

THE SAKLAN INSTITUTE OF ANTHROPO-GEOGRAPHY:  
AN INTERFACE BETWEEN TRADITIONAL ACADEMIA AND THE FUTURE

The Saklan Institute was conceived by academic exiles, exiles forcefully separated from the university by budget cuts. But there are other exiles from academia not necessarily physically removed from their formal positions and they include virtually any scholar who has found his work made meaningless to some degree in the context of the changing world around him. Such exiles include too those who see the university becoming once again the stifling and repressive environment it was in the fifties and who wish to follow Marcuse's plea that we not leave the university but stay inside and learn to use it. The Saklan Institute of Anthro-Geography is thus designed for and by the many formal and functional scholar/exiles now firmly alienated from the educational process.

More precisely, the Saklan Institute is an anti-university, acting as an alternative by virtue of its very form. Where the university is highly centralized in authority, we work in a diffuse and democratic collectivity; where it holds careerism above scholarship, we promise no one a job and offer only the chance to learn and to teach. The university also has a small interlocking elite of patrons and benefactors, while we accept help with no strings attached and commit ourselves together with our work to the very survival of all mankind itself.

The name of the institute is taken from the almost mythical Native American village of Saklan, which now survives as a number of archeological sites near Pinole California, in the upper region of the San Francisco Bay Area. Spanish and Mexican historical records speak of it as a legendary town, longer and wider than other native settlements around, but one Anglo scholar records its significance as a major population center that managed to avoid the net of Christian missionization. It is this rebelde tradition that we wish to memorialize in our name, the tradition of resistance to the onslaught of an arrogant, self-righteous orthodoxy bent on suffocating its victims in the name of uplifting moralism and civilizing zeal.

For the time being, the institute will work within the San Francisco Bay Area only, but our vision is definitely global in nature. We hope to make contacts throughout the country immediately with allied scholars and groups and to find friends as well in other parts of the world with whom we can work and communicate. It is vitally important that we link up as soon as possible with others like ourselves who are taking part in a continuity of rebel scholarship which stretches back into history and across national boundaries. Ultimately, we should hope for one, two, three, many Saklans.

In order to do all this, the Saklan Institute will follow a broad strategy of directly countering the repressive and stultifying aspects of the university on the one hand, while creating new academic forms, techniques and social relationships on the other. This means dealing first with the interrelated problems of false professionalism and knowledge commodity marketeering.

False professionalism is at the foundation of the modern university system, arising as it does from the allocation to the professional of a position in this society that is everywhere accepted as that of supreme knowledge dispenser and guardian. This position, in turn, is based on the folk belief that a professional has necessarily gone through a period of intense expertise internalization and has dutifully passed the rites of affirmation agreed upon by those who have done so before him. Outwardly, this procedure certifies the professional as a legitimate scholar and as one who is entitled and committed to the pursuit and spread of knowledge; but in reality, this is not necessarily the case. On the contrary, it is manifestly true that if one can somehow simply pass the rites of professionalization and merely assume the formal trappings of scholarship, he can and will be accepted as a "Professional" entitled to a position of authority. And, in fact, the universities are most probably under the control of such persons today.

Intertwined with the problem of false professionalism is that of knowledge being pervasively exploited as a highly marketable commodity. The academic professional who opportunistically circumvents the commitment to non-careerist scholarship does so primarily by becoming an expert in salesmanship, proficiently selling his knowledge, his students and himself wherever he can. The notion of the knowledge factory or multiversity, which sees the students as the sole product, does not go far enough, for it is knowledge itself that is the ultimate product. Pre-packaged and easy to digest, it is knowledge itself that is made over into an exchange commodity item, fashioned by individual academics and distributed by university managers to the prime consumers of industrial/commercial society. To this end, knowledge becomes synthesized into expertise properly controlled only by experts and made into a product designed primarily for sale to the owners of the social system under which we live.

Since knowledge is power, power is the basis of control and control is the very essence of ownership; the self-serving academic opportunist makes himself accordingly very valuable to society's owners today. Since knowledge as a commodity, though, is also both product and capital, it is subject to market dynamics by being made scarce, limited and seemingly exclusive in nature. Therefore, the illegitimate and unauthorized gathering of knowledge ultimately useful to mankind, but useless or harmful to the academic market system, is simultaneously dangerous, expensive and undesirable, and it is in this manner that the modern academic rebel makes himself obnoxious to society's owners. In this way, too, he becomes a prime candidate for exile.

To sum up, then, the Saklan Institute's program of academic alternatives is addressed primarily to combating these two general problems. For instance, false professionalism has created the phenomenon of overbearing fissive scholarship, the emergence of thousands of barely interrelated academic specializations and sub-specializations. Jealously guarding their exclusive hold on abstract bits of information, these academic sectarians wallow in the hopes of enhancing their market position by creating paper niches of words on which others cannot capitalize. To counter this, the Saklan Institute will stress fussive scholarship, research and teaching that strives to unify the various divisions of human thought in a workable though not over-generalizing manner.

Similarly, the Saklan Institute will seek to deal with the harmful effects of knowledge commodity exchange dominance. Many "professional mystiques" have arisen from intensive knowledge marketing and such developments have often led to the building of whole esoteric bodies of information which are controlled mostly by "legitimately" constituted authorities and dispensed for a fee to those who can afford it. Saklan will seek to fight this by encouraging research designed to produce new techniques and methods of information access and new social relationships between professionals and those who need their help. At the same time, the very concept of "professional" will be widened to include those who are viable sources of information, though they may be lacking in formal credentials, while new professional training methodology will be encouraged that de-emphasizes careerist opportunism.

In overall design, the Saklan Institute should come vaguely to resemble a sort of "People's RAND," although one lacking the connotations of a socially isolated "think tank." Working on the two levels of theory development and application design, the institute should serve as an umbrella for the many academic exiles now being generated by the system and as a focal point for those outside the university who want to avoid the passive role thrust upon them by this society and take an active part in learning about the world around them. More importantly, the Saklan Institute of Anthro-Geography must serve as a means of not only understanding history, but as a means of changing it.