

What gave you the insight that mass media was being used in very dangerous ways?

Working in advertising allowed me to understand how easy that was to move information into people's consciousness, if you had enough money and understood the media. It was easy to change public consciousness. At first this was fun and amusing. After a while I was horrified by it. Actually most people in advertising are horrified by it.

Really?

I've had a lot of friends that work in advertising. They're very creative and most of them don't like what they're doing. There's this feeling that it is wrong to use the incredible power of advertising to permanently implant images in people's brains, images that cause behavior which might not otherwise happen - for trivial and eventually harmful purposes. Trivia is where it starts. Harmful is where it leads when you realize these images are encouraging people to use natural resources, create tremendous waste and engage in a life-style which is causing great damage to the environment.

Many people in advertising are aware of that feeling and don't like it. But they're hooked on the lifestyle and the money. They're hooked on the power and don't see a way out. First you have to release yourself from the need to make a lot of money. That's number one. That set of perceptions was gnawing at me when I was in advertising. I was not being fulfilled. I didn't like the kind of person I had become. It was harming me. I didn't want to live my life strictly for commercial purposes.

When did you begin to change?

In the mid-1960's I was in New York with David Bowers, who later became the head of Friends of the Earth. He needed ads to keep dams out of the Grand Canyon which were going to generate power to light up Las Vegas. In talking to him I began to realize those canyon walls were expressing 5 million years of geologic time. Being in the presence of those walls was an experience unavailable otherwise. This experience is very important spiritually and psychologically if people are to know their appropriate place in the natural world. Once you understand the environmental issues, then you understand that advertising is a big part of the problem. It's not the solution.

We need to ask, What is advertising? Billions of dollars are spent every year to encourage people to live a certain way and all the ads are identical. One's advertising a Ford. One's advertising toothpaste, but the goal's the same. The average viewer gets 22,000 of these powerful messages each year on television. 22,000 messages telling you that you are not adequate and that the only thing that will satisfy your inadequacy is a product, which must be bought.

What are the four arguments?

There are really hundreds of arguments, which are described in four categories. The first is Environmental. The second is Political. The third is Personal in terms of personal consciousness. And the fourth deals with Communications, what kinds of information pass through the media, and what kinds don't?

The environmental argument is based on how we have moved our consciousness inside artificial forms - from the natural world to that of a mediated reality. Television has a major role to play in the mediation of consciousness, the mediation of reality.

The political argument explores how the use of advertising and television benefits some people more than other people. Advertising and television provide extremely powerful tools to unify consciousness, tools which are more immediate, direct and faster than anything that ever proceeded it.

The third argument describes how television affects people. What it does to kids. What it does to the way we understand ourselves. What it does to thinking. What it does to our psychology.

The fourth argument explores how television threatens democracy. Television accepts certain kinds of information while rejecting others. Conversations like this would be boring on television and yet violence, sex and sports work well. The medium has a built in bias.

*From the Four Arguments
For the Elimination of Television
Jerry Mander, 1978*

Replacement of Experience

America had become the first culture to substitute secondary mediated versions of experience for direct experience of the world. Interpretations and representations of the world were being accepted, as experience, and the difference between the two were obscure for most of us...

People's patterns of discernment, discrimination and understanding were taking a dive. They didn't seem able to make distinctions between information which was preprocessed and filtered through a machine, and that which came to them whole, by actual experience...

If people believed that an image of nature was equal to or even similar to the experience of nature, and were therefore satisfied enough with the image that they didn't seek out the real experience, then nature was in a lot bigger trouble than anyone realized.

The Illusion of Neutral Technology

Far from being "neutral" television itself predetermines who shall use it, how they will use it, what effects it will have, on individual lives, and if it continues to be widely used, what sorts of political forms will inevitably emerge.

Sensory Deprivation

Our environment itself is the manifestation of the mental processes of other humans. Of all the species of the planet, and all the cultures of the human species, we twentieth-century Americans have become the first in history to live predominately inside the projections of our own minds.

The Inherent Need to Create Need

Advertising exists only to purvey what people don't need. Whatever people do need they will find without advertising if it is valuable... Advertisers sell their services on the basis of how well they are able to create needs where there were none before. I have never met an advertising person who sincerely believes that there is a need connected to, say, 99 percent of the commodities which fill the air waves and print media... In fact, advertising intervenes between people and their (real) needs, it separates them from direct fulfillment and urges them to believe that satisfaction can only be obtained through commodities.

How does this bias affect our experience and the programs we see on television?

Television exploits a genetic fight-flight tendency in human beings. When living in pre-industrial environments we had to be aware of changes in the environment to survive. Television comes along and presents images which triggers the same survival response. If something violent is happening on television, we react. We may be intellectually aware that the violence is not "real" but our emotions don't discriminate. They react. It is part of our survival reflex and advertisers and programmers exploit this tendency as much as possible.

To exploit means to use something to one's advantage or to take advantage of another's weakness. Advertisers, and the corporations they serve, are extremely sophisticated in exploiting television in this way, especially when it comes to children.

It became very clear, observing my kids watching television, that they were entering an artificial reality, one where people no longer remember what the world was like without television. It is a reality cut off from the natural world - one created and controlled by a limited number of corporations to sell products people really don't need.

I was very, very worried about that and with good reason. We already have a generation of people who don't know that there was ever a world without a television. They can't imagine what life would have been like without television. Look how we have moved through the technological age and how it has established a new reality, which has no relationship to the intrinsic values of nature. This is tremendously tragic and the main reason I wrote the book.

You describe very clearly how this new reality, driven by television, is spreading like a huge wave all over the globe.

It came out of love for my own kids and also the observation that the next generation won't care about, or even remember nature. They won't remember the experiences, thoughts and feelings, which happen outside of television's mediated reality. They won't care about it, which of course will doom us.

I think that's already happened in our country and it is spreading, along with television and computers, throughout the world. Emotional concern for nature is way down, even though more and more people are going to parks, which I call nature zoos. They go and observe it as if they were going to the zoo. Relatively few people experience real wilderness or have the feelings and perceptions which nature brings. That's very, very serious.

It is through intimate human relationships that a basic sense of trust and empathy unfold. That connection is broken when you split the mother from the baby. Trust isn't there. The child grows more and more defensive, self-centered, isolated, which the altered reality created by television and computers intensify. If you can't trust or feel empathy for mom and dad, family and community, how are we ever going to address the mounting ecological challenges?

This is the core issue.

In your second book, In the Absence of the Sacred, you argue that corporations are the driving force behind this altered reality.

There's no avoiding the fact that corporations are operating by certain rules, which they have to follow. They have to grow. They have to prosper. They cannot express moral feelings. There is competition, hierarchy. Corporations are intrinsically connected to the exploitation of nature. Nature is considered a resource to be converted into products. You can get very good people working in corporations who are unable to do good things because they have to follow the form of the corporation. Anybody who's working in a corporation that's trying to sell products to kids will use whatever techniques they can think of.

But they will try to keep their own kids away from it. My book, *The Four Arguments*, sells better in Los Angeles and Hollywood than anywhere in the country. I've been in many homes of producers where it is sitting on the table. They tell jokes about how they love it - "see no TV in the house", and they're producing TV. They find themselves in the same game as the advertisers. They don't see a way out. They agree with the criticism and they wish they could do something better.

Is there no way out? No positive alternative?

People tend not to be aware that corporations are just a collection of paperwork, yet they take on this terrific personality and we think of them as real. They exist only in our mind and on pieces of paper. The paperwork is an expression of a corporate charter which form the rules by which the corporation operates. These rules originate with state charters. In many cases these State charters were established in the 1800's. Those state charters can be changed. You could have state charters that say corporations located in San Francisco can't move to Mexico or Korea. You could say that a corporation that's making typewriters, can't buy banks and computer companies in Asia. You could say that they can't cut down a forest. You could say that they have to abide by a set of environmental principals or loose their legal status. You could say that they can't layoff more than a certain percentage of workers without first going through a public process. You could say that representatives from the community, from labor, possibly representatives from environmental groups are on the Board of the corporation. Why not? You can make any rules you want theoretically if it's a democracy, and the corporation would have to abide.

From In the Absence of The Sacred
Jerry Mander, 1991

Corporations As Machines

In technological societies, the structure of all human life and its systems of organizations reflect the logic of the machine... The corporation is not subject to human control as most people believe; rather, it is an autonomous technical structure that behaves by a system of logic uniquely well suited to its primary function: to give birth and impetus to profitable new technological forms, and to spread techno-logic around the globe...

Seeing corporate behavior as rooted in the people who work within them is like believing that the problems of television are attributed solely to its programming. With corporations, as with television, the basic problems are actually structural. They are problems inherent in the forms and rules by which these entities are compelled to operate... Form determines content. Corporations are machines...

Inherent Rules of Corporate Behavior

Profit is the ultimate measure of all corporate decisions. It takes precedent over community, worker health, public health, environment and national security. Corporations live or die by whether they can sustain growth. As an employee you are expected to be part of the "team". You must also be ready to aggressively climb over your own colleagues. Not being human, not having feelings, corporations do not have morals or altruistic goals. All acts are in service to profit, including apparent altruism, which is measured against possible public relations benefits. Corporate law requires that corporations be structured into classes of superiors and subordinates. Subjective or spiritual values which cannot be translated into bottom-line numbers are not represented in corporate decision making. Corporations make a conscious effort to depersonalize. Corporations are not committed to local community or its environment. Corporate societies are intrinsically committed to intervening in, altering and transforming nature. It is inherent in corporate activity that they seek to drive consciousness in one-dimensional channels. To ask corporations to behave otherwise is like asking an army to adopt pacifism. Form is content.

The rechartering movement is gaining speed as people are beginning to develop this perception. You can establish balanced rules for salaries. You can say C.E.O.'s can't make more than ten times what the assembly worker makes.

The problem is, if California abandons it's old charter and establishes this new set of rules, all the corporations will go to Nevada, or the next place which doesn't have those rules. It's not as simple as it sounds. The principle is very important, that theoretically people and society can control the rules by which corporations operate.

You don't have to have the profit motive. You can say a corporation is just an organizational system like a church, or like a nonprofit. It is the current corporate structure that is now running society. So it is very, very hard to change it. We're caught in our own, Frankenstein monster. We are caught in our own creation.

That's a great image.

It's hard to change the rules, which we made that created this monster. And now that monster controls the rules.

We are missing an important link, that media is the driving force which feeds the monster that is controlling our lives.

The essential issue of the television book was the homogenization and domination of consciousness and experience by the corporate machine, consciousness and the resulting political and environmental consequences implied in that consciousness.

The focus of the second book was the role of technology plays in separating people from other sources of awareness and knowledge, aside from television. We talk about how computers serve a similar function. We describe how the current corporate structure is a technology. We talk about biotechnology redesigning the genetic structure of life, robotics eliminating the need for people. Through these examples the autonomous nature of technology is revealed. All that is compared with native people, to whom this hasn't fully happened, people who have a relationship to a source, which we have lost - a relationship to the earth and to the spiritual guidance implicit in nature. And we describe how corporations, advertising and mass media are destroying these people and their precious relationship to the earth.

Satellite technology now makes it possible to drop television anywhere on the planet.

That's one thing we're doing. We're converting them in some places. Where we can't convert them, we're trying to steal their land and their choices. When we can't do that, we're killing them. This has been happening for 500 years. It is still happening and technological forms are driving that. The machine accelerates the destruction.

These new international trade agreements extend the power of transitional corporation beyond the sovereignty of individual nations, including the United States.

The third book talks about the systems of control and the corporate world government which is now in place. It describes what happens when you homogenize consciousness, centralized experience and separated people from the Earth - what happens when you separate people from alternative visions, alternative knowledge, and place people into a relationship with the machinery that is controlling their lives. All these things further centralized control and lead to new global bureaucracies which move real power away from community, away from locality and even away from nation states.

Mitsubishi is a larger economic system than Indonesia. Of the top 100 economies in the world, 52 are corporations. Corporations are running the world. Even the United States, which is the largest economy in the world, is subject to the rulings of these international bureaucracies. Corporations are in charge of the world - not to mention that they elect the politicians who further centralized their control.

You saw twenty years ago how television was the perfect tool to bring about this global control, by controlling consciousness in such a way that it would accept this control quite naturally.

I don't think four or five people got together and said here's how we're going to take control of the world. It was worse than that. The control is implicit in the technologies.

Once the forms got into place, once you have global communications, efficient transportation, once you can move vast financial resources by the touch of a computer key, anywhere in the world, once you have the ability to blast images into the consciousness of the planet, it follows quite naturally that the control of these gigantic systems can and will be centralized.

What these global institutions have done is to create new systems of rules, which make it impossible for nation states to stop this process. All of this is part of a logical - I don't want to say natural evolution, because it has nothing to do with nature.

*From The Case Against
The Global Economy
Jerry Mander & Edward Goldsmith, 1996*

*GATT, NAFTA and the Subversion of the Democratic Process
Ralph Nader and Lori Wallach*

When they approved the far-reaching, powerful World Trade Organization and smaller international trade agreements, such as NAFTA, the U.S. Congress, like legislatures of other nations, left much of the United States' capacity to protect its citizens subject the WTO's autocratic regimes and accepted harsh legal limitations on what domestic policies the country may pursue. Approval of these agreements has institutionalized a global and political situation that places every government... at the mercy of a global financial and commercial system run by empowered corporations. This new system is not designed to promote the health and well-being of human beings but to enhance the power of the world's largest corporations and financial institutions...

Un-elected bureaucrats sitting behind closed doors in Geneva can decide whether or not people in California can prevent the destruction of their last virgin forests or determine if carcinogenic pesticides can be banned from their food; or whether European counties have the right to ban the use of gangrenous biotech hormones in meat. Moreover, once these secret tribunals issue their edicts, no external appeals are possible; worldwide conformity is required. A country must make its laws conform or else face perpetual trade sanctions.

At risk is the very basis of democracy and accountable decision making that is the necessary undergerding of any citizen struggle for sustainable, adequate living standards, health, safety and environmental protections. The decline of democratic institutions in favor of deepening multinational corporate power has taken place in Western nations over the past several decades; but the establishment of the World Trade Organization marks a landmark formalization, strengthening, and politicizing of this formerly ad hock system...

The degree of suppression and subterfuge necessary to continue globalization will be hard to maintain in the presence of any democratic oversight. To obtain this oversight and to actually reverse NAFTA, GATT, and the push to globalization will require a revitalized citizenry here and abroad.

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You saw this power shift 20 years ago, television being the perfect tool to bring about this global control.

I don't think four or five people got together and said here's how we're going to take control of the world. It was worse than that. The control is implicit in the technologies. Once the forms got into place, once you have global communications, efficient transportation and can move vast financial resources by the touch of a computer key, anywhere in the world, once you have the ability to blast images into the consciousness of the planet, it follows quite naturally that the control of these gigantic systems can be centralized.

What these global institutions have done is to create new systems of rules, which make it impossible for nation states to stop this process. All of this is part of a logical - I don't want to say natural evolution, because it has nothing to do with nature.

When did these new systems begin?

After World War II a few people got together and looked for a new economic process that would encourage countries to be cooperative, to eliminate rivalries. They decided corporate players would be the best way to accomplish this goal. The current system was rationalized as something that would stop wars, solve poverty, hunger and that nation states could reduce their power in the long run. Soon more and more countries accepted this development model and agreed live in accordance with the rules set down by institutions like the World Bank, which was being controlled by transnational corporations. What they didn't think of is the impact this development model has on the environment. It totally destroys nature. It destroys indigenous communities.

It destroys alternative systems. It destroys local economies and it doesn't solve poverty. It increases poverty.

I remember growing up in school and hearing horrible stories about subsistent economies. Subsistent economies help people subsist. They were very big and where they existed, they were very effective. People used to grow their own food. They ate the food they grew and shared this with others. It was a system, which supported the community. Power was retained at a local level. It was ecological diverse. It looked like poverty on the charts because corporations and banks made no income off these people. There's very little economic activity if you just grow things and eat them.

The World Bank proclaimed that we needed to increase global economic activity. To do that we needed to maximize transportation. They encouraged one group to grow one thing and ship it to some other place, and for those people to ship something over here. This increases economic activity. It increases the numbers, but it doesn't settle poverty.

Big systems were invented to increase the world's gross product, corporate systems. You need big systems to replace people growing their own food. You take the people off the land, replace them with machines, pesticides, and substitute one crop for diverse agriculture and you don't need workers anymore. They're driven off their land. The people get poorer and the corporations get bigger and bigger and bigger.

These people have no place to live so they go to the cities, which makes the cities bigger and bigger and bigger. Cooperation is transformed into competition, displacing cultural values, increasing violence, breaking down cultures and communities, fragmenting society. Now a corporation is on the land sending fifty million dollars worth of cattle to some distant place which looks like progress, an increase of gross national product. On paper it looks like development. Actually it's destruction. It's a preposterous system.

We still think it looks good, it is what our politicians and corporate leaders keep telling us.

It looks good on paper. That is the point. The numbers increase and the people are poorer while the benefits go directly to the corporations. Corporations don't represent that many people. They're mainly machines, paper, banks and white-collar workers. Today, many of those people are being eliminated by robots. It's all part of the system. It is a logical process.

Traditionally family, community and culture gave order and meaning to life, now it is value driven by television and corporations. Populations are growing, the job market is shrinking all over the world.

There's literally nothing for all these people to do. We have lost our connection to the earth and our sense of belonging, to communities and to our families. We are at a point where we have to redefine the whole economic paradigm.

We have to break apart the global system, I'm sorry to say. Globalization is unsustainable. Globalization is a system based upon global control by a small number of self-interested economic players, each committed to a development process which must keep growing, growing, growing, using diminishing resources, increasing waste, a process that separates people from their communities and from their land, from their personal abilities to survive, one that destroys alternative systems, both local and national. The idea that such a system can survive is preposterous.

Even if you and I do nothing to stop it, it is going to fail. It will run out of resources. It will run out of people who will support it. People will riot. Globalization destroys communities and makes people crazy.

We need to dismantle the very system which was consciously put into place not so long ago. The U.S. could withdraw from the World Trade Association. We could have a change in policy. We could change our tax laws so that corporations are not permitted to move their resources from where they are. We could do many things, but of course, it's the corporations that run the political process which is the root of the problem. Even with that there's plenty of room for citizen action.

What you are describing sounds very close to Orwell's 1984, or Huxley's Brave New World.

The Orwellian vision was extremely repressive. Today we have the illusion of choice and control. The artificial environments of the Orwellian System are, however, very much like what we have now. People who were not willing to go along with the system, or saw through it, were hunted down, which is what is taking place with many of our native cultures.

Drugs and pleasure replaced repression in Huxley's system. That's much closer to what we have now. People participate in the creation of the systems that are doing them in. People vote against themselves. They participate in systems that are destroying nature, destroying their own lives because they're not aware of it. Huxley had soma, we have television and computers. We are brainwashed by these technologies into thinking that they are beneficial to us. In the Huxley System, those who couldn't be made to conform were shipped away to islands. The indigenous people today occupy that role, except we're not leaving them alone. We are aggressively trying to destroy them and their systems. A lot of the elements of the Huxley vision are clearly operational today.

Take a young person who's grown up in this artificial environment, separated from nature, separated from family, placed in daycare for long periods of time and sat before television for the rest of it... the experiences needed to perceive and experience the values you're talking about, simply aren't there.

I've been an activist for 30 years. I wake up every day and I spend my day trying to push this alternative vision forward. I write books. I'm involved in the International Forum on Globalization. I'm involved in a foundation. I work for the media center and we do advertising campaigns to try to change consciousness on these things. There's no silver bullet. You do it in a million different ways. You do whatever you can do. I put messages out there and some people hear them.

Maybe we've just got our fingers in the dike, but it's a more entertaining way to live. It feels more fun than being on the other side. I've been on the other side and this is the right thing to do. There is a satisfaction, which goes with knowing that your actions are consistent with your values. Not that my actions are perfect. I get on airplanes, I don't believe in airplanes. I drive a car and I don't believe in cars.

I try to spend the bulk of my day supporting what I believe. In the end that's really what people have got to do. All the people doing advertising have got to quit advertising. All those corporate people who are acting inside a system, which is causing harm need to quit and do something different.

There are lots of organizations doing affective work. My last two books have lists of organizations working in different areas. There are places to hook in. Start in your community. That's very important. Even though the problems are global, the corporate players are acting in your community right now. It's important to put up as much resistance as you can. There are people working to find alternative systems, to set-up systems which are outside the system. A young lady, working in our office, has set up an alternative currency called "B.R.E.A.D.". It's catching on like wildfire. A couple thousand people are using this barter currency. There's a lot of people involved in this all over the country. There's no law in the United States that says you can't set up your own currency, and that's what people are doing. It puts people back into control of their lives.

Tax structures need to be changed. Corporate charters need to be changed. There's a lot you can do if you take your focus off, how do I stop the World Trade Organization, or how do I put Ralph Nader into office instead of Bill Clinton. Those things are frustrating because they're big and appear impossible and yet, by doing these other things, you are taking back control of your life and community.

Touch the Future
Transforming Public Values and Behavior
Step by Step with Advertising Television & Computers
Jerry Mander
A conversation with Michael Mendizza

You're putting out a newsletter. That's what you do. All that energy has some affect. You might not see General Motors turned into an organic agricultural company in your lifetime. That doesn't matter. You can't afford to think about the difficulty.

People are desperate for something positive. Look how Russia changed. Who would have thought that? Our book, [The Case Against Globalization](#), just won the best book of the year from the American Political Science Association, which is a very conservative association. They've never given a prize to a non-academic book. This is a big surprise. These are the people who think about whether the systems are working or not, and who are, for the most part, dedicated to the system as it is. For such a group to come forward and say this is the best book in 1996, what does that mean? It means something very important.

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