Stories of Violence and the Public Interest

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Most of what we know, or think we know, we have never personally experienced. We live in a world erected by the stories we hear and see and tell.

Unlocking incredible riches through imagery and words, conjuring up the unseen through art, creating towering works of imagination and fact through science, poetry, song, tales, reports and laws – that is the true magic of human life.

Through that magic we live in a world much wider than the threats and gratifications of the immediate physical environment, which is the world of other species. Stories socialize us into roles of gender, age, class, vocation and lifestyle, and offer models of conformity or targets for rebellion. They weave the seamless web of the cultural environment that cultivates most of what we think, what we do, and how we conduct our affairs.

The story-telling process used to be hand-crafted, home-made, community-inspired. Now it is mostly mass-produced and policy-driven. It is the end result of a complex manufacturing and marketing process. It both defines and then addresses the public interest. The situation calls for a new diagnosis and a new prescription.

1. Three Kinds of Stories

The stories that animate our cultural environment have three distinct but related functions. These functions are (1) to reveal how things work; (2) to describe what things are; and (3) to tell us what to do about them.

Stories of the first kind, revealing how things work, illuminate the all-important but invisible relationships and hidden dynamics of life. Fairy tales, novels, plays, comics, cartoons, and other forms of creative imagination and imagery are the basic building blocks of human understanding. They show complex causality by presenting imaginary action in total situations, coming to some conclusion that has a moral purpose and a social function. You don't have to believe the "facts" of Little Red Riding Hood to grasp the notion that big bad "wolves" victimize old women and trick little girls – a lesson in gender roles, fear, and power.

Stories of the first kind build, from infancy on, the fantasy we call reality. I do not suggest that the revelations are false, which they may or may not be, but that they are synthetic, selective, often mythical, and always socially constructed.

Stories of the second kind depict what things are. These are descriptions, depictions,

expositions, reports abstracted from total situations and filling in with "facts" the fantasies conjured up by stories of the first kind. They are the presumably factual accounts, the chronicles of the past and the news of today.

Stories of what things are may confirm or deny some conception of how things work. Their high "facticity" (i.e. correspondence to actual events presumed to exist independently of the story) gives them special status in political theory and often in law. They give emphasis and credibility to selected parts of each society's fantasies of reality. They convey information about finance, weddings, crime, lotteries, terrorists, etc. They alert us to certain interests, threats, opportunities, and challenges.

Stories of the third kind tell us what to do. These are stories of value and choice. They present things, behaviors or styles of life as desirable (or undesirable), propose ways to obtain (or avoid) them, and the price to be paid for attainment (or failure). They are the instructions, laws, regulations, cautionary tales, commands, slogans, sermons, and exhortations. Today most of them are called commercials and other advertising messages and images we see and hear every day.

Stories of the third kind clinch the lessons of the first two and turn them into action. They typically present an objective to be sought or to be avoided, and offer a product, service, candidate, institution or action purported to help attain or avoid it. The lessons of fictitious Little Red Riding Hoods and their more realistic sequels prominent in everyday news and entertainment not only teach lessons of vulnerability, mistrust and dependence but also help sell burglar alarms, more jails and executions promised to enhance security (which they rarely do), and other ways to adjust to a structure of power.

Ideally, the three kinds of stories check and balance each other. But in a commercially driven culture, stories of the third kind pay for most of the first two. That creates a coherent cultural environment whose overall function is to provide a hospitable and effective context for stories that sell. With the coming of the electronic age, that cultural environment is increasingly monopolized, homogenized, and globalized. We must then look at the historic course of our journey to see what this new age means for us and for the public interest.

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2. Here Comes the Print

For the longest time in human history, stories were told only face to face. A community was defined by the rituals, mythologies and imageries held in common. All useful knowledge was encapsulated in aphorisms and legends, proverbs and tales, incantations and ceremonies. Writing was rare and holy, forbidden for slaves. Laboriously inscribed manuscripts conferred sacred power to their interpreters, the priests and ministers. As a sixteenth-century scribe put it:

Those who observe the codices, those who recite them.

Those who noisily turn the pages of illustrated manuscripts.

Those who have possession of the black and red ink and that which is pictured; they lead us, they guide us, they tell us the way.

State and church ruled in a symbiotic relationship of mutual dependence and tension. State, composed of feudal nobles, was the economic, military and political order; church its cultural arm.

The Industrial Revolution changed all that. One of the first machines stamping out standardized artifacts was the printing press. Its product, the book, was a prerequisite for all the other upheavals to come. Printing begins the industrialization of story-telling, arguably the most profound transformation in the humanization process.

The book could be given to all who could read, requiring education and creating a new literate class of people. Readers could now interpret the book (at first the Bible) for

themselves, breaking the monopoly of priestly interpreters and ushering in the Reformation.

When the printing press was hooked up to the steam engine, the industrialization of story-telling shifted into high gear. Rapid publication and mass transport created a new form of consciousness: modern mass publics. Publics are loose aggregations of people who share some common consciousness of how things work, what things are, and what ought to be done – but never meet face-to-face. That was never before possible.

Stories could now be sent – often smuggled – across hitherto impenetrable or closely guarded boundaries of time, space, and status. The book lifts people from their traditional moorings as the Industrial Revolution uproots them from their local communities and cultures. They can now get off the land and go to work in far-away ports, factories and continents, and have with them a packet of common consciousness – the book or journal, and later the motion picture (silent at first) – wherever they go.

Publics, created by such publication, are necessary for the formation of individual and group identities in the new urban environment, as the different classes and regional, religious and ethnic groups try to maintain some sense of distinct integrity and also to live together with some degree of cooperation with other groups.

Publics are the basic units of self-government. They make it possible to elect or select representatives to an assembly trying to reconcile diverse interests. The maintenance and integrity of multiple publics makes self-government feasible for large, complex, and diverse national communities. People engage in long and costly struggles to be free to create and share stories that fit the reality of competing and often conflicting values and interests. Most of our assumptions about human development and political plurality and choice are rooted in the print era.

One of the most vital provisions of the print era was the creation of the only large-scale folk institution of industrial society, public education. Public education is the community institution where face-to-face learning and interpreting could, ideally, liberate the individual from both tribal and medieval dependencies and all cultural monopolies.

3. A New Era Is Born

The second great transformation, the electronic revolution, ushers in the telecommunications era. Its mainstream, television, is superimposed upon and reorganizes print-based culture. Unlike the Industrial Revolution, the new upheaval does not uproot people from their homes but transports them in their homes. It retribalizes modern society. It challenges and changes the role of both church and education in the new culture.

For the first time in human history, children are born into homes where mass-produced stories can reach them on average more than seven hours a day. Most waking hours, and often dreams, are filled with these stories. The stories do not come from their families, schools, churches, neighborhoods, and often not even from their native countries, or, in fact, from anyone with anything relevant to tell. They come from small groups of distant conglomerates with something to sell.

The cultural environment in which we live becomes the byproduct of marketing. The historic nexus of state and church is replaced by the new symbiotic relationship of state and television. The "state" itself is the twin institution of elected public government and selected private corporate government, ruling in the legal, military, and economic domains. The media, its cultural arm, are dominated by the private establishment, despite their use of the public airways.

Giant industries discharge their messages into the mainstream of common consciousness. Channels proliferate and new technologies pervade home and office while mergers and bottom-line pressures shrink creative alternatives and reduce diversity of content.

These changes may appear to be broadening local, parochial horizons, but they also mean a homogenization of outlooks and limitation of alternatives. For media professionals, the changes mean fewer opportunities and greater compulsions to present life in saleable packages. Creative artists, scientists, and humanists can still explore and enlighten and occasionally even challenge, but, increasingly, their stories must fit marketing strategies and priorities.

Viewing commercials is "work" performed by audiences in exchange for "free" news and entertainment. But, in fact, we pay dearly through a surcharge added to the price of every advertised product that goes to subsidize commercial media, and through allowing advertising expenditures to be a tax-deductible business expense. These giveaways of public moneys for private purposes further erode the diversity of the cultural mainstream.

Broadcasting is the most concentrated, homogenized, and globalized medium. The top 100 U.S. advertisers pay for two-thirds of all network television. Four networks, allied to giant transnational corporations – our private "Ministry of Culture" – control the bulk of film production and distribution, and shape the cultural mainstream. Other interests, religious or educational, minority views, and the potential of any challenge to dominant perspectives, lose ground with every merger.

Formula-driven, assembly-line-produced programs increasingly dominate the airways. The formulas themselves reflect the structure of power that produces them and function to preserve and enhance that structure of power. The leading example of such story functions is violence. It is a good example of how the system works; it is also an indication of the magnitude and nature of its challenge to society.

4. Humankind and Media Violence

Humankind may have had more bloodthirsty eras, but none as filled with images of crime and violence as the present. While violent crime rates remain essentially flat or decline, news of crime surges to new highs. Violence is a demonstration of power. Armies conquer, states impose their will, persons use violence to intimidate. Violence is always a complex scenario of victims as well as victors and a wide range of needs, circumstances, justifications, and motivations.

Media violence is a symbolic show of force serving many of the same functions more cheaply and of course entertainingly. It shows who can get away with what against whom. This show-and-tell is a staple of all story-telling. It cultivates a sense of command and a calculus of vulnerability. It shapes society's pecking order. It makes some people act like majorities and others like minorities.

The perennial debate about media violence, made trendy by the very fears it generates, brought forth a remarkable array of obfuscations from all sides and levels of the political spectrum. Most of the public discourse, conducted through and shaped by the media themselves, persists in asking the questions reflecting, amplifying, and exploiting media-driven anxieties and interests: Does media violence incite real-life violence? Is it a product of freedom of expression, therefore in the public interest? If so, is its regulation a form of censorship?

But the issues are much more fundamental than parental advisories, v-chips, labeling, or simple controls. They deal with the structural connections between television violence, marketing imperatives, and social controls. The questions we will address are: What is the difference between television and other media violence? What drives television violence? What are its consequences for human development, the public interest, and the distribution of power?

5. Television And Other Media Violence

U.S. television networks doubled the time given to crime coverage between 1992 and 1993. TV Guide's August 13, 1994, survey also showed a steep increase in stories of violence, especially in local television news.

Monitoring by the *Des Moines Register*, an Iowa newspaper (March 27, 1994), illustrated how crime and violence skew news priorities. Of the six top stories on Des Moines evening newscasts during February, 1994, one out of four (118 stories) dealt with crime and violence. By comparison, 27 featured business, 17 dealt with government, 15 reported about racial relations, and two were stories about the schools.

A University of Miami study of local television news found that time devoted to crime ranged from 23 to 50 percent (averaging 32 percent) while violent crime in the city remained constant, involving less than one-tenth of one percent of the population.

A study by Robert Entman for the Chicago Council on Urban Affairs found not only that local news shows are dominated by vivid images of violence, but that "a high percentage of African-Americans and Latinos are shown as victimizers of society, and few as social helpers," contributing to a sense of fear and distrust (which our own research diagnosed as the "mean-world syndrome"), and to the notion that "the inner city is dominated by dangerous and irresponsible minorities."

Another study of homicide news reporting found that only one of three actual homicides was reported, and that the most likely to be selected were those in which the victims were white rather than black or Latino, contrary to the actual crime statistics. University of Pennsylvania Sociologist Elijah Anderson also noted in the November 1994 issue of *Philadelphia Magazine* that media portrayals of crime and violence involving blacks and the resulting demonization of black males, becomes a major reason for "white flight." In fact, however, African American men, not whites, are the most likely to be the victims of violence.

Our Cultural Indicators study of local news on Philadelphia television found that crime and/or violence items usually lead the newscast and preempt any balanced coverage of the city. Furthermore, 80 percent of crime and violence reported on Philadelphia local news was not even local to the city. It is as if a quota were imposed on the editorial staff to fill from wherever they can. It is also the cheapest way to fill the time. We also found that whites are more likely to be reported when they are the victims and African-Americans are more likely to be reported when they are the perpetrators. Black-on-white crime is less frequent but more newsworthy than any other combination.

The percentage of prime-time television dramatic programs with overt physical violence was 58 in 1974, 73 in 1984, and 75 in 1994. The saturation of violent scenes was five per hour in 1974, five per hour in 1984, and five per hour in 1994 – unchanged. In Saturday morning children's programs, scenes of violence occur at a rate of 20 to 25 per hour. They are sugar-coated with humor, to be sure; that makes the pill of power easier to swallow.

Violence is, of course, a legitimate and even necessary news and dramatic feature to show the tragic costs of deadly compulsions. However, such tragic sense of violence has been swamped by "happy violence" produced on television's dramatic assembly line. "Happy violence" is cool, swift, and painless, and always leads to a happy ending. Far from Shakespeare or the Bible, it occurs five times per hour and is designed to deliver the audience to the next commercial in a receptive mood.

Action movies cash in on the trend. "Robocop's" first rampage for law and order killed 32 people. "Robocop 2" slaughtered 81. The sick movie "Death Wish" claimed nine victims. In the sequel, the "bleeding heart liberal" turned vigilante disposed of 52. "Rambo: First Blood" rambled through Southeast Asia leaving 62 corpses. "Rambo III" visited Afghanistan, killing

106. Godfather I produced 12 corpses, Godfather II put away 18 and Godfather III killed no fewer than 53. The daredevil cop in the original "Die Hard" saved the day with a modest 18 dead. "Die Hard 2" achieved a phenomenal body count of 264.

Violence is a demonstration of power. Its principal lesson is to show quickly and dramatically who can get away with what against whom. That exercise defines majority might and minority risk. It shows one's place in the societal "pecking order."

The role of violence in the media mainstream of television emerges from our analysis of prime-time network programs monitored since 1967. Women play one out of three characters in drama, one out of six in the news. Young people comprise one-third and old persons one-fifth of their actual proportions of the population. Most other minorities are even more underrepresented. Most of the groups that are underrepresented are also those that suffer the worst fate.

The typical viewer of prime time television drama sees, every week, an average of 21 criminals arrayed against an army of 41 public and private law enforcers. Crime and violence employ more characters than all other occupations combined. About one out of three speaking parts, and more than half of all major characters, are involved in violence either as victims or as victimizers, or both.

We calculated the violence "pecking order" by counting the number of victims for every 10 perpetrators of violence. That "risk ratio" expresses the "price" groups of characters pay for committing violence. We found that the overall average risk ratio (the number of victims per 10 perpetrators) is 12. But the ratio for women is 17, for lower-class characters is 19, for elderly characters is 20, and for women of color is 22. In other words, minority groups tend to pay a higher price for their show of force than do the majorities.

Our surveys show that heavy viewers express a greater sense of apprehension and vulnerability than do light viewers in the same groups. Heavy viewers are more likely than comparable groups of light viewers to overestimate their chances of involvement in violence; to believe that their neighborhoods are unsafe; to state that fear of crime is a very serious personal problem; and to assume that crime is rising, regardless of the facts of the case. Heavy viewers are also more likely to buy new locks, watchdogs, and guns "for protection" (thus becoming the major cause of handgun violence).

Moreover, viewers who see members of their own group underrepresented but overvictimized develop an even greater sense of apprehension and mistrust. Insecure, angry, mistrustful people may be prone to violence but are even more likely to be dependent on authority and susceptible to deceptively simple, strong, hard-line postures and appeals.

6. What Drives Media Violence?

Media violence is not a reflection of creative freedom, viewer preference, or crime statistics. It is the by-product of a manufacturing and marketing process. The real problem of television violence reflects structural trends toward concentration, conglomeration, and globalization in media industries and the marketing pressures fueling those trends.

Concentration of ownership denies access to new entries and to alternative perspectives. Having fewer buyers for their products forces the remaining "content providers" deeper into deficit financing. As a consequence, most television and movie producers cannot break even on the domestic market. They are forced into video and foreign sales to make a profit. Therefore, they need a dramatic ingredient that requires no translation, "speaks action" in any language, and fits any culture. That ingredient is violence.

Our analysis shows that violence dominates U.S. exports. We compared 250 U.S. programs exported to 10 countries with 111

programs shown in the United States during the same year. Violence was the main theme of 40 percent of the home-shown and 49 percent of the exported programs. Crime/action series comprised 17 percent of the home-shown and 46 percent of the exported programs. NAFTA and GATT dump even more mayhem on the world in the name of "free trade."

Far from reflecting creative freedom, the strategy wastes talent, restricts freedom, and chills originality. Production companies emphasizing alternative approaches to conflict, such as Globalvision, Inc., G-W Associates, and Future Wave, have difficulty selling their product. Concentration of ownership brings streamlining of production, economies of scale, and emphasis on dramatic ingredients most suitable for aggressive international promotion. Cross-media conglomeration and "synergy" mean that ownership of product in one medium can be used, reviewed, promoted, and marketed in other media "in house." It means less competition, fewer alternative voices, greater emphasis on formulas that saturate more markets at a lower cost per viewer. "Privatization" of formerly public-service broadcasting around the world means production and distribution of even more of the same type of product.

Not the least of the consequences is the damage done to dramatic originality and integrity. Arbitrarily contrived violence is inserted into formula-driven programs according to market conditions, not dramatic need. If dramatic integrity and creativity are not valid reasons for most violent scenes, neither is the industry's chief rationale – public appeal. To be sure, some highly popular films and programs are violent, but by no means most. In fact, violent programming is not especially popular either with viewers or, as we shall see, with broadcasters who are responsible to the public as license-holders. Why, then, does a public relations-conscious and politically sophisticated industry persist in risking domestic backlash and international embarrassment for its perennially violent fare? The answer is that violence "travels well."

There is no free market on television. Expensive and risky production requires the pooling of large resources and even larger distribution capabilities. That is (and will continue to be) the main reason for networks and other forms of consolidation and conglomeration. The oligopolies that dominate the market can set the price of production so low that most producers barely break even on the domestic market. They are forced onto the world market and into all forms of syndication, including cable and video sales worldwide, to make a profit. Therefore, they must look for an ingredient to inject into the product that "travels well." They find that ingredient in violence. (Graphic sex is second, but that runs into many more inhibitions and restrictions around the world.)

7. What Are the Consequences?

This unequal sense of danger, vulnerability and general unease, combined with reduced sensitivity, invites not only aggression but also exploitation and repression. Insecure people may be prone to violence but are even more likely to be dependent on authority and susceptible to deceptively simple, strong, hard-line postures. They may accept and even welcome repression if it promises to relieve their anxieties. That is the deeper problem of violence-laden television.

The usual rationalization that media violence "gives the public what it wants" is disingenuous. The public rarely gets a fair choice in which all elements but violence, including placement, headline, promotion, airtime, celebrity-value, treatment, etc., are equal. Economic analysis and trade- press reports indicate that in the media marketing formula of "cost per thousand" (readers or viewers delivered to the advertiser), cost weighs as heavily in the balance as the audience side of the equation. There is no evidence that, cost and other factors being equal, violence per se gives audiences "what they want." As the trade paper *Broadcasting & Cable* editorialized on September 20, 1993 (p. 66), "the

most popular programming is hardly violent as anyone with a passing knowledge of Nielsen ratings will tell you."

We compared the ratings of over 100 violent shows and the same number of non-violent shows aired at the same time on network television. The average Nielsen rating of the violent sample was 11.1; the rating for the non-violent sample was 13.8. The share of viewing households in the violent and nonviolent samples, respectively, was 18.9 and 22.5. The non-violent sample was more highly rated than the violent sample for each of the five seasons studied. The amount and consistency of violence further increased the unpopularity gap.

Concentration of ownership denies access to new entries and to alternative perspectives. Having fewer buyers for their products forces the remaining "content providers" deeper into deficit financing. As a consequence, most television and movie producers cannot break even on the U.S. domestic market. They are forced into video and foreign sales to make a profit. Therefore, they need a dramatic ingredient that requires no translation, "speaks action" in any language, and fits any culture. That ingredient is violence.

Syndicators demand "action" (the code word for violence) because it "travels well around the world," said the producer of "Die Hard 2." "Everyone understands an action movie. If I tell a joke, you may not get it but if a bullet goes through the window, we all know how to hit the floor, no matter the language."

There is no evidence that, other factors being equal, violence per se is giving most viewers, countries, and citizens "what they want." On the contrary, the evidence is that most people suffer the violence inflicted on them with diminishing tolerance. Organizations of creative workers in media, health professionals, law enforcement agencies, and virtually all other media-oriented professional and citizen groups have come out against television violence.

There is an alternative. It is not the "electronic superhighway." Given the convergence of communication technologies, the concentration of ownership, and the shrinking of independent creative alternatives, the notion that a new abundance of hundreds of channels will provide greater choice is a technocratic fantasy. The most profitable programs now being mass-produced for the vast majority of viewers will run on more channels more of the time, while informercial hustle, direct marketing, and electronically delivered magazines catering to small audiences will fill the rest. Cross-media synergy and the global consolidation of electronic marketing are more likely to reduce than increase the diversity of the total orchestration of cultural resources – unless provision is made for liberating it from its present constraints.

What can we do? People suffer the media violence inflicted on them with diminishing tolerance. A March 1985 Harris survey showed that 78 percent disapprove of violence they see on television. In a *Times Mirror* national poll in 1993, 80 percent said entertainment violence was "harmful" to society, compared with 64 percent in 1983.

Local broadcasters, legally responsible for what goes on the air, also oppose the overkill and complain about loss of control. *Electronic Media* reported on August 2, 1993, that in its own survey of 100 general managers, three out of four said there is too much needless violence on television and 57 percent would like to have "more input on program content decisions." A *U.S. News & World Report* survey published on April 30, 1994, found that 59 percent of media workers saw entertainment violence as a serious problem.

Formula-driven media violence is not an expression of freedom, popularity, or crime statistics. It is a de facto censorship that chills originality and extends the dynamics of domination, intimidation, and repression domestically and globally. The media violence overkill is an ingredient in a global marketing formula imposed on media professionals and foisted on the children of the world.

There is a liberating alternative. It exists in various forms in all democratic countries. It is

an independent citizen voice in cultural policy-making. More freedom from inequitable and intimidating marketing formulas, and a greater diversity of sources of support, are the effective and acceptable ways to increase diversity of content. That is also the democratic way to reduce media violence to its valid role and reasonable proportions.

8. Culture as a Solution

The Cultural Environment Movement was launched in response to that challenge. CEM's Founding Convention was held in St. Louis, Missouri, March 15 -17, 1996. It was the most diverse international assembly of leaders and activists in the field of culture and communication that has ever met.

The 261 participants debated and approved a People's Communication Charter, the Viewer's Declaration of Independence, and developed recommendations for action.

The liberating alternative requires citizen action. No other force can provide the broad support needed for loosening the global marketing noose around the necks of producers, writers, directors, actors, and journalists.

More freedom, not more censorship, is the effective and acceptable way to reduce television violence to its legitimate role and proportion. The role of Congress, if any, is to turn its anti-trust and civil rights oversight on the centralized and globalized industrial structures and marketing strategies that impose violence on creative people in many cultures, and foist it on the children of the world.

The new approach of the CEM involves:

- Building a new coalition involving media councils worldwide; teachers, students and parents; groups concerned with children, youth and aging; women's groups; religious and minority organizations; educational, health, environmental, legal, and other professional associations; consumer groups and agencies; associations of creative workers in the media and in the arts and sciences; independent computer network organizers and other organizations and individuals committed to broadening the freedom and diversity of communication.
- Opposing domination and working to abolish existing concentration of ownership and censorship (both of and by media), public or private. It involves extending rights, facilities, and influence to interests and perspectives other than the most powerful and profitable. It means involving in cultural decision-making the less affluent and more vulnerable groups, including the marginalized, neglected, abused, exploited, physically or mentally disabled, young and old, women, minorities, poor people, recent immigrants – all those most in need of a decent role and a voice in a freer cultural environment.
- Seeking out and cooperating with cultural-liberation forces of all countries working for the integrity and independence of their own decision-making and against cultural domination and invasion. Learning from countries that have already opened their media to the democratic process. Helping local movements, including in the most dependent and vulnerable countries of Latin America, Asia, and Africa (and also of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics), to invest in their own cultural development; opposing aggressive foreign ownership and coercive trade policies that make such development more difficult.
- Supporting journalists, artists, writers, actors, directors, and other creative workers struggling for more freedom from having to present life as a commodity designed for a market of consumers. Working with guilds, caucuses, labor, and other groups for diversity in employment

and media content. Supporting media and cultural organizations addressing significant but neglected needs, sensibilities, and interests.

- Promoting media literacy, media awareness, critical viewing and reading, and other media education efforts as a fresh approach to the liberal arts and an essential educational objective on every level. Collecting, publicizing and disseminating information, research and evaluation about relevant programs, services, curricula, and teaching materials. Helping to organize educational and parents' groups demanding pre-service and in-service teacher training in media analysis, already required in the schools of Australia, Canada, and Great Britain.
- Placing cultural policy issues on the social-political agenda. Supporting, and, if necessary, organizing local and national media councils, study groups, citizen groups, minority and professional groups, and other forums of public discussion, policy development, representation, and action. Not waiting for a blueprint but creating and experimenting with ways of community and citizen participation in local, national, and international media policy-making. Sharing experiences, lessons, and recommendations and gradually moving toward a realistic democratic agenda.

The condition of the physical environment may determine how long our species survives. But it is the cultural environment that affects the quality of our survival. We need to begin the long process of diversifying, pacifying, democratizing and humanizing the story-telling process that shapes the mainstream of the cultural environment in which we live and into which our children are born.

That liberating alternative exists in the Cultural Environment Movement. CEM is an international non-profit educational corporation, a new coalition of media, professional, labor, religious, health-related, women's and minority groups opposed to private corporate as well as public censorship. CEM is working for freedom from stereotyped formulas; for investing in a freer, fairer, and more diverse cultural environment; and for citizen participation in cultural decisions that shape our lives and the lives of our children.

(For information, write CEM, P.O. Box 31847, Philadelphia, PA 19104, U.S.A.)