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A DISSONANT DECLARATION FROM THE FED-UP HUMANS OF AMERICA

Stuart Ewen Ph.D.

The Graduate Center, CUNY

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IN THE MEDIA & DEMOCRACY CONGRESS,
October 17, 1997

Held in The Great Hall of The Cooper Union

A DISSONANT DECLARATION FROM THE FED-UP HUMANS OF
AMERICA

Submitted to the Congress
By ARCHIE BISHOP

WHEN in the course of current events, it becomes necessary for people to say "No fucking way!" to the merchandising miasma in which they are mired, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the power to assert popular control over those common carriers of public discussion and amusement which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitles them, it is incumbent for them to make a pitch--formerly known as an appeal--to the opinions of humankind, in order to shine a light on the mischief that has driven them to the brink of this grand and glorious refusal.

We hold some truths to be self-evident:

- That all humans are created equal, that they are subsidized by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, and that among these are Life, and the uninhibited Pursuit of Knowledge and Enjoyment.
- That to advance the meaning and substance of these rights, networks and mediums for public literacy, for the free availability of useful information, and for the unencumbered circulation of divergent ideas and imaginations, have been instituted by people, and that these networks derive their sanction from the public they are intended to serve.
- That whenever the paraphernalia of social communication becomes toxic to these goals, when the arteries of public enlightenment are blocked by ideational sludge, it is the **RIGHT** of the **PEOPLE** to alter or abolish environment from which we routinely derive our stories and pictures of the world-at-large.

Prudence & anxiety, of course, caution that long established systems of public communication should not be undone for light and transient causes; and, as a result, human experience has demonstrated that people are more disposed to take shit, while the shit is sufferable, than to "emancipate themselves from

mental slavery” by getting rid of forms to which they have become accustomed.¹

Still and all, when an unremitting blizzard of abuse and usurpation has made a joke of democratic principles, and has turned free and open public debate into a hollow gathering of numbers, it is people's right, it is their duty, to throw off the empty pageantry, and establish new and improved safeguards for the well-being of the public mind.

Something's rotten in the state of communications, and necessity now impels us to transform the present arrangements of public dialogue. The peculiar history of our media system, and particularly of the publicists and other "compliance professionals", who routinely employ it to exploit and contaminate the atmosphere of cognition--most often to the advantage of vested privateers--is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world:

- In a society where the airwaves--and other thoroughfares of public expression--belong, purportedly, to the people, every channel of perception is being confiscated or deformed by cartels of private wealth.
- Ridiculing the democratic standard of an informed public, retail dramas & corrosive profit circuses are today being staged at every threshold of human attention.
- Strapped public school have been shot-gunned into putting ad-think into daily lesson plans. For the reading public, toilet stall walls are for sale. Human libido has been chained to the engines of pre-meditated disposability.
- "All the great themes have been used up. Turned into theme parks." ²
- In a market-driven milieu, where the interests of enterprise and interests of the public are frequently at odds, hired news and opinion engineers routinely package corporate objectives to make them appear compatible with the common good.
- In the war rooms of Hill and Knowlton, Burson-Marsteller, and Bonner & Associates, stagecraft is transformed into a daily pretense of current events. Occurrences are mapped out to fabricate digestible spectacles of Truth.
- Targeted by opinion managers and influencers at every turn, people in growing numbers are haunted by a disabling sense of paranoia, the in-

¹ Bob Marley, "Redemption Song." (1980)

² Mark Hunter (Christian Slater), in "Pump Up the Volume." (film, 1990)

- luctable consequence--perhaps--of living in a world where others are actually conspiring to shape their perceptions, to influence their behavior.
- The Bill of Rights has recently been amended, and now includes "Freedom of Vodka."
 - Day and night, in an anemic sham of public debate, pollsters and social psychologists take the public's temperature, to manufacture public feeling, to proclaim public moods, never allowing for the possibility of public thought or deliberation.
 - Democracy has been supplanted by its evil cousin, demography. Surveys and focus groups are concocted to provide the ongoing fiction that the people are being consulted.
 - The Public Will appears as a fable of numbers and statistics on the front page of the morning paper, a phantom of democracy, collected to supply people in high places with information about which buttons to push.
 - Placing people in neat, predictable niches, opinion managers have turned stereotype into the unacknowledged law of the land. The common good is a refuge, deluged by a cult of categories. Social science fiction presides over popular culture.
 - In the dark outcome of such charades, policy and crime are customized for public consumption, appealing to resentment, prejudice, and closet ambition without regard to injury caused.
 - Last, perhaps the most towering outrage of all, our republican government has contrived to deliver hefty income tax write-offs to private corporations for the investments they make in advertising, public relations, and other types of institutionalized guile. Given asylum by this historic betrayal of the public interest, giant enterprises are prompted to engage in propaganda, to avoid paying taxes, while ordinary people assume the burdens of an imperiled social contract.

In the face of these presently unimpeded breaches, WE, THEREFORE, the fed-up humans of America, assembled in the Media and Democracy Congress, and appealing to the wisdom of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do solemnly publish and declare, that we are from now on Absolved from all Allegiance to the prevailing cultural machinery; that all mental bondage, yoking popular outlooks to the means and agencies of humbug, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Interdependent people, we must rejuvenate the channels of public discourse and imagine those fabrics and practices which will stimulate a free circulation of intelligence and imagi-

nation from all communities, without regard bottom line priorities, or gross national products.

Present patterns governing *who has a say* and *who gets to be heard* must be corrected. Towards the goal of resuscitating a relationship between media and democracy, we hereby declare that all corporate entities currently occupying, and profiting from, the public highways of communication must be required to pay fair rents--25% of gross advertising revenues, or other earnings derived from the use of these properties--and that these rents must be applied to the advancement of a fund for the support of public communication--to sustain noncommercial venues of expression and commercial-free venues of public education.

The principles of universal literacy, as well, must be revived and updated. As preceding campaigns for literacy were concerned with democratizing the tools of public expression--initially the written word--the educational habits of a post-merchandising society must empower people with the contemporary arts and implements of public discourse. Mere cynicism toward the media will never do. With a firm reliance on the powers of a dreamy and equitable sense of justice, we hereby pledge that distinctions between author and audience will be broken down, and that we will no longer let the chronicles of public discussion be written by the Gallup Poll.

Submitted on the Web by [Hideaki HIRANO](#)