

Arguments for the Elimination of Television

Jerry Mander

The following are three excerpts from *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* by Jerry Mander. The book is an insightful analysis not only of the medium, but the society which produces it. See p. 12

In less than four generations out of an estimated one hundred thousand, we have fundamentally changed the nature of our interaction with the planet.

Our environment no longer grows on its own, by its own design, in its own time. The environment in which we live has been totally reconstructed solely by human intention and creation.

We find ourselves living inside a kind of nationwide room. We look around it and see only our own creations.

We live in a kind of maelstrom, going ever deeper into our own thought processes, into subterranean caverns, where nonhuman reality is up, up, away somewhere. We are within a system of ever smaller, ever deeper concentric circles, and we consider each new depth that we reach greater progress and greater knowledge.

Our environment itself becomes an editor, filter and medium between ourselves and an alternative nonhuman, unedited, organic planetary reality.

We ask the child to understand nature and care about it, to know the difference between what humans create and what the planet does, but how can the child know these things? The child lives with us in a room inside a room inside another room. The child sees an apple in a store and assumes that the apple and the store are organically connected. The child sees streets, buildings and a mountain and assumes it was all put there by humans. How can the child assume otherwise? That is the obvious conclusion in a world in which all reality is created by humans.

As adults, we assume we are not so vulnerable to this mistake, that we are educated and our minds can save us. We “know” the difference between natural and artificial... And yet, we have no greater contact with the wider world than the child has...

Therefore, whoever controls the processes of re-creation, effectively redefines reality for everyone else, and creates the entire world of human experience, our field of knowledge. We become subject to them. The confinement of our experience becomes the basis of their control of us.

The role of the media in all this is to confirm the validity of the arbitrary world in which we live. The role of television is to project that world, via images, into our heads, all of us at the same time.

[Erik Peper, a researcher on electroencephalographic (brainwave) testing, told Mander], “Television watching is only receiving, no longer reacting. It can’t do anything but hold your attention; you are receiving, not looking...Perhaps it’s that the TV target is so far away, the screen so small that your eyes needn’t move; you’re looking at infinity, in a way, like looking at the hypnotist’s flashlight”...“The horror of television,” he added, “is that the information goes in, but we don’t react to it. It goes right into our memory pool and perhaps we react to it later but we don’t know what we’re reacting to. When you watch television you are training yourself not to react and so later on, you’re doing things without knowing why you’re doing them or where they came from.”

Seeing the forests of Borneo on television makes one believe that one knows something of these forests. What one knows, however, is what television is capable of delivering, a minute portion of what Borneo forests are. It cannot make you care very much about them. When Georgia-Pacific proceeds to cut down hundreds of thousands

of acres of Borneo forest, as it has so many other forests in the Pacific Basin, one remains unmoved. The wood is needed for homes. The objective data dominate when only objective data can be communicated.

Meanwhile, sitting in our dark rooms ingesting images of Borneo forests, we lose feeling even for the forests near our homes. While we watch Borneo forests, we are not experiencing neighborhood forests, local wilderness or even local parks. As forest experience reduces to television forest, our caring about forests, any forest, goes into dormancy for lack of direct experience. And so the lumber company succeeds in cutting down the Borneo forest, and then, near to home, it also succeeds in building a new tract of condominiums where a local park had been.



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