



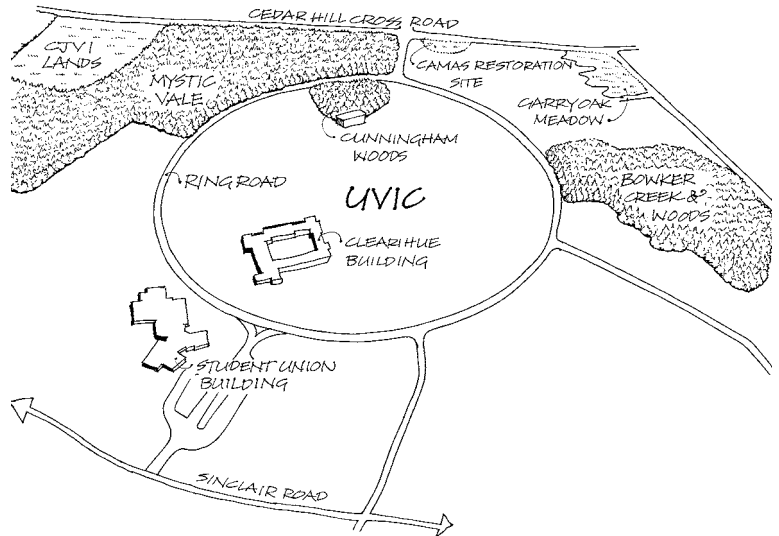
CHAPTER 1

tree-sit

THE UNIVERSITY WAS CLOSED FOR THE HOLIDAYS, but two days after Christmas, the crew from Operations showed up in the campus forest, chainsaws at the ready. By the end of the day, a large patch of the forest was down and the site cleared for a new bio-medical building. Clearcuts are nothing new in British Columbia, but of the University of Victoria's once expansive Douglas fir forest, this was the last grove left within its academic core. And weren't universities supposed to be different?

Visions in the forest

A lot of people certainly thought so. Two months earlier in the sunshine of a late autumn afternoon, some 300 students, faculty and neighbors had joined hands in a protective "ring around the woods," urging the administration to site the new building somewhere else. A hot topic that fall, the future of the woods sparked a larger public debate about the University's processes for campus planning. Why,



for example, couldn't UVic leave the woods alone and do something innovative, like put the buildings on nearby parking lots? This could even be part of a larger initiative to discourage car commuting and reduce the University's contribution to congested local streets and even to global climate change. Maybe, such an initiative could inspire the University to take a lead role in developing a more sustainable transportation strategy for the whole region.

But the University of Victoria's plans had long been set, and these were difficult, awkward ideas. Limit cars? No, everyone was assured that there were academic priorities that had to be met and operational constraints, good reasons for the choice of site. There were no acceptable alternatives. So the holidays came to an end with a hasty cleanup of downed trees, leaving a clearcut and an upturned forest floor to greet returning students and faculty.

UVic students set up camp in a tree to block the cutting of Cunningham Woods.

Sunday night, just hours before classes were set to resume, in the cool and wet of a West Coast January night, the students struck back. It was 2AM, but the

grounds were alive as a group of Frisbee-golf players skirted the dark grounds, hitting target trees and lamp-posts as they made their nightly rounds. As they passed, another group of students worked in what was left of UVic's Cunningham Woods to hoist a banner into the swaying treetops. The banner depicted the University's motto "Challenge Minds, Change Worlds" below an ironic new slogan, "Cut Tuition, Not the Forest." Soon the slogan was refined to "Cut Fees, Not Trees." The slogan reverberated throughout the University for the rest of the spring term.



Photograph by John McKay, *Times Colonist*, January 14, 2003, D1.

The next weekend, the students struck again. Hoisting planks, climbing ropes and a small tent, an invigorated student protest launched a platform into the branches of a large old arbutus tree — UVic’s first tree-sit. A second platform appeared a few days later. For the next six months, Cunningham Woods hosted a permanent occupation in its canopy. From this perch, a rotating cadre of more than 100 students watched winter in the forest turn to spring while they protected the woods from further encroachment.

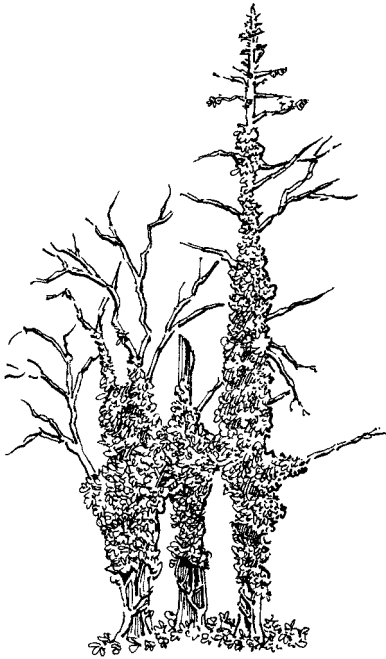
At the center of this action was Ingmar Lee, a dedicated environmental activist and student representative on the University’s Board of Governors. Lee got the call as the forest went down: “I jumped on my bike and rode up there just in time to see the feller-buncher and the grinder eating up half of what was left of the Cunningham forest,” says Lee. “There were trees lying around. Beautiful arbutus trees. Trees that people had put bird boxes in were all smashed on the ground.”¹

“People were poking through the refuse in shock,” Lee recalls. “This was after we had blockaded the University for three hours one day to make our point about the Campus Development Plan during a wider provincial protest over government cuts. They’d seen hundreds of students and faculty out there concerned about the forest, and they snuck in when all the students were on holiday and mowed down the forest. We were outraged. We live on an island that has had 80 percent of its primeval forest destroyed. All the problems that result after clearcutting are here at UVic.”

Ingmar Lee holds up a broken birdhouse found in the debris after the felling of Cunningham woods, December 2002.



Photograph by Bruce Stotesbury, *Times Colonist*, December 31, 2002, B2.



Ivy-choked trees.

“UVic’s wilderness represents the largest unprotected Douglas fir ecosystem in urban Victoria,” says Maurita Prato, another student organizer of the tree-sit. “This wilderness area has ecological significance for the entire Capital Region and should be preserved for all time.”²

Protests like this have been happening in one form or another, in one place or another, for a very long time. It is an old story: ordinary citizens who have little power challenging big businesses and big governments that have a lot. And challenging them directly, with their bodies as well as their voices, bearing witness and being present. In Cunningham Woods, it was also about people protecting *place* and, in this case, not just any place, but the University. Of all society’s institutions, students argued that the University had a duty to demonstrate wisdom in place. Indeed, many thought that, were the University more open to a collective vision, it could actually take a much needed lead in helping society address larger, but related, issues such as global warming and deforestation.

Outlaws and intellectuals

Students calling for a more responsive university is not a new thing, nor is their vision of a university working in the service of social justice. The university has often hosted struggles for social change as Alejandro Rojas knows firsthand. Rojas is a professor at the much larger University of British Columbia (UBC) across the Strait of Georgia that separates UVic from the mainland. In 1973 he was president of Chile’s National Union of Students at a time of intense national reform under then-president, Salvador Allende. Under Allende, Chile’s universities were incubators for political innovation as the government sought to make higher education accessible to all of Chile’s social classes and to give students, faculty and staff the right to participate in the mechanisms of university governance.

“Chile was in the midst of radical change, radical redistribution of wealth, agrarian reform, nationalization of large companies that used to belong to foreign

monopolies and nationalization of natural resources,” explains Rojas.³ At the end of the 1960s, Chile’s universities were transforming their curricula and pedagogical approaches to address these broader social changes: “Universities were reacting to a situation in which the cultural identity of Latin America was being eroded and dismantled by the massive expansion of American culture.”

“So our idea was that the university had to contribute to creating national dignity and sovereignty,” remembers Rojas. “Our plans of study, our curricula and our research agenda should reflect mostly the demands of how to make the country a sovereign nation. We could enhance and defend what made us unique in the world rather than championing the wagon of worldwide homogenization.” Every summer thousands of students were mobilized to volunteer with national literacy campaigns, teaching Chile’s peasant population to read and write. In turn, the peasants instructed the students, sharing with them their direct knowledge and different understandings that come from working the land.

On September 11, 1973, the popular movement collapsed when Salvador Allende was assassinated, and General Augusto Pinochet took power in a coup d’état. Under the ensuing military dictatorship, thousands of people were murdered or forced into hiding to escape the purge. Rojas was blacklisted along with other political leaders on the Left, in trade unions, student groups and peasant associations. Political parties that did not support the coup were banned, as was the Chilean National Union of Students. “There was,” says Rojas, “a price attached to our heads, alive or dead. Suddenly we found ourselves living underground, trying to secure a life somehow. I lived underground for about half a year, and then I was placed in an embassy as a political refugee and finally left for Europe. Many of my people were jailed and sent to concentration camps, and many of them executed. Democratically elected university chancellors were sent to concentration camps.”

The allure of the ivory tower

Around the world, universities have long been centers for political discourse and catalysts for political action. Students were instrumental in the 1848 revolutions

in Germany and Austria. In 1911 Chinese students led the struggle to overthrow the Manchu dynasty and later played a role in bringing Mao Zedong to power in 1949. In Japan student demonstrations in 1960 forced the resignation of the Kishi government. Student activism was omnipresent in the nationalist movements of former colonial nations such as India and Indonesia.⁴

Throughout the 1960s, countries around the world — from the United States to Vietnam, Britain to Brazil, Turkey to Canada — experienced an explosive student movement against nuclear armament, racial segregation, suppression of women's rights, environmental degradation, and war. In India, in 1964, over 700 demonstrations rocked the university system. Over 100 of the demonstrations turned violent.⁵ In Paris, in May 1968, a student demonstration led to the now-famous general strike and national uprising. These were the famous “days of the barricades.” Students called for a lecture hall to be made permanently available for political discourse, and their manifesto demanded an “outright rejection of the capitalist technocratic university.”⁶

Throughout the world, opposition to the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s was played out on dozens of campuses. At UBC Jerry Rubin, the radical American Yippie, addressed a protest rally (to which Rubin had brought a pig to symbolize repressive authority) then led a march that occupied the University Faculty Club. On the other side of the city of Vancouver, the founding in 1965 of Simon Fraser University created what quickly became a major hub of college activism in Western Canada.⁷ Demonstrations were common as students sought to protect outspoken faculty, effectively stalling curriculum development in the University's early years. Through occupations and sit-ins, students and faculty propelled the administration into one initiative after another, erecting a whole faculty of interdisciplinary studies, creating one of the country's first institutional daycare centers, and much more.⁸ In 1967 in the capital city of Victoria, a week-long occupation took place in the University of Victoria's administration building, as students unsuccessfully tried to reverse the University's termination of the contracts of three popular professors.⁹

Since the '70s, universities have been relatively quiet. But things may be beginning to change again as a new movement takes hold, a “sustainable campuses” movement. Like its predecessors, this movement is concerned about the most pressing issues of our time. But it also has a new role for the university — to be not just a site for making protests, but a place for creating precedents. This is

The protest encircled the globe

One truly amazing aspect of May '68 was the way the protest encircled the globe: Saturday May 11, 50,000 students and workers marched on Bonn, and 3,000 protesters in Rome; on May 14, students occupied the University of Milan; a sit-in at the University of Miami on May 15; scuffles at a college in Florence on May 16; a red flag flew for three hours at the University of Madrid on the 17th; and the same day, 200 black students occupied the administration buildings of Dower University; on May 18, protests flared up in Rome, and more in Madrid where barricades and clashes with the police occurred; on May 19, students in Berkeley were arrested; a student protest in New York; an attack on an ROTC center in Baltimore — the old world seemed to be on the ropes. On May 20, Brooklyn University was occupied by blacks, and occupations took place the next day at the University of West Berlin. On May 22, police broke through barricades at Columbia University. The University of Frankfurt and the University of Santiago were occupied on May 24. Protests in Vancouver and London in front of the French Embassy on May 25. On Monday May 27, university and high school students went on strike in Dakar On May 30, students in Munich protested, as did students in Vienna the next day. On June 1, protests spread to Denmark and Buenos Aires In Brazil, 16,000 students went on strike on June 6, followed by a large protest march in Geneva for democratization of the university. Even in Turkey, 20,000 students occupied the universities in Ankara and other cities. The chronology just keeps going as occupations, protests, scandals and barricades continued throughout the summer in Tokyo, Osaka, Zurich, Rio, Rome, Montevideo, Bangkok, Dusseldorf, Mexico City, Saigon, Cochabamba, La Paz, South Africa, Indonesia, Chicago, Venice, Montreal, Auckland.

— Len Bracken, *Guy Debord: Revolutionary: A Critical Biography*. Los Angeles, CA: Feral House, 1997, pp. 174–175. Available at <<http://www.neravt.com/left/may1968.htm>>.

They hated their universities for teaching it

1968 was, among other things, a moral revolt — it was a revolt of passion in the interests of humanity [against] what [protestors] perceived to be their alienation from dominant social values, from the values of the power elites, the Establishment, the “It.” Why had the typically quiet 1950s suddenly burst forth with the student protest movement of the 1960s? A partial list would have to include: big business, capitalist technocracy and the rule by experts, the Vietnam War, the effects of a media-manipulated society and in general, all authority The year of the barricades served as a symbol of everything an entire generation of young people detested about the generation of their parents They hated the late 20th century hypocrisy of material, bourgeois, liberal, consumerist Western society They hated their universities for teaching it These students wanted their voices to be heard — they were not content to let their hearts and minds be controlled by [an] alien other So, these students marched, demonstrated, they occupied administration buildings across Europe and North America.

— Steven Kreis, “1968: The Year of the Barricades,” *The History Guide: Lectures on Twentieth Century Europe*, Boca Raton and Davie, FL: Florida Atlantic University, 2000. Available at <http://www.historyguide.org/europe/lecture15.html>

Rojas’s new mission. Though he left Chile, he did not lose his passion for social change, and he did not leave the university. Only today he has channeled it in a new direction, the burgeoning movement for campus sustainability. He is now a professor of agricultural science at the University of British Columbia. UBC is a big place, covering 1,000 acres (400 hectares) of land at the Vancouver campus where it is home to some 43,000 students and over 10,000 faculty and staff.¹⁰ As UBC develops its campus, Rojas’s students draw on community-based techniques like participatory action research to try to make its development an explicitly social, not just institutional, endeavor. Their special focus is the sustainability of the University’s food systems.

The Planet and the U

Universities have long been special places, places of both innovation and resistance. From the “protestant” monk to the heretical stargazer, academics have been at the center of historical change in the West for the past millennium. But the challenges facing universities in the new millennium are arguably the greatest ones yet. “Material growth has shot up to

almost inconceivable levels,” says Rojas, “accompanied by unconscionable levels of hunger and poverty.” Decades ago, the question of how to redistribute the wealth of society was at the center of Rojas’s world in Chile. Today Rojas is as concerned about ecological wealth as social justice. “The cake is bigger than ever,” says Rojas, “and it is redistributed more unfairly than ever But the cake is built from bad recipes”

For decades the environmental movement has worked to halt the momentum of planetary breakdown, and it has not succeeded. Instead, the breakdown has become systemic, scattered losses of individual species evolving into the wholesale decline in biodiversity, dirty air in industrial cities mushrooming into global climate change, inequities between developed and developing countries becoming entrenched as a globalized model of economic unsustainability. This book need not debate the severity of these problems — they are obvious.

Living beyond our means

Nearly two thirds of the services provided by nature to humankind are found to be in decline worldwide. In effect, the benefits reaped from our engineering of the planet have been achieved by running down natural capital assets.

In many cases, it is literally a matter of living on borrowed time. By using up supplies of fresh groundwater faster than they can be recharged, for example, we are depleting assets at the expense of our children. The cost is already being felt, but often by people far away from those enjoying the benefits of natural services. Shrimp on the dinner plates of Europeans may well have started life in a South Asian pond built in place of mangrove swamps — weakening a natural barrier to the sea and making coastal communities more vulnerable.

Unless we acknowledge the debt and prevent it from growing, we place in jeopardy the dreams of citizens everywhere to rid the world of hunger, extreme poverty, and avoidable disease — as well as increasing the risk of sudden changes to the planet’s life support systems from which even the wealthiest may not be shielded.

We also move into a world in which the variety of life becomes ever more limited. The simpler, more uniform landscapes created by human activity have put thousands of species under threat of extinction, affecting both the resilience of natural services and less tangible spiritual or cultural values.

— Board of Directors for the 2005 United Nations Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, *Living Beyond Our Means — Natural Assets and Human Well-being: Statement from the Board*. The Assessment spanned four years and included 1,360 experts worldwide. New York: United Nations, 2005, p. 2.

We are certainly near — some would say past — the “tipping point,” where self-reinforcing ecological decline is irreversible.¹¹ The demands today are even greater, and the issues even more urgent than those that inspired such campus activism 40 years ago. The focus of this book is a prospective one — how to remake a world whose survival is at stake — and how we might do so quickly.

In getting to this situation, our political and economic institutions have clearly failed us. Past actions have not halted, or even slowed, the trajectory of global ecological and social decline. Indeed, the pace has picked up. New approaches are needed. This book is about making more visible an incredibly important institution that, surprisingly, remains invisible. In so doing, it starts from a simple, but logical, realization: we cannot have a sustainable world where universities promote unsustainability. But neither can we change the university without also changing the world; the two are entwined. This realization is at the heart of this book, and it leads to an intriguing question: Which comes first. Yet despite this inextricable linkage, few people stop to ponder the relationship between the actions of the university and the trajectory of planetary change. A gap exists between what we learn for tomorrow and what tomorrow needs from us today. This situation is all the more significant when one considers how, in the past half-century, a massive “higher education industry” has emerged without anyone seeming to notice. Even though its scale and influence is arguably unmatched by any other industry on the planet, social critics pay it almost no heed, especially in comparison with the attention put on other sectors such as transportation and health.

Changing the world by creating a sustainable university is admittedly a strange idea, as if a university here or there could make much difference to these huge global problems, especially where only a scattered handful of people yet see its potential. Quite the contrary, the time has come round again for the university to take its place as a vehicle of social change. Indeed, one might ask how we could have overlooked it for so long. The possibilities for universities are enormous, and an increasing number of people believe that a collective responsibility exists to make them manifest. As forest activist Ingmar Lee notes, “UVic is one of the

biggest consumers of forest products on Vancouver Island, a free-thinking university buying into the destruction of our magnificent forests. If we convert its actions in B.C., we can send our models to Alberta, Saskatchewan, right across Canada and around the world. That is what universities are for. We have to learn to overcome the forces of destruction, and we have to do it right, right here.”

To appreciate what is possible, one must first take time to reflect on what the university *is*. Most importantly, the university is unique, and in many ways. For example, universities are rooted in local places, yet are well networked globally. With their departments of history and schools of planning, they are actively connected to the past but also shape the future. In space and time, they transcend boundaries. With their senior professors and junior students, they also connect society’s elders with its youth. With their interdisciplinary studies and many

Considering place

When we fail to consider places as products of human decisions, we accept their existence as noncontroversial or inevitable, like the falling of rain or the fact of the sunrise. Moreover, when we accept the existence of places as unproblematic — places such as the farm, the bank, the landfill, the strip mall, the gated community and the new car lot — we also become complicit in the political processes, however problematic, that stewarded these places into being and that continue to legitimize them. Thus places produce and teach particular ways of thinking about and being in the world. They tell us the way things are, even when they operate pedagogically beneath a conscious level.

— David A. Gruenewald, “Foundations of Place: A Multidisciplinary Framework for Place-Conscious Education”, *American Educational Research Journal*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2003, p. 627.

Pedagogue of place.
Professor Alejandro Rojas
in the UBC Gardens.



Photograph by Elena Orrego, 2004

learned associations, they connect across intellectual and geographic boundaries and are thus participants across *space*. In this world, universities provide a relatively open public space. But they are also specific *places*.

Comparing notes.

During Pedestrian Sundays at the large, open-air Kensington Market in downtown Toronto, cars are kept out, and the community emerges to mix on the street. Here Jane Jacobs chats with another local.

The crisis of sustainability is at root a crisis of losing these places, that is, physical territories that are also emanations of local powers — local habitats, local neighborhoods, local cultures, local forests and fisheries, and rural communities. These individual losses add up to a threat of losing our collective place, the planet. Reinvigorating local places may just be the key to sustaining our global future. “Think globally, act locally” was the mantra decades ago, but we never learned how. It is time to do so, and for that we must go back to school. When we do, there are plenty of teachers to turn to.



Photograph by Robert B. Davis, 2005.

How dark is the age ahead?

One such teacher is Jane Jacobs. To those concerned about the future of civilized and sustainable cities, Jacobs is an icon. As a *New Yorker* and associate editor of *Architectural Forum* in the 1950s, Jacobs was struck by the lifeless nature of the conventional developments she was assigned to cover. By the 1960s, she was an active opponent of them, protesting the demolition of slum neighborhoods and the onslaught of cars and freeways. Instead, Jacobs proposed bottom-up, mixed-use approaches to city redevelopment. In 1961 she wrote the classic study *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.¹² In 1968 she left the United States and took up residence in Toronto, Canada, where she continued her activism and her

writing. Her books demonstrate a commitment to livable and vital cities, to an understanding of the role of cities in creating social wealth, and to resident citizens being allowed to create their cities through open dialogue and action. In 2004, then in her late eighties, she penned a dire warning about our collective future, *Dark Age Ahead*.

Dark Age Ahead is a product of her rich experience, and its message is unsettling. We are, she says, losing our cultural memory, and without this memory, societies cannot survive. From the fall of the Roman Empire to Greenwich Village, from neighborhoods lost to freeways to families lost to political indifference, she asks a basic question about social adaptation: What dooms losers?¹³ Jacobs suggests that several factors are presently at work that could well doom the West, factors that operate at a more fundamental level even than “racism, profligate environmental destruction, crime, voters’ distrust of politicians and thus low voter turnout, and the enlarging gulf between rich and poor along with attrition of the middle class.”¹⁴ One of the most significant factors is the decline of higher education.

Jacobs’s analysis of this decline informs our own. Harkening back to the Depression of the 1930s, Jacobs attributes to that period the Western world’s obsession ever since with jobs. One effect of this was to displace the collective commitment to a social education with the individualized quest for a marketable “credential:”

It has been truly said that the past lives on in the present. This is true of credentialism’s origins. It emerged partly out of America’s humiliation when the Soviet Union, with its Sputnik, had beaten America into space, and partly from the still-fresh ideas of the Depression. Credentialism emerged, mostly in California at first, in the late 1950s, when it dawned upon university administrators there that modern economic development, whether in the conquest of space or any other field, depended on a population’s funds of knowledge It followed that development’s most cultural valuable product — jobs — also depended on knowledge.¹⁵

Credentialism is linked to the other underlying causes that Jacobs identifies as leading to a new Dark Age — the erosion of community, the distortion of science, the centralization of government power and the loss of professional integrity. In her quest for a revitalized cultural memory, Jacobs hopes to address these in a future where “responsible government encourages the corrective practices exerted by democracy, which in their turn strengthen good government and responsible citizenship.”¹⁶

This book is dedicated to the strengthening of such responsible citizenship. While it grew initially from our story at the University of Victoria on Canada’s West Coast, it led us to encounter a broader movement that is growing in response to similar problems in other universities. Our story is thus a broad one; it is shared with other places throughout the world. Our perspective is limited, however, looking more at environmental than explicitly social issues, and at northern rather than southern countries. Different universities in different places will have other projects to focus on. But what we have learned through our experiences will, we believe, inform and mesh well with related investigations in other places. Our hope is to provide the emerging movement with a new awareness of the university — its dramatic potential to help create a sustainable world and its many strategies for doing so. We hope, as well, that it will contribute to a broad debate about the university — its character and its mission, its past and its future — at a time when the university is being channeled by social forces that are anything but advantageous to emerging generations of students and citizens.

This book is not a survey of everything that is being done in the campus sustainability movement worldwide. After all, our story starts in British Columbia, and B.C. is unique. A haven of environmental activism, it is home to some of the world’s grandest — and most endangered — forests, such as the world-renowned Clayoquot Sound and Great Bear Rainforest. Greenpeace started here. David Suzuki lives here. Environmentalism is part of the culture. Yet the barriers to implementing a new vision here are comparable to hundreds of universities across the globe. Each has its special character, and particular issues to address, but all are

invisibly networked by the long-shared history of the university. And all face a common set of obstacles to realizing a future for the university that must be radically more innovative, and more sustainable, than anything in its past.

Through writing this book, we have come to realize just how significant this new movement could be. For the story of the sustainable university is not just about more efficient light bulbs and fewer parking lots. Certainly, it is about numerous techniques of sustainability, and we will look at some of these. But it is also about institutional power and powerful mindsets that set the agenda for our modern world, and do so out of sight and out of mind. In the course of this story, we reconsider many important cultural and academic debates, including those of interest to today's social theorists. In these discussions, we suggest the need for broad engagement of such people. Out of their activity should come not just *passive*, but *active*, theory. Substantively, the book argues for a critical but constructive approach to social change in this age after modernism, an approach that can develop sustainability through what we call a more territorial strategy. The story we tell is a critical one, but it is not ultimately about us-versus-them as much as it is about common obstacles and collective opportunities. Despite the sometimes harshness of our judgments, this book celebrates the university for what it uniquely is — a place where society can think differently, act differently, and can do so right where its citizens live.

An actor, invisible, at center stage

The university is a primary institution of postindustrial society. It is one of the chief innovative forces of the society, one of the chief determinants of social opportunity and social stratification and a focus of intellectual and cultural life. Its missions take on a new urgency and importance. In 1967 Daniel Bell wrote: "If the business firm was the key institution of the past one hundred years, because of its role in organizing production for the mass creation of products, the university will become the central institution of the next one hundred years because of its role as the new source of innovation and knowledge." The emergence of the postindustrial society moved the university's mission to centre stage.

— George Fallis, "The Mission of the University." Submission to the Rae Commission, in, *Postsecondary Review: Higher Expectations for Higher Education*, Toronto: Government of Ontario, October 2004, p. 21.

In the next section, we will reconsider the university, its general history and functions and its role in the specific places where it resides. We will then explore some crucial areas where universities can reform their practices. What we have chosen to look at — transportation, urban development and land use — are only examples of a much larger universe of possibilities. But these examples are ones that we have encountered at our university, and they are of wide concern in the emerging movement. They are also central to so many unsustainable practices today, and they are ripe with transformative possibilities. Lastly, we turn to the most difficult of all challenges to our modern institutions — who makes the decisions that direct the university and how we might make them better. From these pages, we hope to stimulate a dialogue long missing in our hesitant attempts to shift the trajectory of planetary erosion and cultural loss. Above all, we hope to propel a movement whose time has come, a movement that can reinvent the world, one university at a time.