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Cover Page Footnote

George Gerbner is Professor and Dean Emeritus at the Annenberg School for Communications, University of Pennsylvania. This is an edited transcription of a talk he gave at Sacred Heart University on July 8, 1996 as part of a Media Studies Department Summer Institute on Teaching Media Literacy.

GEORGE GERBNER

Telling All the Stories: Children and Television

You may have heard the story about the teacher who said to the class, "Children, who can tell me what our century owes to Mr. Thomas Alva Edison." One student raised her hand and said, "Teacher, I can tell you. Without Mr. Edison we would still be watching television by candle-light." Our children cannot imagine that there was such an age, and I think in a sense they are right, because television, which is the mainstream of our culture as we organized the rest of the media, is fundamentally different from other media and ushered in a new age which has profoundly changed the way that our children and all of us are socialized.

In order to understand and appreciate and try to see that change in perspective, we have to start with a very basic question: What is it that makes human beings human? My answer to that question is that human beings are the only creatures that we know (or I know) that live in a world erected by the stories we tell. That means that most of the things that we know or think we know we have never personally experienced, and it's very rare that we realize that most of what we do is not in response to the immediate physical environment, as all other animals behave: they would come in here in order to look for shelter or escape from danger or just get warm or find food. We come in here to exchange stories, in a very general sense in which story is not just traditional storytelling but essentially all of what we think or what we know about life, about other people. All of our signs by whatever means — whether it's architecture, painting, words, music; whether we call it science, whether we call it laws — convey a perspective, are basically little stories that inform us about what life is all about.

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Functionally, there are only three kinds of stories. First, stories that

show how things work. Now, how things work is essentially invisible. It's the hidden connection that's the most important: the hidden dynamics of life, relationships of cause and effect, relationships among people. The way to make the invisible visible is to create a story, preferably or often with imagery, that literally makes it visible: create individuals, create people, put them in action, and have the story unravel as the mystery of what is going on behind the scenes, where we don't see it. This type of story is what we call fiction and drama. It is the basic socializing story because it's the first that we encounter in life — fairy-tales, stories of all kinds — and because it brings us to all the situations in life before we get to it.

The second kind of story is a story about what things are. It really fills in the gaps. The story of the first kind, stories about how things are built, are fantasy that we call reality. And by that I don't mean that it is false: I mean it's synthetic, it's socially constructed, it is constructed according to the stories that we hear and we tell, and this is how things work. Now in order to give that fantasy some testing, some warrant, some verisimilitude, we tell the second kind of story about facts or information about exposition. We sometimes call this legend; today, most of it we call news. News in every society is selected out to support that society's fantasy of how things work, and if you go around the world and look at news, you see that these stories are all basically more or less objective or unobjective; that's not the basic difference. The basic difference is what a society selects out to consider relevant and important, to select out as a fact or an act or an event that relates to its own interests. One of the reasons why we emphasize stories of crime and violence so much is that they represent threats to the social order presumably; but in every society stories that threaten a particular set of social relationships and then show how we deal with such threats and how we build support for dealing with them, very often by aggression, become newsworthy.

The third type of story is a story of value and choice; that is, if this is how things work and this is what things are, now what are we going to do about it? These stories present some kind of a value that is desirable, some kind of an objective, and give us some instruction as to how to reach it. These are instructions, these are sermons; today most of them are called commercials. They are essentially little stories that posit a value and then provide an avenue to its availability and even

instruct us as to exactly how to get it and usually what the price is.

These three story functions have been woven together throughout human history into a seamless texture that we call culture. I define culture as a large set of artifacts like old stories that illuminate the hidden dynamics of how things work, what things are, and what to do about them, and that really erect the kind of environment to which we respond and in light of which we act and behave all our lives.

For the longest time in human history these stories were woven together essentially by hand, so to speak, by handicraft ways, in response to communities, to neighborhoods, to tribes, to regions, and of course in different language communities and so on, but essentially face to face. That means that they were infinitely adjustable, but also means that they were highly centralized, and it was usually the priest or the chief of the tribe that had the right to prescribe and to tell the stories. Today the opportunity for face to face interaction becomes rare, and it is, as I'm sure we all learn, more and more difficult to get people, with the pressures and with the fragmentation of time, and with the way in which we are inundated with mass-produced, mechanical story-telling, with the competition on time, to persuade people to make that investment of actually going to a place where the occasion is the exchanging of stories. And the reason is the first major transformation in story-telling, which is the Industrial Revolution.

The first machine is the printing press. The first industrial product, it is difficult for us to recognize now, is the book. It is really the precondition for all the rest of the upheavals to follow that we call the Industrial Revolution. When a book starts printing out stories, it's the beginning of the industrialization of storytelling. It's the beginning of the era in which human consciousness becomes intimately related to the social order, to a particular industrial order and its ownership, its management, its control over the raw materials as well as over the talent and over the distribution of stories. It breaks the power of the priest. In effect it says — someone like Martin Luther says — you no longer need the priest: we give you the Bible, the book; interpret it for yourself. So it ushers in the Reformation, and it provides the basis for the fundamental condition for any form of self-government, any form of plurality in society which didn't exist in tribal society: it was all highly homogenous within the tribe, within the local community. But it begins to build the precondition for plurality of publics in the same society.

Now this is always a struggle: the right to be able to conceive of, write, and publish stories from the point of view of a class which is opposed to another class in the same society or a region or a religion. There are conflicts that historically used to be resolved through force, through wars, through conquest, through repression. The notion emerges that if you are able to produce stories from your own point of view you have the right to do so even though this competes and conflicts with other powerful points of view in the same society. And in that way, you build a new form of human consciousness called the public.

It's interesting that the word "public" of course stems from "publication": it's the publication that creates a public intimately tied to the ability of print to be distributed across all hitherto difficult if not even forbidden boundaries, a public that can have some sense of collective strength or of weakness without ever meeting face to face, a public not only of dozens or hundreds or thousands. If you go to Greece or to Rome, you can see a coliseum that could collect fifty, sixty, a hundred thousand people. That's not a public, that's a crowd. A public is fifty, sixty, a hundred million people. With printing that is easily available, and with broadcasting is even almost automatically there, but that's another story to which we come in a minute. Once you can do that, you can transcend the face to face interaction and you can conceive of the idea of a self-governing community of a plurality of publics, and these plurality have to do with class, have to do with race, have to do in a multi-cultural society with language, with ethnicity, with religion, on which the basic idea of republic, *res publica*, law, the rule by the public, rests. Most of our ideas about education, about the plurality of religious life, the plurality of political orientation, the necessity of choice in a democracy – not always true but the ideal – is based on a print culture.

To be sure, a print culture also sets up another elite, which is the literate elite. It is also always a minority: even though we assume that most people can read and write, most people do not, in fact, read and write or avail themselves of the kind of information that is needed for a citizen. Most people's information comes from what we call entertainment, which we define as the information that people seek for its own sake, for the sake of its own rewards, instead of being interested in a particular subject matter or a particular area of knowledge.

The second major transformation – and it is still ongoing – which has again transformed the cultural environment in which we live is, let's call it, the electronic transformation. The electronic transformation, the mainstream of which is television, in a sense retribalizes the community. It's highly concentrated, now it's increasingly monopolized, globalized, and so on, and it builds a kind of mythology which goes into every home. For the first time in human history a child is born into a home in which television is on an average of 7 hours and 41 minutes a day – this has never happened before, nothing like it has ever happened before – and in which most of the stories, to most of the children most of the time, are no longer told by the parent or the school or the church or the community, and in most places around the world not even by the native country. I'm sure your daughter hears French people talk about invasion of other cultures and how they try to establish a quota system. What kind of a quota system is it: that 50% of the stories have to be home-produced? Well, we don't let in even 2%. We're very jealously guarding whatever it is that we have, and what we have is less and less for use by us and, as we'll develop in a few minutes, is more and more produced for a global market.

So the new transformation is a retribalization of the community in which now most of the stories are produced no longer in a handicraft way and no longer in response to local community or even national interest but essentially by a shrinking group of global conglomerates that really have nothing to tell but a great deal to sell. And the total story-telling climate is becoming conditioned by a marketing imperative.

Now when this happens, there are certain enrichments that are made available, like in television, to people who didn't read before and who now participate in the mainstream of a culture that they have never before had the opportunity to participate in. But at the same time there are large areas of life that are missing and there are large areas of life that are troublesome and damaging. That means that a ten-year-old child today knows more names of brands of beer than names of American presidents. It means that a six-year-old child today is as likely to recognize Joe Camel – and Joe Camel is the symbol of an industry that kills a thousand people a day in the United States alone and many more around the world – as to recognize Mickey Mouse. And while Mickey Mouse is not necessarily my ideal of human

socialization, especially since Disney swallowed ABC-Capital Cities and has become one of the greediest, most ruthless, even if charmingly presented, global conglomerate, he's perhaps less lethal than Joe Camel.

It means that about one-third of our population who are relatively low income, relatively low education, not the best customers, not the best consumers, are represented, according to our studies, by 1.2% of the population that you see on television: they are practically invisible. Their life and the polarization of information-rich and information-poor, and the growing pool, not only of unemployed but of people living below the poverty level, now 13% of the total population – about 45% in our inner cities of young people – is invisible. And when they become visible, which is usually not in entertainment, but in news, their visibility is twice as likely to be in connection with crime, with drugs, with violence, as any of the better customers, basically white males in the so-called private sector. When they are seen in the everyday story-telling cultural environment in which our children grow up and in which we all live, they are seen as threats, as dangers, which is why the only way that our political system can compete in an election campaign is to offer more jails, more executions – a medieval barbarism: we are the only industrial country that even has executions. One of the reasons why European countries refuse to extradite people to the United States is that they think it's a barbarian custom, and when Canada, one of the last countries to abolish capital punishment, banned capital punishment, its capital crime rate went down and not up. So all these measures have never served to reduce crime. But with a generally fearful and anxious population they never fail to get votes, and by getting votes they add to the repression, which probably produces more crime than all the punitive measures we sometimes advocate and accept.

The skewed representation of life doesn't stop with these examples, but really begins with the way in which, like all the symbolic world, the world of stories is cast. The average viewer of television sees about 350 characters a week, week in and week out. It's a very stable cast: despite all the changes (we follow this on a year by year basis) it's a very stable cast in which, first of all, men outnumber women 3 to 1 across the board, 4 to 1 in children's programs, 5 to 1 in the news, which is the most power-oriented, which means the most

male-dominated. Young people under 18 are about one-third of their true proportion of the population; older people, 65 and above, are about one-fifth of their true proportion in the population, and this of course is not just a question of numbers – nobody would expect our media to reproduce the census – but the question is in which way are the deviations? And these deviations simply mean that the groups that are under-represented are subject to two major influences. One is that under-representation means greater stereotyping, means fewer diversity of roles, fewer opportunities, fewer potentials. So if you grow up with a self-image of belonging to a group that is under-represented, you begin with a relatively limited sense of potentials; in effect you are damaged in terms of any sense of what you can do and what you cannot do.

Secondly, and this is even more troublesome, if you can imagine it, the very groups that are under-represented are also the groups that are over-victimized. By over-victimized I mean that a sense of power comes from seeing yourself or seeing people engage in situations of some kind of a threat or risk or danger and overcome it, through being able to affect their own fate. We measure this by a very simple, but it seems to turn out to be a very powerful tool: by looking at the number of perpetrators of violence in any one of these demographic groups and the number of people in the same group who become victims. We find that the groups that are under-represented are the groups that are over-victimized. I'll give you an example: for every 10 violent characters in prime-time television, there are about 10 or 11 or 12 victims. It's roughly the same, a few more victims: this is a very efficient process. But for every 10 women who are written into scripts to exert the kind of power that white males exert with impunity, there are 17 female victims. For every 10 women of color who are written into scripts to exert that kind of power, there are 22 women of color who become victimized. As you grow up you kind of accumulate a sense of the risks and the vulnerabilities in life. Our research surveys ask people ``Are you afraid to go down in the street at night?" and ``Who do you think would win in this kind of a conflict and that kind of a conflict?" We find that the responses support the hypothesis that being subjected to under-representation and over-victimization makes people feel more vulnerable, more dependent, more demanding of protection, more accepting of even repression if it comes, if it is presented to them as enhancing their own sense of security. In other words, they begin to act

more like the way we define a minority.

Minorities are not born: nobody is born a minority. Minority is a behavioral power term: they are made through learning, as they grow up in a culture. The most productive teaching device in any culture is the showing of conflict, in which different types of people encounter each other in conflict situations, to see who wins and who loses. And of course every plot seems to justify the outcome, so you have to ignore the plot and take a bird's eye view, as we do in our research, and you see how large numbers of people belong to certain categories, what kind of fate is in store for them, what are the probabilities of their winning and losing, of their succeeding and failing, of their getting away with forcing their own will on somebody else, and/or becoming victims themselves.

This exercise is probably the dominant way of cultivating a sense of place in a power structure, a kind of a societal pecking order, by growing up and absorbing the calculus of risks and of opportunities of dangers and of potentials. It goes on with an enormous and unprecedented frequency in our culture. It's nothing new: most stories have had this effect and all stories have a very strong component of show of force and of unraveling to show who wins and who loses in what kind of situation. What is new is that we are in the midst of a tidal wave of exposures of carefully choreographed brutality, such as the world has never seen. In every home, 3 entertaining murders a night is the diet of our children, and in children's programs they occur at the rate of between 20 and 25 per hour, sugar-coated with humor, to be sure, which makes the pill easier to swallow.

The pill of television violence is widely and, I think, wilfully, misinterpreted, especially in the media, which emphasize that it incites to violence — and of course it does to maybe 5% or less, according to the most expansive estimates. What it does and what is very seldom talked about, is to present what we call the "mean world" and to generate the "mean world syndrome," whose primary characteristic is a sense of vulnerability, dependence, and therefore of controllability. Instead of being primarily an incitation mechanism, it is an intimidation mechanism. The pill is the pill of power. Violence is an exhibition of power, and a little bit of terror goes a long way, as anyone knows. It teaches essentially who can get away with what against whom in a real conflict. Therefore, it teaches the potentials of power, the

risks, the vulnerabilities, the ability to prevail in a conflict situation.

Now, let me digress just long enough to say that violence is a legitimate artistic and journalistic feature of story telling. It is even necessary to show the tragic consequences of obsession with violent resolutions of human and social conflict. But most of the stories and most of the violence that we see everyday, let's say 9 times out of 10, is not that. It's what I call "happy violence": that is, it's swift, it's thrilling, it's usually spectacular, sometimes glamorized, and it always results in a happy ending. We are obsessed with happy endings because you have to deliver the audience to the next commercial in the mood to buy, and tragedy simply won't do it and the advertisers won't stand for it. They don't want anything to upset an audience just before they come to a commercial. And if you can't upset an audience, you desensitize people, which is one of the consequences of lifetime exposure to this.

There are essentially three consequences of the lifetime exposure and absorption of this scenario. The first is a sense of normality: that this is normal, that this enormous overkill, if I may use that phrase of violence, is the way the world is, and when we ask children in our surveys, "Is this the way it is in your community?" they say, "No, no we're the exception. In our community we're OK, but that's the way everybody else is." Therefore it's a kind of normality which results in the acceptance of this as a fact which is vastly overdone, and in some people who have few avenues of recognition or who maybe see the wrong examples of problem-solving, it does lead to violence, it makes a contribution to it. But let us not scapegoat the media by exaggerating the amount of incitation, compared to powerful factors like poverty, like unemployment, like despair in our inner cities, like the undeclared civil war that is going on invisibly in many of our cities, that contribute to most of the violence. This is a tragic but numerically negligible factor.

The second consequence, and the second part of what we call the "mean world syndrome," is what the psychologists call desensitization, and what I call brutalization, because that's what it really means: you lose the ability to be upset. You lose the ability to protest. Sometimes clients tell me, "Well, you know, our children see all this and they sleep well and we're OK so they'll be OK." The honest answer to that is, "No, you're not OK, we're not OK." We haven't even begun to know what a civilized life is. We accept and have undergone in the last

fifty years incredible brutality and genocide that was accepted by people who lived in it because of cultural conditioning that made them accept it, and if your children don't lose any sleep over it, that's the problem. They should. These are things to which we should not get reconciled. That is what the package of desensitization means.

Finally, the most pervasive and I think in many ways the most debilitating consequence of regular and frequent exposure is the sense of insecurity and vulnerability, which correlates basically with the amount of television people watch. It is reinforced by the kind of publicity that is increasingly tailored to a public that has grown up on television. It is further reinforced by motion pictures that exploit the maybe 5 or 6% of the addicts, who say that "This is thrilling, this is wonderful, I want to see more of it, more explicit, more brutal," and these are the really brutal exploitation pictures that are specially targeted, unfortunately, to many of the young people who have become addicted. That then correlates with a very high sense of danger, vulnerability, rigidity, and the acceptance and sometimes even the approval of repressive measures in order to enhance one's own sense of security, even if they are highly counter-productive.

Now we ask the question: Why is it so widespread, why is it such a prominent feature of our culture, more than in any other part of the world, even though, as we'll see, we export a great deal of it? Why is it that when most Americans don't like it, we are told that this is what the public wants, that this is a market and it just provides what the public wants and just allows the writers to write what they want to write and producers to produce what they want to produce? Well, all I can say is, don't believe it. That is not true, and we have the data and the evidence, and we are going to try to continue to follow this through on a year by year basis, that it's simply not so. Look at any public opinion poll and you'll find that between 75 and 85% of the respondents say that they don't like it, they think it's too much, they hate it, they wish there would be less.

Look at the polls in the industry itself. A year ago this summer *Advertising Age*, the trade paper of the advertising industry, conducted a poll of television station managers, and 75% of television station managers said that they don't like it, that their viewers complain, they hate it, they wish they wouldn't have to program it, but that is what's available on the market at competitive prices. Look at the ten highest

rated programs: go back as far as you like, there is not a violent program among them. This is not to say that there's not some programs or movies that are good movies and violent movies and are popular: I'm talking about hundreds of programs and films. I'm talking about the general bird's eye view of what whole communities absorb, not what individuals select out.

In one of our studies, we took over a hundred violent programs from our own database and the same number of non-violent programs scheduled and aired at the same time, because ratings are essentially determined not by the quality of the program: ratings are essentially determined by the time-slot into which a program is slotted. The audience is always the same: the audience for television is a ritual. Television is not a selectively used medium. Despite indications to the contrary, like remote control and so on, people basically watch the same programs day in and day out and the audience is practically always the same at the same time of the day and the day of the week. So if you can tap into when the audience is there, you are going to get a big rating. If you can follow a popular program and inherit a large audience, you're going to have a high rating. So that's why our study had to be controlled for air time. The non-violent sample had a higher average Nielsen rating and a higher share (Nielsen tabulates ratings and share, a percent of households watching a particular program compared with another program at the same time) for each of the five years we studied. But we began to investigate a little more and found something that is well known in the trade: as producers say, violence travels well.

Let me explain what this means. Television production is not a free market. It's dominated by a handful of major buyers. That means that when you're an oligopoly, you repress the price you pay and you increase the price that you get. The price that producers get for producing programs, called the license fee, is not enough to break even. They cannot break even on a domestic market. In order to break even and make a profit they are forced into syndication, they are forced into video sales, and, most of all, forced onto the world market. Now when you know that you are going to be producing programs for the world market, you create formula-driven programs, not individual works of art: these are assembly-line programs stamped out to a particular formula, sold at the great international so-called television

festivals, which are big bazaars where all this trading is going on, in lots of a dozen or twenty-five that the buyers are not even allowed to look at. Take it or leave it, because it's such a cheap, irresistible business deal. You are producing for that kind of a market and you ask yourself: What is it that needs no translation, that speaks action in any language, that is essentially image-driven, and that fits into any culture? And the answer by far is violence. Sex is a distant second because it runs into, ironically enough, much more censorship and codes than violence. It's an ironic fact of life that a life-giving activity is more likely to be censored than a life-taking activity, but that's the way it is. So we produce and export 20% more so-called action programs — action program is a code word for violence in the trade — than we even exhibit at home. This is America's second biggest export. Do you know what the first one is? The first one is armaments, the second is television and motion pictures. Sometimes I say first we sell arms and then we teach them how to use them. So it's a very big business, a multi-billion dollar per year business, and it's big business because it is sold in so many countries. Take *Power Rangers*, for example. This is really a cheap program. It's a recycled Japanese series with some action footage put in as part of a global merchandising concept — the program is essentially designed to sell the paraphernalia — but it's playing in 80 countries; 300 million children see it every night. There's never been anything like it, and now the successor is already in the works, and this is a huge, global marketing sensation.

And the reason is that we can sell it. I say we: these conglomerates happen to be headquartered in Hollywood. The money is a transnational investment, but the factories are mostly in Hollywood. The syndicators say we can sell you an hour's worth of this programming for less than it could cost you to produce one minute of your own, and our government — in fact most of the governments and most of the private entrepreneurs — fall for this deal, because they know that the audience is always there, and if they can cheapen the product, they still make more money than if they do something more popular in each country, local home production, but which would be more costly because it's for a smaller market.

By buying such programs, they are not just buying cheap entertainment and even cheap news (news is getting into global distribution as well: Fox is going into it, Turner is going into it, CNN,

and so on). They are driving their own artists, their own journalists, their own producers, out of business, unless they do something that some countries do, like in France. The French charge a 2% tax on theater admissions, a 3% tax on videotape. This generates a large sum that is paid into a fund that provides loans for independent production, so that there's a major national effort to keep some sense of plurality and independence alive. We have driven these out. There are no more independent producers in the United States and not even the networks are independent any more: they are owned by other conglomerates, multi-media and in fact multi-enterprise conglomerates. So there is no sense of independence, and we are rapidly going in the direction of total control of cultural life by a handful of conglomerates.

This is a global system that we have drifted into, without any public debate or recognition or certainly attention or publicity, and the finishing touches were given to it by the Telecommunications Act of 1996. That Act, passed and signed by the President in January, not only does away with any kind of anti-trust consideration, much of which was not even enforced now for decades, but essentially not only legalizes and legitimizes monopolies but unleashes monopolies. It says to them, "You're free to go in the world market: we are going to support you by our trade policies, like NAFTA, like GATT," regardless of the objection of our allies and of our trading partners, which are vociferous but relatively ineffective because sometimes their own governments and usually their own broadcasters buy the cheap product because it is so enormously profitable.

The writers say, "There is no free market: this is not an expression of our freedom. This is an expression of a *de facto* censorship." And when I talk to them in Hollywood, as I frequently do, they say, "Don't talk to me about censorship from Washington. I never heard about that. I mean, to be sure, that's always a danger, but I don't hear about that. I hear about censorship every day. I'm told to put more action in this, or if I have something a little more complicated or a little more sophisticated or a little more complex resolution of a conflict, they'll say 'That's too slow. Take it out.' That is the kind of censorship that I get every day."

So, in dealing with some of the dysfunctions, troublesome, problematic, and damaging aspects of our cultural system, we are really

not up against a simple policy that can be easily changed, although policies can always be somewhat flexible so as to take advantage of whatever opportunities for diversity exist in any system. We are up against the rapid homogenization, monopolization, conglomeratization, and globalization of all major cultural industries and productions, and of all the stories that our children hear, see, and know. It's a structural trap in which our sometimes very talented people in the industry are also trapped and have very little leeway to deal with it.

This brings us to the last point on which we all have to put our heads together, because we all need help, because every culture conspires to make its members, its subjects, feel that ``Yeh, you can do a little reform, a little changes here and there, but you don't vary the structure: that's taboo, that's sacred, that's impossible." We must be sure that we don't believe that, that we act not only as consumers but also as citizens. We have to consider how we can address the problem that I tried to sketch in the last few minutes on several levels: in the home, in the community, and nationally and internationally.

Within the home is the most difficult because in dealing with it we act in isolation and if we say, ``Well, we'll turn it off, we don't use it, we limit it, we ration it, we censor it," we also risk the danger of isolation. The problem must be confronted, not avoided; discussed, not ignored. In the home we should discuss both television and other media sufficiently. That means, first of all, we should watch enough so that we have a leg to stand on. Too often children know more about television than we do. And then we must discuss it, and simply present an alternative point of view. The presentation of an alternative point of view from a valued source confers a great degree of immunity; it distances the child. He understands that television is not the only way to look at life. The main danger is the monopolization of the assumption that that's the way everybody does it, that's what everybody is talking about, that's really the only perspective, because on television and in most media there is no alternative challenge to the perspective that is being presented.

As members of communities, our principal task and duty is to see that every school teaches media literacy. Media literacy on every level, from preschool on to graduate school, is a core subject now: it must be a core subject. It must be a fresh approach, not a separate course

necessarily, but simply a fresh approach to the liberal arts. The liberal arts are conceived as what I call the liberating arts: conceived to liberate the individual from a kind of unquestioning, unwitting dependance on the everyday, local, parochial, and very often isolated cultural environment and put the individual in touch with the great art, the great science, the philosophies, and religions of human kind. That is what the liberal arts were designed to do. Well, today much of that is even on television. Television has some of the most magnificent creations of our culture: maybe once a month, maybe once or twice a year, maybe more often, depending on one's definition, but certainly more often than ever before significant cultural programs are available now on television, as well as in the schools. But what our children have to be liberated from is the unwitting, unquestionable acceptance of a very compelling and in many ways very attractive, insistent, repetitive cultural environment every day, so that the analytical tools that we teach and we learn in the liberal arts should be used to address the everyday cultural environment in which our students live as a primary core task of every level of education.

We spent much of this afternoon in discussing certain tactics of how that might be done, and of course there are many ways of doing it, but my proposition for those of you who are teachers is not to begin with teaching or preaching. Our students think they know all about it: they have grown up with it and they often know more about it than we do. It's to say: We have a way of taking you on a journey of discovery, a kind of a game, that will make even dull programs more interesting, and to teach them a framework for analysis. It can be done on any level, asking them to view with an analytical approach. You have certain exercises which you can teach them to do by which they discover on their own, which becomes much more memorable and certainly much more convincing than anything that we can tell them to begin with. They discover on their own that there are messages behind the aggregate, and when you take a bird's eye view you discover things about your very own home territory that you think you knew all about. Same territory, different features, and you discover that these are messages that you have been receiving without knowing all the time. And then they begin to ask questions. It is at that point that we can come in with the explanations, because at that point they are ready. They are puzzled. They have discovered something on their own

about something that they thought they knew all about, by asking questions, and at that point we are ready to provide the explanations and, of course, these are the exercises that keep on going and that cultivate a habit of not only more selective viewing, we hope, but even more important, more analytical, more critical viewing, reading, and so on.

As citizens, I think we have another responsibility. The difference between being good consumers and being citizens is that when you are led into a cafeteria as a consumer, you are told, "Here are these wonderful dishes, and you are free to choose, so what's the problem?" As a citizen, your question is not which to choose, but "Is this the kind of cafeteria we need?" If we are to act as citizens at all, unless we totally abdicate the notion of citizenship in a democratic society, we have to act as the governors of our institutions, not as only the subjects. We have all these new laws: whether it's laws of physics or laws of chemistry, or laws of society, we are subject to these laws, but we don't have to accept them, and we know, we must know, that ultimately cultural production doesn't grow on trees, and even trees don't grow in the wild. They are planted, they are artifacts, they are humanly constructed by industrial formulas, by large scale cultural policies. In fact, we have an invisible ministry of culture of a handful of men – and I can tell you they are mostly men – whom we have never elected, whose names we don't know, who are not accountable to us but to a group of stockholders, who really determine what our children will see. That is an unacceptable situation for a country of citizens. So, as citizens I think we have to get organized. The difference between consumer action and citizen action is that consumer action is individual choice, individual families and so on; that's very important, but isn't going to change the cafeteria by itself. Citizen action has to become organized and policy-directed action.

It's for that reason that just a few years ago we launched a Cultural Environment Movement (CEM), which is essentially an attempt to build a national and international coalition of many groups. We had our founding convention in March. Over 150 groups from 15 countries came. There are contacts and members from 63 countries by now, because inevitably American media are global media: we can't do it alone, and they can't do it without us. We have to put our own house in order, but by putting our own house in order we are

addressing a global marketing situation, and when you address a global marketing situation, you have to recognize that for every export there is an importer. And we have to tell other countries, as I try to do whenever I have the opportunity to talk to other countries: You are not just getting cheap entertainment or news; you are mortgaging the socialization of your children to a handful of foreign conglomerates who really don't care about their needs. And we have to tell our parents that what our children see is not designed for their needs: it is designed for a global market. Many of the characteristics that trouble us and puzzle us become meaningful as the requirements of a global market.

So what the Cultural Environment Movement is trying to do is essentially to develop – and we don't know exactly how, but sooner or later it has to be done – a mechanism of injecting an independent, non-governmental, non-corporate representative public voice into major cultural decisions that are now made essentially behind closed doors without any kind of citizen participation or sense of public need or responsibility. A slogan of CEM, the “Liberating Alternative,” indicates that this is not a censor group, that on the contrary it recognizes the global system as an imposition on creative people, a handful of formulas, of which violence is just one prime example, that are imposed on the creative people and foisted on the children of the world, and that what we want to do is to liberate the creative people and to save what they need: more jobs, not fewer jobs. In every merger, every conglomeration, the creative sources dry up, because the whole idea of merger is that you can do the same amount of work with fewer people. So the creative sources, the writers, directors, actors, are losing jobs. That's why we got a grant from the Screen Actors Guild to do a study of women and minorities in the media: because they were losing jobs, especially their women members and their minority members. They were losing jobs: women were no longer getting calls after age thirty-five. They were getting fewer calls, all of their people. The Writers Guild is very much concerned, and I'm going to visit with them in a few weeks. All the media guilds are very supportive of this whole movement, for reasons of their own, of course: which is more jobs, more freedom, more creativity. That is what is being eroded.

And I think that the public voice that will be injected into decision making is in the direction of diversity. You want to avoid the idea of

just another blueprint. That would defeat the very purpose. What we have is a *de facto* censorship. We want to liberate the creative people and all of us want to encourage more independent production, want to provide resources for it, and want to create more diversity, which doesn't mean that we will like everything that we see. That's not the purpose. Or that it will be to any one type of taste. That's not the purpose. But with greater diversity, all the different tastes and all the different expectations will find something to their liking, and something to represent them, to represent different groups, the actual reality of the American scene and the world scene with some sense of equal potential and equal dignity, which now simply doesn't exist, partly because of the absence of large areas of life, partly because of the stereotyping and distortions that are the most marketable.

So I hope that you will think about this, that you will take some of this material that in a minute I will put out on the table, that you will consider joining us in due time, and that right now you'll join us in a discussion that is aimed both at analysis and at action, action to create a cultural environment for our children that will be more equitable, more fair, more diverse, and less damaging than what we have now.

Thank you very much.