

SAVITT

# Center for the Study of Commercialism

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December 27, 1990

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Dear George:

Thanks so much for convening the meeting last week. I thought it was quite productive and I was glad to be included. Mike and Ron have asked me to extend their apologies -- they both were sorry to have missed it.


As promised, I have attached a list of the names and addresses of people who would, I think, relish the opportunity to get involved in a cultural, environmental movement.

I briefly discussed with Mike the idea of co-sponsoring a coalition-building conference. Because CSPI needs his attention as the year ends, I have not been able to do more than mention the idea to him. Also, Ron is on vacation until after January 1.

When we reassemble in DC, discussion of a conference will be a priority. I didn't want to delay sending my thanks and these names, though, while I waited to meet with Ron and Mike. I will write or call with substantive news in the first weeks of January.

Thanks again for sponsoring the much-needed meeting. It was a pleasure to meet and listen to that talented group.

Sincerely,

  
 Jill A. Savitt  
 Program Associate

**Staff:**

- Michael Jacobson
- Jill Savitt

Possible Steering Committee Members

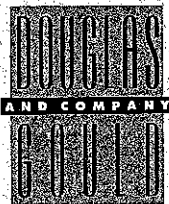
Ms. Ann Simonton  
Media Watch  
1803 Mission Street, Suite 7  
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Mr. Kalle Lasn  
The Media Foundation  
1243 7th Avenue  
Vancouver, BC V6H 1B7

Mr. Joe Marx  
American Heart Association  
1250 Connecticut Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20036

Ms. Alberta Tinsley-Williams *T-Williams*  
Coalition Against Billboard Advertising of  
Alcohol and Tobacco  
600 Randolph Street, Rm. 418  
Detroit, MI 48226

Call?



COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES

JILL SAVITT  
George -  
Here's where I  
landed. I hope  
CEM is up and  
running. Please  
keep in touch.  
Best - Jill

September 1992

## Douglas Gould and Company Welcomes

Jill Savitt

Jill Savitt has been hired by Douglas Gould and Company as an associate with the firm. Previously, Jill worked in Washington, D.C. as the research director for the Center for the Study of Commercialism, a non-profit, advocacy organization that documents and opposes the over-commercialization of American culture.

While in Washington, Jill was also a stringer for WAMU, the National Public Radio affiliate for metropolitan D.C. Jill has also worked on the city desks of *The Miami Herald* and *The Columbus Ledger-Enquirer* (Georgia).

Jill graduated *summa cum laude*, *Phi Beta Kappa* from Yale University. She majored in American Studies with a concentration in African-American literature.


Douglas Gould and Company is a public-affairs and media-consulting firm that advises environmental, health, and human rights organizations, including Planned Parenthood Federation of America, the American Civil Liberties Union, and Gay Men's Health Crisis.



COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES

November 10, 1992

**BY FAX**

To: George Gerbner  
 From: Jill Savitt   
 RE: Cultural Environmental Movement

I have read the most recent CEM documents that you sent, and also pored through my files at home to remember exactly where I left off in the evolution of this much-needed debate on the cultural environment.

From being involved, if only briefly, I know some of the concerns that follow have been discussed -- and re-discussed -- at the brainstorming meetings. I hope you'll oblige yet another re-hash.

As you know, from my two years at Center for the Study of Commercialism, I am deeply committed to this subject. I think it is imperative that Americans gain access to the media and begin to control and use the technology that dominates our lives and our consciousness.

**GENERAL COMMENTS**

In re-reading the prospectus, I realize that CEM is outlining an extremely general, and over-arching problem. This is fine, and necessary, but you must also, I believe, outline some answers and solutions. How do you truly want the media to be governed? Ideally, how do you see the media changing? And into what? If you had a wish list, what would you change first and what would you put in its place? ①

If the answers to these questions are "do-able" solutions (and I believe they are), I think they deserve mention. While the prospectus eloquently outlines the problem, it doesn't paint a concrete picture of the world CEM would like to inhabit. Because the cultural environment is so large, so atmospheric, so amorphous, I think a priority is to make specific recommendations about how to start reforming the media. These specific recommendations will also more thoroughly explain exactly what you mean by a "cultural environment." ② ③

You need to present people with the facts and the ramifications of the media's power, but you also must give hope that there are things people can do immediately to change the situation. CEM, I believe, is uniquely poised to suggest and implement media reform. People are ready for a change -- the election, if nothing else, has hammered that point home. (4)

## A MOVEMENT?

The language in the CEM prospectus is quite academic -- so much so that I think you miss the opportunity to offer a rallying call that would inspire a real *movement*. Remember, as a non-profit group, you will be competing with AIDS, hunger, homelessness, environmental degradation -- and a host of other pressing problems -- for people's attention, activism and money. These topics hit the heart and make people act, donate, and write Congress. Groups addressing these issues have succeeded, in large part, because people can actually participate, and can see the fruits of their participation. (5)

For CEM to survive (that is, to attract money and people who want to participate), it must similarly inspire, embrace and enfranchise people.

While the prospectus shouldn't attempt to woo people with false promises, I do believe the material you are working with can be fashioned to boil people's blood and move them to respond. (6)

I think the prospectus should tease people with concrete tasks, things they can do. Not only will this make people feel the problem is not insurmountable, but, if crafted properly, it will motivate them to join and give. Some ideas:

- o Concentrate on the media literacy angle. Parents are upset by TV's influence on their kids. Have CEM be committed to teaching families (with books, kits, etc.) about how to take control of their TVs instead of vice versa. (The good work of Liz Thoman and Kathleen Tyner is an excellent example of this -- how to breakdown, read, and understand the media. Most important, though, is how to inoculate yourself against some of the media's dupes and tricks.) (7)
- o Explain that the airwaves are in the public domain and required by law to provide programming in the public interest. Tell people that if a station isn't serving the people (the real owners of the airwaves), its license can be revoked by citizen action. And then tell them what that citizen action would look like. Citizen groups, PTAs, environmental groups, women's groups, et al. could be rallied to fight their local affiliates if a group like CEM led and motivated them. (8)
- o Use the prospectus to tell people how public access TV works; also tell them how they can create and place public service announcements (much like Kalle Lasn's work). (9)
- o Help communities organize local album-cover labeling, much like Tipper Gore's work. (10)

In short, to start a movement, you need to get people to MOVE. The Cultural Environmental Movement will be propelled by individuals taking control of the media. To be successful, it really needs to be a consortium and resource center for media activists.

You need to use these "active" ideas, I believe, to reinforce some of the more esoteric underpinnings for the movement. With Kalle Lasn, Kathy Montgomery and Jeff Chester, Kathy Bonk, Jean Kilbourne, Kathleen Tyner, and Liz Thoman among the many others, you already have some of the most active media activists already on board.

If you choose to re-cast the focus of the proposal for a general-audience direct mailing, I suggest that you also point to concrete successes ordinary people have had already in reclaiming the media. (No-TV days; federal, state, and local policy changes; product boycotts; media literacy classes; newsletters; etc.).

Ideally, CEM's mission would be fueled by groups like Kay Lynch's Message to the Media. Chapters like hers, set up across the country (or formed as projects of other groups), could actually begin to change the images we see, and the media structure that has been foisted upon us.

CEM could help set up these groups, provide them with tools and ideas about successful projects to launch or replicate.

Some ideas about groups you'd want to send an initial mailing to are:

- o PTA groups
- o Minority organizations (fraternities and sororities)
- o Boy and Girl Scout groups
- o Teacher associations

Within these groups, and others like them, you might find people who are willing to take up the cause. But no one is going to champion a battle that seems to difficult to win. This fight is winnable -- if CEM can show people how.

## THE ORGANIZATION

The other people and groups interested in "the cultural environment" -- Center for the Study of Commercialism, AdBusters, Kathy and Jeff's work, Center for Media and Values, etc. -- have each been working on select media niche -- advertising, kids' TV, media literacy, etc. CEM, it seems to me, can provide a structure for these groups to work within -- a larger context, a grander mission.

But it cannot survive on theory alone. It must be relevant to everyday life, and it must be communicated in a language everyone can understand.

4

While Ross Perot is not an ideal hero (and his motives more than a little suspect), his campaign did expose how disenfranchised people feel, how powerless the ordinary citizen feels in the domination struggles of Washington and Hollywood. Perot's populist sentiments have struck a chord. People are hungry to *do* something -- did you see the groups that gathered for some of these town meetings? They relished the opportunity to have a voice. I think CEM's best course is to seize this hunger and channel it toward helping people take control of their local media.

(15)

If you want to invest in a conference to set up and launch CEM, I think "local action" should be its theme. CEM needs to act as the general of the army, or a command center. The local groups and people would be the foot soldiers doing actual battle.

## THE DESIGN

You wrote on the fax cover sheet that an artist designed the mailing for you. I think the concept is a bit archaic. The Old English font, the scroll logo, and the torn parchment suggests an emphasis on the written word and older forms of communication.

(16)

CEM, as I understand it, is not interested in abolishing television or new technology -- it's not a group of media Luddites. The style of the design might confuse your audience on this front. Readers of this information might think that CEM believes we should revert to an older style of getting information -- that it is the *new technology* that is causing violence, isolation, materialism, etc.

Yet, it's not the technology per se, but the greed, consumerism, and limited access to the technology that has created the imbalance and domination we now face.

I think to be effective, the design must:

- o **Echo, or at least refer to, the media you are targeting in the movement.** This is not to say that flash should overshadow substance. But it would help to appropriate the familiar images of today's media in order to show what exactly it is you are challenging.
- o **Show that CEM is savvy, "current," and well-informed about the images and forms in contemporary media.** I realize that you don't have the money to prepare a video or audio to accompany the mailing; however, the design, as a whole, should be much more modern -- and dare I say it, "hip."

## THE NAME

I hate to open this can of worms again. I know you've been through this before. However, I do not think the name is accessible for a majority of people. "Cultural environment" doesn't evoke an emotional response. In fact, I think many people need the name translated for them.

(17)

5

Continuing the theme of my other suggestions so far, I think the name needs to be simplified and made more accessible to people.

Some suggestions. (These aren't the best ideas, but they're a brainstorming-step toward some good ideas. I use these more to make my point, than to recommend you go out and get new stationery):

Rechannel the Media

Reclaim the Media

Media Movement

ZAP! (Zealous about Airwave Participation)

Media Activism

Media Warfare

Citizens for Better Media

## CONCLUSION

I showed the prospectus to my boss, Douglas Gould. He thinks the idea is terrific. Many of the recommendations I've presented here are a distillation of a conversation I had with him.

I would love to help with CEM officially through our firm, but unfortunately, we do charge for our services.

If the invitation is still open, I'd welcome the chance to be on the Committee of Advisors and Consultants, and contribute that way.

I'm so pleased that CEM has incorporated, got 501(c)3 status, and moved rapidly along since I last had contact with you. Congrats!

I welcome your reaction to this memo, and I look forward to talking to you soon.

Take care.