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Fastening Our Seatbelts: Turning Crisis Into Opportunity[†]

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The field of communication, like much of higher education, is facing a set of crises brought about by economic, political and technological changes that affect all segments of society. We owe to ourselves, our students and our societies to face these challenges and rethink our mission and our practices in ways that will contribute to solutions. In this article I focus on several dimensions of our present circumstances: the need to embrace a broader vision of the career paths for which we are training our doctoral students; the importance of envisioning communication studies as a necessary and essential component of any rational liberal arts education in the 21st century; the critical role that communication scholarship can and should play in addressing current public policy debates and issues; and the crucial role we need to assume as leaders of a cultural environment movement that will counter the negative externalities of our pervasive corporate media environment.

The dawn of the present century seems particularly ripe for radical rethinking. The past few decades have witnessed unprecedented shifts in the global landscape, as the new technologies of the digital age fast-tracked worldwide economic shifts and concurrent societal upheavals. The start of the century was rocked by the attacks of 9-11 that set off a new perpetual war to fill the vacuum created by the end of the Cold War. The world is slowly coming to accept the realities of climate change, but that acceptance has not yet translated into action to avert catastrophic consequences. The implosion of speculative bubbles inflated by unregulated banking led to a worldwide economic crisis on a scale not seen since the 1930s.

In this crazy world the affairs of universities and their inhabitants might not amount to a hill of beans, but they are still important to us and to the societies that support us, send us their children to educate, and hire our graduates. We owe it to

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ourselves and to our societies to carefully reflect on our mission, on our successes, and on our failures.

As a lifer who has served more than 40 years in the field of communication studies, I am focused here on the strengths and weaknesses of our discipline. We must reexamine the focus and mission of communication studies programs. We must address the critical challenges facing societies everywhere that have their roots and, possibly, their solutions, in communication practices, and institutions.

To accomplish any of these goals will require articulating new missions and goals for our field, rethinking the values, practices, and curricula of our academic programs, and persuading university leaders of the importance of a more engaged scholarship.

In most of what follows I will be drawing on *my* experience, which is largely based in the United States. However, I am aware of many similarities between developments here and elsewhere. Some of these similarities arise because other countries seek to emulate the American model of higher education; some similarities derive from the impact of neoliberal politics and ideologies that have become all too familiar in the past few decades. In other instances, I will be describing patterns and practices that have not appeared outside the United States; in these instances, this may serve as a warning and a caution.

A broader vision of career paths

If there is any group of folks whose interests are a matter of real concern to academics, it is the fate of our apprentices, the doctoral students we work with closely, many of whom become our colleagues and friends. How are our doctoral students doing these days when they graduate and leave the nest?

As we know, there is a mismatch between the number of new Ph.D.s produced in most academic disciplines and the number of tenure-track jobs available. The disparity between the production of new Ph.D.s and openings for junior faculty hires has been well documented in many fields. The present era of economic collapse will only accelerate the shift from full-time and tenure-track to part-time, contingent, and adjunct faculty, especially in the public colleges and universities.

To cite a recent example that has achieved some visibility in the United States, Anthony Grafton, the immediate past president of the American Historical Association, has urged his colleagues to acknowledge that, ''For all their energy, and learning, their range and experience, many of (their) students will not find tenure-track positions teaching history in colleges and universities'' (Grafton & Grossman, 2011).

This conclusion is not limited to historians. A similar analysis of careers in English literature in the U.S. concludes: ''The facts that jump out at me are that fewer than half of all Ph.D.'s find tenure-track jobs. This is simply an issue of supply and demand. If English departments across the country consistently produce more

than twice the number of Ph.D.'s as there are tenure-track jobs, we should hardly be surprised at the 49.4-% placement rate. That leaves more than 26% of Ph.D.'s in non-tenure-track teaching positions, a goal to which no one getting an English Ph.D. aspires'' (Donaghue, 2011; http://tinyurl.com/3hnbujw).

At the same time, university administrators, as well as ranking bodies such as the National Research Council in the United States, define placement in these scarce jobs as a central criterion for success in doctoral education. Having participated in numerous ''external reviews'' of departments around the country, and having served as chair of USC's University Committee on Academic Review for the past 5 years, I can attest that the placement of a program's Ph.D. graduates, especially in elite university positions, is an invariable and salient criterion in assessing departmental strength.

In a recent article decrying the exclusive focus on academic placement in American universities, English professor Leonard Cassuto noted, ''When the National Research Council tabulates the rankings of departments, it is explicitly looking for records of 'placement in academic positions (including academic postdoctoral positions),' and those placements alone help to determine the order of those pernicious lists whose effects ripple outward through our professional public square. So a graduate-school dean who speaks sincerely about the need to encourage alternative academic careers still has to devote the bulk of her resources to help graduate students get the academic jobs that will bolster the university's NRC ranking'' (Cassuto, 2012).

How do the varied fields and domains gathered under the communication umbrella fare in this context? A recent report on career paths for social science Ph.D.s in the United States 'five years out' noted that ''communication Ph.D.s find faculty positions more readily than doctorate holders in other social science fields'' (Hickerson, Rudd, Morrison, Picciano, & Nerad, 2008, p.2), and this despite the fact that ''the number of communication Ph.D.s has risen steadily; today more than 500 Ph.D.s in communication are awarded nationally each year'' (Hickerson et al., 2008, p.1). Overall, the survey indicated that only around 20% of recent communication Ph.D.s were in nonfaculty jobs. Although, it should be noted that this survey was completed before the 2008 economic collapse that continues to wreak havoc with public higher education institutions around the world.

The relative success of communication Ph.D.s probably can be attributed to the fact that we benefit from robust undergraduate enrollments. But, as Craig Calhoun warned in his 2011 ICA plenary talk, ''The supply of students who want vaguely conceptualized communication careers may not be infinite'' (Calhoun, 2011). The field of communication studies would be well advised –on both practical and ethical grounds—to address this challenge sooner rather than later.

Is it ethically acceptable for us to admit larger numbers of doctoral students than the academic world can absorb, while at the same time promulgating a set of values and expectations that dooms many of our graduates to failure? As we all know, many faculty and administrators view nonacademic career choices by their students as an institutional and/or personal disappointment if not outright betrayal. Of course, tenured faculty at doctorate granting institutions are not necessarily likely to see the

problem the way their students do. After all, they are the ones for whom the system worked. Further, those choosing not to pursue academic careers, or failing in their efforts, are usually not as visible to the inhabitants of the institution. They do not publish in the journals, show up at professional conferences, send their students to their graduate alma mater. Anecdotally, we can always rationalize every exception from the rule of "replication" but cumulatively we need to recognize and confront the reality.

Should not the balance between demand and supply be more rational? Should we drastically reduce the size of our doctoral programs? Or, is the answer to this dilemma the broadening of our explicitly articulated goals and implicitly held values to acknowledge the viability and importance of various career paths for our Ph.D. graduates? Once we embark on this path, we need to work backwards from the fact of multidirectional career paths to ask what this implies for the shape of our doctoral programs: what are the curricular and training implications of a broader definition of doctoral education in communication?

The field of communication has an important advantage in undertaking this necessary rethinking. Unlike such liberal arts fields as classics, history, or philosophy, where doctoral training is famously unrelated to "real world" employment, there are numerous career paths for which doctoral study in communication is, or readily can be, highly appropriate preparation. Among these are public health, national development, media industries, and policy-related research and engagement. But realizing this advantage requires that we confront individual and institutional obstacles to rethinking our approach to doctoral education.

Fortunately, it is not necessary to undertake the rethinking process from scratch. In the past decade a number of projects directed at "re-envisioning the Ph.D." have been carried out. Among the fruits of these are two books, *Envisioning the Future of Doctoral Education: Preparing Stewards of the Discipline* (Golde & Walker, 2006), and *The Formation of Scholars: Rethinking Doctoral Education for the Twenty-First Century* (Walker, Golde, Jones & Bueschel, 2008), based on projects funded by the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate.

The Carnegie Initiative asked scholars across a range of disciplines to reflect on their fields and to consider how best to move forward. As reported in the second volume of the series,

> Their answer converged on a number of trends: a move towards greater interdisciplinarity and interaction with neighboring disciplines; growing commitment to team work—even in disciplines traditionally marked by solitary scholarship—with more collaboration in both research and teaching; and greater purposefulness in reaching out to partners and audiences outside of academe in ways that connect academic work with the larger social context. (Walker et al., 2008, p. 37)

I want to underscore the importance of collaboration and team work in research. The CID scholars emphasized the importance of collaboration for research, noting

that the "emphasis on specialization and individual effort (originality and independence) in doctoral training, and on rewards for individual success in academic careers, has supported a culture of competitive individualism in the academy that impedes the development of students and of knowledge" (Walker et al., 2008, p.81). These reports reflect a belief that scholarship in the 21st century requires team work: "today's harder, bigger, more complex problems call for multiple perspectives and collaboration" (Walker et al., 2008). It is also true that when researchers venture outside the university they find a very different reality than the one that dominated their student years. As a student everything focuses on your work—your paper, your ideas, your dissertation—with an emphasis on the individuality, and sometimes with penalties for anything smacking of collaboration. In the nonacademic work environment in which many Ph.D. graduates find themselves the opposite is true: Nearly all efforts are collaborative, and team work is the norm, not the exception. Clearly, it will be important for us to devote serious attention to exploring ways to enshrine collaborative engagement among the methods employed in doctoral education.

Liberal arts for the 21st century

A recent article in the *New York Times* posed a familiar question: "What exactly is a university education for? Is it, narrowly, to ensure a good job after graduation? Or is the point of a university degree to give students a broad and deep humanities education that teaches them how to think and write critically? Or can a college education do both?" (Tugend, 2012).

William Bowen, former president of Princeton and of the Mellon Foundation, wrote about the importance of liberal arts education in today's world:

> The value of a liberal education, as traditionally understood, has never been as great as it is today. As we think about the rapidly changing world our students face, in which fewer and fewer people spend anything approaching a lifetime following one career trajectory, learning how to do mundane, repetitive tasks is not the way to go. What counts is being able to take a new problem, parse it out, and make headway in solving it – all in the company of others. (Bowen, 2012)

Bowen is responding to a frequently noted reality of contemporary higher education—the decline of liberal arts enrollment and the rise in skills-oriented, preprofessional degrees, especially in business, which is now the most popular undergraduate major in the United States. And, within the broad domain of communications, note the rising tide of public relations majors.

Of course, the search for an undergraduate major that will readily translate into vocational currency on the job market is one of the key factors fueling the continuing popularity of communication studies. For better or for worse—and this really does work both ways—we are generally seen as a preprofessional program even when we insist on our liberal arts credentials.

But, more than that: We need to insist on our importance to *both* liberal arts and preprofessional education in the 21st century. If it once was possible to view communication studies as peripheral to the central mission and focus of the academic universe, that is no longer a defensible position. Today, any responsible model of the liberal arts must recognize the centrality of communication for an undergraduate education. If the goal of the liberal arts is the acquisition of basic intellectual skills, combined with knowledge of the historical roots and cross-cultural variations in human behavior and institutions, then communication is necessarily at the center of such an education. As recognized in the classic rhetorical tradition of Western education, communication is the fundamental human trait and the basis of all culture. The forms and media of communication are the nervous system that links the components of our national and increasingly global political, economic, and social networks.

Communication studies can rightfully claim a central role not only in the basic general education of an informed citizenry, but also in understanding and clarifying many of the central challenges of our rapidly changing world.

Among these are

1 The globalization of our information environment as we experience a flatter world in which one way communication is replaced by multidirectional transmission; in which the North is not always the source and the South is not always the receiver.
2 The high stakes involved in struggles over ownership of the new media as well as the resistance to the ever greater consolidation of ownership over old and new technologies.
3 The crisis in journalism, at least in the United States, brought about by the collapse of the economic model of commercially supported news enterprises wedded to an outmoded production and distribution system.
4 The upheaval wrought by the folks formerly known as the audience taking greater control over the means of production and dissemination of information.
5 The epochal shifts in our information environment as we learn, both for better and worse, to live with technologies that provide opportunities and challenges unimaginable until recently outside the confines of science fiction—and more are on their way.

Communication scholars draw upon a wealth of disparate theoretical and empirical strands in order to clarify such questions of societal import, illuminate new paths of research, and explore solutions to pressing problems. Communication scholars, individually and collectively, need to assert our centrality to any cogent and credible account of the contemporary world, and thus, our centrality in the education of the citizens of the 21st century.

Higher education itself is the site of rapid change that threatens to bring what we can only hope will be *creative* destruction of many existing habits and arrangements.

In the past year we have seen an accelerating wave of educational innovation, as elite universities have moved into the territory of online instruction heretofore dominated by for-profit and, frankly, academically suspect institutions. But those who scoffed at the offerings of the University of Phoenix are likely to have had a different response when the top tier of elite U.S. universities began offering online courses, free of charge, to students around the world.

When Stanford professor Sebastian Thrun put his artificial intelligence class online, he enrolled 160,000 students, from countries around the world. Thrun created a website able to handle the scale and demands of the course, and he found that many of the best performers in the class were among the remote cohort, not those sitting in his Stanford classroom. What lesson did Thrun take from this wildly successful experiment? He left Stanford—giving up tenure at Stanford is not a frequent career move—and established a new online university called Udacity [http://www.udacity.com/], and proposes to offer free classes—such as "Building a Search Engine"—to as many as 500,000 students.

Since then, Michigan, Penn, Princeton, and Stanford launched an online free course venture, and Harvard and MIT created a joint online program with $60 million in startup funding.

Suppose your students had the choice of attending lectures by your colleagues—all of whom, I trust, are engaging and inspiring teachers—or enrolling in courses taught online by some of the best lecturers to be found anywhere in the world. Those of us lucky enough to be ensconced in elite institutions—those that can boast of rejecting most of their applicants—might be confident that *their* students would choose to sit in a large classroom and absorb the wisdom of the eminent faculty who teach their introductory courses. But looking across the range of institutions and instructors in most parts of the world, would not it be more likely that students would prefer to enroll in the online courses taught by "world-class" teachers? Is it possible that the emerging availability of online instruction will turn many faculty members into de facto teaching assistants, whose role will be to supplement, explain and expand on the lectures offered by a new class of online "super teachers"?

What does this mean for communication programs, in the United States or elsewhere? Will the university as we have known it become "unbundled" as students consume higher education in pieces? Is it time for the "University Without Walls" to replace the groves of academe? If you do not believe this can happen to your university, I have some Kodak shares to sell you . . .

No one has a crystal ball and predicting the future has rarely been more challenging. But it is certain that the tides of change wrought by the digital revolution are lapping at the threshold of the ivory tower. And communication scholars should be among the first to recognize and embrace the possibilities these new technologies afford. After all, this is *our* territory and we should not limit ourselves to the roles of observer, chronicler, analyst, and theorist of the digital age, although all of these are important contributions that we can and should make as scholars of communication. We owe it to our field, our institutions, our students, and ourselves,

to be among the pioneers exploring and developing the new world unfolding around us.

Cultivating engaged scholars and scholarship

As one who came of academic age in the 1960s—whose final semester of graduate school combined completion of a dissertation with antiwar protests—the demand that academic pursuits be ''relevant'' to the most important and pressing real-world issues is both familiar and persuasive. However, the climate of academic pursuits of the past few decades has not retained the heat and passion of those heady times and, truth be told, it is far from clear how widely held those convictions were even then.

What is certainly true is that the 1960s were followed in many parts of the world by a counterrevolution determined to recapture the hearts and minds of the academy, or at the very least intimidate and bully them into submission. I am mostly familiar with the forms that political and cultural reaction took in the United States, but I know that these forces were also present in other parts of the world. Often there were direct connections, as in the U.S.-abetted coup and subsequent Pinochet dictatorship in Chile. In other instances there was mutual admiration and encouragement, as in the parallels between Thatcherism in the UK and the ''Reagan Revolution'' in the United States.

Today we see political leaders everywhere agreeing on the necessity of imposing austerity on the 99% to pay the bills run up by the 1%—and education is prominent among the institutions being sacrificed in the name of ''fiscal responsibility.''

While conspiracy theories are often more fervently held than they are empirically sustainable, in this instance a fair case *can* be made for a conscious effort on the part of the ''establishment'' of the post-1960s era to roll back what they saw as an assault on their power. The case rests in part on a 1971 memorandum that a successful corporate lawyer named Lewis Powell addressed to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The memorandum outlined the dangers Powell believed the corporate establishment needed to comprehend and counter:

> No thoughtful person can question that the American economic system is under broad attack. This varies in scope, intensity, in the techniques employed, and in the level of visibility . . . what now concerns us is quite new in the history of America. We are not dealing with sporadic or isolated attacks from a relatively few extremists or even from the minority socialist cadre. Rather, the assault on the enterprise system is broadly based and consistently pursued. It is gaining momentum and converts . . . The most disquieting voices joining the chorus of criticism come from perfectly respectable elements of society: from the college campus, the pulpit, the media, the intellectual and literary journals, the arts and sciences, and from politicians. (http://reclaimdemocracy.org/corporate_accountability/powell_memo_lewis.html)

The Powell Memorandum laid out in great detail not only the causes for alarm but a strategy for counterrevolution. Powell's advice has been credited with turning on the faucet that poured millions of dollars into funding right-wing institutes, think tanks, and advocacy groups. Powell understood the need for a long march strategy and his vision has been vindicated by the political shifts in the United States during the past 4 decades. President Richard Nixon must have appreciated Powell's wisdom, as he appointed him to the U.S. Supreme Court shortly after the memorandum was written.

In the spirit of the Powell memorandum, the right wing in the U.S. broadened the focus of the counterrevolution from their perennial target of popular culture to encompass the domain of elite culture. Communication scholarship and teaching figured in an important way in the debates over the role of the academy because we are among those who can be accused of "diluting or displacing" canonical texts in favor of the degraded products of popular culture.

By devoting serious attention to the mass media, communications scholars were among the first members of the academy to question the sanctity of the elite cultural canon. In fact, I would argue that the status of communications study within the American academy suffered for years—and probably still does—from our association with mass culture.

What these "threats" had in common, and what provoked the enmity of right-thinking politicians, journalists, and academics, is that they represented a specter haunting our society: subordinates getting uppity, silenced voices starting to speak out, new perspectives shifting the center of gravity towards the margins. But, despite the ferocity of the counterattack mounted against them, the marginal voices and forces were not in fact remotely as successful as the public was told.

However, much communication scholars expanded—or corrupted—the curriculum, and however much they challenged the universality of traditional canons, the field of communication studies in the United States was also retreating from an explicit engagement in the realm of political economy at the very moment that upheavals in communication technologies and media industries were transforming the national and global landscape. Whether by design or unhappy coincidence the critical engagement of communication scholarship with these momentous developments and policy debates diminished, along with the imperative to train our students to participate in and contribute to these important decisions.

The result is that public policy debates are taking place in the U.S. today with little meaningful input from communication scholars, and thus often with too little socially contextualized and theorized empirical data and research to inform them. While many of our programs train graduate students to study media effects, media content, and media processes, too few of our students are trained in the study of media economics, law, regulation, and policy, and fewer still are able to do this in a way that produces research that is both academically rigorous and yet useful and accessible to policymakers, media activists, and interested citizens.

We're all familiar with the condescension if not contempt with which many academics view colleagues who address lay audiences rather than scholarly peers

and graduate students. One of the ironies of the hostility to writing that addresses a broad audience rather than a peer cohort is that one such audience is comprised of our undergraduate students (and even some of our graduate students and colleagues in somewhat distant corners of the discipline). As Jan Radway (1996) put it,

> the largest and most predictable audience for the material we generate is not composed of our professional peers. Rather it is made up of young men and women, aged roughly eighteen to twenty-two, ranged before us in the classroom, seeking not only professional middle-class validation, but often guidance and reassurance about the appropriate emotional, moral, and political standpoint to take with respect to a confusing and oppressive world.

Protecting the cultural environment

When I entered the field of media studies 44 years ago, making a sudden, unplanned sideways move from social psychology, I was drawn into conversations with my colleague and future collaborator George Gerbner about the role of the media, television in particular, as the primary vehicle through which culture was experienced in contemporary American society. Having been drawn to communications because of my interest in the role of the arts in society it was not difficult to see that the mass media had subsumed many of the functions previously performed by the arts as the conveyors of core cultural assumptions, beliefs, and values. Culture has always been transmitted to new generations, and maintained throughout the life cycle by repetitive ritual storytelling, whether in the form of ''myths'' or ''scriptures'' or ''news'' or ''entertainment.'' In the late 20th century, as George liked to say, television told most of the stories to most of the people, most of the time.

Along with our students-turned-collaborators, Michael Morgan, Nancy Signorielli, and James Shanahan, George and I embarked on a long-term research project, looking at the content of network TV drama and its role in shaping attitudes, beliefs, and values. This process we termed *cultivation*, to note the role of the media as educator and entertainer, informer, and illustrator, and to avoid the assumption built into most media effects research that ''media impact'' took the form of changing, rather than stabilizing attitudes and belief systems. The results of these research undertakings, subsumed under the label cultivation theory, are widely known and, while sometimes controversial, generally accepted as offering at least a partial picture of the role of mass media.

Of course, our project was carried out just before the onset of the technological revolution that exploded at the end of the century and that is still unfolding around us. Despite the crucial change wrought by the digital revolution—the shift from the overwhelmingly one-directional broadcast system to a world in which communication is multidirectional and often bottom-up—it remains to be seen whether the fundamental power dynamics will change.

In the early 1990s, liberated from the restraints imposed by his administrative role as dean of Penn's Annenberg School, George turned towards a more activist engagement, founding what he called the Cultural Environment Movement. This enterprise brought together scholars, media activists, labor, religious, minority, and consumer groups, as well as media professionals, to address the challenges to democracy represented by the commercial domination of our common cultural environment. While the Movement itself had only limited impact, and died out by the end of the decade, it planted seeds that have come to fruition in later movements for media reform and opposition to corporate media power (see Morgan, 2012, for an account).

The concept of the cultural environment is one that should be taken to heart as the basis for an ethically responsible and publicly engaged communication scholarship.

In the decades following Rachel Carson's *The Silent Spring* an environmental movement gradually grew in size and power and, even though we still face extraordinary environmental dangers, most citizens understand the basic message of the movement. That is, we live in a physical environment that has been, and continues to be degraded, damaged, and even poisoned by the byproducts of our industrial system—what economists call negative externalities. Once this truth is understood it is not as difficult to organize public sentiment to demand measures to control, mitigate, or even end environmentally damaging practices. The fact that this truth is ''inconvenient'' and that it as often ignored as it is accepted and acted upon, does not impeach the fundamental importance of recognizing this truth as the starting point for change.

Parallel to our physical environment it can be said that we live in a cultural, or symbolic environment. Unlike animals, who are almost entirely confined to their immediate surroundings, humans are largely focused on and affected by images and ideas that are not part of their physical environment. We sacrifice, suffer, fight, and even die—or kill—in the name of abstractions that we cannot touch or see. As W. I. Thomas famously said, ''If men define things as real, they are real in their consequences.''

The processes through which societies create and maintain themselves are largely those of storytelling in words, pictures, music, and dance. In stark contrast to preindustrial societies, in which the culture communities consumed was almost entirely dependent on what they could produce, we now are faced with endless competing choices placed in front of us by industrial corporations with which we have no social contact whatever.

Note: this dizzying 24/7 array of media options is not there because anyone actually asked for all these images, songs, or stories. Rather, it exists because someone, somewhere, has a commercial interest in selling us a product—or more typically, in attracting our attention so that it can be ''sold'' to advertisers who wish to sell us something. Larger or smaller audiences, prime, or less desirable demographics, the media are selling audience attention all the time, on all possible platforms.

Even in the brave new world of social media, the spoors of our searches and the tracks of our tweets provide the raw material for data miners seeking to monetize our lives. The old rule applies: If you are consuming media and not paying for it, you are the product.

The corporations that create media fare also control how particular social groups and issues are represented. Indeed, representation in the media is in itself a kind of power, and their relative invisibility helps maintain the powerlessness of groups at the bottom of the social heap. Not all interests or viewpoints are treated equally, and judgments are routinely made—by producers and writers, editors, and reporters—about what to include or exclude.

News—the provision of information in the public interest that is the lifeblood of democracy—has been absorbed into the realm of entertainment. Political coverage features ''horse race'' commentary and shouting matches, avoiding serious exploration of the issues confronting society. It magnifies the illusory differences between essentially interchangeable candidates and parties, all of whom are ultimately controlled by the corporate elites that pay the piper and call the tune.

Just as the physical environment has been damaged as a byproduct of industrial production, so too, the cultural environment has been polluted as a byproduct of the cumulative effect of our immersion in commercially motivated and produced media.

The point is not to focus on the usual targets of media criticism—sex and violence—or to imagine that censorship, a weapon that invariably ends up strengthening the powerful, will be the solution. Rather, we must wield the weapons of intellect and scholarship to expose the workings of the corporate media system—this is the heart of the media literacy that we must provide as educators. In George's phrase, we need to mobilize as citizens as effectively as commercials mobilize us as consumers.

This is not a challenge easily met, nor is it even easy to imagine it being explicitly adopted by most of our educational institutions—after all, they exist to help the next generation fit into, not challenge the arrangements of the status quo. But it is the necessary and essential role for ethically and intellectually responsible scholars and teachers, and it is especially appropriate for those of us who take as our purview the study of communication. If we are to truly comprehend and respond to the poisoning of our common cultural environment, and if we are to meet the fundamental responsibility of scholars and educators to uncover, expose, and teach even the most inconvenient truths, then we have no time to waste.

Fasten your seatbelts, it's going to be a bumpy ride.

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