

THE TURTLES OOZE AGAIN
By George Gerbner

It's October and the annual onslaught of holiday commercialism is creeping up on us. Or I should say oozing up on us, out of the sewers of our cultural environment. The principal targets, as always, are our children.

Oozing its way onto the screens and other holiday promotions is the record-breaking marketing sensation and glorification of the martial-arts, "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" and its sequel appropriately named "The Secret of the Ooze." With 133 acts of mayhem per hour, they are the most violent films ever marketed to children and perhaps also the most appalling to adults who have the stamina, and stomach, to view them. A marketing survey of licensed cartoon characters found the Turtles by far the "LEAST favorite" (politely phrased) of both men and women.

Nothing can prepare the unaccustomed for the expertly choreographed brutality, wisecracking misanthropy, and rock-rap-rhythmic slashery crammed into one sick spectacle. Males fight, torture, gorge themselves on pizza (brand names prominently displayed), burn, crush, mutilate and kill. One lone mini-miniskirted sex object (intrepid reporter, she is bossed by boorish editors) is assaulted, scared, victimized, and has to be rescued at least three times. Finally she, too, kills to earn an appreciative "You're a natural, Sis!" The only other major woman character is the object of a long-ago rivalry that starts the blood-feud now played out on the streets of New York's Little Tokyo. She appears briefly just to be brutally murdered.

Undaunted by the dismay of trapped parents, harried teachers and overworked psychiatrists, "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Secret of the Ooze" is another punchup and kick-in-the-teeth opus in which the martial artists, indecently named for giants of the Renaissance, pursue their rampage into pseudo-scientific mysticism and blind obedience to the leader in a cult of violence and vengeance. (Britain, Germany and Sweden are among countries that require cuts or age limits or both.)

"The Secret of the Ooze" has been oozing out of Burger King posters, toys, commercials, and ads in its *BK Kids Club* magazine. A 30-second spot for the magazine (in addition to other promotions) should not surprise those who think they escape commercials when they buy the video for \$22.95. Nor should it surprise anyone to find the Turtles show up in rival Pizza Hut and Nabisco Brands campaigns in time for the extended Christmas selling season.

Pizza Hut pumped \$20 million into launching its campaign, despite the fact that more than 130 Ninja licenses

already flood the country with over 500 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle products from T-shirts to yogurt. After a gala Radio City Music Hall kick-off in New York, the Turtles went on a 40-city rock concert tour where rhythmically gyrating teenage Turtle groupies, many in Turtle costumes, personally helped set the stage for the sales campaign.

After the domestic blitz, the global conglomerate PepsiCo, owner of Pizza Hut, hurtled the pizza-gobbling Turtles onto the international marketing circuit where retail sales of Turtle paraphernalia alone reached a record one billion dollars worldwide already by mid-1991. "Los Tortugas Ninjas" (and other dubbed versions) replaced Batman as the current global movie mania and there is concern that the lust for pizza will replace tortillas or empanadas (and other local favorites) as the kids' new passion.

Not to be outdone, Nabisco Brands, part of another global conglomerate, (tobacco and food) will offer four Turtles gelatin molds on boxes of a new holiday flavor tastefully named "Royal Ooze." Oh yes, an unspecified "percentage of the profits" from the Turtles II video will be donated to Kids for Saving the Earth, a subtle reminder that, after all, the Turtles' mayhem is environmentally correct.

Saving the earth from the Turtles and their ilk may be a better idea. The environment most vital to our humanity is the cultural environment on which both physical survival and mental health depend. A Cultural Environment Movement will oppose domination of our holidays (and our children's minds) by story-tellers who have only to sell, and sell at any cost. CEM should help liberate creative energies from marketing strategies imposed on them, build a constituency for freer media, and develop ways of public participation in cultural policy-making. Wouldn't that be a more fitting gift for our children this holiday season?