

# I M A G I N E : M E D I A O F M E A N I N G

*C o n s c i o u s n e s s a n d t h e M e d i a*

E L I Z A B E T H T H O M A N

**A**t the beginning of the 20th century, about the time the movies were invented, our visions of the future were transformed from utopian dreams into urban nightmares.

Many factors were at work. But it's likely that the new visual media played an important role in this shift. Film, and later, television producers found it easier to visualize a world of surrealistic decay than to laboriously shape entertainment that, as Gloria DeGaetano, media literacy author from Redmond, Washington, puts it, "shows people negotiating conflict and resolving it through communication, understanding and empathy."

It's time we all put our imaginations to work again.

The challenge of creating a world of peace and opportunity for all involves a massive struggle for educational opportunity, ethnic understanding, and alternatives to aggression. It won't happen overnight. But we must begin.

The effort will take place on many fronts. But we can ignore neither the media's part in creating the ideas that shape us, nor our responsibility for demanding the kinds of media we need.

Media creators must also face up to their own responsibility for molding our hopes and dreams. But it's up to all of us—as teachers, parents and caring citizens—to demand and work for a culture in which "blood and gore, horror and the basest of human instincts are not the driving storyline of prime-time entertainment and talk shows," DeGaetano continues.

And yet, media violence exists within a "circle of blame." There is an assumption that "the media" are responsible for violence when in truth, they are simply one of the points, albeit a powerful one, in the economically driven circle of media production/consumption. Viewers who elect to support, watch or pay to attend violent entertainment are also part of the equation as they drive demand.

That's why the work of the Center for Media Literacy is so important. Our media literacy workshop kit, *Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media*, is part of a broad range of media literacy teaching resources for schools, churches, and community groups available from the center. In the United States, our center represents a strong voice for media literacy as a means for transforming the discourse about mediated violence from

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# SPIRITUAL

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one of simply blaming “the media” to promoting critical analysis and the acceptance of responsibility for today’s culture of violence on the part of viewers, media professionals, networks, and advertisers.

When the *Beyond Blame* curriculum is introduced to students, whether elementary or high school, they gain the critical thinking and viewing skills to evaluate what they are seeing, and the personal insight to make appropriate choices. A thirteen-year-old from Kansas City, said, “I learned to separate TV violence from regular violence, and to know not to handle my decisions like they do on TV.”

The center hopes that media literacy can be made available to children in schools everywhere.


Psychologists and social critics are beginning to understand that traditional therapy breaks down when it tells people to “adjust” to a pathological society. In the same way, media that merely “reflect” a troubled society are not providing the hope and new ideas we need. We need not just the “politics of meaning,” but a “media of meaning.”

The late physicist Frank Oppenheimer once said, “We don’t live in the real world. We live in a world we make up.” How media construct our reality is the first principle of media literacy. We can choose to make up a world that glorifies violence—or reinforces peace.

The word “imagine” is based on the word “image.” The effort to change our images is the first step in the creation of a caring culture. We invite your participation in the media literacy movement.

It is time to begin.



**ELIZABETH THOMAN** has been a pioneering leader in the US media literacy movement for more than 25 years, and is the founder of the Center for Media Literacy in Los Angeles: [www.medialit.org](http://www.medialit.org). She holds a degree from the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California. 

*“As we evolve as a species, we hit certain key moments when old ways are discarded and new maps of behavior are forged. Movies are the most electrifying communications medium ever devised and the natural conduit for inspiring ourselves to look into the eternal issues of who we are and why we are here.”*

I BELIEVE CERTAIN MOVIES CONTAIN SPIRITUAL messages through which we communicate with ourselves about the eternal mysteries of what it may mean to be human. I have always been deeply affected by the inspiration of these mystical movie messages. One day, I realized that these films all had a spiritual focus, and indeed constituted a whole category of film that has not yet been rec-

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ognized as a specific genre. I now call this genre “Spiritual Cinema.” So a couple of years ago, I wrote *The Force is with You: Mystical Movie Messages that Inspire Our Lives*. The films I discuss in the book all have empowering and inspirational messages about this experience we call life.

These movies appeal to the most integrated and majestic aspects of our nature, and illuminate for us models of behavior of who and what we can be when we are operating at our very best. These messages, when taken as a whole, provide road maps for us as we evolve as a species. Spiritual Cinema essentially focuses on the empowerment of the God within each individual, rather than religious films that focus on God as an external power.

These kinds of films consistently outperform most other genres. There is a huge, passionate, and hungry audience that wants more of these films to be made every year. As things are, we have numerous action movies, comedies, horror, and love stories produced each year because their audiences have been previously quantified. With the recognition of Spiritual Cinema as a genre, more funding will flow, and more films on these themes will be made and marketed.

I believe that Spiritual Cinema exists to empower and inspire audiences, not to denigrate or discourage them.

## A NEW FILM GENRE [some examples]

### THE NATURE OF REALITY

*The Matrix*

*A Beautiful Mind*

*Vanilla Sky*

### LIFE AFTER LIFE

*Sixth Sense*

*Ghost*

*Heaven Can Wait*

### ENHANCED HUMAN ABILITIES

*Phenomenon*

*Powder*

*Altered States*

### TIME TRAVEL

*Back to the Future*

*The Kid*

*Frequency*

### OUR FASCINATION WITH ANGELS

*All That Jazz*

*City of Angels*

*Michael*

### EXTRATERRESTRIAL INTELLIGENCE

*Independence Day*

*Forbidden Planet*

*E.T.*

### PLANETARY CRISIS

*Armageddon*

*Planet of the Apes*

*Fail Safe*

### THE POWER OF LOVE

*Castaway*

*Sleepless in Seattle*

*It's a Wonderful Life*

This is not to say that some films in the genre are not powerful and even disturbing. The dark shadow side of human nature is evidenced in many of these movies, but the underlying messages about our humanity are ultimately positive and life-affirming. I think we already have enough

doom and gloom in entertainment for Armageddon enthusiasts. I simply want to illuminate another side of the human experience—especially in this age of uncertainty where humanity is on the brink of a positive evolution of the human spirit.

Films in this genre are generally passed off as flukes, or incorrectly categorized as comedies or love stories. Right now, the entire notion of spirituality is anathema in the halls of power in Hollywood. They don't want to be bothered because they don't yet see the viability of this market. The movie business has always been behind the curve when it comes to social phenomena. Films tend to reflect the major social advances of society after the fact, rather than before or even during such changes. This is neither bad nor wrong. It just is. Eventually, the film industry will see what embracing spirituality has done for book publishing, television, and the music industry, and will jump on the bandwagon. For some in Hollywood, the dignity of the individual in Spiritual Cinema is in contrast to the social ethics of the business itself.



**STEPHEN SIMON** is a film producer and co-founder of *The Institute for Spiritual Entertainment, Inc.*, a non-profit organization dedicated to the development of intellectual properties focused on the rediscovery of inner wisdom and divine power. His movies include *Some-where in Time*, *What Dreams May Come*, and his latest, *Indigo*. Find more information online at [www.mysticalmovies.com](http://www.mysticalmovies.com)



## Now every IONS' member has a chance to see great spiritual movies.

Remember how you felt when you saw *Field of Dreams*, *Ghost*, *What Dreams May Come*, or the new movie *Whalerider*? Many films just as beautiful are made every year, but almost nobody gets to see them.

Academy-Award-winning film director Stephen Simon, who selects these great movies, says: "Some of the best heartfelt and soul satisfying films made every year go virtually unseen because distributors won't touch them."

But now you can *build your own library* of spiritual DVDs when you join the Spiritual Cinema Circle. They're yours to keep and share with friends and family: A lifetime of rare spiritual entertainment.

**Join the Spiritual Cinema Circle today, and get three special movies every month to keep for only \$21 monthly. Limited-time introductory offer.**

It's easy. Go to IONS' website ([www.noetic.org](http://www.noetic.org)), click on "IONS Goes to the Movies," and register. Be one of the first to benefit from this new genre of Spiritual Cinema.

**[www.noetic.org](http://www.noetic.org)**



When you sign up via IONS, you help our nonprofit institute because a portion of your fee comes to us.