

Anti-Media Bias

“Technology is a way of organizing the world
so that we do not experience it.”

Max Frisch

“As a result of techno-cocooning, huge segments of the population have become autistic in relation to the natural world.”

“Our circumscription by technology has also made us autistic in relation to one another, markedly eroding our social lives in recent years.”

Andrew Kimbrell

In “Cold Evil: Technology and Modern Ethics” (2000) Andy Kimbrell has given us a brief and frightening essay on the psychic, spatial and social distancing that technology forces upon us at an accelerating rate. It was after reading this Schumacher Society booklet that I was thinking about not putting a CD or DVD in the back of this book. At a more recent Kimbrell lecture (2003) on “the commons” I was pleased to discover that Owen Barfield’s “Saving the Appearances” was a touchstone book for Andy in the same way that reading Barfield's book sparked my ideas about the importance of grooving and getting ever more participatory discrepancies into our lives. I'd like to think that *Born to Groove* is all about “hot goodness” and the changes in perception and naming of reality we need to make in order to save ourselves and the appearances, make both ourselves and nature *real*. More recently I've decided to put a few dozen "2 minute drum lessons" in the back of this book so that a reader and listener can make the connection to practices/skills immediately and easily . . . and **then immediately** go looking for a real, live, teacher.

Why be biased against media, technology, writing, visual and audio mnemonics when they can be so easily used to facilitate drumming, dancing, singing? Won't it help kids remember what to practice? Can't we dance to our favorite music on demand with the push of a button?

The simplest answer might be “participation -- accept no substitutes!” I'm biased against the “substitutes” because the media have already taken over much of our lives and may well be a cause of much alienation and the different kinds of aut-isms or attention deficits. People are 'aut'-onomous inside their walkman earphones. People are “aut'-onomous as they flick the channel switches and pick their programs. We get the 'aut' or “ought” messages hundreds of times a day: you “aut” to be an individual, you “aut” to think for yourself, you “aut” to consume this product, you “aut” to be the “aut”hor of your own fate, everything about individual choice is 'aut'-omatically assumed to be good. These media “substitutes” may induce or 'aut'-horize passivity. If you see it or write it down or hear it from a “speaker” you think you own it individually and don't have to do it with others. Ever. Why hit a drum when you can just press a button and have the whole band? Media are all attraction and no action. If you watch, gaze, spectate, listen long enough you become what's called “a couch potato” or worse, “an intellectual”. The “substitutes” could be partially responsible for different kinds of limpness and paralyses,

attention deficit disorders, pervasive developmental disorders, dyslexias, disabilities, and dozens of other named and about-to-be-named syndromes that require drugs, therapies, various remedial, recovery and reclaiming programs.

So why let our children pay any attention whatever to media or any technology that denies or substitutes for their experiencing of the world first hand, or *immediately*? Why ask anyone to make eye contact with a cathode tube for any reasons whatsoever? Why not go find a real live Puerto Rican? Put an add in the paper for someone who knows how to samba? Find a summer camp that will transmit a tradition to you? Any social solution to your lack of grooving is better than any mediated aides to interaction. It is assumed by the instruction tapes that sooner or later you will drum with others, find a dance partner, join the party . . . so why not now? Why not start with a teacher, a partner, a party, real live people? If you start with people then you don't have to worry about media addiction, or weaning, or an "exit strategy," a way out of mediated substitutions.

Any time spent looking at a book or notation or a blackboard or a TV or a computer screen is usually time spent not dancing, not drumming, not singing together with people, not looking at actual people and absorbing how they actually produce their sounds and movements. There is indeed a "karaoke" or "empty orchestra" or "music minus one" mode of participation, a variety of ways in which people can sing along with, drum along with, dance along with recorded or televised images and sounds. I admit that in my own life I have probably spent more time playing along on drums or bass with jazz recordings than I have playing with people. True enough -- more dancing is done with recorded music than with live musicking these days; DJs have taken over both night clubs and rites of passage like weddings. And certainly dancing is "part of the solution" and rarely, if ever, "part of the problem" no matter what the sound source that inspires it. But, for infants and young children, I believe the basic issue is *skills-acquiring-time spent interacting with living people*. Like goslings imprinting on mother goose or on Konrad Lorenz, kids need live people and animals -- not TV, computer screens or machines -- to imprint with, or on, or upon. I'm not sure that dancing with prerecorded or mechanically reproduced music is so good for adults either. My own aims as a musician are always for the dancing pleasure of others. And I pray that most dancers would still prefer to have live musicians responding to their moves. I'm quite certain that infants and children are born to groove with humans and other life forms first and foremost -- primarily to experience the joys of primary communication -- so that they can make responsible decisions in later life about whether or not they want to "bop with the borg!" or not.

The basic hypothesis or "guess" of Born to Groove is that young children are starved for *skills-acquiring-time spent interacting with living people*.

They are spiritually, physically and intellectually starved or malnourished for Lack Of Synchronized Timing -- LOST.

*I once was LOST, but now I'm found
Amazing Grooves = Amazing Grace*

Pat Campbell:

Cass is not a fanatic, but she limited the TV time for her two children to four hours on the weekend. Usually, it was an hour of Saturday morning animation for Jay and Becca, a family movie on Friday night, and a Channel 19 Hallmark program every Sunday. Oh my, that left so much time for doing other things! Jay is a college freshman now, and Becca is in 11th grade. Cass was never a music major, but both her children play music because she supported their curiosity to learn an instrument (to say nothing of the constancy of music curricular programs in their elementary, middle and high schools). Jay has played trumpet since fourth grade, and took his trumpet to college to play in the marching band; he recently wrote his mom of the prospects for some friends forming a jam-band with him. Meanwhile, Becca has played guitar for three years (after six years at the piano, and five years--and counting--in the school choir). Besides music, Jay is a cyclist, a sci-fi enthusiast, and enjoys fishing in the rivers east of the mountains. Becca runs cross-country for her school, and has recently taken up photography. They seem to have done well without overloading on animation, serials and soaps, X-Box and Game Cube. It's not that their mother is anti-media, but that "life is too short", as she notes, "to spend it in couch-potato fashion". She added with a twinkle: "The trick is to hear their enthusiasm for a sport, a hobby, even music, and to figure how to channel it without choking it". Her approach seems to be working well into rich lives for Jay and Becca.