

## Ioan Davies. Memorial talk 2005

Welcome to this fifth memorial lecture in honour of Ioan Davies, whose memory I am honoured to celebrate with you. He was my dissertation supervisor, mentor, colleague, and friend, and he shared generously with me as with many other students his intellectual enthusiasms, his politics, and his beloved family. In presenting this remembrance I follow in the legendary footsteps of my esteemed teacher and colleague Ato Sekyi-Otu, who has previously offered such eloquent comments on Ioan's life and work. These teachers taught me the lasting value of mentorship, which begins in the classroom but reaches outwards and shapes our continuing relationships with ideas and the worlds of others.

As editor of *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, I just edited an article by Gary Genosko and Kristy Marcellus which revisits the magazine *Border/lines*. This was, for those of you too young or too distant to remember, an alternative magazine launched in Toronto in 1984 that published articles, polemics, reviews and creative interventions in the arena of culture and politics. Ioan Davies was a central figure in the founding and editing of this magazine. Toronto's cultural community was becoming an engaged political arena generating diverse publications and other projects. Ioan's inspiration was to respect and cooperate with the generative resources of these others while giving generously of his own personal, intellectual and institutional resources. This is not as easy as it sounds, but it was crucial to how Ioan understood such projects. Genosko and Marcellus write:

The birth of the magazine - *Border/lines: Cultures/Contexts/Canadas* - with its subtitle of pluralist signifiers, its multiple constituencies and crossings, while obviously not the Eternal Return, founded a site for the practice of

cultural studies in Canada in a milieu that appeared to be rich and promising. B/I was the antidote to the Journal of Canadian Culture [a project from the U.S. offices of the Popular Culture Association] but much more importantly, it engineered, to borrow one of Davies's favorite terms, bridges "between academia and the wider public on a whole range of cultural issues." (Davies 1994: 4).

Borders, bridges, publics: these words echo Ioan's retrospective published in border/lines ten years after its first issue. Genosko and Marcellus revisit this story with a different purpose; they suggest that the magazine's reviews of other journals, in Canada and abroad, often functioned as memorials to dead magazines written by former contributors trying to make sense of the intellectual, personal and material circumstances surrounding the life and demise of the folded periodical. In focusing on relations between academic thought, collective affinity, and the material conditions of publishing, Genosko and Marcellus suggest, border/lines anticipated, and perhaps even willed, the story of its own ending.

Whether academic cultural projects in Canada share a will to their own demise is beyond the scope of these remarks. But Ioan's emphasis on the important bonds between thinkers and thoughts and the social fabric of their lives is worth recalling. This history of a terminated magazine fascinated by termination also reminds us of Ioan's unique engagement in the everyday activities and personal geographies of activist projects like this one, built by people who seek not just a movement but also a creative project, who share intellectual and creative affinities and who gather in various kitchens to work together in the unprofitable pursuit of radical thought. Is there is a way to remember Ioan's perspicacity, animation and

commitment to such creativity in the context of our own brave new world, without simply sounding nostalgic for the echoes of a time now past?

Genosko and Marcellus say they set out to excavate this history because they are “interested in the active forces of affirmation and constitution that existed between the university... and non-mainstream worlds of magazines and cultural practitioners.” With this memorial we also have an opportunity to reflect on the “active forces of affirmation and constitution” that Ioan so persuasively pursued. In addition to books Ioan produced magazine articles, conferences, audio interviews with authors and artists, columns and polemics for publications as diverse as *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, *Canadian Forum*, the family *Haggadah*, and the *YUFA* newsletter (of which the last two survive). What characterized his work, in addition to its plenitude and scope, is what we might call excess. As sociology it drew on literature and art, travel and philosophy, story-telling and the politics of friendship. It was more literate and expressive than it needed to be. It journeyed farther than it needed to succeed in its particular context. Its affirmations of enchantment often outweighed its urgent evocation of critique. Davies enticed his readers through love of writing, unabashed love of the life of the intellectual, and gentle advocacy of bridge-building and activism. He invited readers and students to acknowledge that an intellectual experience worth having was always larger, more speculative, more risky and more pleasurable than what was absolutely required.

The production of texts has changed, along with the social relations that surround them. While Ioan plunged enthusiastically into websites and email, his passionate negotiation of words, politics and biographies seems remote from the expectations and practices of research today. Technically it

is far easier to publish or disseminate writing now; no texts to re-type, no columns to cut and paste, no need to work together in anyone's kitchen. If a thousand flowers bloom as a consequence of these improvements, they mainly occupy electronic rather than physical space. Indeed the flower/student ratio on the York campus is grievously depressed. Our institution's obsession with efficiency is occurring at the expense of what Genosko and Marcellus call "a phenomenological shift in the lifeworld of production."

In memory of Ioan, let us remember that words can do much more than they have to; that writing is about much more than words; that scholarship can produce much more than useful information; that the bridges we seek can build much more than data bases and research accounting; and that communities of scholars can generate energies, connections and hopes for change that may be much, much more than our present institutions want or need. This is, I believe, a lesson in love.