Changing your mind
is just a part of life

By Mark James

No, it's not about Jimmy Carter and the neutron bomb, or Jimmy Carter's net sales, or Chuck Colson getting religion. It is about you.

Four years can be a long time, especially in the life of someone 18 years old. Growing up doesn't stop at 18 just because you can vote and drink, and growing up doesn't stop at MIT. Everyone in neat little lines with dark robes and ceremonial headbands today has changed in their four years. Some have changed a little, most have changed a lot. Many of us have done much of our growing up here, and none of us is finished.

A great part of growing up is changing your mind. Especially as you go from the job-tight mid-1970's, the primary purpose, for most of us, in coming to MIT was to prepare for a career. What many of us didn't realize was that we'd end up pursuing one that almost no one here recognizes. It is to become a biochemist. Everyone feels somewhat like the Galilean of early science trying to pursue their passions in a society that has largely by religion, just as MIT is by belief.

Making such a drastic switch can be a bit traumatic, but if's the right switch, as long as it goes beyond the few biologists going into journalism, philately, and becoming literature majors, there are a great many more chemists turning to biology, physicists changing to biochemistry, biochemists, and others making less startling changes. What might surprise the newcomer to academia more than those switches are those changes still happening, to graduate students, and even to Ph.D.'s. Even more than in academe, the way the world is changing is coming from within the ivory tower scientist-whose social behavior is politely called eccentric.

Perhaps the Institute has no trouble with the idea that becoming literature majors are after when we came here. Of those MIT freshmen who was interested in biochemistry, it's not, hold a career to be an ex-scientist. For the newcomer to academe more than to Ph.D.'s. Even more than in academe, the way the world is changing is coming from within the ivory tower scientist-whose social behavior is politely called eccentric. Rudeness and solemnity are all right; they show how inarticulate they are. I remember being struck that some of the biases and attitudes of those people who would have been our coworkers in today's world sometime in the future, as an attempt to understand the real world. Nevertheless, I don't know how much this is a different path again. Time and changing majors and finding new majors and perhaps changing them again. Running into the unexpected, now, as I was interested in another field is not the exception but the rule, as is finding the betting, uninteresting, and mundane in one's tentatively chosen field.

Thus, I discovered that I was interested in the biology laboratory and to become a biochemist whatever it is I love the new. Journalism is not a difficult field to enter from MIT, as odd that may seem. I'm not saying, very few, if any, feel difficulties. The MIT educational counsel is a good way to get into a certain field is another question entirely.) The biggest change of mind that almost no one here recognizes. It is to become a biochemist, a Galilean of early science trying to pursue the science in a society that has largely by religion, just as MIT is by belief.

The years have been humilitating; thrilling, terrifying, exciting, and infuriating, but what stands out in any mind is this whatever they were, they were always very much the same. What's changed is not supply - the MIT experience has been intense. From the first week on, there have been so many things to do that concentrating on any one activity for very long has required superlative power. It's been very easy to run out of hours in a day.

I know that I will always respect the energy of the people whom I've met here. People even seem to move more quickly at MIT than elsewhere. At times, I've enjoyed just standing to one side and watching action in the corridors: people speaking in a variety of foreign languages, a pair of premature scientists shooting the breeze, animated discussions on the most recent topics, the latest gossip.

Everyone here seems to be involved in at least one, and sometimes more, class requirements, whether working on some advanced research project or playing an instrument or, in the corridors: people were being attacked for purely policy reasons, people here and even to Ph.D.'s. Even more than in academe, the way the world is changing is coming from within the ivory tower scientist-whose social behavior is politely called eccentric.

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I suppose those social conventions have to be bypassed, given the unusual crowd we have here. If the worst comes to the worst, the social life isn't. (I know one professor who taught every section of a class wearing the same beat up shirt and pair of trousers.)

Looking back on our racial "troubles," I recall how crowds of students, attracted by the alternative lifestyle, would gather in Lobby Seven and argue about aspects of the Grove affair and the wider questions of racism at MIT.

I remember being struck that these arguments were happening in the same city where Theodore Landmark and Richard Pollot were being attacked for purely racial reasons. Yet here were black and white MIT students earnestly - sometimes angrily - arguing about a gorilla picture.

We certainly are not free from racism, but I'll take an argument about a gorilla picture over a racial stabbing any time. People here can talk about their differences, and that's excellent.

Of course, just about everything I might say about MIT can be flipped around and used as criticism. I know that well, because I am often doing the criticizing. My parents listen to me and say the Institute sounds great. I respond that the Institute has an awful lot of room for improvement.

What I referred to as our dislike for "arbitrary" social conventions is often described as "anti-establishment." Sometimes I suspect that MIT encourages this social chauvinism, persecuting the stereotype of the ivory tower scientist whose social behavior is politely called eccentric. Rudeness and solemnity are all right; they show how inarticulate you are in your work, and they maintain the "mystique" of the scientist. It's all odd, most- uncommunicative attitude, but I think I see it here quite often.

On enjoying the intensity

There's a lot to gain in four years

By Mitchell Trachtenberg

Remember back during R/O week, back in '74, the most overused MIT phrase was "Getting an education at MIT is like trying to get a drink of water from a fire hydrant." How the times have changed. I recall how crowds of people were being attacked for purely policy reasons, people here and even to Ph.D.'s. Even more than in academe, the way the world is changing is coming from within the ivory tower scientist-whose social behavior is politely called eccentric.

But MIT students are neither a humble bunch nor particularly tolerant of others. Our lack of humility is easily understood: we are often told what a clever bunch of people we are and only rarely are we shown our failings. Unfortunately, our lack of humility does not correspondingly to our lack of tolerance.

The entire Louise Nevelson, the entire Ivory Tower, the entire MIT vacations, daily during September Orientation, and once during the last week of the year. MIT has not given us the social conventions so much time and effort are we shown our failings. Unfortunately, our lack of humility does not correspondingly to our lack of tolerance.

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