



*'Something as quiet
as a change of mind
is bubbling up . . .
spreading around the
world, changing
everything.'*

—WILLIS HARMAN

SIGNS O A W

So much of the media focuses on the sensationalism of bad news—stories of disaster, misdeeds, and tragedy. But these days, more and more people are waking up to the fact that the press and broadcast media do not give sufficient voice to the many inspiring ideas and events that millions of people share and participate in every day around the world.

In this issue of Shift, we have presented a range of thoughtful critiques of the mass media, balanced by examples of people committed to making a difference—taking action and sharing personal stories of ways to transform the media both from within and from the outside. Here we give some further examples of people waking up to a new set of possibilities for how the mass media may serve the needs of 21st-century humans.

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Turn on for New Heroes

Spurred by public criticism, the leaders of the film and television industry have been searching many years for ways to reduce the display of media violence. For example, during one of the industry's summer conferences on television violence, I listened as network executives struggled with the question: How can media creators attract and excite audiences, retain the impact of dramatic narrative, and at the same time eliminate or tone down scenes whose impact depends on excessive and gratuitous violence?

In an industry built on imagination, the participants seemed remarkably lacking in vision. They debated whether the murders should be shown on screen, to demonstrate the consequences of violence, or should happen off screen, to save us from the gruesome details.

They missed the point: "Turning off" the violence in media is not enough. We must also "turn on" stories that will provide role models for children and adults.

What is needed is not the same old story with the violence sanitized.

F A W O R L D A K E N I N G

Kids do know there is violence out there in the world—even right at home and in their schools and neighborhoods. What they need are the tools of good conflict-management and resolution. They need new role models to show the way to a power greater than violence. They need new kinds of “beyond macho” heroes of both sexes and all races.—Arthur Kanegis, founder of Future WAVE, Working for Alternatives to Violence in Entertainment. Source: www.medialit.org

‘Open Sesame’ for Mid-East

The educational organization behind Sesame Street launched a bold new children’s television production to help foster long-term peace in the Middle East. Airing simultaneously on Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian channels, Sesame Stories builds on the Sesame Street model but caters to the special needs of the region. It aims to promote respect and understanding among Arab and Jewish children in the belief that ignorance about each other fuels the ongoing conflict in the region.

Premiering last Monday, Sesame

Stories counters the negative images children see every day on television. It offer alternatives to violence when dealing with anger, and presents rarely seen positive images of the other side. The stories encourage children between the ages of four and seven to appreciate similarities and differences in their own culture and others, and to celebrate the diversity of the human experience.

The three shows are thematically parallel, and combine segments featuring the Sesame Street Muppet characters with animation and mini-documentaries. Locally developed Muppet characters appeal to young children through cleverness and humor.

The three production teams persevered over two-to-three years despite endless practical and physical challenges. It was difficult for the producers from each country to meet. They had to meet in neutral, safe places, and rely on email and telephones a lot. Packages and tapes sent in the mail to other teams would sometimes be intercepted by government agencies.

Beatrice Chow, Director of Publicity for Sesame Workshop, the non-profit parent of both Sesame Stories and Sesame Street, said, “I can’t tell you how happy everyone was when

all the programs got on the air for the first time. Beyond teaching letters and numbers, we are opening children’s minds toward their neighbors, other cultures, and the larger world.”

One producer said they are teaching “the ABCs of Life.”—Received from sustainabilitynt@aol.com. Story idea from Libby and Len Traubman, founders of the Jewish-Palestinian Living Room Dialogue Group in California. <http://traubman.igc.org/global.htm>

In the Theater of the Soul

A Russian spy once told me that Communism was brought down by Dallas—the soap opera. We met by chance on a street in London. He knew me from a Moscow conference during the Gorbachev era. I had vaguely suspected that this “intellectual” was KGB. Now we could talk freely about why the Wall came down and the Soviet empire crumbled.

“It wasn’t politics or the nuclear race or any kind of ideological war,” he said. “It was TV. Once the people saw J.R.’s Cadillac, once they absorbed week after week all those

Tell-A-Vision

‘Everywhere you go, it seems, you hear people complaining about their reality. I say if you don’t like the current programming, step out from behind the remote. It’s time to change the channel and tell a vision. Instead of being just another divisionary taking sides on the latest televised drama, become a visionary who uses the spectacle to help us all see more clearly. If enough of us do this, even the mainstream media will have to replace its commentators with uncommontaters who have an alter native vision.’

—SWAMI BEYONDANANDA

mansions and beautiful clothes, the end was inevitable.” He sounded serious, but could Communism really have been destroyed by glamour?

Hollywood almost takes for granted that it exerts global power, yet its influence is mysterious and hazy. Dallas was about much more than nouveau-riche style. Hollywood’s greatest achievement is to seep into the unconscious of the world, and it has never done it more widely than now. I can go to the remotest outback in India, Guatemala, or Malaysia, and what will I see? Huddled people sitting in the dark watching seven-year-old reruns of *All My Children* (or *Baywatch* or *Top Gun*) in front of a battered television. Every moment they spend has a ghostly but huge influence.

Ten influences give me great hope for the future, and I measure all TV, movies, and music by them. Whatever is coming at me in the dark, I want it to arouse a sense of freedom, inspiration, love, laughter, and joy, hidden potential waiting to blossom, unfulfilled need, nurturing, education, compassion, and truth. I don’t have to respond on all ten levels, just one. They are all qualities of the soul. They are the seeds Hollywood alone can plant, because whatever the word “spiritual” means, it isn’t superficial, and it isn’t just a matter of words. At the end of *The Matrix*, when Neo stops the bullets in mid-air and sees through the illusion of happiness created by the monstrous machines, a chill went up our collective spine. What he had seen through wasn’t just the matrix but the *maya*. At that moment everything was a dream, not just the movie. For an instant we participated in a theater of the soul.

Hollywood’s great potential is to fill unspoken needs; above all, the need to transcend. To shape the unconscious isn’t sheer manipulation (although that is always a danger and calls for a serious sense of responsibility). Everyone is hungry to be part of the theater of the soul. Critics too often view Hollywood as raw technology and money. Certainly the current technology is phenomenal, but digital images aren’t what get us past the *maya*. Audience meets image at a deep level where all the qualities of love, compassion, truth, and above all, freedom, hold sway. In the dark we will always seek the light; that is the real bottom line. Despite the chaotic pressures and enormous greed that has always stained Hollywood, its visionaries are attuned at this deeper level. I don’t see anyone else who wields such untold power—or must live up to it. “All my children” now means the world. If a KGB agent can see this so clearly, surely the rest of us have to.

—Deepak Chopra, www.transformedia.org

Metaphysics Goes to the Movies

Film producer Stephen Simon believes that the public is underserved by not getting a steady diet of films that deliver conscious content. In *What Dreams May Come*, Simon addresses the afterlife in a way that hadn’t been done before, but yet appeals to a mainstream audience.

“The movie industry is the only major entertainment industry that is behind the times in recognizing metaphysics and the exploration of

consciousness as a genre,” says metaphysical movie producer Simon. “Yet we sense that there is now a worldwide yearning for this type of material.

“Metaphysically motivated movies give people hope. They allow you to see yourself as something really extraordinary and as a human being witnessing the potential of humanity,” he says. “If we do our job correctly, we hope that people will walk out of these movies feeling a little bit better about what it means to be a human being.”

Simon predicts that in the near future there will be new delivery systems for entertainment, as inconceivable to us now as DVDs were twenty-five years ago. “The whole future of entertainment is changing, and we are going to have technology that will allow the viewer to truly experience a movie in a new way. When that day comes,” says Simon, “it is my passionate belief that the experience people will want is not to have a gun pointed at their heads so that they can see the bullet coming; it will be to go inside, and experience the wonders of what we feel in our meditations and in our dreams.”—*Randy Peyser, Conscious Life Magazine*

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Copyright Consciousness

Two manifestations of the media liberation movement are “Copyleft” and the “Creative Commons license.” According to the Free Software Foundation (www.gnu.org), Copyleft is a method for licensing computer programs to

be free software, and requiring all modified and extended versions of each program to be free as well. This “liberation” of intellectual property allows programmers to build upon each other’s works without worrying about getting sued by the original author(s), or fear that their work will be picked up by others who wish to make money off it without acknowledging the source. Copyleft-style licenses (of which there are many different kinds) have led to large collaborative programming efforts free of national boundaries such as Mozilla (www.mozilla.org), which serves as the basis of the Netscape browser.

Parallel to this is the Creative Commons license (www.creativecommons.org), which sets forth how content creators within any medium can share the fruits of their labors, and protect their rights without denying others collaborative use. Under traditional copyright law, one must either deny access or sell the content for money in order to establish copyrights (hence the phrase “all rights reserved”), or simply put one’s work into the public domain without any legal protection. Under the Creative Commons schema, creators have greater flexibility in what rights they wish to grant that support creative collaboration rather than legal wrangling. Musicians, recording companies, photographers, writers, filmmakers, educators, and scholars have begun to share rights through creative agreements that honor collaboration between the creator and future users of that content—a true win-win situation for everyone.—*Tobias Bodine, IONS’ electronic communications editor*

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