

organizing

What do we do about it, then? Well, the most efficient way to find out what's behind the screen is to break down the screen. And since that screen is a screen of rules, written and unwritten, we're just going to have to break some rules. Not because we're violent and vicious and irresponsible and unprincipled, but because somebody is doing something violent and vicious and irresponsible and unprincipled in our selves, namely taking our heads, and we can't really relate to that. Maybe we'll begin by breaking the unwritten rule that says we have to be alone in the classroom. Like we could start discussing what's going down in the classroom among ourselves. At the start, if the professor won't let us do it in class time with or without his presence, we might get together after the class and find out if *everybody* in the class feels alone, if *everybody* has trouble relating to the paper, if *everybody* lives in fear of the examinations, if *everybody* lives in fear of the professors' power over their whole lives, their entire futures. Then we might start thinking about what to do about it.

Then we might break another unwritten rule and start thinking about why it is that we all have to be alone in there, when we are the majority. We might work up some ideas on what we would like to be taught, how we would like to learn it together, how we would like to sit together in the classroom instead of in nice little rows so that all we can see is the back of somebody's head. Then we might actually get together so well that we'll form a Classroom Student Defense Organization (that's right, *Defense*—they're trying to take your head, remember?) and start presenting that professor with some *demands* about what goes down in the classroom and how it goes down.

okay, you present the demands

Classroom Student Defense Organization: (notice you don't call him "sir" anymore — he isn't any better than you, you know)" Fred, we've formed a Classroom Student Defence Organization, and we've drawn up these demands here, and we want to rap about them with you. We demand the right to determine course content, the right to organize the physical set-up in the classroom, the right to tell you when we want a lecture and what we want it on, the right to determine what books will be read, the right to have class sessions without you being there, the right to assign our own final marks at the end of the year, the right to dispense with any and all examinations."

Fred: "Well, okay, let's see the list there, and I'll tell you which ones I think we could do. Now, the physical set-up in the classroom. I think we could change that anytime you want to. There's certainly no problem there. And some of the others, there, on course content and textbooks and so on, we could certainly talk about that. I've always said I wanted feed-back, you know. There are some problems, though. On the textbooks, you have to order them about three months ahead at the bookstore, and even some of the ones I ordered aren't in yet and it's already November. And the course content is flexible up to a point, but the department sets certain stuff that we just have to get over. We might be able to work something out, though. I don't know just how much time will be left for free classes after I've lectured on all the stuff we have to get through. The really big problem of course is the examinations. It's a department policy, or maybe a university policy, I forget which, that a certain percentage of the final mark has to be on the final exam, and I don't see how we could get around that. Marking your own examinations? Would that be fair? What if somebody gave themselves a high mark when they didn't do any work. Those marks mean something when you're out there looking for a job, you know, and . . . etc. etc. etc."



photo: doug kellough

Well, at this point, you can put yourselves on the line, walk out of the classroom, set up a counter-course in the nearest abandoned Weber Brothers house, and get on with the revolution. But probably you won't be sure yet that there aren't other routes to success that are less extreme and burn fewer bridges to the future. So let's look a little more closely at Fred's reply.

Fred's big problem is that he isn't a big master, he's only a little master. He has masters over him, and in fact he has so many masters over him that he's not even sure which ones make which rules half the time. That's how the really big masters control the little masters so they'll have to control you—the really big masters have so many rules and regulations coming down from so many directions that it's difficult to identify the enemy. For the really big masters, the screen is chaos — usually referred to as rules and regulations for the sound and efficient operation of the University.



photo: bob beal



photo: john hushagen

the next stages

Now if you lean hard enough on Fred, one of two things will happen. He'll call for help from *his* masters, quoting rules and regulations, failing the troublemakers, expelling the most visible agitators and so on, and maybe make you angry enough to move on to the next stages of radical political organizing on the campus. Or, Fred will decide he's on your side, he'll help you do battle with *his* masters, you'll get nowhere even after weeks and months of playing the game by the rules, and then you and Fred will be angry enough to go on to the next stages of organizing. Either way, survival in the classroom is going to mean ultimately organizing all those classroom Student Defense groups into bigger and bigger mass meetings and mass organizations to exert power in the departments, the faculties and the university as whole, and maybe to take over the damn bookstore too. It'll be hard work, it'll screw your chances for "success", it may fail in the end as it did at Simon Fraser University, but if you want to keep your head you might as well make up your mind that you're going to have to hit long and hard for a total transformation not only of the entire University, but also the entire society. The University's rules didn't come out of thin air, they came out of the society the University lives in. To survive in the classroom, you have to be able to survive in the department, the faculty, the University, the society. They all have pretty-much the same rules, and they're all after your head. You can't save your head alone, but maybe we can all save our heads if we get together and **DO IT**.

By the way, one last thought. Is cheating on an examination or a paper really cheating when they're after your head? Or is it self-defense?

Ron MacDonald
Graduate Studies