

University Governance in the 21st Century

Len Findlay M.A. D.Phil. D.Litt. F.R.S.C.,
University of Saskatchewan

The background features a dark blue-grey central area on the left, transitioning into a series of overlapping, semi-transparent green shapes on the right. These shapes are geometric, resembling triangles and polygons, and vary in shades from a vibrant lime green to a darker forest green. The overall effect is a modern, abstract design.

Institutional Autonomy: Collegial Governance and its Discontents

Overview

- ▶ The non-identity of Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom, and what that may enable
- ▶ What's in a frame? The upside and the downside of (imposed) allusions to Freud
- ▶ Violating the conjunctural campus: corporate and governmental examples
- ▶ A better model: The TRC Calls to Action

Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom

- ▶ Their imbricated non-identity keeps open, always, an institutional space for collegial governance as **either** deliberative, peer-driven autonomy, or as an alibi or mask for heteronomy
- ▶ Which will it be? CAUT or UC?

Invigorated, simulated, or subverted autonomy?

- ▶ The title of this session implies equivalence between institutional independence and distinctively academic self-rule linked to a suspiciously modish signifier of trouble: see, e.g., “civility and its discontents” and forms of campus soma

Political or Psycho-centric Freud?

Civilization and its Discontents

- ▶ *Das Unbehagen in Kultur* (1930) in the shadow of Hitler/Trump
- ▶ The academic ego, the administrative superego, and the id of the world
- ▶ The academic pleasure principle *versus* the administrative reality principle

Dialectics of Unsettlement

- ▶ Mutually constitutive others (autonomy/heteronomy, etc.) always produce an academic unconscious
- ▶ “It is impossible to escape the impression that people commonly use false standards of measurement...” (C and its D)

Discontents continued

- ▶ Like civilization, the academy is threatened from within as well as from without
- ▶ On the inside, autonomy can be a pretext for authoritarian management, self-autonomizing metrics, and the transferable curriculum commodified for mobile student-consumers

Discontents continued

- ▶ Meanwhile, on the outside, the disgruntled barbarians are always already clamouring for tribute and conscription
- ▶ So collegial governance may stage *Eros* succumbing to *Ananke* (SF), desire bowing to managerial necessity, scholars sucking up to leadership

The upside of governance's constitutive discontents

- ▶ These discontents require vigilance and struggle from an alert, agonistic academy
- ▶ They also affirm academic aggression and desire as primal, ungovernable, and regularly uncivilized, enacting inquiry more feral than federal

But where does that leave collegial governance now?

- ▶ In a conjunctural space between enforced, fetishized civility on the one hand, and voracious capital and its “servant state” (McCormack and Workman, 2015) on the other-- and as the heteronomic Other



The downside of governance's discontents: a God that failed

- ▶ Freud can help us no further here, I fear; we need a new *Anti-Oedipus* (D&G) moment
- ▶ Discontent with discontent needs to shift the focus dialectically from the esoteric bourgeois individual to the luminously collective academic subject

What's civilization got to do with it?

- ▶ Consider the dangers of a quasi-Freudian, apolitical, academic unconscious (the antithesis of Fredric Jameson's) Consider also Samuel P. Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis and the distribution of discontent now

The Academic Unconscious

- ▶ Reason's other and neoliberalism's accomplice
- ▶ We need to map the deceptive terrain of contradiction whose signage boasts of sovereignty, whose communities are mostly conscripted, and whose tourist authority is abjectly corporate



Owning the means of academic production in 1947

- ▶ A top-hatted tycoon acts like the anti-intellectual precursor of today's more discreetly directive donors
- ▶ This strong-arming rather than arm's-length incarnation of "Monied Interests" spurns disinterested inquiry for the ultra-instrumental production of "Safe Toys" who wear--not the uniforms of war veterans demanding a less "safe" education for a more just civvy street--but instead the ceremonial garb of standardized white male tools of capital, while dollar bills transform into academic scrip (i.e. diplomas) with every crank of the universities machine

Ownership in its moment

- ▶ The moment of this cartoon is one of re-emergent, post-war socialism looking for a more democratic and open academy and a more inclusive understanding of public systems and the public “interest” in what soon becomes *Cold War Canada* (Whitaker & Marcuse)
- ▶ The unidentified cartoonist (in fact Harry Gutkin) fears reinscription of big business agendas and academic Taylorism after a global crisis (WW2), as well as implying a reimagining of the public university and its “products” to replace the dominant economic order and its overly contented civics

Contingencies of “Progress”

- ▶ But this Left critique of an academy captive to capital and “management science” in 1947 is as relevant today as it was then, or perhaps even more relevant, given the agility, self-belief, and “crisis”-management capacities of neoliberals
- ▶ Here, I would simply reference CAUT’s invaluable but disregarded *Open for Business On what terms?* (2013), and also my experience investigating (with two colleagues), for the past year and a half, the Enbridge Centre for Corporate Sustainability at the University of Calgary
- ▶ My personal view (without precedent or prejudice!) of the PUBLIC record in the Calgary case is **DAMNING**

My takeaways from the ECCS at the University of Calgary

- ▶ It is worse than we thought
- ▶ Institutional leadership can be fraudulent and imperious
- ▶ The collegium can be both spineless and merely careerist
- ▶ CAUT's fight with heteronomy means it is reviled and feared by pseudo-autonomists

Austerity's Doublespeak

- ▶ The Wall government's anti-union animus and bungled governance at the U of S
- ▶ The long road to recovery
- ▶ Profligate politicians scapegoat the public service
- ▶ Then the Minister's letter

What the University Act in our case legislates

- ▶ The U of S is “an autonomous corporation,” whose parties to tri-cameral governance commit to complying with the Act and with “the recognized principles of academic freedom”

The Act contd.

- ▶ Its “general powers” include the right to “do all of those things that **the university considers necessary**, incidental or conducive to meeting its primary role” (5(g); emphasis added)

The U of S Board Chair gets his marching orders

- ▶ Single addressee, but copied to the President and Deputy Min.
- ▶ The mysterious disappearance of agency and accountability
- ▶ Figuring “the” economy and its market discontents
- ▶ Euphemism and passivity fabricate “innocence”

Appealing to autonomous institutions in the key of justice

- ▶ Harry Gutkin's cartoon did so by exposing the post-war farce of independence and by urging universities to work for social and economic justice
- ▶ Similarly with the TRC *Calls to Action*

Interpellating in a good way: The TRC *Calls to Action* (2015)

- ▶ Emanating from evidence (after Harper)
- ▶ And from the critical internationalism of UNDRIP
- ▶ Calling for resources, research, and rethinking, but without prescribing their outcomes
- ▶ Human aspiration, not branding hype

Parties to Academic Governance

- ▶ The provincial government's role: the fist behind the fig leaf
- ▶ The Board of Governors' role: captive fiduciaries
- ▶ Senior management: survival
- ▶ Faculty: co-optation ... or else

The Return of the Curious Collegium

Discontented collegial governance, not a court culture with a rubber stamp

▶ Embracing curiosity, uniquely enabled by academic freedom in a transparently autonomous institution

What now, then?

- ▶ Inter-union, cross-campus strategising is key
- ▶ Campus labour's many faces need to recognize and talk regularly to each other so they can act effectively in concert
- ▶ CAUT remains indispensable

Key considerations

- ▶ Academic freedom remains key to autonomy-as-integrity; to achieve the former, you must continuously interrogate, and if necessary trump, the latter
- ▶ The defence and promotion of both notions means **political** struggle at all points of production, 'real' and virtual

The Groves or the Grooves of Academe? The choice is clear.

- ▶ Ecologies of knowledge in territory or the “efficient” path-dependencies of market “logic”
- ▶ Treaty-or-unceded academe and “all our relations” or “the university means business” and public relations

In sum

- ▶ University governance in the 21st century must not be global-corporate, the academic avenue to a corporate social licence, but actively decolonizing and committed to giving students the tools of critical citizenship to use as they choose for the public good