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THE DESIGNER AS AN AGENT FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: CREATING
AN ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATIONS MODEL OUTSIDE OF THE
MARKETPLACE OF PRIVATE MEDIA OWNERSHIP

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Abstract

As the primary source of information for society, the mainstream media shapes public discourse and citizens’ perception of reality. Because journalistic decision making by corporate-owned media outlets is based on profit, many critical public interests and perspectives are ignored in news reporting. The result is a media marketplace that disenfranchises the voices of many progressive social justice groups like the Global Justice movement.

This thesis examines the mainstream media and proposes how activist-designers can utilize their unique abilities to increase awareness and provoke social change through alternative forms of communication. The Fair Trade Multi-Media Project (FTMP) is a model based on the philosophy that visual communication is a powerfully persuasive tool that can catalyze a paradigm shift in awareness and public discourse. Additionally, advances in technology provide windows of opportunities to create alternative sources of communication that circumvent the corporate media establishment to better educate the public. The functional attributes and societal implications of this theoretical model are discussed herein.
Acknowledgements

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This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Christy, and daughter, Eva, whose love has provided the foundational support and inspiration behind my graduate work.
Table of Contents

Abstract ..................................................................................................................................................  2

List of Figures .......................................................................................................................................6

Preface ..................................................................................................................................................7

Introduction ..........................................................................................................................................9

Part 1  The Disenfranchisement of Social Movements Through Private Media Ownership

The Mainstream Media and Public Perception of Reality ....................14

Corporate Economic Propaganda through the Withholding and Distortion of Information .....................19

Creating a Commercial Culture through Corporate Disseminated Propaganda ......................................27

Conclusion ...........................................................................................................................................33

Part 2  The Designer As an Agent of Social Change

Historical Precedents of Designers as Agents of Social Change

Looking into the Past for Inspiration ..........................................................35

A Model for Design Activism Today:
The Fair Trade Multi-Media Project (FTMP)

Introduction .........................................................................................................................41

The FTMP Experience ............................................................................................................43
List of Figures

Figure 1.1  Image from The Rwanda Project, Alfredo Jaar, 1998
Figure 1.2  Images from The Rwanda Project, Alfredo Jaar, 1998
Figure 2.1  Gargantua, Honoré Daumier
Figure 2.2  Money, Honoré Daumier
Figure 2.3  Money, Honoré Daumier
Figure 2.4  Positioning Map of Style vs. Technology (Cagan and Vogel)
Figure 2.5  Levels of Engagement/Success
Figure 2.6  Target Market
Figure 2.6  The FTMP Model: Communication System Components and Communication Goals
Preface

The foundation of this project lies in the idea that graphic design is a complex and very powerful discipline that has great implications for effecting the world. Visual communication design has evolved into a formal professional practice, yet I as well as many others, contend that we have merely scratched the theoretical and philosophical surface of this discipline. This thesis calls for a deeper and broader investigation to discover the ways in which it can positively change our world. Herein I propose one such path the designer can take to make an important impact in furthering the cause of social justice. It is of significant note that this call for new ways of viewing the role of design has been echoed by the American Institute of Graphic Arts, who’s board members are currently rewriting their mission to reflect a broader consciousness. As stated on their web site, “The design profession has been building a momentum toward taking on the really difficult problems facing a troubled planet.”

One of the most important reasons for the narrow development of communication design, rests in the commercial context in which it is bound. People who are familiar with graphic design generally see it as a form of “commercial art” versus fine art. Most academic design programs focus primarily on preparing students for the professional world. By this we have created tightly wound intellectual straight jacket that has restricted the breadth, depth and philosophical exploration of our discipline. Consequently, design’s ability to bring value of endless possibilities to all aspects of society is curtailed by market driven forces.
The modernist educational philosophy has long been a major influence on the foundations of graphic design programs. The neutrality and objectivity of the modernist ideal naturally establishes the role of the designer as a passive third party, who receives the communication goal of the client and transforms this into a design solution. ‘Good design means good business’ and the objective designer betters society by creating a functional and aesthetically handsome solutions for the target audience to enjoy. Design educator, Katherine McCoy, also denounces this passivity and servitude to economic interests in her essay, *Good Citizenship: Design as Social and Political Force*. She proposes that, “Designer and design educators are part of the problem and can be part of the answer. We cannot afford to be passive anymore. Designers must be good citizens and participate in the shaping of our government and society.”

I advocate the design discipline as a holistic ‘meta-force’ crossing the boundaries of the sciences, arts, cultural studies, etc. and is as diverse as each one of its participants. For each individual it might be professional, private, spiritual, social or political. Whatever the case, design must break its traditional artificiality with the economic and become active in contributing new ideas and solutions to the world. This project exemplifies this philosophy by calling for the designer to take a pro-active role in initiating a project that uses his unique and influential abilities to directly effect social change.
Introduction

On November 30, 1999 fires, smoke, civil disobedience, tear gas, arrests, protestors and riot clad police filled every news broadcasts in the country. The location was not a third world country. It was downtown Seattle. The World Trade Organization (WTO) was scheduled to have a series of trade meetings and tens of thousands of protestors travelled from around the world to voice opposition to this organization and the multi-national corporations it serves. For the next few days, Seattle was declared to be in a state of emergency and under a curfew. What caused so many citizens from diverse interests to come together to demonstrate and what fueled the rage for some to act out so passionately?

The controversial World Trade Organization, which oversees a number of trade agreements for 149 nations, is one of the most powerful decision-making bodies in the world. This un-elected body of government officials and corporate advisors creates rules that effect almost every aspect of our lives. Through the WTO corporations have been granted unprecedented power: first, to establish the new rules for the global economy and second, to challenge sovereign laws democratically created by citizens because they conflict with terms of these agreements. Civil society has no seat at the global round-table, yet the domestic laws and regulations we create can be second guessed by a body that was never given any constitutional authority. It is the official policy of the United States to harmonize all of our laws to meet the terms of WTO agreements. The WTO, as well as other free trade agreements like NAFTA, have created a “one size fits all” set of rules for every nation to follow. To participate in the global economy a nation must surrender its national sovereignty.
It is no surprise that with corporations are writing the rules they have a disproportionate amount of power and the global economy is shaped to serve their interests. The consequences for citizens and the earth cannot be overstated. Healthy economies and fair wages for workers, environmental sustainability, child labor regulations, human rights, worker safety and public health are some of the most affected targets of these new rules. Transformations occur rapidly. In the first ten years of the WTO and NAFTA: Mexican grain agriculture has been devastated and at least one million Mexican farmers have been displaced, 3 million U.S. manufacturing jobs have been off-shored, sections of the clean air act were declared illegal under the WTO, sections of the endangered species act have been declared illegal.

For an issue as important as corporate led globalization and free trade, why is it that most Americans have only heard of the World Trade Organization because of the news coverage from the 1999 Seattle demonstration? Most can only figure out what the acronym WTO means from its initials, but don’t have a clue of its activities that dramatically effect the way we live. Americans are familiar with NAFTA from the controversial presidential debates of 1992; however, citizens hardly hear mention of it today. Less have heard of its massive expansion currently underway to include all of South America that will create the new Free Trade of the Americas (FTAA). If NAFTA was such a highly contested issue in the debates in 1992, why is the public unaware of its massive expansion? Why isn’t this being discussed in the public arena instead of in secret meetings behind closed doors? Free trade issues and corporate led globalization are absent from mainstream television, radio and press. How can this be?

I, as well as many researchers, propose the reasons behind citizen ignorance of free trade issues is due in large part to the current state of highly concentrated
media ownership by a handful of corporations. It is no secret that the current free trade model is one that was created and lobbied by the largest and most influential corporations. The media coverage of these issues is not only missing, but activists have even been denied the right to purchase advertising time. Though access to the media is a fundamental tenet of a democratic society, global justice activists find themselves in a difficult position when denied a voice. Not only are they disenfranchised from media access, but so are other social groups whose message is contrary to the interests of multi-national corporations.

The mainstream media, particularly, television is an extremely powerful tool in mobilizing people’s actions and mediating their perception of the world. As such, the content that is on TV is also a social barometer of the public’s political beliefs, morals and values. What they buy, how they think and how they vote is largely influenced by television, and thus the range of discourse on the airwaves is a reliable indicator of prevailing attitudes. In order for activists to effect society, they must be able to create awareness and communicate on a broader scale. Significant social change cannot happen without access to mass communication, because this is the primary venue for democratic exchange. Participatory democracy cannot truly exist without diverse representation in the media.

Throughout history, a number of activist-designers and activist-artists have used their visual communication abilities to make important strides to foster social change. Past examples serve as inspiration while revealing how other visual communicators attacked the problems of their time. The media access challenge that faces the global justice movement and other grass roots activists, is particularly fitting for the graphic designer. Designers can actually turn this problem into an opportunity, using their abilities to create new and innovative media solu-
tions, activating citizens to fight for social change. By seizing new technologies including the internet, instead of traditional mainstream media, the designer has the possibility of using this more democratic medium to find new approaches for disseminating information and compelling large audiences. This thesis proposes a specific methodology for using design as a tool to increase awareness and provoke social change for global justice. This methodology, however, is one among many approaches an activist-designer may bring to this problem; each designer has his/her own unique capabilities and vision. Through my research and analysis, I hope to provoke a broader dialogue regarding the power of the activist-designer to leverage technology to find new communication solutions in this era of corporate media consolidation as well as use visual language to inspire political action. Design has tremendously powerful potential to inform and catalyze social change.
The Disenfranchisement of Social Movements Through Private Media Ownership

The following section discusses how private media ownership by a handful of corporations shapes public discourse to the advantage of commercial interests. The result is an undemocratic media marketplace that disenfranchises social justice groups, while systematically creating a culture of economic and political propaganda.
The Mainstream Media and Public Perception of Reality

In assessing why the media is such an influential component of society’s behavior, it is important to explore how people come to perceive the world and their reality. Social constructivism describes the contemporary academic study of how individuals construct their own perceptual realities and knowledge within society. At the core of this scholarship lies the fundamental view that reality is primarily created through the social process of communication. Historically, communication was done through interpersonal means and language has always been an important part of this process, “the terms with which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people.” In recent years, however, the emphasis has been not interpersonal communication but what has been called “mediated communication.” This widely held theory was strongly advocated by Lippman and Kessel who say that the “pictures in our head” are created through the media rather than through direct experience. Karen Johnson-Cartee further elaborates on this: “For most people, political knowledge is constructed through the mass media. Many people have never met their city council member or mayor in person but don’t doubt that they exist, because the media told them that they do.” Ultimately, the construction of reality is one dominated by the media and is consequently characterized as “mass-mediated reality.”

A basic tenant of a democratic society is freedom of expression and the right to a free press. As such, a free and open media is recognized as serving an important role in the public interest as it is the main way citizens acquire information to make informed choices to participate responsibly in civic life. Scholars Croteau and Hoynes describe this vital role by saying:

One of the most revered elements of American democracy is its ideal of a free press, as enshrined in the First Amendment. Because its public service responsibility is so entwined with the health of democracy itself, the press is the only business explicitly protected by the Constitution.
In the current state of the media in the U.S. and globally, however, there is much skepticism as to how the media is serving democratic societies. Inherent in this problem, particularly in the U.S., lies in the free market system of the media, giving private enterprise ownership and control of the nation’s media outlets. Corporations have, by nature, a vested interest in the pursuit of profit above all else; their role in this process is not an objective one. Consequently, I, as well as many scholars, believe the media should not be treated like a free market enterprise like every other business in the United States. It has a fundamental role in promoting democracy. As a matter of fact, many contemporary scholars see the market model as one that is eroding democratic principles rather than serving them.\(^{13}\)

In *The Business of Media*, Croteau and Hoynes analyze the market structure is analyzed and categorized it into *advantages* and *disadvantages*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tr>
<td>Markets promote efficiency</td>
<td>Markets are undemocratic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Markets promote responsiveness</td>
<td>Markets reproduce inequality</td>
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<td>markets promote flexibility</td>
<td>Markets are amoral</td>
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<tr>
<td>Markets promote innovation</td>
<td>Markets do not meet social needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markets can provide media like any other product</td>
<td>Markets do not necessarily meet democratic needs.</td>
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The problem is that the advantages to a market economy serve only bottom line business interests. They do not promote or reward responsibility, stewardship, objectivity, transparency and diverse representation which are inherent to the media’s role in promoting a free society. Instead, the process of achieving these *benefits* directly undermine democracy.

The airwaves or “spectrum’ is actually owned by the public, just like sidewalks, public lands and social security. Renewable licenses are granted to media stations and in return the corporations are entrusted in serving the public good. To fulfill this condition, there are only some small allowances they need to make, such as allocating 4% of space to public service content and granting equal airtime to
candidates of different political parties. Once the licenses are granted, the media acts like any other for-profit market. Corporations license the airwaves for free, but make enormous profits without paying any ‘rent.’

The most significant way in which the market system works against democracy is by allowing a virtually unchecked system of de-regulation and private ownership, which has led to intense monopolization. Ben Bagdikian is one of the most prominent scholars on media consolidation and has been closely following its dramatic evolution for over twenty years. In response to his 1983 book, *The Media Monopoly*, some critics described his critical analysis of media consolidation and the dangerous effects of advertising on the news “alarmist”\(^\text{14}\). At that time 50 corporations owned a majority of the newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations, books, records, movies, videos, wire services and photo agencies in the United States. In 2004, his new book, *The New Media Monopoly*, shows that consolidation has led to five corporations: Time Warner, Disney, Murdoch’s News Corporation, Bertelsmann of Germany, and Viacom (formerly CBS)—now controlling most of the media industry in the United States. General Electric’s NBC is closely trails these corporations in size as the sixth biggest.\(^\text{15}\) If these statistics are not frightening enough, perhaps the fact that Ted Turner, owner of one of the five biggest media conglomerates, Time Warner, acknowledges the problem of over concentration. He has stated publicly, “There’s really five companies that control 90 percent of what we read, see and hear. It’s not healthy.”\(^\text{16}\) Media scholar, Ben Bagdikian describes the natural market driving motivations of corporations:

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As we have seen, the critique of corporate media ownership is not one of smoke-filled rooms populated with conspirators who are out to control the world. Instead, it is a critique of the market logic as it applies to the world of culture and ideas. Corporate entities pursue profits for their shareholders because that is what they are expected to do.\(^\text{17}\)
Monopolization has created the ability for corporations to shape the content in the mainstream airwaves, radio waves and press. The Global Justice movement is faced with a tough challenge in creating awareness around issues affecting the global economy because their views conflict with the interests of corporate media and sponsors. Current issues and events concerning corporate globalization are under reported in the media and additionally, activists have even been denied advertising time because their message conflicts with corporate interests. What has resulted from corporate ownership of the media is a culture of economic propaganda that serves corporate interests.

Propaganda refers to techniques used to influence the opinions, attitudes or behavior of a group. Through a “constant ‘cultivation’ of perceptions of the world, propaganda aims to integrate the person as well as the social group into a shared context of symbols, meanings and desired objectives.” In the current state of media ownership there are multiple types of propaganda. This paper focuses on two common types: economic, which influences public perceptions for profits, and political, which influences public perceptions for legislative interests. Propaganda is not only concerned with the specific information that an organization disseminates to the public, but the information that this withheld or distorted.

Because the organizations that control the media content are for-profit corporations, they naturally have economic and political interests in what is presented to the public—its their audience. As the mainstream media shapes public perception, citizen ignorance or knowledge of certain issues effects how citizens will act. How they decide to make purchases or vote has significant implications for the profitability of companies. The interests of corporations directly effect what is represented in the news and consequently the viewpoints allowed in public discourse; this has critical
importance to democratic society. The next sections discuss some of the tech-
niques used by the corporate propaganda machine. These are broken down into
two categories: (1) withholding and distorting of information through censorship,
advertiser influence and self-censorship and (2) the dissemination of information
through video news releases and branding and advertising.
Corporate Economic Propaganda through the Withholding and Distorting of Information

Corporate Censorship

Because many of the media conglomerates own companies that span a wide range of industries, their financial interests are broad and diverse. As such, there are many documented cases where corporations have directly censored a story because it economically effected an affiliate. One of the most blatant and serious cases of the media censoring a story for profit has to do with the 1996 telecommunications act. This act implemented the most far-reaching changes to the communications industry in 50 years. One of its most significant reforms was that it dramatically changed the number of media outlets that could be owned by one company. It was very heavily lobbied by the large media companies. Why did this go virtually unnoticed by the American public? Because it was in the media industry’s interest to keep it quiet. A study found that for nine months between the time the bill was introduced to the time it was passed, the three major television networks had only 12 stories about the proposed legislation amounting to a total of 19.5 minutes of coverage. Most of the content related little to ownership, but focused on the new television rating system and the V-chip.

United States citizens are also victims of corporate censorship in regard to free trade issues. In 1994 the highly controversial North American Free Trade Agreement was passed by congress, creating unprecedented trade rules between the United States, Canada and Mexico. These rules have very negative implications for labor, environmental, consumer and other groups, but extremely advantageous financial and political gains for large corporations. Fortune 500 companies intensely lobbied all three governments to pass the agreement and the corporate conglomerates did their jobs to use the media as an important tool. The media
during this time presented NAFTA in a favorable light, even though it was unfavorable to the majority of citizens. One study analyzed the press coverage in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* over a four month period and found that pro-NAFTA sources outnumbered anti-NAFTA sources by three to one. Not a single labor union representative was quoted.\textsuperscript{21} Across the country many other newspaper outlets stood to gain financially and made pro-NAFTA promises to the public. *The New York Times* (7/21/92) said NAFTA promised “jobs, wealth and economic activity throughout the continent.” The *Wall Street Journal* (8/7/92) predicted “lower prices on a wide variety of goods,” which *Time* (8/10/92) pointed out would especially help “low-income households.”\textsuperscript{22} NAFTA is arguably one of the most lucrative pieces of legislation for large American corporations in recent history. The big companies intensely lobbied congress and their media system became a vital tool in marketing their political campaign.

*Advertiser Influence*

Newspapers, television stations, magazines and radio stations are businesses and advertising dollars make or break them. In 2005 the top 100 hundred advertisers spent approximately $101.31 billion and these advertisers are extremely powerful in exercising their influence.\textsuperscript{23} Traditionally the advertiser’s pressure was subtle, but today corporations are overt in their demands of what content is deemed appropriate. According to a report by G. Bruce Knecht in the *Wall Street Journal*, it is now commonplace, as with companies like Chrysler Corp., Ford Motor Co., Ameritech and Bell South, for these advertisers to require magazines to notify them before they publish an issue that contains “controversial” stories or opinions.\textsuperscript{24} A letter sent to publishers by PentaCom, Chrysler’s advertising agency, stated, “In an effort to avoid potential conflicts, it is required that Chrysler Corporation be alerted in advance of any and all editorial content that encompasses
sexual, political, social issues or any editorial that might be construed as provocative or offensive.”^{25}

Freedom of the press and journalistic integrity has suffered as a consequence of advertiser strong armings. The group, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, performed a survey with 241 editors and investigative journalists at television stations and found:

- Nearly three-quarters of the respondents reported that advertisers had “tried to influence the content” of news at their stations.
- The majority of respondents also reported that advertisers had attempted to kill stories.
- More than two-thirds reported that advertisers threatened to withdraw their advertising because of the content of news stories.
- Forty-four percent of the respondents reported that advertisers had “actually withdrawn advertising because of the content of a news report.”^{26}

Advertising influence by big corporations not only affects content, but who can advertise. Activists have been particularly effected and have even been denied the right to purchase advertising time. Kalle Lasn, founder of the Media Foundation, has been fighting for access to the airwaves for over 15 years. His battle started in 1989 while living in British Columbia. During that time the logging industry was promoting a multi-million dollar campaign in which they were touting to the public their work in sustainably managing the local forests. In reality the industry was rapidly clear-cutting old growth forest; Lasn and others produced a television commercial to inform the public as to what was really happening. When he tried to purchase the air-time, he was denied by the station, CBC.

Since then Lasn has produced a number of commercials criticizing various industries involved in activities such as unsustainable growth, the fashion industry’s representation of women, the advertising industry’s influence on citizens. Many of these industries are the networks biggest sponsors. All of his commercials have
been rejected by CBC as well as all of the big American networks like NBC, CBS and ABC. In response to the “Buy Nothing Day” commercial here are some of the responses he received while arguing with the networks over the years:

There’s no law that says we have to air anything—we’ll decide what we want to air or not.
—ABC New York Station Manager Art Moore

We don’t want to air anything that’s inimical to our legitimate business interests.
—NBC network commercial clearance manager Richard Gitter

This commercial (Buy Nothing Day) is in opposition to the current economic policy of the United States.
—CBS Network’s Robert L. Lowery

Ironically, Lasn was born in Estonia where he witnessed, first hand, the oppression of free speech by the government. He finds a strong similarity between these two experiences. “In the Former Soviet Union you weren’t allowed to speak out against the government. In North America today you can’t speak out against the sponsors.”

Self Censorship

Self censorship occurs because journalists, editors, executives, etc. feel they understand the interests of the organization and advertisers. They voluntarily self impose constraints on the types of stories that get covered as well as how content is framed. In these situations, there is no direct intervention by an outsider, rather censorship is influenced by the culture and politics of the organizational environment. Self censorship, though common, is very difficult to document; however, a study by the Pew Charitable Trust has provided some interesting insights into the prevalence of this practice:

• More than 40% of journalists and news executives surveyed admitted they had engaged in self-censorship by purposely avoiding news worthy stories or by softening the tone of stories. Market pressures were most often cited as the reason.

• Almost 80% of those surveyed said stories that are seen as dull are sometimes or often avoided.

• Just over 50% said important but complex stories are often ignored.

• More than 33% said they censored themselves because of personal or career concern.
Because of monopolization, the culture and economic interests of the corporate media are powerfully unified and established. Activists who are critical of free trade find their voices disenfranchised from the networks. This is supported by Croteau and Hoynes who state:

> the views that dominate in the corporate media tend to be those that are compatible with a corporate worldview. This is most blatant in the news coverage of the economy — where business programs and Wall street analyses prevail and labor and consumer perspectives are rare — but it also spills over into coverage of a wide range of issues.\(^{10}\)

The corporate media’s boldness in cherry picking what constitutes news is particularly evident in the coverage of the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Within a three month period over 1 million people were murdered, most of whom were of Tutsi origin, in an ethnic cleansing spree by rival Hutus. Unbelievably, this holocaust was casually looked over by the major media networks and western governments. Artist, Alfredo Jaar, pointedly documents the lack of news coverage in *The Rwanda Project (1994–1998)*. Jaar reveals the magazine covers of *Newsweek* week-by-week, juxtaposed with a couple of sentences reporting the events (and number of murders) in Rwanda for that week. As the deaths escalate, the viewer is faced with the trite subject matter featured on the covers (Figures 1.1 & 1.2): “*The Case Against O.J. (Simpson)*”, “*To Walk on Mars*”, “*The Myths of Generation X*”, etc. Not until August 1, after the horror had actively ended, did Rwanda make a *Newsweek* cover. The project spans 16 *Newsweek* covers — 15 opportunities to tell the world about the horrors taking place. Overall, reporting was scarce if done at all in most major media outlets in the U.S. Vicenc Altaio describes the situation in *Let there Be Light*:

> In a world apparently globalized by multinational information conglomerates, where newspaper presses print million of lay bibles everyday and where television sets for domestic use offer an open window like medieval mural painting, terror and wrath are removed from the common awareness when there are no interests of the Almighty Market involved. The law of economy shows its dynamics in barbarism, turns man into subhuman coinage with no value, and no sense of awareness of the other.\(^{31}\)
The United States argues with the U.N. over the cost of providing heavy armored vehicles for the peacekeeping force.

500,000 deaths

Figure 1.1 Image from The Rwanda Project, Alfredo Jaar, 1998
These 15 Newsweek covers span the genocide in Rwanda. Not until the conflict finally ended, was it featured on the cover.
The bloody rampage was carried out largely by hand held weapons such as machetes, tools, etc. In retrospect, intervention from western nations would have required relatively little resources to halt the attacks. What would reaction have been if the public would have known of this? Could pressure have been put on the government to do something? What the Rwanda case represents is the degree to which the corporate media withholds the news from public discourse and its transparent impact on the world.

What is left when citizens expect news, yet the news media—directly through outside censorship or self censorship—actively avoid stories that need to be reported? The answer is infotainment and soft journalism. This long time cultural trend which continues to grow erodes journalism at its core. Gone are the days of Watergate style investigative journalism—reporting that meant something to the citizens of the country.
Creating a Commercial Culture through Corporate Disseminated Propaganda.

The last section gave examples of how media monopolies utilize propaganda to shape the perceptions of society by censoring and suppressing information. The following examples demonstrate how the corporate media establishment generates a second form of propaganda, influencing the content and type of information that the public receives.

The New Age of Fake News: Video News Releases

Television news has long been valued by Americans as a place to get reliable information about world and local events. Researchers at the University of Southern California found that 74 percent tune to local TV news and 69 percent of Americans rely on the local newspaper for information. Citizens grant a certain amount of trust that the content delivered to them has a level of journalistic integrity and is generally free from bias. This underlying trust gives the news a special power in mediating the public’s perception of reality. Exploiting this relationship that the public has with the news is a deceptive propaganda tool, called the video news release (VNR), that is becoming rampant in use. VNRs are prepackaged faux news stories, created by public relations companies on behalf of corporations and even government agencies. These segments promote the company (or agency), its products, or ideas to sway public opinion and then are distributed for free to television stations for broadcast as news. A recent investigative report by the United States Government Accounting Office describes them as, indistinguishable from news segments broadcast to the public by independent television news organizations. To help accomplish this goal, these stories include actors or others hired to portray ‘reporters’ and may be accompanied by suggested scripts that television news anchors can use to introduce the story during the broadcast. These practices allow prepackaged news stories to be broadcast, without alteration, as television news. An example is anti-global warming feature created by Exxon’s PR firm. The news anchor introduces the report by saying, “Hurricane seasons for the next 20 years
could be severe, but don’t blame global warming.” None of the reporting or content came from the station, WTOK-11 in Meridian, Mississippi.\textsuperscript{34}

Though corporations are aggressively using VNRs to promote their products and agendas, \textit{New York Times} investigative journalists David Barstow and Robin Stein found that at least 20 government agencies have made hundreds of VNRs over the past four years of the Bush Administration. What makes these insidious is that, unlike PSAs (Public Service Announcements) which declare their informational intent, they present themselves as if it is \textit{real} news by real news. The \textit{New York Times} reporters found that, “Some reports were produced to support the administration’s most cherished policy objectives, like regime change in Iraq or Medicare reform. Others focused on less prominent matters, like the administration’s efforts to offer free after-school tutoring, its campaign to curb childhood obesity, its initiatives to preserve forests and wetlands, its plans to fight computer viruses, even its attempts to fight holiday drunken driving. They often feature “interviews” with senior administration officials in which questions are scripted and answers rehearsed.\textsuperscript{35}

The watchdog group, Center for Media and Democracy (CMD) recently did a 10 month study documenting news stations who used 36 known VNRs. They found 77 stations, collectively reaching more than half of the U.S. population, who disguised these stories as ones they had produced themselves. CMD estimates that this accounts for less than 1 percent of the number of VNRs broadcast annually.\textsuperscript{36} A 1994 article by Lawyer Robert B. Charles estimated that the annual use of VNRs in 1993 exceeded 4000.\textsuperscript{37}

\textit{Branding and Advertising}

Branding is a term that is difficult to define and differs somewhat in meaning from one expert to the next. At its core it is the identity that exhibits the desired intangible
attributes, characteristics and image of a product, service, person or corporation. Vital to the creation of the identity is the visual representation of the brand which is designed to connect emotionally with consumers. Generally this encompasses a trademark (word mark, logotype or picture mark, etc.), color palette, photographic style, packaging and more. Branding programs can also include the manufacturing of the verbal tone of voice, vocabulary and attitude that is used with consumers as well as inside the company. Essentially, it is the design and styling of all of the elements, which portrays the image of what the product wants to be in the mind of consumers and employees.

Branding’s power lies in the psychological and emotional connection made with consumers. It allows corporations to play in the ‘theatre of the mind’ by projecting attributes that are aspirational to consumers. Companies are able to then transcend the limited physical qualities of the product and provide a more valuable brand experience. This idea of going beyond the literal is captured in the famous quote by graphic designer Walter Landor who said, “Products are made in the factory, but brands are created in the mind.”

Branding’s power to psychologically influence the consumer was realized even at branding’s early roots. Gary Cross cites in his book, An All Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America, “Increasingly the product took second place. Beginning about 1905, innovators like Ernest Calkins advocated that modern psychology be used to link products with the desires and insecurities of consumers, thus creating a longing for particular items.”

The emotional connection that successful brands offer is strong. Crest Whitestrips, a teeth whitening product, is not about the physical act of whitening, but about
becoming beautiful. This aspirational experience is carefully constructed through
every nuance in the color, materials and design of the packaging. The most suc-
cessful brands become more than an experience. They become an indispensable
part of the consumer’s lifestyle and personal identity. Tommy Hilfiger clothes can
fulfill the need to fit in and feel cool. Teenagers loyally wear the label proudly like
a badge. It becomes a part of their personal identity and how they identity with
their peers. Superbrand Nike no longer sees itself as a manufacturer of sporting
goods, but as a company that sells the Nike lifestyle. They now out-source all of
the product manufacturing, divesting themselves of tangibles and investing in
intangibles—the brand. They now position themselves as a marketing company
and view their products as marketing tools.⁴⁰

Branding creates the meaning, spirit and visual assets. Advertising is the vehicle
that disseminates the message of the brand to consumers. Advertising seeks to
take the brand tools and project them into society through compelling stories.
The more successful the branding and advertising, the more these transcend their
roles, becoming part of the culture. Superbrand Ford constructs an ideal brand im-
age of their trucks as being rough and tough. They seek to play on the machismo
of men by using the celebrity, Toby Keith, to identify with them. He sings, “I’m
a Ford Truck Man” making the Ford a core part of who he is. These truck owners
are a prime example of how powerful brand loyalties can be. Who hasn’t seen a
sticker on the back of a truck with an illustration of a mischievous boy pissing on
a Chevy? Their Ford is a part of their lifestyle.

Not only are the narratives that ads tell compelling, but the methods that adver-
tisers use are potent, relentless and often jolting. As a society, we Americans are
bombarded by ads everywhere including on television, newspapers, magazines,
billboards, the internet, and mail. Advertising even penetrates personal and unexpected places such as bathroom stalls, personal e-mail accounts and fliers handed to us on the street. Because of our constant exposure, marketers continually innovate to find new ways to “break the clutter”—finding new spaces, media and ways to communicate in order to take us by surprise. Ads must forever raise the bar to shock and find the emotional buttons of the consumer. Messages are more powerful and influential than ever. Massive amounts of repetition re-inforce ads into our psyche. There is a maxim in the advertising business that adds must be seen six times before anyone remembers them.

More than ever, branding and advertising campaigns are valued as critical to marketplace success. Corporations often spend millions of dollars just in branding a single product. These campaigns do not appear out of the blue, they are carefully crafted and tested to ensure maximum resonance and recognition. It is important to note the significant role of the visual communicator here, who is the creative mind, architect and innovator, carefully designing the essence of the offering. Visuals fuel the brand’s spirit. They often connect metaphorically and consequently more powerfully with the consumer. They plug into the consumer’s heart and mind seductively promising a desired experience. Through the purchase of the brand. As consumers are exposed more and more to sophisticated and potent doses of graphic design, they become more visually sensitive. They become more demanding of quality design. Connecting to the marketplace through high quality design is a must to win over consumers in contemporary society. Innovative graphic design firms are highly sought after by corporations because their ability to influence the public mind is so effective.

Perhaps the most successful propaganda campaign in terms of the designer’s abil-
ity to influence public opinion is that of Adolph Hitler. Hitler—through his intensive study of propaganda and visual training as an artist—had developed an acute understanding of the power of persuasion through propaganda. As Stephen Heller describes, Hitler “...presided over the most effective and venal national identity program the world has ever known”. Many historians agree that his propaganda was a crucial factor in rallying support for the Nazis. The Nazi example is significant because it shows the extent of propaganda’s influence. As Nazi historian David Welch writes, it was the visual dynamics of the party: “its parades, the ceremonial blessings of the banners, the marching columns of the SA, the uniforms, the bands, etc. which captured the imagination of the masses.” The experience of message was awe-inspiring and became the experience that people longed to be part of. It helped to mobilize virtually an entire nation to go to war, as well as accept the politics of a party that would go on to commit horrifying acts against mankind. The significance of the visual power, conceptual execution and creativity Nazi designers infused into the work—its significance cannot be overstated.
Conclusion

What ultimately results from a privately owned media system is a skewed worldview that has been constructed primarily by the economic and political interests of corporations. It is not based in a conspiracy for power, but rather in the expected decisions and actions of corporations to shape the world in a way that will be profitable for them. Consequently, viewpoints that are counter to the interests of corporate interests are not equally represented in the media, disenfranchising many communities and social justice organizations. As the mainstream media is the primary source of information for society, it is the basis by which citizens construct their perception of reality. Citizens make moral, political and everyday decisions based on the messages they receive from these sources. As seen with branding and advertising campaigns, visual communication designers are crucial in constructing this commercially driven reality. The power of designers to impact the lives of people through visual communication design—to inspire action—makes them a significant component of social justice movements. In using their talents and abilities to communicate information, designers function not only as agents of social influence but agents of social change.
The Designer
as an Agent
of Social Change

The next section discusses how the designer can be an important agent of social change. It examines how activist designers have used their skills to foster resistance to propaganda of the establishment by utilizing and creating alternative forms of visual communication. Secondly, it proposes how to create a new a communication model to promote fair trade in the current state of corporate owned media.
Looking into the Past for Inspiration

Graphic designers have long played a role in social movements. Throughout history they have utilized a wide range of technologies available to them: painting, drawing, woodblock printing, etching, lithography, silk screening, spray painting, wheat pasting, film, video, digital multi-media and anything else they could utilize to disseminate messages counter to the establishment. As social activists are typically economically disenfranchised with little funding, they have creatively seized just about any and every type of media to carry their messages. By looking at successes of the past, one can gain special inspiration. The communication goals may still be the same, but the tactics, methods and media may change for today’s needs. The way that some of these designers were able to impact society shows potential for what can be done today.

Graphic agitation has been traced back centuries to the streets of the Roman empire, where political slogans were written, painted and carved as graffiti in Pompeii. Subversive mass media, however, has strong roots in print media, where multiple images could be made for distribution to large audiences. Woodblock printing was used between 1515–1525 during the Peasant Wars in Germany. In the aftermath of the brutal suppression of rebelling farmers, Durer, Deutsch, Tirol, and Lucas the Cranach the Elder used woodblock prints to speak out against the acts. Though state-of-the-art in the sixteenth century, woodblock printing has been used throughout history—even in modern times—because of its affordability, accessibility and visual impact. It was used widely in social movements of the 1960s and by anti-Apartheid activists in South Africa in the 1980s.
At the end of the 18th century, many French revolutionary visual communicators seized the newly invented technology of lithography. Unlike the labor required with woodcuts, lithography is a medium for drawing—allowing economy and fluidity. The most notable of these illustrators was Honoré Daumier, who along with a host of others like Paul Gavarni, Charles-Joseph Traviés, Jean-Ignáce Grandville, Henri Bonaventure Monnier, Gustave Doré, developed the use of political caricature and satirical prints. These became powerful weapons against the monarchy. Their witty social and political commentary crossed the lines of social class and literacy, emotionally provoking dissidence in the masses. In 1822 a government deputy described their influence, “As soon as they are exhibited in public, they are instantly viewed by thousands of spectators and the disturbance has taken place before the magistrate has had time to repress it.”

When the censorship ban was lifted in 1830, Charles Philipon founded a number of newspapers that used political satire and the caricature as a sword against King Louis-Philippe. So began the golden era of French political caricature and an alternative media outlet that fueled a people’s movement opposing the monarchy. The writings of Boyer de Nime, a royalist critic of the revolution, noted the connection that caricatures made with the public, “Caricatures were among those [means] that one employed most skillfully, consistently, and successfully in order to lead astray and agitate the people.” Both Phillipon and Daumier’s activism came at a price—both were jailed multiple times for their work. Philipon’s press arguably represents one of the most impactful subversive media examples of all time. It was a major mobilizing force which contributed to the dismantling of Louis-Philippe’s reign. The king ultimately abdicated the throne in 1848. The effectiveness of caricature as a political weapon is evidenced by the bans the French placed on it in 1820–1830, 1835–1848, 1852–1870, 1871–1881 and even during
Figure 2.1 *Gargantua*, Honoré Daumier

Figure 2.2 *Unknown Title*, Honoré Daumier
World War I. Note that it was not the press that was censored as a whole during these times, just the drawings.52

Another historically significant example of counter establishment propaganda was that of Jonathan Heartfield and his collaborators against the National Socialists in the first part of the twentieth century. Heartfield, his brother, Wielande Herzfelde, and George Grosz founded the Malik Press in 1916 as a leftist educational and propaganda organization.53 Heartfield also contributed to a number of other publications, most notably the Marxist newspaper *Arbeiter Illustriete Zeitung* (AIZ: Workers Illustrated Newspaper). Heartfield, an early Dadaist, left the traditional gallery to focus on social commentary and political propaganda for the masses. Heartfield and his partners faced tremendous danger in publishing works against the Nazis.

Heartfield produced perhaps the most visually dynamic and arresting German design in defiance of the Nazi regime. He skillfully crafted a unique style of photomontage, being the first to use it for political purposes. Heartfield believed strongly in the power of photography, as he thought it to be highly successful in perpetuating false myths of capitalism in the bourgeoisie press. His photomontages extracted and re-purposed the images of the Nazi propaganda machine to boldly reveal the lies behind the political establishment. They had an almost documentary type of truth value.54 By fusing together these images he made poignant political statements with striking visual effects. Critic Adolph Behne described his work in 1931 as “photography plus dynamite.”55 Heartfield’s creation of this style was pioneering and deliberate. He realized that the real estate of the book cover provided an opportunity to advertise and instruct the viewer. Even the passerby or the viewer who was illiterate could instantly decode the profound message of...
Figure 2.3 Adolf, Der Ubermensch: Schluckt Gold und redet Blech, John Heartfield
the bold, poster-like graphic visuals. Heartfield’s focus was to reach and persuade the masses and by 1931 AIZ grew to reach 500,000 issues for each circulation. In 1933 when the Nazis’ presence in the government was secured, Heartfield along with many other agitators fled to Prague. The AIZ soon followed Heartfield to Prague, where he continued to work on it until 1938, when Czechoslovakia was invaded by the Nazis. At this time he moved to England where he lived until returning to Germany in 1958.56

Throughout history activist designers have utilized their visual communication abilities and resourcefulness in harnessing available technologies to impact society. In strategizing a new model for social change, the components of a contemporary design campaign reflect many attributes of historical successes. The technology and methods may be different, but many of the core communication goals and principles behind the work are similar.
A Model for Design Activism Today: 
The Fair Trade Multi-Media Project

Introduction
With the voice of the Global Justice movement marginalized in today’s corporate run media, new ways of educating the public are required. A new model to address this problem is proposed in the Fair Trade Multi-Media Project (FTMP). At the heart of this project is the belief that visual communication is a powerfully persuasive tool that can catalyze a paradigm shift in society’s opinion of United States trade policy. An additional core concept is that advances in technology provide windows of opportunities that can subvert the corporate media establishment to better educate the public. Coupling design and technology, the FTMP strategically builds a holistic campaign and communication system crafted to educate and activate citizens to reform current free trade policy.

The synthesis of design and technology is as strategy that has had proven success in other areas, including product development. In Creating Breakthrough Products: Innovation From Product Planning to Program Approval, Cagan and Vogel present case studies of successful brands such as OXO GoodGrips, Starbucks and Motorola who have differentiated themselves in the marketplace by moving to the “Upper Right”. As figure 2.4 demonstrates, moving to the upper right integrates high style (design) and high technology, creating a breakthrough product. This category provides value for the consumer, “through the integration of the attributes represented in the Upper Right, breakthrough products meet the needs, wants and desires of customers, resulting in increased sales, profit and brand equity.”57
Figure 2.4 Positioning Map of Style vs. Technology (Cagan and Vogel)
The Fair Trade Multi-Media Project Experience

Target: Mark, age 20, Student at University of California at Santa Barbara

Mark checks his e-mail in the college computer lab and finds an e-mail from his friend. The title of the e-mail is Check This Out. When he opens it he’s hit with powerful imagery, graphics and color like he’s never seen before in an e-mail. It doesn’t even really look like a regular e-mail. Normally e-mails might have some photos and simple graphics, but this is something different. It looks pretty cool and hip—Mark relates to it. He’s pulled in by the headline and dives into the text. “I didn’t know NAFTA did that,” he thinks to himself, “That’s messed up! Can that really be true?” He feels a little hit in the gut by what he just read, since always considered himself patriotic. He just learned that NAFTA essentially trumps all democratically created laws in the U.S. He had only kind of known what NAFTA was from his Poli-Sci class in high school, but didn’t know much else. “This isn’t like most dorky campaigns.” He thinks to himself. Moved by the powerful visuals he goes on to find out more. “Besides,” he thinks to himself, “there’s not that much too read”. Mark hates reading long e-mails. After briefly looking it over, Mark sees the option to clink on the link to the web video to find out more. He’s intrigued and it’s got to be o.k. if it came from his friend. There is power and impact in this call to action. He clicks the button.

After his browser launches the FTMP video web page, Mark is drawn in by music that sets a deep contemplative tone. He thinks, “I’ve never heard this before, I need to try to get the name of this song.” The music fades out and he is soon engrossed in a documentary video. Mark is astonished. He didn’t realize how many jobs are being off-shored to foreign sweatshops through the WTO and NAFTA. “I’ve heard of these agreements,” he thought, “but I never knew these completely undermine our U.S. labor and environmental laws!” “These agreements are just loopholes for corporations to avoid the laws that we citizens create.” It also really
hit home for him when the video pointed how many technology jobs will be lost for his generation. Another unique feature of the video that compels Mark is the animation and motion graphics. “Not only are they stylistically really cool, “like how they look on music videos,” but they “really break down the information in a clear way.”

There is one thing in the video that really struck a nerve with Mark—learning how NAFTA gives special rights to foreign corporations. It empowers them to sue the United States for hundreds of millions of dollars if one of its laws undermines its profitability. “That’s crazy,” he thinks. From the video he understands the ramifications of the trade agreement and how it fundamentally undermines our democracy and national sovereignty. Emotionally, a chord was deeply struck here, he always had a quiet, but strong pride in his country. When the video ends it challenges Mark by asking “So what are you going to do?” It gives a link to the home page to take action as well as a link to watch more videos from the series.

The FTMP site provides a number of action-oriented tools for Mark to get immediately involved, including:

- Clicking on a button to send an e-mail (like the one he got) to his circle of friends
- Signing an online petition
- Sending a pre-drafted e-mail to his congressional representatives on an issue
- Signing up to get e-mail updates for news and actions,
- Joining the FTMP’s online group dedicated to Internet activism
- Linking to a local global justice group in the area.

Another important facet of the FTMP is the variety of online educational resources it provides. The short video Mark watched is only the first of a series. After watching this one, he can continue to watch videos on other trade topics. The videos provide a very easy, entertaining and inspiring way to get informed and are particularly designed for young people. Additionally, a number of articles are
available on the site as well as links to other articles on the Internet. The FTMP’s resources provide a range and depth of information, allowing personal customization of the experience. One can get a very quick and cursory overview, or spend more time investigating certain topics.

Design is used as a tool not only to communicate, but to visually compel the user to get involved. The degree to which each user is willing to be active and use the online tools will vary. For this reason a variety of tools are provided to customize the right experience each user. If the project were to demand a significant commitment from every newly enlightened young citizen, it would be unlikely to succeed. Providing options maximizes the user’s willingness to participate—from small steps to more dedicated actions. The more commitment one gives, the more successful the project. Figure 2.5 demonstrates different levels of activity and success criteria. It is important to note, however, that the most important action one can take is distributing the e-mail to others which increases the multiplication of the viral marketing campaign. This is the most effective way to create broader awareness and inform public discourse. ‘Word of mouth’ is one of the most compelling forms of advertising. 58
The more an individual participates in the FTMP's activities, the greater success of the project in reaching its goals. The most important action, however, is dissemination of the viral e-mail which is vital to the promotion and sustainability of the campaign.

Figure 2.5 Levels of Engagement/Success
**Target Audience**

Using the example of Mark is not by accident. A 20 year college student— he represents the prime target audience of the FTMP. The Internet has changed our culture, the way we communicate and get information. Those who grew up in the Internet era have been dubbed the ‘Connected Generation.’ The ‘Connected Generation’ is made up of Generation X (1965—1979) and Generation Y (1980—1997). Internet fluent—they are largely represented in the FTMP’s target audience. To be even more definitive with the focus of the FTMP campaign, the target audience has been delineated into two age groups consisting of a primary and secondary tier. The prime target is comprised of individuals between the ages of 17-25 years of age. The secondary tier spans the ages between 15-35 years of age (Figure 2.6).

As a college student, Mark not only has access to updated computers and a broadband connection, but his demographic represents the most active users of the Internet. A big part of this age group’s culture are the social relationships and

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**Figure 2.6 Target Market**

The chart demonstrates the segmentation of the prime target and secondary target. Additionally it shows the division between Generation X and Generation Y.
communities that they engage in online. Facebook, MySpace, Flickr, YouTube, Rate Your Music, blogs and music sharing sites are big part of everyday life for many of these young people. Social networks are not just prevalent in the prime target, but also with the older audience in the X and Y generations. Professionals have less time and are getting married later because of their careers. As such, they are making online connections that are less formal than traditional professional organizations, demand shorter periods of commitment and reflect their lifestyle interests.\textsuperscript{60}

Another reason for the selection of the prime target relates their experience of personal development. At this age they are in an important time of identity discovery–learning about and formulating their values on politics, culture, justice, etc. with their ability to vote. They are formally becoming part of the political process. This is a very ideological time of their life and the FTMP could be critical in informing their political opinions. Globally students have been at the forefront of historically significant social and political movements. Young people are also energetic! When motivated they can become a powerful force for social change. These are the citizens that will determine the future.

Though the prime target is the main focus of the campaign, it’s expected that the secondary target will also play a strong role. The information that the FTMP provides is relevant to citizens of any age. The secondary target is still part of the connected generation and digital media is highly conducive to their lifestyle. The look and feel will also appeal to them. Teens look up to what the eighteen and nineteen year olds are doing, while many of the older tier still desire to stay connected to young culture.
Design Components of the FTMP Communication Model

Model Overview

Behind the Fair Trade Multi-Media Project’s awareness campaign is a strategic model, carefully crafted to meet the communication goals. The model consists of a number of components that are coordinated into a cohesive communications system. Each component serves a distinct function, but is dependent on the other parts to effectively carry out the campaign. In the following sections, each component is discussed in detail. A diagram of the overall model: the components of the communication system in relation to the communication objectives of the campaign is provided in figure 2.6.

![Diagram of FTMP Model](image_url)

**Figure 2.6** The FTMP Model: Communication System Components and Communication Goals
The Design Factor: The Look and Feel

At the heart of the FTMP is the way it articulates its message and expresses itself. The FTMP is manifested from the general notion that graphic design can create social change. The way that one visually crafts a message for an audience can be powerful, meaningful, provocative and compelling. Graphic Design makes personal and emotional connections. It wins hearts and minds.

Designers are play a significant role in shaping a consumption-driven society by motivating consumer behavior. Commercial empires and mega-brands have been built based on the way design creates an aspirational need for consumers. Design is so influential in the marketplace—what are the implications if design is used to make powerful connections with citizens for social justice? The FTMP is based on the philosophy that if commercial brands can be built based on design, social movements can similarly harness this influence. A global justice campaign can use the same design/branding tactics to win the hearts and minds of citizens. The FTMP even sees the possibility to use design to revolutionize the currently apathetic political participation of young adults!

The way the FTMP expresses itself through its look, attitude and tone of language is fundamental in connecting with young citizens. It makes an important first impression. For instance, does it make a big bang? It also needs to make a personal connection. As young adults and teenagers are bombarded by branding and advertising today, they are more visually astute than any other generation. High quality design is now just a basic requirement for the young, it is not necessarily a differentiator. As the bar is set higher for design, visual language and content must be very powerful to win them over.
The FTMP invigorates young people to be part of something not only genuinely meaningful, but critical to promoting a democratic, just and environmentally sustainable way of life on this planet. Becoming active through the FTMP means participating with a young community that is part of something bigger than themselves. This soulful, admirable and aspirational quest is portrayed through the look and feel of design. Words alone are not sufficient.

Illustration, color, photographic style, texture, sound, video and motion graphics comprise the visual toolkit that conveys the soul of the FTMP. They are orchestrated into a look and feel that expresses the excitement, energy, action and unity of the movement. The urgency and importance of the work is emphasized. Democracy, justice and a better, more sustainable life are core values that are thematically expressed through the visual and visible language. These attributes comprise the FTMP’s visual identity and passionate offering to young citizens.

The FTMP challenges society’s idea of what is a cool lifestyle for young people. Branding and advertising drive consumption and create many superficial needs for consumers to fulfill. In order to feel accepted by their peers importance is placed in having the right possessions like clothes, gadgets and car. The activist-designer can rewrite the rules of what it truly means to be cool. Engaging in civic life, fighting for global justice, protecting the environment and preserving democracy with one’s peers is much more meaningful. Civic participation and social consciousness transcend physical possessions. If the FTMP can inject the same inspirational design success of the big commercial brands, young people can be motivated to get involved in the global justice movement. Unlike many mega-brands that use design to create false meaning behind their products, the FTMP delivers not only high design but a lifestyle activity with genuine substance. It is the re-birth of cool.
Every component of the FTMP—the viral e-mail campaign, web site and video is infused with the same visual language that communicates the spirit of the project. It gives a cohesive identity to all the parts and makes it more memorable—more meaningful. Design also plays an important role on many other levels. Besides the emotive connection, good design also adds credibility and usability. A study by Stanford Persuasive Technology Lab with Consumer Web Watch found that the “look and feel” of a web site is more important than the content. 46.1% of consumers assessed the credibility of web sites based in part on their visual design appeal, including layout, typography, font sizes, and color schemes. A well-designed web site makes the content easy to comprehend and navigate. A poorly designed web site is an instant turn off. Getting the user to the web site is important, but user-friendliness helps one utilize it as an educational tool while keeping them coming back.
**Viral E-mail Campaign**

Viral marketing refers to ‘word of mouth’ campaigns. It is a “strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message’s exposure and influence. Like viruses, such strategies take advantage of rapid multiplication to explode the message to thousands, to millions.”

In the FTMP experience example, what sets the project e-mail apart from a piece of random spam, was that it came from his friend. His friend’s name gave it automatic credibility and incentive for him to open it. In addition, Mark may even feel somewhat obligated to read it since it came from someone he knows.

Viral e-mail has tremendous potential for distribution. Like any advertisement the content, concept and form of the message dictates its success. The success of seductive content is exemplified by the most virally distributed video on the net. The Danish Road safety council developed a campaign to reduce speeding primarily for men who have been hard to reach through traditional media. It was passed between 6.5 million viewers, with 1 million seeing it in the first week across 180 different countries. What was the was all the hype about? The humorous documentary style video displayed a faux program by the Road Council which planted topless models at crosswalks to slow down drivers. While the content of this video is totally unrelated to the global justice movement, what is significant is this video’s achievement in quickly reaching millions.

Virally distributed videos have also had an impact in the social and political sphere. It was a virally distributed video posted on YouTube, which made public a controversial tasering of a student in the UCLA library. Posted by a lawyer, it was quickly seen by tens of thousands of people. A single viral video was a major
factor in the GOP losing the Senate in 2006. Republican George Allen, who was in a key senate race, was caught making an alleged racial slur on video and the clip sped its way across the Internet. It helped prompt further investigation into past allegations of his use of racial slurs and soon after his senate race abruptly tanked.

Checking e-mail is a routine often performed quickly. When the FTMP e-mail campaign is disseminated, the e-mails need immediate graphic impact to engage the viewer. There must be a bang factor. Breaking the clutter through design is not a new idea. Jonathan Heartfield understood that his book jacket designs had seconds to catch the eyes of the passerby. His bold, graphic photomontages were able to succinctly deliver a message in a visually arresting way; strong impression was made almost instantaneously. Designing the FTMP e-mail’s content to have visual impact will set it apart from other e-mail one receives. Rarely are e-mails designed, and when they are, they are not very sophisticated. This provides a window of opportunity to explore the limits of what can be done graphically with e-mail. This type of innovative research is an important part of the project.

Compelling design gives the message an unexpected comparative advantage that adds distinctive value. Once opened it causes an intervention. It disrupts the person’s routine with an impact, much like the way bold street graphics or unexpected graffiti can do in the physical environment. The e-mail recipient isn’t actively looking for information on trade, he is provoked by the message that guides him to the web site. Marketing the web site in this way recruits the person that would not otherwise seek information on trade issues to do so.
The web site

Young people live in a connected world where the Internet is an important part of their life. This is a pivotal point in time as the World Wide Web may soon overtake television as the single most important place for young people to get their news. To position itself strategically, the FTMP has established a web site as a primary portal for citizens to access information on global justice and trade issues. The viral e-mail campaign serves as a marketing device to recruit citizens to the web site.

The world wide web provides accessibility to information like no other media. It eliminates many barriers of traditional media that scholars and activists often utilize to publish their work. For instance, if a friend recommends an important book, newspaper, movie or magazine, that person may have to first find where it is sold, travel to the store or order it, and finally pay for it. Even when free brochures are available, there is an effort that needs to be made to try and find an organization that distributes them. In scenarios such as these, the motivation needs to be high to acquire the information. The FTMP web site transcends these barriers by providing a free and easily accessible central resource to download information. The target market is not comprised of information seekers, in fact, the viral e-mails intervene in their routines, guiding them to new information. In this case the web site provides immediacy, convenience and the opportunity to use compelling design.

Besides convenience for the user, the advantages are tremendous for the organization. Print media is expensive, limiting in the number of copies that can be produced. A web site, however, provides a very affordable and high quality production platform. For instance, it allows the use of a wide variety of colors, high quality photographs and real time multi-media to be used. Information can also be updated immediately, keeping this medium relevant, reliable and informative.
The web site also allows the opportunity for a more multi-sensory experience and dynamic way to provide information. Introducing ambient sound and music sets a mood that can be captivating and profound. Coupled with the visual language, it adds dimension to the experience. Bringing interactive motion and sound into the navigation, makes the web site more engaging and experiential. These nuances may seem small, but are significant in re-inforcing conceptual themes. They add another layer of subliminal precision that makes the site feel inspiring.

Currently, much of the important information on trade and globalization resides in thick books and scholarly articles. Many articles even ride on the world wide web. For new information seekers who just want to get a basic understanding, it can feel like ‘information anxiety’ has set in when confronted with pages upon pages of scholarly text. Understanding the target market is important in creating a ‘friendly’ environment. To a demographic that is accustomed to short clips and sound bytes, putting thick scholarly articles in front of them is not going to entice them to learn more.

The FTMP web site is designed to address the lifestyle and attention span of the target market. Because the Internet allows multiple types of media to exist within a single web site, the FTMP web site can provide a number of options for the user. The primary educational feature is the series of short (10-20 minute) documentary videos. This medium provides a highly informative, quick and effortless way to learn about trade issues. It is a user friendly way to appeal to the target market by presenting information dynamically. While the videos provide a basic introduction to the issues, more in-depth information is supplemented by text, links to other web sites, and downloadable pdf documents. The web site, however, is not just a gateway to information. It is also a tool for direct action. Once informed, citizens
may feel impassioned to do something about the injustices they learn about. The FTMP not only spurs them on, but provides immediately accessible tools to get this process started. These tools include petitions, pre-drafted e-mails to elected representatives, viral e-mail to friends, listserves and blogs. The user can stay connected and active by also becoming a member of the organization.

Not only does a presence on the web allow great accessibility and ability to connect with the growing network of young people utilizing the web, but it positions the FTMP in a strategic place to quickly build on new technological advancements as they develop. The world has only begun to see the limitless communication potential of the Internet. Having this infrastructure in place allows new opportunities to be seized immediately as they occur.
Video Series

Today, the powerful medium of the motion picture is an accessible tool for social justice groups. The declining cost of video technology has made production and post production equipment reasonably affordable for activists. With the technology and cost gap closing, activist designers have new opportunities for broadcasting and disseminating movies that tell a different story than what is perpetuated by the corporate media.

In the past and present many activists remain restricted to utilizing print media and the written word to inform public discourse. To effect contemporary culture, however, this is insufficient by itself. According to author Steven Goodman, the image is the most important medium.68 He writes, “The dominant medium is changing. Learning to read and write the printed word is essential but no longer sufficient in a world where television, radio, movies, videos, magazines, and the world wide web have all become powerful and pervasive sites for public education and literacy.” The designer and film maker’s visual capabilities have incredible opportunities here. The power of the photograph was particularly understood by Heartfield. Through his photomontages Heartfield was not only able to emotionally provoke the viewer, but by showing images of real events, create a realistic documentary truth value.69

The power of the moving image on society’s perception of reality is particularly evident in the form of television. In Prime Time Politics Philip Green describes the significance of television on society:

The television system, put simply, colonizes public space and discourse. There is little room left over for other discourses in that space for the reason that television, as an imperial system, tends to subsume them all. Public discourse becomes unreal unless it can be reproduced on TV.70

As fair trade issues are not adequately represented on television, the voice of the Global Justice movement is not part of the public discourse. By utilizing the
abilities of the designer and film maker, activists can bridge the visual literacy gap. The FTMP can seize the power of the moving image to tell alternative stories of globalization and trade that have an equivalent ‘reality factor.’ The FTMP accomplishes this by creating a series of short documentary-style videos. Even though television may have a more far reaching-distribution, the FTMP can be competitive with television by using this comparable medium, allowing space to be created in the public discourse.

On the FTMP web site will be a series of short informational videos. Each video focuses on a major topic in trade, such Jobs and the Economy or Democracy and National Sovereignty. Segmenting what would normally be a long documentary movie into smaller topics allows for a series of 10-20 minute movies to be produced, thus optimizing the medium. Shorter videos allow more efficient and faster downloading over the World Wide Web. These are also more digestible for the time frames that most users spend on the Internet. Many people who are casually browsing the Internet do not want to spend a lot of time on a single site. Being succinct will make a stronger impact in this fast paced world. Providing the videos via the Internet allows the audience to access them immediately for free. This convenience is vital. Many independent videos have been made about globalization, but most of the time they have to be ordered from an organization. Grass roots organizations typically do not have the resources to fund a major motion picture that will be shown in the theaters and then distributed for rental in major video stores. Going through the process of finding the distributing organization, paying for the movie and then waiting for it to arrive, requires a considerable amount of commitment. For many citizens it is easier to just avoid doing this altogether.
The goals of these videos are to communicate basic information on trade issues in a provocative and inspirational way. This medium is also a very approachable way for the target audience to learn, which is a critical factor. Young people have grown up in a world of multi-media and short news clips. In this vein, video narrative can be very stimulating, while simultaneously a passive activity for viewer. This ‘YouTube generation’ may be unwilling to invest the effort into reading a 20 page article on corporate globalization, but watching a 15-minute movie offers entertainment and little effort. Voter apathy and low political participation is strong among young people. Finding the right ways to connect with and motivate them is essential in order to active them. Designers and film makers play a crucial role, because of their ability to create influential media.

Trade and globalization issues are complex and many people find these abstract concepts difficult to understand. Video serves as an excellent medium for clearly communicating information and mediating knowledge of the world. Structuring and organizing the elements of visual imagery and audio allows the audience to learn on multiple levels other than the written word. Observing social artifacts through image and sound provides representational understanding. Certainly Daumier found visual communication to be a potent tool in bridging the literacy gap with the peasantry.

The FTMP videos include interviews by activists, everyday people affected by globalization, elected officials and renowned experts. Witnessing someone speak about a direct experience not only helps them see an issue from an insider’s perspective, but it provides context. Interviews with experts not only add credibility, but are excellent in conveying complex information in a way that only a specialist can.
A distinctive feature of the FTMP video series is the use of motion graphics to dynamically communicate information. Because of budget restrictions, some things cannot be captured on video first hand. By using illustration and motion graphics facts, figures and events that cannot be represented through video can be expressed. Perhaps the most useful functionality of motion graphics is the ability to communicate complex statistical information. Many people feel overwhelmed by seeing charts and graphs, but through motion can breath new life into information design. The line, curve, color, typography and shape of charts and graphs become assets that energetically animate in real time. Using frame by frame animation transcends static communication. Instead building charts and information graphics can be performed in a sequential step-by-step process. Al Gore’s film, *An Inconvenient Truth* is a successful example of a film based largely on the presentation and representation of information graphics in real-time. Even though many of the graphics are of mediocre design, his methodology is still highly effective in communicating information. It also passes the test of keeping an audience entertained. The impact of the movie is impressive, becoming the third highest grossing documentary film of all time and winning an Academy award. The movie’s success in the political sphere is also notable. It greatly raised awareness in the public discourse, arguably creating a tipping point in the public and corporate sector’s acknowledgement that the science behind global warming is credible.
Online Empowerment Tools

A major goal of the FTMP is to inform citizens, yet its other goal of inspiring citizens to take action is an even more challenging one. Knowing what to do when one is inspired to take action is another issue. Many often want to take action once they’ve become informed, but they don’t know how to best utilize their abilities. The path to action can feel distant and require significant effort to get started. Commitment is required to search out an organization, introduce one’s self to the members and then dedicate time to work with people one doesn’t even know. After the point of enlightenment, there exists an invisible chasm that few cross to take part in changing the system. It is often difficult to break the ice. Recurrently, the informed person loses the motivation to act before the work begins.

Seizing passionate moments of inspiration are vital to igniting a viral epidemic of global justice activism. Once citizens are informed and emotionally affected by the information/videos on the FTMP web site, immediately engaging the person in an activity is important. To implement a person’s energy the participant is referred to the user-friendly online tools provided conveniently on the web site. A variety of different tools and resources are furnished that individually cater to the motivation level and personality of the user. The tools and resources on the web site are not meant to be a “be-all, end-all” set of tools. These act as a ‘starter kit’ to get the person on a path to activism. Once engaged they may continue to work virtually or actually in their online and local communities. Some users will want to do more and others, less. The important thing is to be able to take advantage of the person’s willingness to engage. This is the way to further the viral reach of the campaign as well as directly effect the political process.
A number of different tools and resources are provided on the FTMP web site. As the project evolves as well as Internet technology, the tools will expand. A brief description of each tool that is provided in the initial release of the project is provided below.

**Viral E-mails to Friends**

Clicking on the button to send the pre-drafted, designed e-mails to people in one’s address book is the single most important action a user can take. The success of the FTMP campaign rests on the willingness of citizens to pass the e-mail along to friends and family. This is the primary way the FTMP will effect the consciousness of society as people come to the web site to be informed. The goal is to create an epidemic that spreads throughout society.

**Online petitions**

Online petitions are now commonplace in grass roots campaigns for political action and in many cases have produced highly effective results. It is important to set up an online petition correctly by recording the names and basic information of the signatories in a documentable format. Organizations like Care2 provide the online vehicle free of charge for progressive campaigns. Organizations like MoveOn.org have become lobbying powerhouses by mobilizing citizens to get involved in their online campaigns. MoveOn.org cites recruiting hundreds of thousands of signatures for many of their successful campaigns including those for Medicare reform and the Voting Rights Act. Besides the direct impact of their petitions, these drives have ignited the spirit of activism in hundreds of thousands of Americans who felt a lack of voice. The indirect impact of MoveOn.org’s campaigns have been significant in impacting the climate of politics for progressives.
E-mails to Congressional Representatives

Like the petition, this is an action that directly effects the political process by voicing concern on an issue to one’s elected official. This is a pre-drafted e-mail that the activist can edit, which will be sent to his/her congressional representatives. It will be automatically sorted based on zip code.

External Links to Other Organizations

The FTMP is but one resource and one organization in the Global Justice Network. Connecting with other groups and tapping into their areas of expertise is important. Learning from these allies is encouraged, so the FTMP provides a large network of links to other web sites. Participating in one’s own community is also important and local groups may even be found through the provided links.

Chat Room

A chat room is a popular way for citizens, especially the connected generation, to engage in dialogue about issues. It taps into the social aspect of online culture, bringing participants back to the web site to stay involved. Through the chat room citizens have the opportunity to vent, add commentary and provide new ideas to the community.

FTMP Online Group/Listserve (Actions and Events)

The FTMP is positioned to be an important resource for the public regarding trade and globalization issues. Finding and participating in a local group is encouraged. Additionally, developing an online group is an effective way to stay linked to a large number of people and keep them informed on important current events. Building a mass movement online allows quick action when a political response to an event is needed. Building a large e-mail listserve is a critical component of constructing this network.
Even though people learn and understand the implications and effects of global trade issues, they may feel powerless to act or engage, in part because they don’t know where to begin. They may also feel that they can’t make a difference. “What can I do?” They may ask. “I’m just one person.” The FTMP not only creates a community of activists, but benefits from the momentum that occurs when individual efforts build to a critical mass. The FTMP serves to ignite an activist movement which could spread like wildfire one personal act of activism at a time.
Process of Catalyzing Social Change

**Starting an Epidemic**

How can one person make a difference? How does the action of one person affect the lives of many? Individual actions do not occur in isolation, they do not simply begin and end without any consequence. Individual actions touch others in their lives and effect change, the action taken in response to this change, then touches the lives of still more people, and on and on. If the circumstances are right, an individual act can spread through communities reaching epidemic levels in short time. The idea that seemingly little things can make a significant change in society is the focus of study by best selling author Malcolm Gladwell.

Gladwell describes his book, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, as a biography of an idea: that the mysterious changes of everyday life—ideas, products, messages and behaviors—spread just like viruses do. Like viruses, infectious phenomena have three characteristics: contagiousness, the fact that little causes can have big effects, and that change happens not gradually but in one dramatic moment. According to Gladwell of the three traits—the idea that epidemics can rise or fall in one dramatic moment—is the most important because it is the principle that makes sense of the first two and that permits the greatest insight into why modern change happens the way it does. The name he gives this dramatic moment in an epidemic when everything can change all at once is the Tipping Point. For example, in the mid-1990s Hush Puppies tipped from being out-of-fashion shoes sold in outlet malls to an international fashion sensation; sales went from 30,000 pairs annually before 1994 to 430,000 shoes in 1995. The sudden spike in popularity began with a small group of kids who started wear-
ing them precisely because they were out of fashion and when the right people saw them in the New York City neighborhoods of the East Village and Soho, the necessary connections to tip the epidemic were made. Gladwell’s theory and case studies are not only relevant and meaningful to the FTMP’s goal of catalyzing social change but serve as useful inspiration of how little things make a big difference.

Three features of the Tipping Point: the Law of the Few, the Stickiness Factor, and the Power of Context provide insight into why epidemics tip. The three key people in the Law of the Few are: connectors, mavens, and salespeople. Gladwell identifies connectors as people with an extraordinary network of social ties. These people do the ‘work’ in spreading word of mouth epidemics as they connect with other people and make connections between people. Mavens are people who have uncanny expertise, actively seek knowledge and are excited about sharing it. Salespeople have an exceptional ability to persuade others. It was a small group of kids on the East Side of New York City that wore the Hush Puppies, but somewhere along the line a number of connectors with ties to a variety of different social groups caught on. These people ultimately spread the fad to different designers who used them in their fashion shoots. The fashion designers in turn made them chic and them gave exposure. Who and what people knew, how they made connections, and how these connections were ‘sold’ were extremely important as the hush puppies fashion trend spread.

Gladwell states that when it comes to epidemics a tiny percentage of people do the majority of the work. According to the author, in the case of a gonorrhea epidemic of Colorado Springs, Colorado, research found that about half of all the cases came from four neighborhoods which represent approximately 6 percent of the city. And half of those in this 6 percent happened to frequent the same six
bars. Through interviews with people in these neighborhoods, it was learned that in a town of well over 100,000 people, the gonorrhea epidemic tipped because of 168 people who went to the same bars, had similar lifestyles, and came in contact with a variety of different kinds of people. These 168 people were able to tip the epidemic because they shared similar traits: the ability to make connections with a wide variety of people and persuade these people to have sex with them.

Another important element in creating epidemics is what Gladwell calls the Stickiness Factor: the way one packages and frames a message effects its ability to resonate with people. An unconventional, unexpected or particularly pertinent piece of information is part of stickiness. Gladwell uses the example of how seniors at Yale University were finally convinced to get tetanus shots. They were divided into several groups and given a seven-page booklet explaining the dangers of tetanus, the importance of inoculation, and the fact that the university was offering free shots at the campus health center. Some students received a booklet considered to be ‘high-fear’ where the information about the dangers of tetanus were more graphic. After the students read the booklets, they were given a test to find out what information they acquired. All students did quite well on the test, it appeared they were well educated about the dangers of tetanus. The interesting thing was that after one month, only 3 percent of the students had received inoculations. The experiment was repeated, only this time the booklets included a map of the campus health center building circled and the times that the shots were available was listed. Sure enough, the percentage of students who were inoculated dramatically increased. The subtle change to the information allowed students to understand how to fit the tetanus stuff into their lives. There are simple ways to enhance stickiness: little details which make the information more personal, more memorable. The deliberate and intentional crafting of a message and the structure
of a message can make a message more sticky. The more sticky the message, the better the chances it will be engaging, the more engaging, the better the chances for transmission.\textsuperscript{79}

Gladwell states that epidemics are sensitive to the conditions and circumstances of the times and places in which they occur.\textsuperscript{80} He writes about the crime epidemics of the desperately poor neighborhoods of East New York and Brownsville. Crime in these neighborhoods in the 1980s and early 1990s was so bad that come nightfall people would take to the safety of their homes; an ordinary citizen would not risk being on the street after dusk because criminal activity and gang warfare were so rampant. But within five years murders dropped 64.3 percent and total crimes had fallen to almost half. Citizens were able to reclaim the streets.\textsuperscript{81} The crime wave in New York city did not drop because of the economy or the decline of the crack trade, it dropped so dramatically due to the changes in the conditions in the environments. The ‘Broken Windows’ theory explains how environmental attributes affect behavior. The details of environments: the broken window, graffiti, trash on the streets all affect people and the way they perceive their reality. It communicates the conditions and the care of the environment. Those who would normally not engage in criminal activity think “if everyone else is doing it and getting away with it, I might as well too.” So people who would normally not be inclined to criminal behavior may engage in it if the situation is right. The Power of Context states that people are exquisitely sensitive to changes in their environment, and these changes affect their behavior. It was the changes made to the environments in New York City that changed the behavior of people, creating an environment less likely to solicit criminal behavior.\textsuperscript{82}
Gladwell’s analysis and theories on social epidemics support the idea that the FTMP has the potential to make a big bang without the big budget needed to access mainstream media. Communication of the FTMP is based on a viral system. Unlike many epidemics which depend on getting word of mouth exposure as an indirect result, the FTMP actually sets a word of mouth in motion. It also provides an inherent viral distribution system for the message to be continually passed. In essence it sets up the infrastructure for word-of-mouth to continue. It spreads disparately and heterogeneously through the social networks of the people who receive it. It can penetrate subcultures, social classes and age groups. It has the likelihood of linking with connectors, mavens and salespeople who do the work of pollinating the epidemic. Furthermore, these people have the means of distribution provided to them right at their fingertips. The FTMP, through the use of dynamic and engaging visual communication design has a structure that assures stickiness: compelling graphics, music, and information combine to create an experience. The content of the FTMP itself is sticky: the components of the web site cater to the personalization of the experience as well as provide a variety of ways to communicate the information, thus adding to the dynamism. The Power of Context is significant to the FTMP in two ways. First, the FTMP provides a virtual context for community as people feel connected to others who are engaging in activism, they too will be influenced by the activity of others in the online environment. Secondly, with the consequences of free trade taking a toll on the lives of average citizens, as they lose their jobs due to outsourcing or the like, the conditions in society present a context that makes people acutely sensitive to the results of these trade agreements. They may not know that these are a result of the trade agreements because the corporate interests of mass media avoid the subject, but they know something is afoot. Once they learn about these issues, they may be moved to take action.
As the profit driven marketplace is one that is hostile to the views and interests of the global justice movement, the FTMP has critically analyzed this condition to find new opportunities to inform the masses that exist outside of this sphere. Doors that have been closed regarding traditional forms of media and capital are replaced by creative leveraging of resources and technology. The FTMP is an alternative model illustrating how to strategically express, package and disseminate messages that run counter to mainstream media. Its message is genuine and its inherently patriotic. As an educational resource, it is highly strategic with carefully considered details. It is small, nimble and potent. Its strengths lie in the fact that it has to be resourceful and cunning. The content is urgent and compelling. The communications system has been set up to allow it to spread like a virus. These pieces have been carefully put together to set the conditions favorably for a powerful and massive awareness campaign to spread throughout society. It is a call to action and a tool for action.

In a world of consumerism, people still fundamentally believe in democracy. If people knew how little information they really received from the media, if they understood that impact of global trade agreements on their lives, if they understood the forces that are usurping their democratic rights to information and participation, they would be up in arms. But can one person really make a difference?

The midnight ride of Paul Revere serves as an excellent example of how an individual’s action can have a huge impact on the lives of many. The famous ride of Paul Revere serves as the most famous word of mouth epidemic in history.83 This piece of extraordinary news spread through the Massachusetts countryside like wildfire. Revere infected the countryside with his message: he was a connector and he came into contact with other connectors, mavens, and salespeople; the
message was sticky; and the circumstances were such that people got the word: it was at night and people were home in bed. His message was timely: people received word of the British plan in time to form a resistance to it. Revere’s “The British are coming,” served as a call to action; and all who heard readied themselves for the encounter which started the war known as the American Revolution.84

The ride of Paul Revere and the subsequent uprising of the American Revolution led to the Declaration of Independence. After declaring independence from an unjust King, the forefathers established a democratic nation. The beliefs of this democracy are outlined in the U. S. Constitution which emphasizes the importance of individuals in the context of government and solidifies the rights of individuals as participants in this government in the Bill of Rights.

The rights of people are violated by trade agreements that usurp the laws of the of the United States. Corporate control of the media disenfranchises people from the right to get the knowledge necessary to meaningfully and actively participate in their government. How can individuals become active in movements about which they know nothing? How can individuals participate in their democracy that is gradually being dismantled?

Now more than ever, it is easier to affect change and participate—it is as easy as clicking the button in an e-mail. The FTMP offers not only information about trade agreements, not only an opportunity to get involved, it offers a powerful and meaningful way to participate in the democracy that was the founding of the United States of America. Involvement with the FTMP not only offers the opportunity to take action, but to be patriotic. Consider it a social obligation.
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