

Making Sense of It All...Creatively Speaking

By Jim Grapek© 2005

What an exciting time to be alive, especially if you're a "creative soul" - so much opportunity!

I want to be optimistic, but not only are we witnessing the mass destabilization of our atmosphere and ecosystems, but we're also witnessing a decline in our quality of life and well being, not to mention the loss of our civil liberties and a general feeling of helplessness. Did I miss anything? Some things haven't changed, though; we're still free to shop like it's nobody's business. And China Mar...sorry, Wal Marts seem to be opening up like there's no tomorrow.

In my mind, things have gotten so weird that I can barely find words to describe it. The last I remember it was the early seventies... we were marching for peace, brotherly love and civil rights. I was sure it had worked. The Vietnam War ended, the Cold War ended...even the Berlin Wall came down. But the next thing I know, poof! The World Trade Center is attacked, surveillance cameras are popping up everywhere, Iraq is invaded, and on top of it all, I along with every other upstanding American, had become a suspect.

It wasn't long before I started feeling that this whole war on terror thing was spiraling out of control. In 2004 President Bush signed the Bioshield Act into law, giving the government the authority to bypass legal protections in place for decades and direct the use of experimental drugs (vaccinations) for both military and civilian populations during times of emergency or "potential" emergency, whether that emergency has its basis in reality or not. Does this scare me? Hell yes, it terrorizes me!

It's weird, but these days I feel like the Al Qaeda is the least of my problems. The more I read the newspapers and watch TV, (and perhaps it's time to stop?), the worse I feel. Life has become a big "what if". What if China destroys our economy? What if the market collapses? What if I catch that new "killer" strain of West Nile Virus? What if we run out of oil? What if my kids get kidnapped? Meanwhile, billions of dollars in contracts are being doled out to Haliburton and other political campaign contributors.

Meanwhile, where are the "real" news stories? What about all of the positive stuff happening... the progress being made? Am I forced to get all of the good news from the Internet?

If you read the papers or listen to the news from any of the mainstream outlets, it's like they WANT people to live in fear and feel anxiety ridden and powerless. I bet much of what they are printing would be called 'propaganda' anywhere else. Legendary newscaster and journalist Eric Sevareid wrote, "The biggest big business in America is not steel, automobiles, or television. It is the manufacture, refinement and distribution of anxiety." Is this really the only way that the news-entertainment industry can make money? It doesn't make sense.

And we're getting the same rubbish from all of the mainstream media outlets, even the White House Press Secretary. If it's not sensationalized faux news, it's news that's been "spun" to twist the truth, or it's plain dribble. "Lose 25 Pounds with new fill-in-the-diet-of-the-year-here", "50 Great Recipes for fill-in-your-holiday-here", "Ten Best (or worst) Dressed People", "Shopping for the Man (probably not woman) Who Has Everything," "How to Please Your Man" and finally, "Finding His (or her) G-spot". Did I hit them all? It's always the same, month after month, year after year.

Neil Postman, a brilliant professor at NYU, wrote several books about the media and television. One of my favorites is Amusing Ourselves to Death. What's key to understand, though, is that the media –and whoever controls it - shapes our culture and our thinking. If people are fearful and disoriented, if they are shown only problems and not solutions, if real issues are continually buried and replaced with fabricated distractions...people will become divided, unfocused, and easy to control. Is that what's going on here?

Well, not ready to accept that I was actually living in a country of propaganda and tabloid truth, I went searching for some answers. Were things always like this? Was America always the sickest, most obese, and most poorly educated nation? Apparently not. In the beginning of the 1900's, we Americans were the

healthiest people in the world and among the best educated.

Fast forward to today. In addition to our poor health ranking, our children rank right alongside those of the 'third world' nations in terms of education, substance abuse and teenage pregnancy. Holy Bat Babies! What about all of the money we've been spending on education and health? What about all these "Run for the Cure" fundraisers we support? I don't get it.

In his 2005 State of the Union address, perhaps we were given a sign. The President called our healthcare system 'the envy of the world'.

Huh? Statistically speaking, that couldn't be farther from the truth – unless you are talking about those who profit from disease. Do you think? I can see those overseas hospital administrators and drug company executives now - - marveling at the profits being made in America. "Boris, vee need to do more beezniss in Amerika." And doing some more digging, I found a lot of truth here. Next to war, sickness and disease (disease control) was indeed about the largest, most profitable business on the planet. The profits of the ten largest Fortune 500 pharmaceutical companies are greater than the combined profits of the other 490 companies.

Hmmm. Maybe this 'profit' thing was a part of the reason for our slide. Or was it a push? As I scoured through books and articles, it became clear to me that one of the underlying causes behind our sad state of affairs was an economic system that no longer met our needs. Editorialist Bob Kuttner, in *Business Week* (5-20-2000) summed it up well:

"[Our economic system] puts profit before value, and short term gain before long term stability. Ethical values, sadly, are often lost between the cracks.

...The free market is without equal when it comes to generating growth, material prosperity and consumer choice. But what happens when the same market forces relentlessly promote images of violence – because violence sells? ... When the imperative of "shop til you drop" pushes two breadwinners into the work force leaving no one at home with the kids? When child care gets shortchanged because subsidizing it would raise taxes or depress profits?"

Author David Kortin, in his bestseller *When Corporations Rule the World*, takes it a step further.¹

"If we are to save ourselves and our planet from wholesale financial collapse, environmental destruction, and social chaos, we must eradicate the myth that consumerism is the path to happiness, and work instead for the creation of a society that nurtures cultural and biological diversity.

More directly, he says that global financial markets and global corporations are programmed to destroy life — the lives of working people, the life of community, and the living wealth of the planet — to make money for the already wealthy. And they do it with extraordinary efficiency.

[...] The system is brilliantly designed to strip away any human sensibility from decisions that have profound human consequences. Even if the top manager of a corporation has a deep social and environmental commitment, he (it's usually a "he") is legally bound to act on this commitment only to the extent that it is consistent with maximizing returns to shareholders."

Are these the people then – for there ARE real people at the top who sit on the boards of directors –responsible for the 'Great Slide'? What if we eliminated or restructured these limited liability, public corporations and required them to be more responsible? What if we put a better system of checks and balances in place – diverse committees like they have in Denmark that consider the human, societal and environmental costs of doing business?

Disconnected: The Age of Missing Information

But as I read through Kortin's book I was disturbed by something. Why, I wondered, weren't more people in government and big business making better, less destructive decisions? Duress, perhaps...or has something gone awry in their decision making process?

¹ From an interview in Yes! Magazine between Sarah Ruth van Gelder and David Kortin, Summer, 2001.

Author Bill McKibben has an interesting take on things:

“While in a certain narrow sense this is the case [that we are in the midst of an information revolution], in many important ways just the opposite is true. We also live in a moment of deep ignorance, when vital knowledge that humans have always possessed about who we are and where we live seems beyond our reach. An un-enlightenment. An age of missing information.

“My children”, a man once told Marshall McLuhan, “have lived several lifetimes compared to their grandparents when they began Grade 1.” Which basically is nonsense, because these same youth have much less access to precisely the kinds of fundamental information we most sorely lack.

For instance, even the dullest farmer quickly learns a deep sense of limits. You can’t harvest crops successfully without understanding how much can be grown without exhausting the soil, how much rest the land requires, which fields can be safely plowed and so on. This sense of limits of one particular place grants you some sense that the world as a whole has limits, a piece of information we’ve largely forgotten. Certainly, today’s business people have forgotten it, in part, because being a successful businessperson means constantly breaking through limits... [Good in some ways...bad when the mandate is to maximize profit and stock prices above all else. JG]

The Fallacy of Modern Science

“...By the end of the 18th century, the rapid, indeed extraordinary development of science began to throw the whole system off balance. ...Science, as we say, became scientism, which means it didn’t just pursue its own truths, it aggressively denied that there were any other truths at all!”

Ken Wilbur, A Brief History of Everything

I think McKibben makes a good point, though it really just touches the surface. As my search

continued, I found that there have been even more powerful, “disconnecting influences” at work. One of the perpetrators: modern science - also known as “quantitative” science. Sound crazy? I thought so at first, too. But then it began to make sense.

Okay. Without doubt, modern science has a lot going for it. Look at where we are today. Whoops... okay, what I meant to say was look at how modern science has allowed us to better understand our world. It has truly given us valuable tools we can use to improve our quality of life. Whether we use or share those tools is something else entirely, but from where I’m sitting, it doesn’t seem like the powers-that-be have done enough of either.

But there’s another side to this tale. Literally. Consider this: What if the picture portrayed by modern science of our world...of our existence, told only *half of the story* as to what was really going on? In other words, what if it gave us only half the truth? What if, like Western medicine, it was missing the “big picture”? (That is the reason now, by the way, that complimentary medicine is supplying so many successful therapies.)

Okay, consider, for a moment - not what science includes, but rather what it excludes: It excludes anything that cannot be accurately measured by existing instruments and double-blind, laboratory studies. That’s quite a category. It includes intuitive or psychic phenomenon, anything related to astrology and the zodiac and a myriad of other forecasting modalities, folk magic, folk sciences such as dowsing, holistic and nutritional medical therapies, hands-on healing and other healing processes, as well as the practices of prayer or meditation; it also excludes the existence of ghosts, spirits, angels, celestial humans, crop circles, and unidentified flying objects. Have millions of people been hallucinating?

Of course, we know that many of these things exist because many credible people have had first-hand experiences. Yet, because modern science doesn’t recognize them and even ridicules them, society is pressured to not take them seriously...to consider them only as novelties. Today, though, the evidence that many of these things are quite real is coming from leading scientists and authorities who aren’t

afraid to speak out. Writer and scientist Gregg Bradon is one such figure.

"We have today, and have always had, direct access to the creative forces of our bodies and our outer world, through an almost lost technology, called prayer."

And what is compassion but perhaps a conscious or intuitive understanding or *knowing* for that person or object which is being felt? Is what we call compassion some kind of way in which we direct-link our beings with that of the object outside of us? And if this direct-link is how we humans not only feel and experience our world, but participate in it, shouldn't this information be considered and explored, if not in science than in some other serious course of study?

Gerry Vassilatos is among the growing number of people who believe this to be the case. Vassilatos, author of *Lost Science*, goes one step further:

"The scientists of former times were not the mere force-measuring technicians of today. They were truly Doctors of Philosophy. These natural philosophers employed the powerful tool of consciousness in a metacognitive consideration, reflection and interpretation of Natural behaviors. ...Data, however accurate, was often disqualified as inadmissible and inconsequential, when far greater principles of metacognitive importance were weighed. The genteel elegance of their philosophical art has been replaced by a base and mindless technical threshing tool, which is incapable of discerning between mind and object."

Vassilatos goes on to say that the early scientists viewed the world as a vast potential of experiential possibilities, and that Nature was (and is) essentially an experiential reality. Since we are a part of Nature...of the natural world, it makes no sense to drop the subjective experiential component and consider only measurable, hard data for all of our answers. These early scientific thinkers understood this and saw everything as interplay of energies, emotions, qualities and aspects. They recorded the objective, hard data when they did their experimentation, yet they also recorded intuitive data such as feelings and sensations. How did they process and interpret their results? Through the use of their consciousness – for this is the only

direct means by which we humans can *know* Nature on an intimate level. Haven't we all wished to become 'one with Nature' at some time or another? Certainly, this is a large part of the underlying motivation beneath the scientific study of Nature. Modern science does not give us this experiential understanding, this *knowing*. Art, it can be said, more thoroughly achieves this purpose.

Based on this – the fact that sensation is the only possible window through which consciousness can access Nature directly, Vassilatos concludes that modern science, in attempting to explain the Natural world and humankind's place within it, has completely missed the mark.

Wow! So perhaps we are not only looking at the mass media, the economic system and the public corporation as the perpetrators here, but at one of our most revered institutions– "modern science".

It was like a small epiphany had occurred in my brain. However, like many of these moments of clarity, they raise as many questions as they answer. Why were all of these qualitative aspects of science – of our Nature – removed from modern science? What do we do now? Is it, perhaps, time for another renaissance...for revisiting some of these lost sciences and reconsidering our world and how we fit in?

In an essay written some twenty years ago in Eastern Europe by Vaclav Havel, he too, suggested a shifting away from the hard data and cold divisiveness that Western science and technology had fostered. Havel, a noted poet, playwright and artist, in "The Need for Transcendence in a Postmodern World," wrote:

"The world is in transformation, and crisis, caused in large part by our reliance on science as the basis of the modern conception of the world."

The dizzying development of science, with its unconditional faith in objective reality and its complete dependency on general and rationally knowable laws, led to the birth of modern technological civilization. It is the first civilization in the history of the human race that spans the entire globe and firmly binds together all human societies, submitting them to a common global destiny. It was this science that

enabled man, for the first time, to see Earth from space with his own eyes; that is, to see it as another star in the sky.

At the same time, however, the relationship to the world that the modern science fostered and shaped now appears to have exhausted its potential. It is increasingly clear that, strangely, the relationship is missing something. It fails to connect with the most intrinsic nature of reality and with natural human experience. It is now more of a source of disintegration and doubt than a source of integration and meaning. It produces what amounts to a state of schizophrenia: Man as an observer is becoming completely alienated from himself as a being.

The only real hope of people today, of turning this identity crisis around, is probably a renewal of our certainty that we are rooted in the earth and, at the same time, in the cosmos. This forgotten awareness is encoded in all religions, indeed, in all people. All cultures anticipate it in various forms. It is one of the things that form the basis of man's understanding of himself, of his place in the world, and ultimately of the world as such.

It is this awareness that endows us with the capacity for self-transcendence. Like the Gaia hypothesis, which suggests we are all part of a single system, a kind of mega-organism, a living planet – we must again learn how to listen to and nourish our inner voices and begin caring for our world. Politicians at international forums may reiterate a thousand times that the basis of the new world order must be universal respects for human rights, but it will mean nothing as long as this imperative does not derive from our respect for the miracle of Being, the miracle of the universe, the miracle of nature, the miracle of our own existence.

In today's multicultural world, the truly reliable path to coexistence, to peaceful coexistence and creative cooperation, must start from what is at the root of all cultures and what lies infinitely deeper in human hearts and minds than political opinion, convictions, antipathies, or sympathies - it must be rooted in self-transcendence.”

ART Matters

For those of you not familiar with Vaclav Havel, he is one person who can 'put his money where

his mouth is,' because in 1990, he engineered a most remarkable event: the overthrow of the brutal communist regime in Czechoslovakia. Havel's plays, and his writings as a political prisoner, moved the people of Czechoslovakia to rise up and overthrow the government regime without a single shot being fired. Not a drop of blood was spilled! And Havel, released from prison, was democratically elected the country's next president.

Speaking at a commemorative event in New York celebrating Havel's victory, actor Ron Silver conveyed an important message – a message that a broader, more inclusive and *feeling* worldview needs to be given its due.

“Vaclav Havel”, he said, “has shown the world that art matters. He has reminded us that art is not an end in itself, but it is a means of addressing humanity. And he has reminded us that artists speak to people in ways that politicians cannot.”

Ah-ha! Another light bulb went off. Aren't art programs being cut out of curriculums all over the country? Aren't they always the first to suffer the budgetary ax? Could it be, though, that art is equally as important as reading and math? Could it be that like the modern science analogy, pulling art out of education is analogous to giving our children only half of the tools they need to navigate through life? Meanwhile, notice how the focus is more and more on rote memorization in preparation for the standardized testing. Yet, grades continue to slide and more children than ever are being “left behind.” Author Barbara Marciniak wrote:

“Within the corporate world where ever-increasing profits must prevail, children are considered future customers for an economy based on a conditioned response to “buy ever more”. Many teachers are stifled, scripted, penalized and threatened with dismissal for not meeting federal test quotas and for expressing their own opinions. No thinking allowed. The teaching profession has become a mandated forum for rote delivery, encouraging uniform memorization by appealing only to the left hemisphere of the brain, and by discouraging creative expression and original thought, which is a right-brain activity. In a world where power is sought for its own sake, the old tenant of divide and conquer rules.

In order to function in a healthy and balanced manner, coherent brain wave patterns and whole brain integration is required. Quite simply, this means that when you use both hemispheres of your brain, you will have greater mental, emotional and spiritual clarity, enhanced creativity and greater overall health and vitality. You experience a state of integration when you spend quiet time in nature or when you focus on slowing the body down through [...focused breathing and meditation.]

[Today's teaching and testing techniques have] created millions of individuals who are part of the "obey and be on time" school, and who are often completely incapable of developing emotional and intuitive solutions to the many challenges of the times. Art for beauty is no longer a cultural focus, and today's educational principles have become a mind controlled training ground for robotized beings learning how to earn an unimagined living."²

Sound a bit extreme...or does it ring true? I recommend browsing through B.K. Eakman's well-documented "*Cloning of the American Mind: Eradicating Morality through Education.*" You'll never look at education the same way.

And here's another bit of telling trivia: In 1968, George Land distributed among 1,600 5-year-olds a creativity test used by NASA to select innovative engineers and scientists. He re-tested the same children at 10 years of age and again at 15 years of age. The test results amongst 5 year olds: 98% were in the top creativity grouping. Test results amongst 10 year olds: 30%. Test results amongst 15 year olds: 12%. And the test results from the same test given to 280,000 adults -- 2%. Land wrote: "*What we have concluded is that non-creative behavior is learned.*"

A Second Renaissance

At the end of actor Ron Silver's speech to the packed house, he went on to say that while we still had the freedom of expression here in America, we couldn't allow ourselves to grow complacent. Yet, that is exactly what has happened. Amidst the shopping, pro-

sports and Seinfeld, we've become complacent, disconnected and cynical. Most of us have come to look for, and rely on, the hard data – the "irrefutable" evidence, and we've been taught to discount nearly everything else. In the midst of all of this, we've relegated our decision-making, our power, to others...and sadly it's been sold off to the highest bidders.

And here we stand. We are witnesses to the massive, unprecedented poisoning of our environment -our very life support - by our pesticides, petro-chemicals and fossil fuels. There are a myriad of industrial toxins in our air and water, we're losing animal and plant species faster than it took for the dinosaurs to disappear, and our lettuce and milk is contaminated with rocket fuel. Given where we are today, the question that comes to my mind is, "Can we be more than mere witnesses?"

Former Congressman Dennis J. Kucinich, in a September 14th, 2002 speech, presented his audience with a new vision for America's future. "Today," he said, "I want to speak to you about the America that can be. About reestablishing the context of our nation. About remythologizing America. About a Second Renaissance which can begin in this nation, with this generation. ...[Let us] change the outcome, connect with our aspirations for peace and reclaim our ingenuity and creativity in human relations."

"Renaissance" and "creativity." There are those words again, two of my favorites. But what can we really do? A lot. We can get involved in the decision-making process again. And just like in the 70's, we can work at the grass roots level. There are community groups, non-profit organizations, local politics and more. We can join Internet-based groups that are supporting the democratic process and trying to push out the special interests – groups such as MoveOn (www.moveon.org) and True Majority (www.truemajority.org) And if you're a "creative", you can do even more! Remember what Mr. Silver said? "Artists speak to people in ways that the politicians cannot". Is the corollary perhaps that artists, *creatives*, speak to the politicians in ways the less creative cannot? The good news is that everyone can learn to be more creative and think "out of the box".

² Bold Connections Newsletter, Barbara Marciniak, 12/02

Deep inside, I believe that we are all connected - a part of some greater whole. And that everything we do has an effect on everything else. To sum it up more eloquently, "*Pluck a flower, and you affect a distant star*".

When everything is stripped away, all that remains - and the physicists will tell you this - is a sea of energy: mental energy, physical energy, electrical energy, spiritual energy, magnetic energy, emotional energy and so on. And every action, even the smallest action, produces infinite ripples and repercussions in this vast sea. The fact is, we have no choice but to have an effect. We do have a choice, though; as to the *kind* of effect we'd like to produce.

It's time the messages of Havel and Vassilatos are given their due course. I wouldn't recommend we start throwing out our old science books, but maybe it's time to start teaching a more complete and inclusive version of science, a more inclusive model of medicine, a more realistic form of economics, and of course, those much needed art courses. (And as far as politics, well, it might just be simpler to begin again from the ground up).

Perhaps, in the spirit of renaissance, we can start getting together with friends to share and devise creative action plans...host monthly salons, community forums, results-focused group mediations, town meetings... Taking a little more time each day to listen to our hearts and access our intuition will make a big difference, also.

As Havel said, "*we must again learn how to listen to and nourish our inner voices and begin caring for our world*". And this transcendent thinking must "*derive from our respect for the miracle of Being, the miracle of the universe, the miracle of nature, and the miracle of our own existence.*" Doesn't that ring so true?

There are none more capable of helping affect this transcendence, this change in our worldview, than each and every one of us - creative or not. For as we awaken...as we change, we directly affect that vast sea of consciousness which surrounds us. Having a little trouble *breaking the mold*? I refer you to a quote from my friend Ann Silberman:

"Be who you want to be and do what you want to do. Those who matter don't mind, and those who mind don't matter."

So go for it! *Pluck a flower and affect a distant star*. Or put in a more prosaic way, get busy and start transcending!

[Jim Grapek is an award winning filmmaker in the Washington, DC area, producing programs to raise awareness on health and environmental issues, and the convergence of spirit and science. He can be reached through his website: www.associatedproducers.com]