

SUT JHALLY

STATEMENT OF PLANS

This is an unusual application for a Guggenheim Fellowship in that it is asking for support for a program that combines scholarship and video-making. At the end of the current academic year it will have been 10 years since I finished my doctorate. In that time I have (or will have) authored or co-authored four books and co-edited one collection of essays. However, for the last three years I have also been involved in exploring new mediums, such as video-tape, for the dissemination of scholarly research. The first fruit of this endeavor was the videotape *Dreamworlds: Desire/Sex/Power in Rock Video* which examined the nature of female representations in commercial images and their impact upon the culture and society. The tape was the center of quite a bit of media coverage in the summer of 1991, when MTV Networks threatened legal action over copyright infringement. The tension between property rights and free inquiry generated a lot of useful debate about the "fair use" provision of the Copyright Act.

In response to demand for *Dreamworlds* I established a non-profit organization, the Foundation for Media Education (a 501 (c) (3) organization), to handle distribution and to explore new ways of communicating scholarly research in a more popular and accessible form. (In 1993, the name was changed to *MEDIATED, the Media Education Foundation*, of which I am Executive Director.)

I founded *MEDIATED* on the premise that the media no longer simply influence our cultural environment, they are our cultural environment — an environment of television, movie, advertising, video, magazine, news and other images which tell powerful stories about how the world works, about ourselves and others, about happiness and aspiration, about right and wrong, and about history and the future. The literally thousands of media images and messages which bombard us each day comprise a new, image-based language. The predominance of visual forms of mass communication demands that 'literacy' include not only the traditional forms of writing and reading, but also the new languages of this mass-Mediated environment. Following the goals of traditional literacy movements, 'media literacy' implies the requisite critical skills to 'read', both analytically and discerningly, the stories being told within the cultural environment.

Traditionally the extension of democratic participation in political life has been facilitated by the extension of textual literacy. At present, media literacy has become the new prerequisite for effective democratic participation in politics, culture and society as a whole. Within the new 'mediated' environment, the analogs of traditional critical reading and writing skills, are the abilities to critically deconstruct, and to produce alternative messages, within the new modes of communication.

To this end, *MEDIATED* develops, produces, and disseminates educational video resources that address diverse issues concerning media, culture and politics with the intent of drawing attention to the increasingly central role the media play in the modern world. The choice of video as a conduit for education in this area is not incidental -- video allows one to speak about, and rebut the messages of the visual culture which surround us, on their own terms; to 'quote' images and representations much as a literary critic would quote paragraphs of text; and to engage the interest and attention of individuals from all walks of life who might remain alienated from the traditional vehicles of intellectual work (i.e. publications and scholarly books.)

I am convinced that for intellectual work to truly be a social force, rather than an academic exercise, means finding vehicles of expression which interest and impassion non-specialist audiences beyond academe. The experience of *Dreamworlds* testifies to this belief. Critically addressing music video representations of female sexuality, and the impact these representations have on our real-life relationships, attitudes, and female identity, the tape has affected at least 250,000 men and women, teenagers and scholars, rape victims and others through informal community resource organizations, crisis centers, and formal institutions of education.

Mediated's goal, in short, is to act as a conduit between academic perspectives, and society at large.

I was on sabbatical leave from the University of Massachusetts for the 1992-93 academic year and I devoted that year to work connected with *MEDIATED*. Income from the sale of *Dreamworlds* allowed for an office to be set up, and two new tapes to be completed (*Pack of Lies: The Advertising of Tobacco* and *Getting the Message Across: A Video About Making Videos*). A number of other tapes are in progress.

In June of 1992 I hired a full-time Managing Director to take care of the business related aspects of *MEDIATED* leaving me freer to concentrate on the creative aspects of video production. However, since the end of my sabbatical and the return to full-time teaching at the University I have found it very difficult to find the time to devote the necessary energy to the conceptualization and production of the ongoing video projects. A Guggenheim Fellowship would allow me time off from the University for a year to concentrate on a mixture of scholarship and video production to further the expanded activities of *MEDIATED*. Specifically I wish to concentrate my time and energy on two related sets of activities.

(a) Video Production: A number of videos are in progress, dealing with advertising, the symbolic world of television, the commercialization of movies, the war on drugs, the "liberal" media, the beauty myth, and sexual harassment. Some of these will be completed this academic year. Others will be ongoing for the period of the Fellowship. Other videos, dealing with timely and important topics, will be added to this list as the year progresses. For example, plans are underway at the present time for a video dealing with the media treatment (or mistreatment) of the nomination of Lani Guinier for the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department. Although described as video production, much of my time around these projects will be involved in research and conceptualization.

(b) Instant Video Analysis: Plans are underway to find support for a novel new program of media analysis and commentary. The program will be based upon the presumption that the way in which the media report on crucial events and issues is key to the way that the society can think about them. Responding to breaking events, the program will make the media part of the story by producing and distributing in a video form an analysis of media coverage of specific events. Accomplished in a timely fashion with widespread distribution, such a project will draw attention to the highly mediated nature of our understanding of the world, for the necessity to remember that stories are always told from a particular perspective, as well as opening up the way that we think about crucial issues by providing an outlet for voices that are denied access to the mainstream media, while the events are unfolding or the issues being discussed. Each month the project will produce an approximately 30 minute video dealing with the media coverage of a current and highly visible issue or event. The aim of each tape would be to analyze and show the actual nature of the on-going coverage, as well as give voice to those sources who do not fit into the conventional and highly limited media frame. Each tape would be a mixture of media analysis and an extension of the debate around important topics. These tapes (as well as supporting written materials) would be distributed widely through both formal and informal educational channels. While it is difficult for one tape (no matter how good) to make a big difference quickly, the key aspect of this program would be its on-going and long-term nature. To be distributed on a subscription basis, the presence of the project as a whole will be a permanent one -- people would come to expect the monthly tapes and could build them into ongoing curricular programs.

The mixture of scholarly media analysis dealing with current topics in a video form with widespread distribution is a new and exciting possibility that could point the way to a new role and voice for intellectuals in our new mass-mediated culture.