

There is something radically wrong

Arts community—it must change its attitudes and hence its public image

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The arts student is called second-class because of his experience in the Faculty of Arts, which allegedly prepares him for second-class roles in society, whereas his counterpart in the sciences is being prepared for a first-class role.

The function of the arts should, in part at least, be the fostering of an awareness of the significance and great potential for good that mankind possesses. I stress *should* because the arts today tend to do precisely the opposite (for example Bonnie and Clyde). Creative minds at work in the arts must realize that constant carping, negative criticism, expression of despair and disgust simply breed more of their kind. No one profits. The members of the arts community have a responsibility to society. Art for art's sake is a deplorable, head-in-the-sand attitude.

This is directly related to the dilemma of the arts student: the bulk of society looks for positive—repeat: positive—leadership and with absolute justification is highly suspicious of people brought up on a mental diet of negative criticism. People who lead society must be insiders, not outsiders. I urge the arts community to change its negative attitudes and hence its public image.

Status of creative artist is questioned

Another reason is related to this: the mainstream of society is practical, and would like to know the function of all important institutions and organizations. For example the monarchy, still officially in existence in Canada, has come under attack largely because its function is unclear, and thought by many to be unnecessary. So too, the status of the creative artist is questioned. What good does he do? What, for example, is the social benefit of two pieces of upright structural steel in the grass south of the Rutherford library? Dogs will no doubt find a use for them, but will we? This is not anti-intellectualism, but serious inquiry. The arts student ought to have convincing answers, but unfortunately not even his teachers do. Naturally the average man considers people associated with such "art" as unfit for positions of responsibility. Those engaged in the arts must relearn how to interact with society at large.

In contrast let us consider the students of science, medicine or law. Why should they have a better chance of achieving positions of influence? Surely the case is clear: their functions in society are meaningful to everyone: science can benefit us all if properly applied, while the law is ideally the expression of our intent to uphold what is right and suppress what is wrong. Whereas in the Middle Ages people looked to the church and aristocracy for spiritual and temporal leadership, we today are favoring lawyers to be our moral arbiters and scientists to look after our physical surroundings.

The arts student will suffer-unless . . .

In other words, the arts student will perform less important (at least, less glamorous) functions, because the general public thinks of him in connection with those who do not try to communicate with society, but rather attack it, in connection with authors who write unreadable novels, poets who dream up incomprehensible poems, painters who cover canvas with blobs, smears and thumbprints, and with sculptors who erect bedsteads and boulders. Until the day the artist speaks again to the average citizen in meaningful forms, the arts student will suffer from this association—and justly if he accepts negative, hostile attitudes.

On the other hand, science and law students gain from association with the real or potential benefits derived from the application of their disciplines.

If the arts student feels like rebelling, let it be for the good of society. Let him call the bluff of the pseudo-intellectual or pseudo-artist who claims to be unable or unwilling to get across the normal people. Writers must write for everybody, not just their own little in-group. The true artist is he who speaks to his fellow man in meaningful forms, not he who sets out to smash them, replacing them with a new set. This prevents him from communicating with others; he talks only to himself, thus increasing the sum of alienation in society.

Society requires a degree of conformity

By all means let the artist modify and adapt the cultural idiom he has inherited; but if he smashes it or distorts it beyond recognition (and many take this to be a virtue) he can only talk jibberish. Let us have an age of art to appreciate.

While it is true that any form of society requires a degree of conformity, it reaches absurd and tyrannical levels in those states (such as the Soviet Union and Mainland China) radicals are very reluctant to criticize. On the other hand the United States and the West generally, where the attempt is made to uphold individual freedom to the utmost degree at which public orders is considered threatened, are held up to abuse, among other things, for making society a tyrant. There is something radically wrong with radical thinking—or is there an underlying principle explaining this apparent madness? The propaganda organizations of socialist totalitarian states are conscious lying machines with the purpose, in large part, of criticizing the West. Is it not possible that much radical protest and propaganda is, in its emotional commitment to the fight against the establishment, equally indifferent to fact and fair appraisal? I hold it to be a radical underlying principle that facts and arguments are judged according to their bearing on the anti-establishment cause. This is unacceptable.

Desperately lonely individual worlds

Another radical tenet is that any step in the direction of greater freedom of choice for the individual is good. Radicals claim to want to set man really free in every sense.

What are the implications of this? They are:

(a) utter disorganization of society, because no one would be constrained to perform any social function;

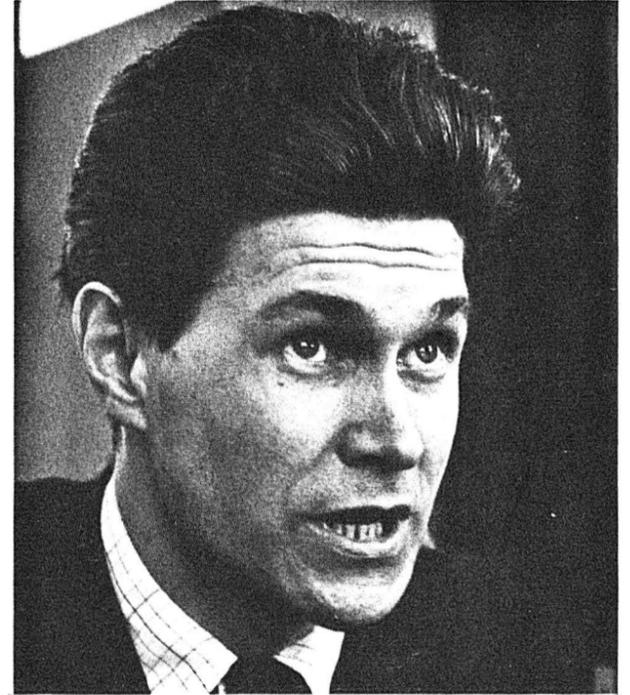
(b) maximization of alienation, since we would all be living in our own desperately lonely individual worlds;

(c) a practical consideration—utter defencelessness against any aggression from other societies or even from re-organized groups within our own. Let us never forget that the individual with the greatest freedom of choice is the successful dictator, and further the form of society which allows absolute freedom of action to the individual is bound to allow the most aggressive and domineering spirits to form a new ruling class.

Society implies interaction and organization; these in turn demand restrictions on personal liberty. Consequently there can be no such thing as an absolutely free society, no such thing as an anarchic society. This is a contradiction in terms. We must at all times strive to achieve a just balance between the restrictions demanded by society and the freedom demanded by the individual, between demands on the individual and those of the individual.

Radicals have taught themselves to stop thinking.

Matt Cohen's article is so biased against the prevailing order, so exclusively negative, one is led to doubt his ability or willingness to make a fair assessment. There is a state of mind, call it obsession, fixation, religious fervour or what you will, in which one's reasoning powers are sub-



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ordinated to an irrational conviction. Intelligence has nothing to do with this, it merely serves to support the conviction more plausibly.

I believe many radicals have achieved this state. We are told they are bright kids. Probably so—they can internalize new ideas more quickly than others. They are more curious than others and absorb the modern anti-establishment doctrine.

This goes together with emotional commitment. If one goes too far along this path, one is hooked as severely as with drugs. The radical is hooked. As impressions come to him, they are automatically ordered neatly round the fixation, or discarded. Propaganda? Nonsense, that's the way it is! If by a strong experience they were forced to give up the fixation, they would be disillusioned—the withdrawal symptom.

Society is not a giant corporation

Let me illustrate the inconsistency, irrationality and immorality consequent upon such fixations by commenting on some quotations from Matt Cohen.

"The second-class student, as an individual, is irrelevant within the university and irrelevant without it for the same reasons."

These reasons appear to be that most arts students will not be able to earn a first-class living by selling the knowledge or skills they learn at university. This does not make them irrelevant to society. The presence of a large body of people whose background is the humanities is of immense value to society, for such people realize, or should, society is not, and must not be allowed to become, a giant corporation; and they as teachers, journalists, librarians, writers, social workers and so on can illuminate society concerning this fact.

Purposeful radical doubletalk

In spite of radical claims to the contrary, such people are largely free from the pressure of industrial organizations. To accept Matt Cohen's claim, however, we have to entertain the irrational fixation that industry equals society.

"He (the arts student) is essential only in the mass, as a social instrument." I fail to see any support for this statement. If he is irrelevant as an individual, how can he avoid being one member of an essential group? I regard this as typical of purposeful radical double-talk:

The arts student is irrelevant. This makes him feel alienated so he will, at least, not want to defend the Establishment.