

(Cont'd, Experience . . .)

AN ALIENATED PROF?

Now, I had a sociology professor, who was by some peoples' terms, a radical, but who was a radical in a very interesting way.

His course was about alienation. And the basic theme of the course was that people who work basically don't like their work; that people in industrial society are doing jobs that are kind of meaningless.

Because their jobs are meaningless, because they are ridiculous, they hate themselves and hate their work; they don't have any sense of being a whole person.

I said, "What a beautiful guy to say things like that. What a very sensitive person. He's really great. He really understands what's wrong with the country. He's gonna teach me a lot."

Except for one problem. He didn't believe that alienation extended to his course.

He didn't believe that his course was work. He couldn't believe that for me, reading his 19 books on alienation was very alienating. As a result, he thought the rest of society was terrible except for his course.

You could rebel any way you wanted against the factories because they were evil. You could rebel all you wanted about the schools because they were evil. You could rebel all you wanted about politics because it was evil.

But if you rebelled against his course, you were ungrateful.

So what I found out was that many radicals or people who call themselves radicals can't be judged radicals until you see what they do with their own lives, unless you see what they do when they have real power.

Are they willing to relinquish the power? If they're not, then they're no different than anybody else.

So not only was I unhappy, but slowly I came to feel that I wasn't really very smart after all — that there were people in college who were better than me.

The people I respected were the people who could work 8, 9, 10 hours a day.

There were pre-meds in my fraternity who would go out at one o'clock in the morning.

We'd call them the Goldwyn-Smith Boys," because they'd go to this building called Goldwyn-Smith Building in ten below zero weather with these big clodhoppers on at one o'clock in the morning to study, after having studied all day.

I mean, they were just very serious guys. Like it's late at night and you say "Where you going?", and they would say "I'm going to study." And they would trudge off in the middle of the night to find this old building.

And I remember not just feeling that it's O.K. for them, but feeling very much like "Why can't I be like them? Why can't I have that concern for knowledge?"

Well, I got out of college, graduated, I think as a mutual favour. They wanted me out and I wanted to be out and when it came down to some last minute credits, they gave me some government credits toward my biology 12 major, we were all happy and I left.

My basic conclusion about college was that it's a pretty good place, but it just

wasn't for me. And I remember I left Cornell the day after my last final — I didn't go to graduation; I literally left Ithaca three minutes after I put down that pen. I shut my eyes and drove straight to New York, didn't wanna come back and a very funny thing happened the next year.

GOOD LIFE AT BERKLEY?

The funny thing that happened the next year was a thing called "Berkley."

Now thousands of students at Berkley went around protesting on the issue of free speech. But besides raising the issue of free speech,

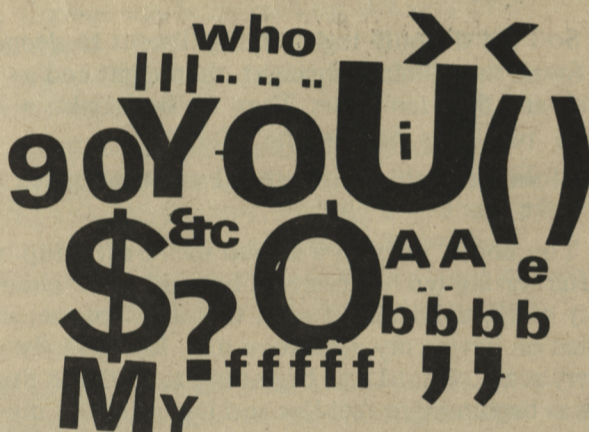
they began to talk about something called the multi-versity.

What they mean by multi-versity is me talking to you without knowing you, me talking through this microphone to hundreds of people, not one to one, not as a group, but as mass education, mass indoctrination.

The students began to say "Maybe" — they didn't say it to me but I knew they meant it... "Maybe Ithaca wasn't your fault. Maybe it's because that place stinks. Maybe that place wasn't built for human beings. Maybe you weren't the only guy sleeping. Maybe you weren't the only guy that hated that work. Maybe you weren't the only guy who wanted to leave in his freshman year but stayed three more years because the world needs that "piece of paper" as we are so often told.

Maybe we can't change things right away but at least what Berkley did for me was for the first time say to me, "You're a person and you count and an institution that makes you feel like shit, that is the bad institution for you."

That changed a whole lot of my feelings, about myself and the society and I began to feel a lot of different things from there. I began to think maybe it wasn't just the university that didn't care about me. Maybe I could look around and see other things.



For years we have been telling black people that all they had to do was get integrated into our good world because we had the good life. But all of a sudden some of us discovered that the good life wasn't as good as we thought it was.

Now what I want to talk about to finish up is college as an extension of the kind of life that it's preparing you for. College in many ways is a very bad place. But it's a very logical place. And it's always bad things that make sense.

I remember being told by a teacher once, "You're doing very good work, keep it up, keep it up."

Keep what up? Sitting at that desk for three hours — you know, sitting in a system of reward and punishment. Of course, there's the sympathetic principal who comes home to your parents and says, "Joan is a very promising student. But she just can't seem to apply herself. She just has no span of attention. Why don't you work with her?"

And so having been given that reinforcement, the parent begins to say, "Joan, why are you such a discipline problem? Why can't you be a good girl like all the other girls?" So Joan begins to feel that there is a priority being placed on being a good girl. And we see how the definition of a good girl is set-up.

'GOOD' MEANS 'OBEDIENCE'

A good girl is a quiet girl. A good girl is one who does the assignment.

I remember in third grade, writing a paper on Balboa. Why did I do it? Because that teacher was going to put it up on the wall. I did one on Balboa, one on DaGamma and one on Cabatha DeVaca. Now if you were to ask me who Balboa is, who De Gamma is or who Cabatha DeVaca is, I couldn't tell you.

But I can tell you that all three of them were put up on the wall and that's why I wrote them. I didn't write them because I cared about those three names, in fact, Cabatha DeVaca could have discovered Balboa for all I know.

The main thing is that I wasn't writing these things because I cared about these guys. I was writing because a whole system of rewards and punishment had been set up. My job was to get that thing on the board. And it's interesting to know, that the teacher place it up so high on the board that you couldn't read it even if you wanted to. This makes it very clear why its up there. It's not up there to be read.

So we can talk about what it's like to work in a school which produces people who do things because it is important to do them, but because the more paper you have on the wall the better it looks, no matter what's on them.

Now, isn't this the same thing as working in a factory which produces televisions that are made not to work in about two or three years, even though we have a technology that could make them work for fifteen? Why do we make a television that we make last for 3½ if we can make it last for 15?

Well, the answer is clearly because we want to sell a lot of televisions.

Now you may ask "Who's we?" You say that we don't want to sell more televisions. They want to sell more televisions. But you see, they have a way of talking to "we" and it makes it seem that we're all working together.

Their argument goes like this. Look, if our t.v. lasts for 15 years, then we wouldn't sell a lot of t.v.'s. Therefore, if we don't sell a lot of t.v.'s, then you would be out of work. See, you have a vested interest in selling a t.v. that lasts for 3 years because that 15 year t.v. will knock you out of a job.

Now what kind of relationship is that to work? We've all been given that American myth about American Craftsman.

Can you imagine the American shoe-maker in the old days, making a pair of shoes, and then cutting the letter in half. I mean that's such a crazy concept, you know? I mean, theoretically, a craftsman is one who makes things for other people. An yet, industrial society makes things for profit.

That's what I mean by things being logical — if you keep a system that's based on profit, then you might as well turn out your own televisions because it all makes sense. If you want \$3.46 an hour of \$4.12 an hour as a factory worker, then you have to accept certain compromises.

And what are the compromises? Well, in order to make \$4.12 an hour, which is a very high wage, factory workers don't usually mind that, you have to work in a company that's highly automated.

A highly automated company usually makes its money by breaking down the job into a lot of very small parts, and using a lot of technology. I met a girl who said to me, "That's a very nice toy." I said, "Thanks.

I bought it for my daughter." She said "Yeh, I used to make them." I said, "oh, you used