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Aufderheide
L2/19

Dear George,

Thank you for your enterprise and courage in holding the exploratory meeting on Cultural Environment. I'm sorry I wasn't more helpful. Most immediately, I had just come from dental surgery, and was suffering from the backlash of the anaesthetic. More generally, I am stymied by the scope of the enterprise from coming up with helpful ideas.

I think I misunderstood the notion of the meeting at the outset. I assumed it would try to figure out how to link up media issues with more traditional environmental ones. I see from the draft statement that you envision something far more vast, a critique of the commercial information system.

You asked me, minimally, for comments on the draft. I don't have any real critique of the guts of it, in the first four paragraphs, and of course I agree with it. I don't think that the next step is holding an international conference, or a conference of any kind. As an organizer, I would think the next step is much smaller and individual, for you to assess what you think you would like to do and what your resources are.

As for the first part, only you know that. What I heard at the meeting is that this issue is not one that anyone at the table was willing to make, in its present form, their top priority, and that people turned the initiative back to you. Discouraging, but a common problem with organizing.

As for the second, clearly your mailing list is an important resource. The value of the mailing list isn't necessarily clear, though. The people who signed up did so for a wide variety of reasons, at least as wide as those of the people in the room for attending.

As you are far more aware than I, the issues of information design and access are intensely political as well as economic. It would be as easy to sign the present statement for a rabidly Eurocentric right-winger as it would be for, say, a militant Afrocentric-curriculum supporter, a neoconservative, and a social democrat like myself. (The AMA and FAIR are equally concerned, but have different takes on the solution.) But it wouldn't mean much either without some vision of an approach to change, e.g. government censorship; subsidies for alterative information providers and for noncommercial producers and distributors; nationalization of information providers; etc.

I do think that the moment isn't now for a total ideological shift in any direction. But there are groups reaching out to the broad public, like the Center for the Study of Commercialism and FAIR, who might be able to benefit from the mailing list, at a minimum.

I also think that it might be possible to design a broad statement of concern about marketing leading information design and commercial profit-making priorities shaping access, to be

signed by a broad spectrum of organizations and individuals, perhaps to be published in the New York Review of Books, and perhaps published on a negative occasion such as the Matsushita takeover, or on a positive occasion such as the debut of the Independent Television Service programing, which could peg some suggestions for reform to the event. The statement could then be used by a variety of groups and organizations to do things like ask for money from foundations to fund a salary for lawyers and organizers on media issues. (One of the reasons there's so little interest among young people in going into the public interest is there are no jobs.) Another target might be getting the domestic peace corps, whatever it's called, to devote some resources to media training at the local level, and to make that a priority in the Peace Corps (or U.S. Peace Corps). That would also expand the jobs pool.

As I said in the meeting, I'm not sanguine about my own active participation in any activism for the next two or three years. I think I now have my hands full, with two kids and getting tenure. I don't think that situation will last forever, though! But at the moment, I'm hard pressed to hold on to the organization of my own domestic life, much less taking on a new initiative. In fact when my child's pre-school board director asked me to take over the pre-school newsletter, I started to cry. So I'm real sure I shouldn't overextend myself right now. And I'm hoping that won't mean that I fall off the mental checklist of people to include in social change activities in the meantime.

Again, I'm full of admiration for your effort in getting us together to think about media reform at a rather grim time, as well as your immense knowledge and insight. I was honored to be considered among the group of people you want to talk to about this, and I want to stay in touch. I'll also continue to brood about this, and to get back to you the moment I see a connection or an opportunity.

Thank you again.

Sincerely,



Pat Aufderheide