



Political Media Literacy 101

With Jerry Mander
and
Michael Mendizza

Do you watch corporate television or listen to commercial radio to 'stay informed'? Do you believe what you see and hear? Years ago the infomercial blurred the lines between advertising and television programming. Today the same is true of most broadcast news and commentary. There is no conspiracy. It's the way mass media works.

Far from being "neutral" [objective fair and balanced] 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.

Jerry Mander

The Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television

This concise statement published in 1977 describes the forces at play in your and your children's lives today. Mander goes on...

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...

I will say it again. The majority of images and commentary found on radio and television are propaganda. Nearly all of political coverage and commentary is propaganda. This is accepted today as normal, natural. Liberals seek out those propaganda networks that support their ideology. Conservatives do the same.

- Propaganda is a concerted set of messages aimed at influencing the opinions or behaviors of large numbers of people. As opposed to impartially providing information, propaganda in its most basic sense presents information in order to influence its audience. Propaganda often presents facts selectively (thus lying by omission) to encourage a particular synthesis, or gives loaded messages in order to produce an emotional rather than rational response to the information presented. The desired result is a change of the cognitive narrative of the subject in the target audience to further a political agenda.

If this is true and I believe it is, then where is truth? Would you know it if saw it? How would you know? Are you sure? Or, are we so deeply conditioned to accept what is presented on public media, radio and television, as 'reality' that you can't as Jerry described over 25 years ago, distinguish 'the truth' from 'the scrip' if it hit you in the face like a pie?

I asked Jerry - *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 preceded 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.

MM: *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.

MM: 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....

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