrase “corporatization of the university” for a few years, along with other people, because of the changes that I observed around me over the last several decades, but I had never thought through what this phrase might mean. That was the starting point for the investigation that led to the book. I then broke the question of corporatization into three separate questions focusing on teaching, research and application, and technological change. The analysis is quite different in each case, so one has to be careful about exactly what one is referring to. I also had to get into the history of the university in order to be able to assess whether, and for how long, people had expected anything more from the university than service to the current power. For a long time, it turns out. But the university has never been entirely free of service to the prevailing power, it is rather that it has never been entirely subservient—it has been a space in which there was some distance from social power.

In our own time, the transition that is taking place is from the public university to the corporate university. Given the obvious problems with the corporate model, it is tempting to subscribe to a narrative of decline. In fact, I think that most older academics do spontaneously explain the current circumstance as a decline since they have personally experienced better times in the university. I didn’t want to subscribe to this for several separate reasons: First, I admit to being skeptical to narratives of decline from a golden age in general, even though I’m equally skeptical of progressivist narratives which give over all evaluative and ethical issues to the verdict of history—which means the verdict of the stronger. Second, the public university is not an original state, anyway. It came about during the 20<sup>th</sup> century mainly and became widespread during the expansion of universities after the Second World War. Third, when one focuses on the technological aspects of contemporary changes, there is really no chance that they could be reversed (even if this were desirable). So, the virtues of the university have to be re-invented for our own time, and the future, not simply re-captured. Time is more complex than our forward-back metaphors would indicate. Sometimes one can recapture a lost virtue by re-inventing it in

new conditions. That is what we need to do now, so I had to problematize narratives of both progress and decline.

Yes, I do think that some aspects of the university still resist corporate forces, even though they are very embattled now. Faculty still struggle to teach in a way that serves scholarship and enlightenment. Students still come to university with high expectations. I don't know that there is a general formula for what still remains of value, though. Or, perhaps, it is simply that the study that would identify its features hasn't been done yet. It is important to note that the corporatization of scientific research preceded that of the humanities and social sciences, so to some extent the discussion now is based upon the extension of a process that has been underway for some time. It would be useful to inquire into which parts of the natural sciences have resisted corporatization and what success they have had. In general, though, as I argue in the book, I think that the seminar is the core of the university and the place which is most driven by the search for enlightenment of all who genuinely participate. It is from seminar-based learning that I would expect the most.

BH: The massification of the public university has created some big, depersonalized campus environments that calls to mind the 1960s critique of the "knowledge factory." Yet, academic strategic planning texts which inscribe the relations between administration, faculty and students are replete with the term "community." My sense is that the myth of a unified, organic scholarly community only survives in managerial discourse. What is your sense?

IA: You make a good point. The rhetoric of community is everywhere these days and serves to mask a lack of the genuine thing. The same is true of the word "public." But can we abandon either term? I agree that the 1960s term "knowledge factory" still has some effectiveness, but it has that effect only to the extent that one still expects something more, or other, from the university—and what is the basis for this expectation? We need some terms with which to describe alternative scenarios of knowledge production, transmission and application. I think that we have to fight over these terms or we'll be without any basis to make criticism at all. There is a deeper issue of whether such terms imply a "nostalgia for a common language" that cannot be recaptured given the contemporary proliferation of knowledge forms. I would accept that this is to a large extent true but argue that this is exactly one of those points at which we have to recapture the best of the past by reinvention in the future. I have argued in a short essay that will soon come out that interdisciplinary studies can perform this role, but this is where we need to have a lot more discussion and debate because the public role of the university in the future hangs on it.<sup>a</sup>

BH: Your book draws on two key concepts to analyze the transformation of the university: enlightenment and techno-science. You discuss how the concept of enlightenment goes back to Socrates but was given a modern interpretation in Kant's essay "What is Enlightenment" (1784). In your Note on Enlightenment, we read that Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (1944) was an intervention in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that revealed how enlightenment becomes a myth that leads to social domination rather than progress. In any case, in the body of the text, you skip from Kant's emphasis on the public use of reason to a phenomenological approach to the "instituting moment" of the institution. Can you elaborate on this "instituting

moment” and the philosophy you are drawing upon? Is this where Edmund Husserl comes into the philosophical picture?

IA: Yes, this is where I rely upon Husserl and the phenomenological tradition. In his late work Husserl invented a new procedure for philosophical criticism in order to take apart the way in which assumptions based in modern mathematical science have filtered into social institutions and become taken for granted in the way one thinks and acts. One needs to “think backward,” as it were, to show how these assumptions have been institutionalized in a tradition, or “become traditioned” as Husserl would say. I think that phenomenology is an under-utilized resource for social and political criticism and in my more philosophical works I have tried to make that point.<sup>b</sup> Husserl uses this method of thinking backward—which he calls “unbuilding” (Abbau) and is the origin of Heidegger’s “destructuring of the history of metaphysics” and Derrida’s “deconstruction”—to displace contemporary thinking from the horizon of modern mathematical physics. It can perhaps be illustrated by noticing that “education” comes to mean something different for us after the introduction of compulsory schooling. Education inevitably becomes caught up with social discipline and hierarchy. Thinking in this way allows one to see the importance of the social movements of our time—feminism, environmentalism, etc.—in destabilizing these traditional assumptions and opening up new possibilities. Social movements can thus be seen as “the new in the new,” whereas many commentators analyze them in terms that take them back to “the old in the new.” Thinking possibility as higher than actuality is a key touchstone of phenomenology, which I want to say resonates with the new social movements as an opening of possibility.

BH: In Italian Marxist thinking about post-Fordism, there was a return to Marx’s concept of the “general intellect” in order to rethink work, immaterial labour, and the question of subjectivity. Following this tradition, we could say that the public university is articulated to post-Fordist, informational or techno-capitalism, and academic labour has always been immaterial labour. What, if anything, would you add to what you have said about digital labour and subjectivity in the new academy?

IA: The analysis of information in the book attempts to show why the proliferation of information continually produces a crisis of identity. The network society is criss-crossed by struggles over identity. There is an important difference between subjectivity and identity here. The subjectivity directly produced in the network society simply completes the existing circuits, whereas identity involves a struggle for understanding of the network. The Italian Marxist tendency has produced some interesting analyses but I think that it, in continuity with classical Marxism, fails to theorize the construction of identity and therefore fails to show how a working class identity, or a more contemporary network-based identity, can become the subject of history in Marx’s sense. This passage between the production of subjectivity by the system and the emergence of a revolutionary subject—the relation between a class in itself and a class for itself in Marxist terminology—was simply assumed into existence by classical Marxism as it is today by Hardt and Negri, for example. It amounts to wish-fulfillment and not social analysis. The book’s analysis of identity-construction in the network society aims to fill this lacuna, but it can’t be filled by any sort of a necessity—which is where the concept of enlightenment comes in. The

construction of a coherent identity is based on a struggle for enlightenment in the new conditions of the network society.

BH: I was intrigued by your story about teaching *Humanities 202: Great Texts in the Humanities II* one summer. There is the moment when you realize that your students were untouched by Rilke's *Letters*. Yet these same students could approve of Marx's *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. I have also had the sinking feeling that the oral tradition and the art of eloquent speaking is no longer sufficient to move the Internet and mobile media users in large lecture halls. Such teaching experiences raise broader issue of what Côté and Allahar call the 'disengagement contract' between faculty and students. In their sociological account, student have become reluctant intellectuals and faculty have become reluctant gatekeepers. However, the administration's rhetoric of "student engagement" makes overworked faculty more responsible for the "student experience" and lacks any notion of the indebted student-worker subject and how they are (un)attached to ideals or commitments within a democratic society. In this situation, how can we show students what self-expression and intellectual self-development is?

IA: I think that you're right about the loss of oral tradition in the university. This oral tradition was very important to the English-speaking tradition of the liberal arts. Professors no longer structure lectures carefully and muster their rhetorical powers to move students. It was through listening to my teacher in phenomenology, José Huertas-Jourda, lecture that I understood how philosophy could come to shape a life. Without life-changing experiences in the university students go into their working life with the influences from their family undiminished. The only social shaping is the commodity economy. This bodes very ill for the future. The idea of a 'disengagement contract' is a useful one and I agree that the administration uses the rhetoric of responsibility to students to shut down genuine faculty attempts to disrupt these smooth transitions to make room for thought. What can we do? I think that we do our best to teach the way that we were taught, keep the traditions going, reinvent it in new conditions, and also seek new places in which teaching can take place. We need to take teaching outside the university and to students who want it for life-reasons not for job-reasons. My earlier Semaphore book *Emergent Publics* came out of a project planned for public television and later used in discussion with the voluntary project *The Critical University* in Vancouver.<sup>c</sup>

BH: Democracy is no longer part of the atmosphere of the university but "innovation" and "collaboration" are. While writing these questions, I received an email from the MITACS ACCELERATE program which builds and subsidizes research projects, in any discipline, between academia and industry." They say they "can help your research collaboration by:

- \* Leveraging funding from new or existing industrial collaborations
- \* Funding graduate students and postdocs
- \* Funding projects from 4-24 months
- \* Providing funding to attract graduate students and postdocs

Scrolling down to one of my current research interests—Information & communication technology—I find that my scholarly attention is directed to the area of Banking & Finance. This

kind of propaganda is part of our everyday email. How can we maintain the ideal of a 'democratic university' and its social function, once the 'social' is reduced to the market?

IA: The analysis of identity struggles in the network society in the book is meant to show that the social can never actually be reduced to the market even though that is the intention of the dominant neo-liberal social forces now. If it could, then you're right that there would be nothing positive that we could do. But identity-struggles continuously arise in new forms, because information piles up without coherence, and it is our job to bring the project of enlightenment to these identity-struggles. So, there are always some out there—students and non-students—who recognize what is going on when one speaks about these matters. This is where we have to intervene. It's certainly not easy but it is important not to confuse the attempt to reduce the network society to its neo-liberal form with an actually achieved, or achievable, state of things. It is because the network society could take another form than the dominant neo-liberal one that the university could take on the project of enlightenment in a new form.

BH: In your view, an "ethical basis for critique can be found in the history of the university and not merely superimposed upon it." Can you elaborate on this?

IA: Well, I tried to explain above why a moral language must be deployed in critique. We all experience the social-political world as morally laden and critique, to be effective, must work with sedimented ethical layers and make them explicit. I believe that this is how an intellectual may speak to others in the society and contribute to political movement. However, there is a danger here that must be carefully addressed. It is not useful for me to just sally forth with a lot of moral language that denounces social institutions—at least not at this point in time. It's likely to be seen as just moralizing; indeed, it's likely to degenerate into moralizing. But wringing one's hands that the world isn't the way it should be isn't useful. It seems to me that there is a tendency among many intellectuals today to go too far in the other direction—to jettison an ethical language altogether because it may degenerate into hand-wringing.

The solution, it seems to me, is to connect with an ethical, evaluative language that has a certain purchase on the institution itself because of its history and functioning. This is not possible with all institutions, of course. If the institution contains no claim to a 'higher,' moral goal then one can't appeal to it. But in the case of the university, there is a very articulate debate about its purpose that has accompanied the institution from the beginning. It is an institution of thought and has never operated without thought about its own purpose and function. It is for this reason that I tell the story of the modern university. I tell it quickly, without the detail that historians would like, but with the purpose of uncovering the purpose of the university in evaluative terms that I can then deploy in a contemporary context. Even so, I do not think it sufficient to just 'apply' these criteria from the past and I save some critical words for those who articulate such a conservative, backward-looking critique that does tend to slide into nostalgia and hand-wringing. But one can start from this evaluative history as a basis for addressing contemporary issues. One begins from some commonality, if not agreement at least a common set of references, as the basis for critique and proposal. The proposals, however, one has to articulate in one's own voice and submit them to others for discussion. If this strategy works, it should terminate in an intensification of debate and commitment, not a set of received truths.

BH: You sketch a history of the modern university that includes the Wilhem Von Humboldt's and Cardinal Newman's classical models of the university as well as Matthew Arnold's writing on "culture" and "civilization." I was surprised to learn that with Arnold's secularization of "culture," you highlight how the aim of liberal arts education was not merely to oppose ignorance but also to oppose the organization of industrial capitalism. Knowledge is not only expanding one's area of ignorance, but, "changing—or at least holding at bay—the organized force of ignorance." Turning to the contemporary university, we have seen a decentering of the humanities and the liberal arts in favor of research based on scientific reason and professional studies. At York, for example, the Faculty of Arts and Atkinson Faculty of Liberal and Professional Studies have been 'restructured' into the Faculty of Liberal & Professional Studies. In these times, what are the prospects for reinventing the liberal arts tradition?

IA: I want to be clear about this because it shows at exactly what point a liberal humanist defence of the university can pass over into a more radical critique. I'm not saying that the Arnoldian conception of culture was anti-capitalist in the sense of proposing a revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system. I'm saying that it needed to oppose the "organized force of ignorance" rooted in capitalism to keep open the social space for "culture." This involved a certain appreciation of the social situation of culture. The earlier project of enlightenment was simply to lift the individual out of the lower social layers which were "ignorant" in the sense that they were deprived of education. The Arnoldian model realizes that one can't be simply "lifted out" because capitalism organizes and propagates a mechanical view of life throughout society. It is in this sense that it opposes the mechanization of culture under capitalism but it did not propose the possibility of changing the system into something else. However, one can see how this possibility arose out of a radicalization of the Arnoldian vision in the later conditions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Raymond Williams and cultural studies in Britain took this further step, for example.

The restructuring that you refer to is underway everywhere these days. I think that it is dangerous to separate ourselves from these developments and concentrate our efforts in a department of critical studies whose funding could be easily cut. One should participate in the 'applied' restructurings and find places where students and practitioners encounter ethical and political issues themselves. That is an entry point. I have also tried to emphasize in the book, partly through the discussion to T.H. Huxley, that the contemporary university can't be separated from its function as job-training, so one has to enter into the job-training and show how the 'humanistic' questions still arise there.

BH: On the one hand, with the 1960s California idea of the "multiversity," the university abandons its modern ideal of unified knowledge and repurposes itself to adapt to the status quo. During the 1990s, the liberal arts tradition comes under attack with the rise of the new 'high-tech' economy. The liberal arts are defended to some degree but have become just another stream of studies. You conclude that a new nexus of knowledge and new unity of science-technology-communication ends the humanistic ideal of self-knowledge. You break your discussion of techno-science into three issues: the corporatization of the university, the commodification of the university, and the emergence of a new model of knowledge.

First of all, what would you say to faculty who still object to any claim, first made by Harold Innis about his own university (of Toronto), that the university has become a kind of corporation? In Zizekian terms, we could say that faculty knows that the university has become a kind of corporation and yet they sometimes act as if they do not know this.

IA: Indeed. It is difficult to accept the bad news, keep up the struggle, and look for new paths all at once. Consequently, I think that some people keep up their will to struggle by saying “it’s not (yet) all that bad.” After all, it is very easy to just slip into despair and accept that there’s nothing left worth struggling for in the university. This is also why some people are drawn to conservative arguments that suggest that the university must be returned to what it once was. I think that many of us have only recently turned our attention to analyze the institution within which we ourselves work. Until a sufficiently enlightening analysis is widely distributed, many people will rely on conflicting and partially contradictory ideas. That is the normal condition of being human. It is only sustained thought and analysis that can infuse some coherence into one’s responses. So I recognize that many people oppose the corporate university today with insufficient understanding, but we must realize that it is based upon a recognition that something has gone drastically wrong. It is our job to build upon this recognition, improve the analysis, and bring the understanding to a higher level where it can inform action in an improved way.

BH: Second, you describe how the university is relocated from national economy to become a corporation that “operates” within a global economy. The Canadian university has become a public-private enterprise and degrees have become products in an educational market but I wonder if the globalization of the university has been overemphasized. While the University of Toronto’s MaRS Discovery District has global public-private partnerships, most other universities global ambitions are more limited to attracting and recruiting more international students. Has the globalization of the university been overemphasized?

IA: It depends on what you are referring to here. You are probably right that few universities have direct links with global corporations, though many would like to have them, and that attraction of international students—which really means students who can be charged very high fees—is the more limited goal of many universities. The point about the loss of national economy, however, is a bit different. The balance between the nation-state and the capitalist economy in the period of national economy meant that the university could play a role at once in between these two dominant institutions and also represent the whole social realm as a field of knowledge. The university was both in and out of the national economy and this positioning is what its earlier claim to enlightenment was based on. It is this double role that has been lost. With the globalization of the economy, and the decline in power of the nation-state, the university has been subsumed into the social forces and can no longer claim to represent the totality as a field of knowledge. I don’t think that this has been over-emphasized. In fact, I think that there is still very little understanding of the relationship between this historic institutional shift and the changes in paradigms of knowledge that have been debated over the last several decades. This is the point that I was trying to make here: that the decline of knowledge understood as representation of the whole is essentially connected to the loss of the framing institutions of national economy. A whole sociology of knowledge is implied in this short

analysis, one which, as far as I know, has yet to be written. For example, it implies that Georg Lukács' claim that bourgeois philosophy and science represents the totality in a mechanical form is now obsolete. Network philosophy and science represents knowledge as applied in specific contexts. It does not refer to totality at all. This has important implications for Lukács' correlative claim that proletarian knowledge enacts the totality as praxis. My analysis suggests that socially-critical knowledge enacts identity as self-construction from information-bits. I came upon this in the context of understanding how technological changes have influenced the university in a way that cannot be reduced to corporate influence. Both because I wanted to keep the book focused on the university and as widely accessible to non-specialist readers as possible, I did not follow up this insight any further. But for a thinker like me who was formed by the classic theories of the Frankfurt School and phenomenology, this thread may well be the most significant to follow up in the future.

BH: While the corporate model of education you describe identifies owners, managers, workers, product and support staff, and you delve into the consumer model of education and changes in academic work (including the growing casualization of academic labour), but you don't mention faculty unions. What is the role of academic labour unions in the corporate university? Is the party-form of a union obsolete within the network university?

IA: I do mention faculty unions briefly but you're right that I don't provide any full analysis of their role. On one hand I do think that faculty unions could bring many of the changes toward corporatization to the bargaining table and thus might well be a beneficial influence. On the other hand, it would depend on the faculty being public-spirited about such bargaining and not merely pursuing their own self-interest. This is by no means impossible. We see how other public-sector unions, such as nurses for example, have bravely fought for public health care as the larger concern within which their own work takes place. Faculty, however, often see themselves as "middle class" and not as workers; they also often subscribe to an individualist credo in which they are not really employees of the university but rather people who work "at" the university. So, I would be cautiously optimistic about faculty unionization, especially if younger faculty, and faculty without tenure, place their work within the larger context of social unionism that places the unionized worker within the larger community. This has been the credo of the Canadian Labour Congress. Not only in the university but in the economy at large, many workers have begun to see themselves as entrepreneurs within the market and the network university can be expected to reinforce this mentality. The market has sunk down into the daily activity and thinking of many workers and has tended to replace the big industry model that pitted workers and their organizations against each other. This is a complex process and by describing it quickly I don't want to give the impression that the structure of big industry is, or is likely to be, overcome. But I do think that enough change has come about to be able to say that the success of social unionism depends on the extent to which we can revitalize the notion of "public" in this market-dominated environment. This can't be an automatic consequence of unionism even though unionism is likely a force that could give it some effect.

BH: In U.S. cultural studies, James Carey once made an important distinction between the "transmission" versus "ritual" of communication that appears to have dissolved. If one examines

university education today, knowledge is reduced to sending or conveying information, and education has “degenerated towards the simple transmission of knowledge.” At the same time, however, education is a “ritual” where a particular neoliberal view of the world is portrayed, confirmed and, in some courses, altered. What is to be done to shift gears from knowledge transmission to building knowledge culture?

IA: Carey’s distinction was useful, though I don’t think that his term ‘ritual’ expresses all that is important about communication when it is understood through the etymology that connects it to ‘community.’ Communication in all its forms is a ‘bringing-together’ or ‘making-common.’ Transmission accomplishes this by taking content from one place to another and thus enabling the origin and destination to be brought together by sharing the same content. Community requires communication through events that bring them together, whether it is Sunday church services or rock concerts. So, I don’t think it’s really a question of shifting from one model of communication to another but rather of seeing the construction of community as the more basic level of communication that is always going on, even when the manifest concern is transmission. My book *Primal Scenes of Communication* (State University of New York Press, 2000) goes into this in more detail. Shifting gears can be accomplished by pointing out the assumptions inherent in transmission—of the non-creativity of the receiver, that all change is disruption or noise, that the sender and receiver pre-exist fully formed prior to the communication—never obtain, really, and that there is always something more basic going on. This more basic something is the construction of community, the ‘how’ of bringing-together, that the knowledge university continues to accomplish even while it disavows that it does so. It is this latter contradiction that can be exploited in the shift to which you refer.

BH: The digital galaxy of the Internet, broadband and software has added another layer to print culture and technology. New media require new research methods as well as classroom strategies. What is your position on the question of technology in teaching and learning?

IA: I don’t have an “in principle” answer to this question. My teaching still revolves around the lecture and the seminar and will likely continue to do so. I don’t think that new teaching technologies are inherently bad but I do question the transmission model of knowledge that usually lies behind using them. For example, PowerPoint presentations are very much used now, to the extent that some students think that a lecture is a failure without them—yet why do students have to copy this outline down, when it could be simply emailed to them? The issues of lecture structure can be usefully discussed in class since I find that most students simply assume a transmission model, based on their experience, and have never really thought about it. If they do think about it, they tend to agree that learning is an active process and not about swallowing what someone else has told you—but they may not want learning in this deeper sense from the university at all. This is the ‘disengagement contract’ that Côté and Allahar point to and which you mentioned earlier. And they may be right. The university may no longer have the significance for enlightenment that it once had. But I don’t think that everyone who uses a new teaching technology is necessarily buying into all this. I would address the question on a case-by-case basis. I do think that it is important, however, that some of us keep alive the basic media of communication on which the university was based: oral seminar interaction, reading and writing.

New communication technologies will change this structure and that's not bad if they are introduced with a clear idea of what was made possible by the old media and how it can be preserved/transformed by new media.

BH: The university, as a public sphere or space, dedicated to academic freedom of inquiry and critical thinking, is in decline. The high profile cases of the violation of academic freedom that you cite show that critical thinking is out and "ritual blaming is in." What concerns me even more is Jerry Zaslove's prescient observation, which you share in a footnote, "that the disabling factor in intellectual work is not the external threat to academic freedom but the internal compliance with the social agenda." The neoliberal turn within the university creates a chilly climate not only for assistant professors on the tenure track but contract faculty on the tenuous-track. For these 'hidden academics,' exercising the "freedom to express freely one's opinion about the institution, its administration, or the system in which one works..." is to risk being unhired the next time you apply for a short-term, per course contract. Tenure is the foundation of academic freedom for full-time faculty, but for contract, adjunct or contingent faculty, the ability to "ask and confront genuine questions" is curtailed to an even greater degree. How can the academic freedom of these academic workers be expanded?

IA: Jerry is an astute critic of the university and his comment is quite accurate about the current state of the academy. The changes that we are discussing have been brought about without general discussion, or even awareness, in the academy so that it has not really been a question of succumbing to pressure from the outside. The administration has caved in largely through the underfunding that has produced grave fiscal problems. Faculty often anticipate the exigencies of the administrative-managerial model and apply the pressure themselves, sad to say. These days one hears a lot of suggestions ruled out of hand among faculty themselves with reference to the 'fact' that "the Dean, or the President, won't go for it." They censor themselves before the fact. University faculty are often very timid people. So Jerry's right that we shouldn't think that all faculty are in open revolt against the corporate university. They have often already internalized the agenda and, of course, those who are less powerful in the hierarchy always find it more difficult to dissent.

For those whom you wittily call 'the tenuous-track' faculty, the situation is more extreme already. For them the university is already essentially a corporation which they have little ability to influence and to which they must regularly go in search of work—low-paying work at that. It is these people who really prove that academic work isn't done for the money but for the love of it. Their capacity to criticize the system is always held hostage to the next contract. The lack of traditional academic rights in this sector can be most effectively combated if they are in a union with tenured faculty. The tenured faculty should be able to see that the degradation of the rights of contract faculty degrades the university that it is their duty to protect. There are significant barriers in the way of such collaboration, but I do not see much chance for improvement if these two groups are kept separate. If tenured faculty will not fight this battle then contract faculty will have to go it alone and this will be a difficult struggle. It has a chance, though, because of the increasing reliance on contract faculty means that the university can't function without them. In my view, non-replacement of retiring faculty will likely mean that universities turn to primarily contract faculty within the next two decades. In this way the administration can undermine

academic freedom, research time, wages, and tenure without confronting tenured faculty directly. If this is so, then the future of the university will likely be decided by the extent to which contract faculty can unionize and demand academic rights.

BH: You argue that network university is a node in the network society based on techno-science, which is the leading edge of techno-capitalism. As you also point out, when the academic milieu inside the university no longer differs from the milieu outside, the “double, inside-outside” relationship of the modern university to society ends. Where we can find a standpoint for reflexivity in a network university? How can we imagine the coming network university as a non-capitalist, or even anti-capitalist, institution?

IA: At the end of the book, I hang my expectations for a new critical university on the role that it can play—and has already played to some extent for the last few decades—in bringing into intellectual discussion the identity movements of network society. This would be a non-capitalist activity even if it occurred within a capitalist environment. My supposition is that such identity movements are important to people as citizens, social actors and individuals. The question is where would the resources come from that could pay for such an activity. I explore some suggestions about this but do not come up with a definite plan. In general, though, such an allocation of resources demands a revitalization of the notion of the public. Without some notion of public education the university as a critical institution is doomed.

BH: Your book ends with an appeal to the notion of the public and the public interest. To revive the public university, university-based academics could reflect on the public issues raised by social movements. They could produce publications, courses, and citizenship. By putting the public university on the map of what matters to the public, the public university might have a future. While you see the “public” in a transformed sense, you do not address the theme of the commons. Are the concepts of the “public interest” and the “common” compatible or incompatible with each other?

IA: The concepts of the ‘public’ and the ‘commons’ are different ways of coming at the same issue. The public has usually referred to the citizen in modern nation-states and might appear to be a limited concept in that respect, but there are also other references, such as the city or locale and now, with the Internet, non-localizable references of the public. The ‘commons’ refers much more to the idea of property. I would recommend here the classic works by C. B. Macpherson on the ‘exclusive property right’ that came into existence with capitalism in contrast to the ‘limited property right’ characteristic of pre-capitalist societies. I have argued elsewhere that an environmental socialism requires a revitalization of the notion of common property,<sup>d</sup> but I didn’t want to get into that in this book because the whole thing could spin out of control. In fact, I got into writing this book when Arbeiter Ring Press, a wonderful group of people in Winnipeg, asked me to write another little book for their Semaphore series. The previous book was called *Emergent Publics* and phrased a lot of similar issues through the idea of the public. This time I thought that it would be a good way for my concerns about the university to reach a non-specialized audience. So, yes, ‘public’ and ‘common property,’ or ‘the commons,’ are ways of getting at the same thing. This thing is how to re-invent socialism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

BH: From a technocultural materialist perspective, the mode of information, the communication structure of the university, and the Foucaultian question of the “formation, circulation, and utilization of knowledge” and power, is what makes the study of the media, knowledge and the “network university” so urgent and necessary. As you say, communication studies, is a recognized academic discipline but in my opinion, it has left the question of digital media in an academic setting to people working in education. One of the major contributions of your book is to show how humanities oriented communication studies might begin to articulate critical media studies and critical university studies. How might such an articulation contribute to making the university into a space not only of reflection and reform, but a space of--in the [edufactory collective's](#) terms--conflict and transformation?

IA: You're right that it's surprising how these discourses have been kept separate. When I researched the background literature prior to writing the book, I found a lot of material in established genres: the idea of the university, higher education studies (often of a rather limited focus), recent studies of corporate influence, humanities professors bewailing the current state of the world, etc. There were also some useful sociological studies of corporatization and some provocative late lectures by Jacques Derrida, etc. But there was very little work that used a relatively articulated intellectual framework to propose specific analyses and raise larger issues. Especially toward the end of the book I found that I had to work out for myself a communication theory of the university that synthesized the ethical core of liberal studies with an analysis of media that are currently in transition and a social theory of network society. I think that I was able to work this out sufficiently to sketch the analysis of contemporary possibilities with which the book ends, but there is a lot more work needed on this aspect of the argument. I hope that others will take up this issue as well since it has both large-scale and local aspects that demand study and discussion. In distinction from academic research that follows established paradigms within the division of knowledge, work like this comes on to the agenda because of practical issues. It divides up the intellectual pie in a different way and makes new connections. In this way it can, I believe, contribute to the productive ferment around higher education today. I think that it's too soon to say exactly what is possible but the first step is to underline the political decisions behind the managerial direction. This is a beginning of 'conflict and transformation,' I would say, though the university is an established institution and the process of change is likely to be long and arduous. As well it depends on the political environment outside it.

BH: 2009 was a year of education protests in fifty-one countries on five continents, including Canada. In January, after 85 days, the strike by CUPE 3903 representing teaching assistants, contract faculty and graduate assistants ended when the union was forced back to work by the Ontario 'education premier' Dalton McGuinty. With the support of the NDP, the link between the casualization of labour and the quality of education was put before the public in the Ontario Legislative Assembly but public opinion was overwhelmingly hostile. In September, [The Trotsky](#) premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival. This Canadian comedy film mixes the high-school genre film with biography of Leon Trotsky to pose the serious question of whether the energies that gave rise to student protest in the 1960s could be mobilized in the present historical conjuncture. The film's answer is in the affirmative. Given the limits on faculty and students' time and energy, I think communication studies is in a unique disciplinary position

to confront the aesthetics and efficacy of protest and demonstrations. The traditional symbolic repertoire builds community but has been less successful in effecting changes in educational policy. How might a communication theory of the university help us study and discuss these issues?

IA: It has been important to the rightward turn of the last 25 years or so that a majority of people have been kept from seeing their common interest. There has been a push to lower taxes at the municipal, provincial and national levels, for example, without any sense that services are going to be lost. Of course, everyone wants lower taxes but everyone also wants social services. Sufficient numbers of people have been persuaded that they can buy back with their individual income the services that they lose due to lower taxes. But this is only true for a small minority. For the majority the solution must come with the pooling of resources through taxation (or perhaps some other form of joining social resources) to promote services in which a general level of well-being is guaranteed. How this can be reconciled with a loss of power by the national state to global corporations is a difficult and long-term question that depends on the revitalization of the public dimension of existence in new conditions. I have made some suggestions in my work but I won't recall them now. This question needs to be explored by many collaborating thinkers and activists. I don't think that the answer is already sitting out there but will be designed by the emergent social movements of our time as they design new forms of common property and a new public space in opposition to global capital. I have tried to show in the latter section of my book how the struggle for the university might be inserted into this larger struggle through the construction and reconstruction of identity that is a continual process in the network society.

So, my initial response is to avoid what seems on the face of it to be special pleading for the discipline of communication and to suggest that all academics can and should spend some of their energy addressing public issues, especially the issues raised by social movements, and that tenure and promotion committees should include this in their criteria of academic publication. But in another sense your question goes deeper. Social movements with their traditional means of protest have come to an obstacle in that protest is now accepted and contained. This was apparent during the recent protests at the Olympics in Vancouver. One has to push in some way beyond this closure. (But, it must be said, simply breaking windows does not accomplish this.) While I would dismiss neither the mobilizing function of demonstrations nor the validity of supporting those elected representatives who are on board, there is a valid perception among both activists and some commentators that traditional protest has become ineffective. This is a large question important political implications and I won't try to do more than recognize the salience of the issue now.

What can communication analysis of the university add to this situation? When I began to write this book I had no expectation to rely on communication theory at all. I think that it is significant that in order to analyze the irreversible contemporary changes in the university that are due to technology, I needed to draw upon the communication theory that I knew and apply it to the current transformation. I don't think that this is just my own background but is something in the nature of the situation itself. Contemporary transformations are happening precisely through fundamental transformations in the dominant media of communication. To this extent communication analysts might bring something especially necessary to the table. I have argued before that a renewed democratic ethos would operate at the inside/outside seam of the

contemporary system and that this outside is defined by the limit of translatability between dominant media of communication.<sup>e</sup> In this sense I think that the future of communication studies is tied to the possibility of new forms of democratic ethos. But I don't think that I can say much more than this because what is needed is a lot of specific analyses of different sites to drive this idea forward. The inside/outside dynamic is, I think, well exemplified by the way in which the street protests during the Seattle WTO demonstrations resonated with the contributions of some of the Third World and civil society representatives inside. Put another way, both piecemeal reform and total revolution are unacceptable at this point, though for very different reasons that I don't have space to analyze now. The analysis of closure, and the possibility of opening, cannot be controlled by any one perspective, but it can be fostered by analyses of what slips out of control by dominant organizations and that which, for reasons of public/common discourse, can't be simply dismissed as outside. If I were to set up an Institute of Public Communication it would focus on this problem. It can be seen in the university and in many other contemporary sites but a general theory of it is not yet available. There is a lot of work to do.

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<sup>a</sup> "The Telos of the Good Life: Reflections on Interdisciplinarity and Models of Knowledge" in Raphael Foshay (Ed.) *The Scope of Interdisciplinarity* (Athabasca University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>b</sup> I try to summarize the phenomenological underpinnings of my social-political criticism in an essay called "Phenomenology as Critique of Institutions: Movements, Authentic Sociality and Nothingness" *PhaenEx*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring-Summer 2006 which is available at <http://www.phaenex.uwindsor.ca/ojs/leddy/index.php/phaenex/article/viewFile/36/114>

<sup>c</sup> See the account of The Critical University by Mark Coté, Richard J. F. Day and Grieg De Peuter, "Academicus Affinitatus: Academic Dissent, Community Education, and Critical U" in Mark Coté, Richard J. F. Day and Grieg De Peuter (Eds.), *Utopian Pedagogy: Radical Experiments against Neoliberal Globalization* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

<sup>d</sup> See "Subsistence as a Social Right: A New Political Ideal for Socialism?" in *Studies in Political Economy*, No. 65, Summer 2001.

<sup>e</sup> "Media, Expression and a New Politics: Eight Theses" *Media and Cultural Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2005.