

Halls of academe, bureaucracy and alienation

Berkeley and U of A show disturbing similarities

By BOB EGGERS

One of the enriching attributes of man is that he is a social being. He is unique in his ability to communicate. The power is at his command to relate his whole being to others.

Man is a strange creature, though. In order to fully understand others, he feels a need to control and predict them. Bureaucracy is a devastating weapon for this purpose. By freezing all communication into rigid channels, a bureaucratic process insures predictability. Color and warmth are sacrificed to the Triune God—Predictability, Power, and Efficiency.

The term "bureaucracy" describes far more than the mundane business world. Consider, for example, just how much The Church does to channel communication between Man and God, and vice versa. The rituals and procedures are so thickly frozen that one can conclude that God now wears a gray-flannel suit.

The abstract becomes palpable in a brief, first-impression look at this campus. Arriving here from a larger university in Berkeley, I have become very interested in the similarities and differences. Meaningful communication is easier here than at Berkeley. Students, professors, and administrators, all are much less secretive and withdrawn. I doubt if students here are used to waiting two or more hours to talk briefly with bored teaching assistants. Students here can speak with professors more often than once every quarter.

This campus scene has disturbing similarities to the icy grist mill at Berkeley, however. Administrators should plead insanity in the case of the U of A registration system. It is simply a nightmare. It could be called a Fresca welcome—chilling, freezing, icy, biting, etc. Starting with a campus cop giving orders through a bullhorn, registra-

tion ends "not with a bang, but a whimper."

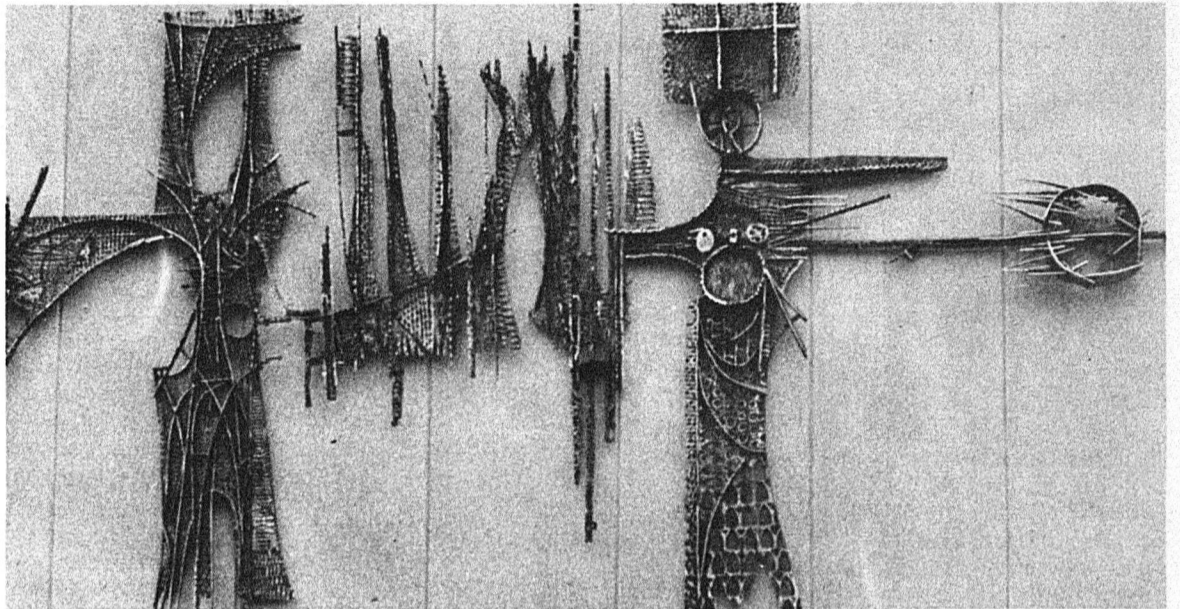
After six hours of bowing and scraping to man's progress in computer science, students can depart. They have been victimized by efficiency. There is no humanity—just numbers and punch cards.

There is a problem here at U of A—one that all university bureaucracies must realize. There is a persistent tendency for such systems to confuse "means" with "ends." A university is not a power hierarchy, a cluster of structures, and a system. It is the phenomenon of an exchange of sophisticated ideas and examples. Power and efficiency are means to facilitate this phenomenon. When power and efficiency become ends, there is no university—just another mundane campus.

The university phenomenon obviously needs fluid lines of communication. There must be a constant struggle to open, preserve, and refresh new and creative streams of communication. When social communication stiffens and breaks down, social disasters usually follow. This can be seen in every social setting from marriage to international diplomacy. The strife of the Berkeley campus is one specific example.

Students at this university have much opportunity to work with professors and administrators. The student groups and administrative groups should actively encourage communication with each other. It would be trivial to say DO IT . . . OR ELSE. Perhaps violence would never start here anyway. The point is that violence is not the greatest tragedy. Violence is only an indication of a deeper problem. It is a good indication that the university phenomenon is near death. The great and noble Berkeley phenomenon is meeting such a fate.

It is a real tragedy when the social nature of man must confine itself behind ivy-covered walls of orthodoxy.



NO OTHER CAMPUS HAS ONE OF THESE

. . . so why did we get stuck with it?

background

In the whirlwind life of the university campus, students sometimes tend to lose sight of the fact that the U of A is only one in a huge network of universities all over the world.

In the narrow confines of a single campus, one often wonders about other places—if they are substantially different and how—or if they are the same.

By way of comparison, we are running the following two articles. The first compares the controversial Berkeley campus with the U of A and the second deals with a British university.

Both are written by students who attended these universities and saw in them definite areas of contrast with our campus.

British campus a place for deep contemplative thinking

One beneficial aspect of going through university is its effect as a finishing school. The officials play this feature down in favour of a greater understanding and/or adaptation to the world. But the fact remains that the parents of the typical kid from Innisfree hope that he will return unto them subtly changed, more polished somehow, more je ne sais quoi mais plein de savoir faire.

Ambitious students go one step farther. They travel to the sources of our culture: they follow Stein and Hemingway to the cafes in Montparnasse; they survey the fields that van Gogh painted; they peer past the sharp iron in Berlin. An alternative to this wanderlust lies in a rush to Greece or its travel equivalent, the acid trip. Needless to say these ambitious students miss Parnassus.

The impetus to go off to Europe gathers in a mass of preconceptions, and these necessarily condition the first impressions of the country when one finally arrives. I went to England for two years conditioned by literature of the traditional sort, so I looked for daffodils and Stratford-atte-Bowe and the other—the Avon one. The England that faced me I could have anticipated, but I hadn't considered the concentration of people, the heavy industry, the thick and many-layered communications blanket, until these things actually faced me. It all called for waking up a great deal and quickly. I resented this a little but not for long: there is too much that is real and good going on. The carapace of status and prejudice cracks every now and then, when young men are desperate and brave and lucky enough. Sometimes the

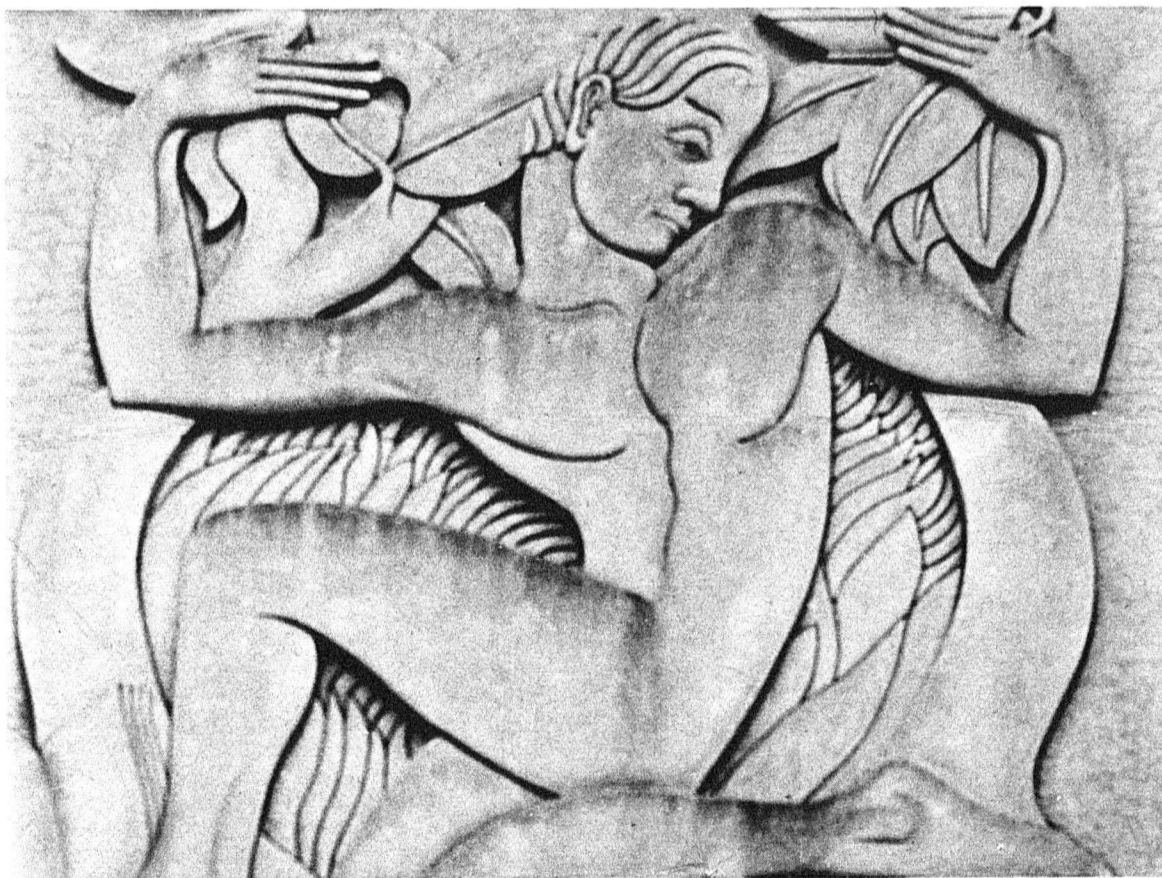
cracks glue up again and sometimes they manage to stay open to let new elements dominate.

These are the amazingly various appearances and conditions and accents and attitudes which survive and move even under the crust. And by these, the country is kept breathing and going. Going where? The British have had their share of idealists of all colours.

All this life, however, didn't seem to hit the university I attended. This school was small and just too far from London to draw on the city's life but not far enough to be sufficiently emancipated. The nearness of the great universities had dominated the founders' concepts of what a university should be and how it should be organized, so that imitation of them prevailed. There were groups within this university that moved, and times when the whole institution lived. But most days it was a quiet place.

This was good for thinking, not just automatic arranging and planning what one can do and what one can get away with left undone, but the contemplative kind that is deep and peaceful. In contrast people here seem to be occupied with more immediate and specific problems of their work. They are adequately and evenly, richly rewarded at the U of A, which is why a goodly number of foreign students reverse the process and spend a few years here.

Of the travellers abroad, some inevitably stay and some return home, to Innisfree like our exemplary kid, or wherever else they decide home is or has become. But whether they return or not, prodigal or not, the worth of their sojourn in the far country has been largely what they themselves have made of it.



THIS IS DISTINCTLY U OF A ART

. . . early Canadian ugly on old SUB wall



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