

NOT EDITED NOT FOR PUBLICATION

REMARKS TO FALL CONVOCATION, LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY, THUNDER BAY, ONTARIO
NOVEMBER 17, 1973

Eminent Chancellor, President, Members of the Graduating Class,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Over the past couple of years I have become increasingly convinced that the most effective form of leadership, the most authentic approach to personal communication or persuasion, in short the only valid way to have an impact on other human beings in an organizational context is through the example of your daily activity and interaction. In short, by your example. That it should have taken so long to recognize this obvious truth is a source of some embarrassment to me. But my point in mentioning it here is that in trying to remain behaviourally consistent with this recognition of the superiority of the exemplary as against the exhortative mode of leadership, I have rather uniformly declined invitations to engage in the kind of pontifical exhortation in which I am currently engaged.

As a quick aside, let me throw myself upon your mercy by admitting that I really don't know why I broke with principle in the interests of a November Convocation at the Lakehead University. The diagnosis of masochism comes to mind but I've long been chary of loosely applied and poorly defined clinical labels; or a resurgence of exhibitionistic tendencies is a second clinical label that might be attached; but the only hypothesis that I'm prepared to consider with any seriousness is that it permitted me a visit to a new

university context and the opportunity to renew old friendships with a couple of former students from the University of Alberta who now distinguish your faculty. But for whatever reason, I am here and unless you are prepared to redefine exemplary leadership to include the behaviour currently underway, I am violating my own principles by engaging in this exhortation. But I haven't the strength of character to stop, so the least I can do is try to add a component of phonetic if not cognitive dignity to the few minutes that I will use to engage in this ineffectual form of communication.

Perhaps because of my cynicism as to the impact or usefulness of these remarks, I began my preparation by asking myself, "What is it that you members of this particular graduating class -- and it is of course you with whom I am primarily interested in communicating -- will recall not only about ^{Today} tonight but about your entire university experience in a month, a year, 5 years, and so on." Put another way, what is it that you will miss now that many of you are about to remove yourselves from this context? Because prior to returning to the Simon Fraser University in May of this year I had been out of the traditional university context for a year and a half, I have been asking myself the same question. Engage with me then if you will in a kind of instant nostalgia about the experiences whose successful completion we celebrate here this afternoon. Even though we all recognize that education is a process and not a product, and therefore unending and that all we truly remark by this ceremony is a benchmark in the continuing learning

process, I submit that it may be instructive and perhaps even enjoyable for all of us to think collectively for a few minutes about this period of our lives.

I can't resist beginning the exercise with an essentially silly quotation from Sam Gould, former Chancellor of the University of New York. A few years back, shortly after having left the sanctuary of the university, Gould told a national meeting of educators that the things that he missed most about university life were:

- first, "the glow of physical well-being that comes from leaping back and forth across the generation gap";
- second, "the deep sense of satisfaction at the end of a long night when all the broken window glass was swept up, the fires put out and the damage neatly totalled";
- third, "the exhilarating challenge of fighting chaos with one hand tied and the other weaponless while phrases like 'due process' and 'rights of the individual' echo about";
- fourth, "the intellectual stimulation of the daily sparkling correspondence with anonymous admirers and some not so anonymous but all united and unanimous in agreeing upon the high degree of idiocy and cowardice I have attained";
- fifth, "the surge of creativity felt each day as one prepares tomorrow's statement expressing firmness in the face of every student threat and at the same time the most stalwart defense of academic freedom and supreme faith in youth";

sixth, "the eye-watering happiness that comes of walking through the haze settling over the student lounges, where hospitality is keen and the pot is always simmering";

seventh, "the brilliant prose of student newspaper columnists and editorial writers as they skilfully improvise on 4-letter words making every verb irregular, every tense imperfect, every noun peculiarly singular and possessive, and always arriving at amazingly erotic and unlikely conjunctions";

and

eighth, "the wonderful pause in the day's occupation otherwise known as the 'children's hour' when the legal injunction has just been served and the offices are ^{once} ~~one~~ more quiet with only the debris left by passionate environmentalists to mark what has happened".

Gould concludes on a totally serious note and I'm hopeful that it can change our mood from one of total facetiousness to at least a semi-serious attitude, when he admits in conclusion that he does miss the "hitching posts of a lifetime that are now suddenly removed where in some strange and wonderful way to be tethered was at the same time to be free to move and act in the world of learning."

So given that I would that we could be having a 2-person conversation and sharing our memories, if not simultaneously, at least alternately, let me suggest for you the things that I missed during my brief separation from the university world, some of the things that I continue to miss even though I have retreated to the safety of the sanctuary that we call the university once again, and some of the things that I did not miss; or, to use a double negative, some of the things which given my present situation, I wish I were in a position to miss. All that circumlocution to say, as you have recognized, that I intend to regale you with my November 1973 conception of some aspects of the utopian university. But if the next 15 minutes are to be of any use to you at all, you must engage in the same activity as I provide the background noise and perhaps occasionally a stimulus to thought.

In a kind of "good news/bad news, but first the bad news" format, this is my statement of faith.

1. While I was away, I did not miss the awesome intolerance that prevailed and regrettably continues to prevail in the academy -- as well as in the society at large. (But recall that my attack today is on the institution I love. There are plenty of critics prepared to attack society at large on similar grounds.) Briefly, may I submit that intolerance in the university context

is particularly offensive and even obscene. Although there are admittedly important differences between the terms, this intolerance has not infrequently resulted in an arrogance that is not only repulsive, but I suggest self-destructive. Moreover, this arrogance or intolerance is not expressed exclusively in a kind of abstract pity for lesser mortals, the community, society, and world, but most destructively makes itself known and felt in the interpersonal situation. Nothing, I suggest, is more destructive of community and contradictory of the ultimate value commitments of the university.

Conversely, I really did miss and predict that you will miss, those delightfully impractical and totally endless debates in which ideas were expressed, heard, assessed, analyzed, destroyed in some instances, but always within the context of primary commitment to doing one's damndest to seeing the other fellow's point of view -- whether the subject under discussion was a relatively factual area of knowledge or one within which the parameters of truth verification have yet to be determined with any rigour, i.e., whether the subject of discussion was statistical decision theory or the I Ching.

2. The second category of bad news items, or things that I did not miss and predict that you will not miss involves some of the formal structure of the traditional university -- both in terms

of governance mode and pedagogy. Now I recognize that it is commendably the case that the Lakehead University is not rigidly traditional either in terms of its governance and curricular programming efforts, or in terms of its historical antecedents. But in an absolute sense, at least to an outsider who looks at its Calendar and a general description of its governance structures, it appears to be very much like the majority of contemporary North American universities. Do not misunderstand me, this is not altogether bad, and indeed if it were, I would need to rush on in all fairness to point out that the institution with which I am currently affiliated, for all of its reputation for experimentation and innovation, and the institution with which I was formerly involved in Lethbridge which aspired to a similar image, were equally traditional. My point, if I ever get to it, is that there are structural aspects of the formal academy that I didn't miss and would like to be in a position now to miss.

Let me point out the more offensive structural hang-ups as I see them.

Sophisticated colleagues and former students of mine have recently attacked my organizational theory naivete with a heavy artillery of new jargon that makes the confusion that is alleged to have surrounded the construction companies involved in creation of the Tower of Babel seem like a seminar in straight talk.

Given that I've extracted even a glimmer of understanding from all their verbage, it does seem to me that I fall into the category that they would claim grows out of a kind of socio-technical systems theory. Just for the sake of the completeness of this lecture, in case some of you are persevering with regard to old habits, and are taking notes, let me note that the other two categories are pure organization development theory which is essentially group process oriented and argues that intergroup relationships are the key to effective organizational development, and the class of individual based strategies best illustrated by the writing of Chris Argyris which contends that structure is unimportant and that the only impediment to organizational effectiveness is the interpersonal competence of top management. Translated with what I recognize is considerable imprecision, I understand these categories to be pointing to the old homilies which suggest that the best possible organizational structure won't work if people don't trust one another and therefore want it to work; or stated conversely, that any organizational structure, no matter how deficient in theoretical terms, can be made to work and to work well if people like and trust one another and therefore want it to work. If and when I get to my conclusion, you're going to see that I want to have my cake and eat it too, but at this point in my argument I want to only half-agree with that homily and suggest that the way we organize ourselves, the kind of governance structures we set up, the kind of pedagogical methodologies we adopt,

do have a real and measurable impact on our attainment of organizational and individual goals; and that moreover, the way that we have been accomplishing these tasks within the university are seriously deficient.

Now, let me be more specific.

1. Along with a small but vocal host of saints crying in the wilderness, I suggest that the course construct as we know it in universities is more often an impediment rather than a facilitator of effective learning. It seems to me that we have gotten so caught up in our need to package information or knowledge neatly and in unit form that we too often overlook such criteria as internal consistency, relevance to other areas of knowledge, and historical antecedents.
2. I suspect that I need only comment in passing on my second structural concern about the contemporary university since it relates to the inadequacies I have noted in the course construct approach to preparing to fulfill at least the knowledge dissemination function of the university. I refer specifically to the concept of the degree and in particular to its equation with the accumulation of credits of some sort via the completion of courses. I said at the outset that I concede the validity of there being benchmarks in the life-long process of learning that we recognize, symbolize, and perhaps mythologize by ceremonies of this kind. What I challenge here today is the manner by which we determine, identify and label those who have reached this benchmark.

3. Inextricably intertwined with the course construct and the method of degree determination, is the entire method of evaluation that still for the most part prevails in our universities. In this regard I agree with the philosopher Wolff that, "Before we can determine the role of grading in the ideal university, we must sort out the several kinds of grades and consider their relationship to the process of education". In Wolff's notion, we have allowed evaluation and ranking to become the predominant purposes of grading, while concomitantly allowing the only valid educational purpose of grading, i.e. criticism, to go virtually unnoticed. In awesome oversimplification let me suggest with Jencks and Riesman that we could if we tried make positive strides in the direction of reducing the extent to which our grading system is simply a component of the larger system of meritocratic sorting that higher education has become for North American society today. Having said this, let me prove my occasional contact with the real world by noting that I do recognize that only a "social revolution of the most far-reaching sort could free education from the twin courses of evaluation and ranking".
4. The next structural component that I didn't miss and would like to be in a position to miss within the university has also been alluded to earlier. While recognizing as sensitively as most the risks of gimmickry

and dilletantism in designing what are called multi-, cross-, or inter-disciplinary programs, it does seem to me inescapable that we have permitted ourselves to become bound by the boundaries of disciplines even when our awareness of the historical accident that produced the particular parameters that we continue to honour is nil. I am not arguing for a loose and vapid kind of "let's all get together and study something, gang" approach, but rather for a rigorous rethinking of the historical antecedents and contemporary assumptions that cause us to package knowledge in particular disciplinary ways. At the very least, such an exercise might produce a rational ordering that could be defended and make it possible for us to move into collaborative attacks with greater clarity as to the valid uniqueness of our separate disciplines.

5. This university is a bad context in which to lash out at the absurdity of what has been called the 'lock-step' approach to not only higher education but indeed all of education. As illustrated by several of its programs, at long last we are seeing the end of the period of history during which, following elitist and anti-egalitarian values, a university education has been considered a right of birth for young gentlemen -- a kind of intellectual finishing school. Again by using the jargon terms 'egalitarian' and 'elitist', I risk misunderstanding

and so hasten to add that, to put it in the vernacular, I don't believe that we all arrive in this valley of grief with the same number of marbles in our gourds. More elegantly, I do believe in genetically determined differential intellectual capacity. But, I humbly submit that is hardly the same as denying the validity of the principle of equality of opportunity. This is such a Pandora's Box that I've got to rush on to say that after a period in which I suffered from genuine delusions of grandeur, I finally matured enough to know that the university must not continue to try to be all things to all people. In my judgement, it does so at the real risk of its very survival. So I am for a delimited function for the university and unquestionably one in which it will serve a delimited segment of the population. In effect, I am endorsing in this context Sir Eric Ashby's distinction between higher education and further education. Ashby argues that everyone should have the opportunity for further education but restricts the term higher education to apply to the university context and argues that such an experience is not appropriate for everyone.

But, having qualified the several potential misconceptions, the point that I would underscore here is that I would not miss the complete absence from the university of the notion of a full-time student. No matter how often you say it in the introduction to

your Calendar, no matter how effectively you set up an entire organizational unit to service them, the part-time student still becomes the one that in the allocation of university resources you attend to on a part-time basis as well. Again to hint at a component of the dramatic conclusion with which I shall shortly regale you, I am a firm and true believer in the importance of community in all of society's organization, and certainly in the university. But I contend that the attainment of community is not dependent upon the existence of a captive population of individuals largely between the ages of 18 and 22 who agree to come away for a 3 to 4 to 5 year period of their lives and commune with senior scholars. I think real community can be attained even in a relatively transient population -- and I'm in the midst of putting that faith to the test in my current context.

Now obviously, the converse of these negative observations are the things that I do miss about the university and that I would like to see in the university where they do not exist. Let me summarize:

I would like to see attempts at education made outside the narrowly defined course construct,

I would like to see degrees determined by examinations and other as yet determined assessing devices that go well beyond simple accumulation of units of credit,

I would like to see criticism brought back into the mainstream as a rationale for grading,

I would like to see the boundaries between disciplines broken down and more problem-centered approaches attempted,

I would like to see the elimination of the distinction between part-time and full-time students.

An allegory by Sarah Cerise entitled "Lovely Old Boxes are For Lovely Old Times" neatly summarizes my feelings about the contemporary university as far as these structural considerations are concerned. It goes like this:

"Once upon a time an organism (it doesn't much matter whether you see it as a baby or a bug) lived in a lovely old box. It was fed a diverse menu ranging from steak to garbage, but primarily peanut butter. It gained both because of and in spite of its diet. Over the last decade it grew to such dimensions and proportions that it found the box confining. It was a long time before those who paid the grocery bill began to notice this growth. In 1964 the organism mumbled 'OUT'. Very few heard what it said in their concern for silencing it. Someone studied the situation. It continued to be fed and to grow, but it began to have an occasional upset tummy. Now and then it poked an appendage out tentatively, but received no real help. A tiny corner of the box was enlarged, but the shape and size were not significantly changed. Eventually an arm burst out, and not by accident a window with a shattering blow. What is this monster? Who sired it? What do we do with it? Shove it back in, lop its arms off, deplore it, starve it!

Recently the organism was handed a piece of grit. It just could not digest it. Its reaction has not been to vomit, to have a tantrum, or to explode. Instead, it came up with a rational and logical suggestions to change the shape of its box -- to make the box fit the needs of the organism it houses and to open up the sides to permit interchange with its environment.

But it won't be a box anymore.

Whatever the shape, those who favour this change hold that it would be a far more appropriate home than the old box. Lovely old boxes are for lovely old times."

It will be apparent to you by now that I could reminisce, both positively and negatively, interminably about the social institution to which I have committed my life and which I rather desperately love.

If you have been playing the instant nostalgia game with me at all, I am sure that your list this afternoon will differ from mine; and both our lists will hopefully differ considerably five years from now. The important thing is that we continue to be concerned about this amazingly varied but critically important social institution that we call the university.

The kinds of concerns I have expressed in this rather cumbersome manner are, in my judgement, important with regard to the future of not just this university but of the world-wide academy. But in the logician's sense, what I've talked about thus far are what might be termed some of the necessary conditions for the ideal university. They do not comprise what I would suggest is the sufficient or essential condition for the utopian academy. Since they constitute another set of remarks and deserve more complete development in their own right, you will forgive me for just paying lip service to the true cornerstone of my faith about universities as I conclude. I suggest to you, in short, that the ultimate test of organizational validity lies in the extent to which a particular social grouping can be shown to be providing a context in which what Maslow would call 'the good person can come into being and develop', in which through the authenticity of daily relationships and daily lives a valid sense of community can emerge. I have no argument with nor wisdom on the basis of which to improve upon the time-honoured suggestion that the purposes of the university are the acquisition and dissemination of truth and/or knowledge. These, with differences in emphasis and the style with which they are expressed, may well be the necessary goals or objectives for the university. But from my perspective, in order to be considered a genuinely valid social institution, the university of today must add to that set of necessary goals or objectives the sufficient goal or objective which is to provide a context in which individual lives can grow toward genuine community.

Hayes and March, in my favourite quotation of the decade, put it this way and, with their remarks, I conclude:

The lack of honesty, loss of dignity, and weakness of passion in the university are inseparable from the parallel imperfections of private encounters between people -- in classrooms, in bars, in offices, and in beds. The greatness of the university depends on the integrity and beauty of the private lives within it.

We have no magic for improving the quality of private life in the university. That general subject has been, after all, a major focus for philosophers, psychologists, and other missionaries for long enough to suggest that there is no simple procedure. However, we should recognize a special perversion of intellect. We in the university are often lured by the idle evil of great causes into callousness, distrust, hypocrisy, and indifference in our relations with people. We justify our private atrocities by our public virtue. That is a tragic confusion. The contributions to knowledge we make as students and teachers; the contributions to justice we make as revolutionaries -- all of these are minor beside the contributions to the quality of life we make as relatives, friends, passing acquaintances, and lovers.

We cannot ask others, for we cannot ask ourselves, to abandon entirely the comforts and excitements of saving the world in order to help reconstruct the soul of a university by rebuilding its private lives. But if we could, we would."