An alien environment can only alienate

By WINSTON GERELUK

Look—don't bother me about what the administration does. As long as they don't hurt me I don't care. I can't stand this place and as soon as I get my degree I'll get out of here. Call me apathetic. So what? Students that get involved in protests are usually just queers anyway.

Originally, this was to be a scholarly dissertation on the topic of student alienation, but in the writing, it turned into a polemic. I am bitter, because I know that students who day after day complain about 'this stupid place' will for some reason want to protect it from what I have to say here, and will suddenly assume that they have never been so happy with anything as this university.

To explain the situation by saying that students *choose* to be apathetic is to be self-contradictory. Apathy is a state of existence that students find themselves in, in much the same way as geese find themselves winging south in the fall, without choosing to do so.

Only, unlike geese, students have a chance to be people, and people have shown that they can choose their actions and thus decide what type of existence they want to lead. It is the essence of man to be free to choose.

Alienation occurs when this essence is contradicted by man's existence; when a person's world is so arranged as to not allow him to assert himself in a creative or productive way. This is where 'abnormal' behavior results—in university students it takes the form of apathy, nervous tension and frustration, perpetual sleepiness, or walking off the bridge.

This alienation is first the result of growing up in a highly structured and organized world; and it is aggravated by coming to a university which is one of the most highly systematized parts of this society. For, if society is highly structured, it follows that here can be very little place for creativity or freedom of choice. All the individual is 'free' to do is choose among a few prearranged existences.

Therefore, the student that comes to university is probably already alienated, and when he arrives, he is further convinced that this is indeed a regimented, overwhelming institution.

Who is really in control at this university is really only an academic question. All that he knows is that once in a while it really troubles him that he is controlled, to know that all that he can be is 'follower-of-orders'—an Eichmann.

So, many students end up on the psychiatrist's couch; they would sooner that they be declared the source of the trouble (insane) than admit the insanity is the fault of the society according to whose dictates they have attempted to live.

Identity lost in human marketplace

A person is only the sum total of what he does (acts, feels, thinks, etc.), The only way, therefore, to get to know who I am is to experience myself as the source of my actions. But when a university student's life has been, and still is, composed of activity which is not his 'own', he has no chance to develop an identity.

The university is a part of the capitalist society. That is, it is a part of a society in which the main reason for

doing anything is money, or, more specifically, capital which is "value" that can be re-invested for more capital

In this society, everything, even the people, become an abstraction of what is 'real', money. That is, they become things, commodities that are more or less valuable depending on how their exchange-value stacks up against the other commodities on the market. Society becomes a big marketplace, and competition is the rule as people attempt to enhance their relative value at each other's expense. What did you think that the stanine system was all about?

Once in a while you can find someone doing something which they enjoy for its own sake, or actually relating in a human way to somebody else. But that's all peripheral to the system of competition which offers one prize only. That is, the society does not reward a surgeon for being interested in his work, but for being a surgeon, a valuable commodity at the present time. Similarly, the degree, directly convertible into money, is not a reward for finding university meaningful.

But always doing things for 'increased value', and never for reasons I can call my own, has at least this terrible result—it means that there is no 'me', that I never experience 'me' at the centre of my activity.

I am only a student commodity whose activity is caused by the marketplace. I go through an identity crisis every time I ask myself the taboo question, "Who am I?" I realize that I can't answer because it has not mattered up to now, and certainly will not matter when I go out to work for DuPont or IBM.

So, besides helping to break up human relationships between professors and students, and between students, this university helps to rob me of an identity.

Because they lack an identity, students can only conform to the norms of a society that has defeated them. But then, there is the nagging doubt that one day they may fail to reflect the norms—and then who will they be.

It is small wonder that they internalize the goals of the university, and reject any of their own that might conflict. That is really the height of inhumanity, to reject even yourself.

And so, because he is impoverished, the student becomes a super-inflated ego—that becomes more inflated the more that he consumes, or owns. Everything in his environment becomes potentially 'ego-involvement'—especially the beautiful girls he dates and 'gets' in the back seat of a Mustang after a fraternity party. (And, this is the same reason for which girls allow themselves to be used as desired objects.)

Think of the power that advertisers (and our own educational propagandists) have over such a person: they only have to suggest something, and he wants it.

In short, it seems that this society and this university have very nicely placed the student in a position where he will serve them for the rest of his life—and believe that he is happy doing it. Things would go smoothly indeed, if only students would stop walking off that bridge.

"You're a person and you that makes you feel line institution

Our position has grown paradoxically out of a new commitment to traditional liberal values. The traditional liberal accorded to the individual the highest status in society; the individual is the end toward which all else was merely a means. But in serving this idea, the traditional liberal invented the sweeping bureaucracies he thought necessary to reach every citizen systematically. The problem of how to maintain the identity of the individual in this process has become our inheritance. The civil rights movement has most clearly pointed up this problem.

The American Negro represented one of the most passive elements in our society. One of the reasons for his plight was "organized America", which kept him in his place by the sheer weight of its structures. It became the task of the civil rights workers to convince the Negroes that by standing up and asserting their individual identities, they could have some impact on their communities.

On the campus, a student who understands this is outraged by the individual values which have been applied to the education process and by the bureaucratic models that the university follows in its organization patterns.

Our solution is to inject into the system more human qualities, the most obvious of which is emotion. Perhaps the combination of the McCarthy era and the departmental approach to knowledge has sterilized the academic process. It has certainly made it irrelevant to activist students because they have seen what a commitment to ideals can do for a group of people if it is fearlessly defended in front of the cameras of human conscience. No wonder the educational experience bugs us with its shallowness when professors aren't willing to lay their competence on the line publicly. Why load us with principles and ideals that are obviously less important than a \$14,000-a-year job and tenure? We want ideas that are worth some passion.

I don't think it's really the cours Jyou're taking that cause the stress, you have a goal to work for, you con overcome the problems you encounter in your courses. The thing I have against university is the social aspending you have a rotten social life, untiversity is ruined for you.

I am lonely now, but not as mu as I used to be. I've lately realize people aren't going to come to you you have to go out of your way you can go out and meet people, meet them. Half the battle is won you're lonely, it will reflect on ever thing you do.

Some find education courses gar age—others find them interesting believe it or not. Take this ed psy a bit—a lot of it is regurgitation. I do call that learning. You can't this your way around the ed psych que tions . . . it's just memorizing a multiple guessing.

—first year co-

Our colleges are a bit too m like high schools, and because we no longer high school students, find this very stressful. Students n not be very mature when they enroll at the university, but they looking forward to the freedom make mistakes and the help of capa people to set them right when t are made. If we weren't going to ma errors in judgment or performa sometimes, we shouldn't have to to college. We want a chance to the for ourselves about politics and mo and how we can earn a good li and keep our integrity. What we is a choice of a profession with a of little packages tied to a thr that leads to medicine or busin administration or engineering, the packages are called philosophilos and economics and what-have-They are too seldom geared to and what we are, too seldom ta by people who want to find out ab us, and too seldom informed by efforts to make our needs kno We don't know how. That's one of reasons we came to college—to out, not to be filled up with and ideas that other people beli are important.



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