

Called
6/13/97

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Dear George Gerbner,

19 May 1997

As I subscribe to far too many magazines, I've just now had a chance to read "The Man Who Counts the Killings" in the May Atlantic Monthly. Of course I'd been aware for a long time of your work in a general way, but it was galvanizing for me to see it summed up in this article. Since I know from personal experience that journalistic accounts of oneself or one's activities are never adequate, if not downright misleading, I suspect you may not be happy about some aspects of the article; on the whole, however, I thought it seemed fair and accurate, and helpful to the cause of decreasing violence in television.

Long disturbed by the amount of violence depicted on TV, I've sometimes written or called TV program managers about especially gory items, for whatever good my protests might do. Mindless mayhem obviously does affect children and adults who are already insecure, creating a kind of circular effect. (I admit I've enjoyed some episodes of "Murder, She Wrote" and "Diagnosis Murder" - but for the puzzle-solving aspects, not the gore.) More intelligent grappings with crime and social disturbances were presented in "Moloney" and "Dangerous Minds," both of which I happened to stumble across; but they've now apparently been canceled. As I see it, however, the main roots of violence (and street crime, and drug use) are the insecurity and lack of ability to empathize that are endemic in unstable homes and neighborhoods - which are caused mainly by lack of interesting, useful work providing a decent living. Frustrated outbreaks of violence and reliance on violent solutions are then exacerbated by the violence seen on TV and in movies - and in the military policies of governments.

While I'm totally sympathetic with your work, my own emphasis, as you may know, has been on more direct advocacy of peace (i.e. anti-militarism and nonviolent conflict resolution) and of social and economic justice (i.e. promoting racial and cultural understanding, and - perhaps most important - providing job training and decent jobs for everyone). Not that my feeble efforts have made much dent in our government's policies, but in addition to writing and teaching and working with War Resisters League, Peace Action, et al., I've done my little "volunteer" bits with Habitat, Project Home and a few other worthy local programs. Expecting basic problems to be solved by "volunteerism," however, is an unrealistic dream of mainly well-off people who are out of touch. (I would, however, like to know more about CEM, perhaps work with it in some capacity. I think I would also enjoy our becoming re-acquainted, as I've felt a lack of intelligent companionship since my return to Philadelphia from Prague a few years ago.)

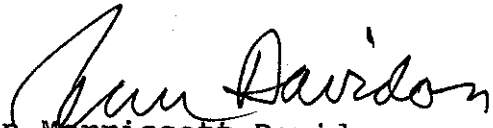
Most recently I've focused on playwriting because I think I can express my feelings and ideas effectively in this medium, and because I think intelligent drama (and comedy) can help increase people's sensitivity and understanding. (My screenplay

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about Leonardo da Vinci, first produced long ago as a play on NY public radio, has recently enabled me to get a PA Council of the Arts grant - but it will probably never be produced.) Unfortunately, most moving and thought-provoking plays are not financially (perhaps also culturally) accessible to many people, except when they make it to the screen or TV - and even then they have trouble competing with the grossly sexual and violent films or silly sitcoms more readily available - though in a few sitcoms I've been surprised to find some good social commentary. (Obviously I too have been watching too much TV!)

I hadn't intended to write such a long letter, especially as I'm sure you, like me, are overwhelmed with reading material and "information overload." But personal letters seem to be getting rarer, like personal friendships. I hope that you and Ilona are well and that we might meet again sometime.

With best wishes,



Ann Morrisett Davidon

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George Gerbner
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Dear George Gerbner,

13 January 1998

I was pleased to hear your recent interview on the Temple radio station (which I sometimes listen to now that WFLN no longer plays classical music) - and of course I was gratified to have at least some of the public hear the information and views that we share. Unfortunately they don't seem to be having much effect on the media, or on the public which seems more focused on revenge than on root causes of crime and violence.

While I don't have much time or energy left from my scattered efforts - which still include writing (currently playwriting, but for publication mostly book reviews); teaching (only one course this semester, at CCP); and volunteering when I can for good causes - I'd still like to know more about the Coalition and perhaps at times help in whatever way I can.

I was particularly struck by your comments about the dearth in TV and movies of serious and thought-provoking drama - as I've been trying to find how to get my screenplay about Leonardo da Vinci read by possible producers. This is a script that was first produced long ago on public radio in NY and Phila., and that I've since developed further, receiving a PA Arts Council grant for it this past year. One problem, of course, is that I have no agent or appropriate contact in the film world. There are some serious film-makers and good films that are occasionally produced, but I have no access to them, and I know that this script would not be very cheap or easy to produce. (It takes place during 1503-06 when Leonardo returned to Florence from Milan, and was working on the mural in the Palazzo della Signoria, the portrait of Lisa del Giocondo, plans for diverting the Arno from Pisa, and many other things.) Right now I'm working on another more contemporary play, about Jimmy Baldwin and Lorraine Hansberry, which raises some provocative issues, and for which there may be a public reading sometime in the spring, but of course I have no idea of its future.

I'm glad you're still working on these important issues, and if there's some way I might be useful I hope you'll let me know.

With best regards, also to Ilona,


Ann Davidon