

## EDITORIAL

THE OFFICE OF *BC STUDIES* has moved from the West to the East Mall at UBC, and from a view westward into a second growth forest and beyond to a Japanese bell hanging, to a view eastward towards a Faculty of Law and a Presbyterian residence. What the journal loses in magic will be replaced by probity and rectitude. Our two new rooms, refurbished by the university, serve the journal admirably. Supported by UBC, Simon Fraser University, the University of Victoria, and the University of Northern British Columbia, as well as by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, *BC Studies* is well looked after.

This situation contrasts with the increasingly precarious position of faculties of arts in the province's universities. Years of budget reductions have taken their tolls, hitting faculties of arts with particular severity because they are less able than more applied or professional faculties to raise alternative funds. Most departments in the faculty of arts at UBC are considerably smaller now than ten years ago, yet teach as many or more undergraduates while struggling to maintain or expand graduate programmes and to meet increasingly relentless pressures for sustained research output. The bar for appointment, tenure, and promotion rises. Acute stress, burnout, and breakdown are common, especially among younger faculty. And, rightly or wrongly, the sense is pervasive that the huge labour to maintain the faculty of arts is undervalued. The press reports the latest medical discoveries; the administration vaunts the scientists. The quieter scholarship in faculties of arts passes largely unnoticed. The momentum lies with an increasingly corporatized science to which the whole university seems beholden.

Compounding the problem is the mantra of interdisciplinarity, now heard across the university. The problems of our day are alleged to transcend disciplinary perspectives, and therefore to require interdisciplinary solutions. Interdisciplinary research institutes proliferate, appointments are increasingly joint, and granting agencies and university administrators view interdisciplinary collaborations with great favour. This emphasis on interdisciplinarity ignores the fact that most "disciplines" are themselves complex loci of radically different perspectives and skills with some history of working out fruitful interactions among them. It ignores the fact that the most rewarding interdisciplinary collaborations through the years have depended on strong disciplinary formations, the source of the different perspectives and skills that, in collaboration, have worked

productively together. Interdisciplinarity without strong disciplines shades into non-disciplinarity, an increasingly amorphous medium the message of which is sameness. But the pressures of interdisciplinarity militate against strong disciplines, partly because scarce funds tend to be deflected into interdisciplinary institutes, partly because faculty in understaffed disciplines are drawn into collaborations that only make it more difficult to maintain core programmes.

Equally pervasive is the pressure to obtain research grants. Universities measure themselves by their ability to attract research funds. A good scholar is one who secures large research grants. But the product of scholarship is new information and ideas – new conceptualizations and understandings – for which research funds are, at best, a means. If evaluation shifts from the product to the means, and if the basic means is the research grant, then the system tends to reward those, often with sharp entrepreneurial instincts, who are particularly good at obtaining research grants. They are rarely the best scholars. Of course, scholarship is contested, open to divergent evaluations, and best appraised by those intimately familiar with it. Such familiarity is impossible across the span of a university, and therefore the system retreats to numbers: the size of research grants, the number of publications. This substitution of numbers for judgment, pervasive in large organizations, is understandable enough. In universities, however, its effects are felt particularly in faculties of arts because, characteristically, they do not generate competitive numbers. Too many good scholars in these faculties require little or no research funding. Too many of them write books; too few engage in the sort of research that can produce five or ten multi-authored papers a year. And yet the pressures to fit the model are always at hand, leading to more and lower quality publications and, often, to the acquisition of research grants that tend to turn the recipient into a manager and a writer of reports while destroying what is the most precious single support of creative scholarship in faculties of arts, uncluttered time. Those, like the editors of this journal, who are established and professorial, are relatively immune to such pressures, whereas the young feel them acutely as what they know to be the demands of scholarship and of the system pull in opposite directions.

More funds are beginning to flow into the universities, and some small fraction of them will reach their faculties of arts. There they can do much good, not by buying out faculty teaching with large research grants, but by making the many young appointments that will rebuild disciplines, reduce pressures, put time back in the system, and create the conditions in which interdisciplinary collaborations can flourish.

*The editors*