

Envisioning Nonkilling Futures in Film

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Synergistic nonkilling creativity among the arts can uplift the human spirit and imagination for the crucial transformational tasks ahead.

(Paige, 2007: 139)

Introduction

Is nonkilling futures in films an unrealistic dream or an idea whose time has come? Glenn Paige (2007) in his pioneering book began the discussions about nonkilling, and in it he questions whether nonkilling can be viewed as possible, especially by those in his field of political science. Similarly, the possibility of creating a film about a future that does not include killing would, initially, be questioned in its desirability by the film industry and, questioned by by much of the conventional future (sci-fi) film audience. To many people the idea of scenarios of nonkilling futures in films seems impossible, even naïve. And yet, Paige (2007: 139) challenges filmmakers and others in the arts to “find ways out of violence” and participate in the creativity of nonkilling. The ways out of violence in filmmaking are possible *if* the filmmaking process from script development to distribution, including audience and critics’ attitudes, can evolve sufficiently to allow nonviolent, nonkilling images of the future to be depicted in film.

To envision nonkilling futures, like any visioning, requires a leap of faith, to what we most want and desire for our communities’ futures (Meadows, 1996). For filmmakers to see past the practices and mindset that focus on killing and create a film about the future based on nonkilling is an act of resistance against the hegemonic forces at work in contemporary society, and within their industry. Most films about the future are expensive blockbusters produced in Hollywood studios now owned by transnational conglomerates. The films, as well as filmmaking industry that creates them, are part of a society that is based on militarism and focused on violence. But films about the future, and the filmmakers who create them, can also be part of a purposeful resistance, and begin the envisioning of nonkilling futures. Films,

with their powerful images and stories, contribute to how contemporary society envisions the future. According to filmmaker and film screening innovator, Mandy Leith (Hurley, 2009), film is the “magical fire place, it’s the fire, it’s the hearth of our time that people gather around and that continues the storytelling tradition”. Storytelling is a powerful communicator of information and mythology; film has the additional strength of providing images to accompany the narrative.

In this chapter, I will explore why images of the future are important, how Hollywood dominates in films about the future and its connection to the military industrial complex, the gendered nature of films, how film and filmmakers are important to envisioning nonkilling futures. I will also use Glenn Paige’s (2007) theory on nonkilling societies to evaluate films about the future and the filmmaking industry relative to his criteria of a nonkilling society, and explore possible ideas for change.

What film images of violent future are telling us, and why it matters

Frederik Polak (1961) analyzed images of the future that a number of societies held throughout the millennia, and found that when a society had a positive image of the future they flourished, and when a society held a negative image of the future the society perished, an indication that the images had agency. He argued that the first step in moving toward positive images of the future is identifying what is wrong with the images of today as a “preliminary clearing of the decks for the great act of purposeful, responsible recreation of images of a still glorious future” (Polak, 1961: 367). Guided by Polak (1961), we will explore images in films about the future as the preliminary phase of working toward the depiction of nonkilling futures in film.

Feature films are a compelling and visceral source of dominant futures imagery that are now global in their reach. Most feature films about the future are created by Hollywood, and are part of the highly lucrative genre of ‘blockbuster’ science fiction or sci-fi, which is “a significant economic weapon for Hollywood, few others being able to afford to compete at the expensive high end of the latest effects technologies” (King and Krzywinska, 2000: 64). These special effects technologies, in the hands of skilled filmmakers, result in highly pervasive and persuasive images of the future. These films are now globalised through film theatre releases as well as the seemingly limitless reach of television and its thirst for content.

The dominant contemporary images of the future are of bleak ecological wastelands rife with violence and despair (Lisa Garforth, 2006; Slaughter,

1998). These Hollywood films, with their compelling, intoxicating imagery, may be negatively affecting what Elise Boulding (1988) refers to as our *futures image literacy*: our ability to envision our own futures. At the societal level, and as individuals, we are losing our ability to engage our imagination in acts of creating images of the future—visions for our futures—that are unique to our community. But without visions to work toward we do not know what direction to take with our actions (Meadows, 1996). While I make no attempt at a direct causal link between the film images and actions, or inactions, I argue that the powerful, dominating, film images may be interfering with our ability to create peaceful, diverse visions of the future that are unique to our community and country. As Bruce H. Franklin (1985: 85) warns: “With no better vision of the future to offer, the United States may possibly succeed in forcing the rest of the world into one of those futures imagined in Hollywood”. We have an obligation to future generations of humans, and nonhumans, to create visions of diverse futures that are more life sustaining than those presently coming out of Hollywood.

The dominant, and repeating, images of the future in contemporary film are of violent conflict, where war or killing seen as inevitable: whether by hand-to-hand combat (*Blade Runner*, *Star Wars*, *Terminator*, *The Fifth Element*) or fantastical weaponry (*Star Wars* series, *Terminator* series, *Minority Report*) and even nuclear bomb annihilation of the entire world (*Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines*). Much of the violence results in killing, and most is men-on-men, but there are a few examples of sexualized women fighting (*Blade Runner*, *Alien*, *Aeon Flux*, *The Matrix*). In most films about the future, violent conflict or war is underway, or preparations for war are being made, all supported with spectacular, seductive visual effects (Hurley, 2008, 2009). These dominant images of war and violent conflict reinforce themselves from one film to the next. The repeated nature of the images contributes to violence and war being seen as *the* only possible future: the singular future that repeats itself across mediums and over time (Milojevic, 2005).

The repeated pattern of violent conflict in many films about the future, involving guns and other armaments, including nuclear weapons, is not especially surprising given Hollywood’s many ties to the US military (Franklin, 1988; Rosenbaum, 2000; Valantin, 2005; Alford and Graham, 2008). Since 1942, when the American War Ministry set up a partnership bureau in Hollywood, which remains active today, “the cooperation between the [US] security system and the major studios functions in many complex ways and has increased over the decades” (Valantin, 2005:6). Recent research has exposed the Pentagon’s involvement in reviewing screenplays and editorial

influence in exchange for studio access to equipment and locations including the Navy lending aircraft carriers, planes and pilots, (Rosenbaum, 2000; Valantin, 2005). As Franklin (1999:72) observed “the infrastructures that support the preparations for war and violence are very powerful and deeply entrenched”. Filmmakers in the US, and increasingly filmmaking in Canada and other countries, appear to be part of these preparations, as war is glorified and made to seem inevitable and necessary. As Paige (2007: 13) argues “violent media socialization is useful for a state in need of professional patriotic killers”. The connection between the film industry and militarism is historical and tightly woven, but the pattern could be broken if many filmmakers are courageous enough to offer less violent ways of addressing conflict, and if audiences support these films by buying tickets.

Another dominant pattern in films about the future is loss of human life due to an apocalyptic event, including films based on environmental disasters (*Day After Tomorrow*: climate change; *The Awakening*: virus/red tide killing humans; *Children of Men*: global loss of fertility, *Aeon Flux*: global virus and global loss of fertility). I worry that these films also impoverish futures literacy by reducing hope for the future.

Films about the future are also highly gendered. Women are highly outnumbered by men as characters in films, and their roles in society are of those of support to the elite men in charge, or the love/sexual interest of the male lead. The journey is masculinised, and the narrative arc of the story is always that of the male lead. Children are rare in films about the future, and when they are seen, they are almost always boys. An exception is *Aeon Flux*, although the girls are in the background of scenes, at least they are visible. The dualistic way that men and women are depicted in films about the future is not healthy for society, for women nor for men. Women are not seen as politicians or leaders in other positions of power in filmic futures, reinforcing the notion that *the future* is the domain of men and where women and girls do not see opportunities for themselves to be powerful agents in society.

In some films about the future (as in some films based in the present and past) women are so invisible, so completely missing from the screen, that these films could be contributing to the notion that women and girls don't matter, that their presence in society is optional. The optional future for women and girls is likely contributing to policies and practices that result in higher women's mortality, including higher levels of mortality in natural disasters (Ikeda, 1995) as well as globalised violence and killings of women and girls. *Femicide* is a gender specific killing that takes the forms of murder by spouses/partners, dowry deaths, sexual assault, 'honour' killings and female infant/child neglect. “Femi-

cide is an extreme form of the gender-based violence (GBV) that many women suffer at home, in the workplace, in the community and in their relations with the state, violence that is intrinsically linked to deeply entrenched gender inequality and discrimination, economic disempowerment, and aggressive or machismo masculinity” (Prieto-Carrón, et al., 2007: 26). Much too often in films about the future, women and girls, if they are seen at all, are victims of male violence, sexual predation, societal oppression, or neglect.

Violence and killing is pervasive in films about the future out of Hollywood. The lead characters in the films are often not the best role models. What are we modeling as futures appropriate behaviour to young people, especially young men and boys, who are the main target audience for films about the future? According to Jo Groebel (1998: 4), the lead scholar of the UNESCO study of 5,000 12-year-old students from 23 countries, “the study revealed a fascination with aggressive media heroes, especially among boys: Arnold Schwarzenegger’s ‘Terminator’ is a global icon, known by 88% of the children surveyed, be they from India, Brazil or Japan”. In films about the future, the elite men are predominantly depicted as warriors/fighters of some kind, which narrows role model opportunities for boys to aggressive hyper-masculine roles with little opportunity to witness caring, creative men in their personal lives, as well as in the public domain.

The repeated images of war and militarism in films about the future continue the notion that war is inevitable. Many countries of the world, and certainly the US, have intertwined militarism throughout much of their society. We have disregarded Dwight D. Eisenhower’s (1961, my emphasis) caution in his final speech as president: “we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military industrial complex. *The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist*”. And it has. In 2010, global military expenditures reached \$1,630 billion USD—with US 42.7% of the total—and shocking annual increases in South America (5.8 per cent) and Africa (5.2 per cent) (SIPRI, 2011a). Beatrice Fihn (2011) argues that the global military expenditures are having a direct and disproportionate effect on women by keeping them in poverty, and directing funds away from health care and education, and quotes the World Bank’s estimate that it would take only 35 to 72 billion USD per year to 2015 to meet the Millennium Development Goals—a tiny fraction of that spent on the military—but those in power, overwhelmingly men, continue to prioritize war.

Author Margaret Atwood (1992: 79) argues in a poem that killing is gendered: “Why do men want to kill the bodies of other men? / Women don’t want to kill the bodies of other women / By and large. As far as we know... / Men’s

bodies are the most dangerous things on / Earth. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully analyse the nature of men and killing, but I suggest that films about the future are contributing to the problem by repeating the future. . .”

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully analyse the nature of men and killing, but I suggest that films about the future are contributing to the problem by repeating the future as violent and warring, and focusing on male characters solving conflict with violence. There is ongoing debate about the nature of violence and whether it is gendered or not, but it appears to be gendered, and pretending otherwise is not going to help us create nonkilling futures. Richard Wrangham (2010: 30) argues that “men are inherently more dangerous than women and that massive imbalances of power among hostile entities tend to induce violence” and that understanding this violence provides opportunities in reducing it.

By stressing the particular dangers of male coalitionary behavior *Demonic Males* [Wrangham’s book] contributes to an ongoing debate about the prospects for promoting nonviolence through the education of women and their increased representation in legislative bodies. Since *Demonic Males* was published I have participated regularly in seminars with such programs as Women Waging Peace, in which participants represent conflict zones from around the world. I have repeatedly found that they cherish the optimism represented in *Demonic Males* by its identification of some sources of violence that we can do something about—namely, the appalling ease with which men are induced to violence under some circumstances (Wrangham, 2011: 44).

Filmmakers may argue that their films include violence and killing because that is what audiences want, and we will see below that audiences do have a role in changing the nature of films about the future, but films remain a creative act and the filmmakers can create films in a different way, with different stories and images.

As women in the Global North are becoming increasingly involved in public life, business, medicine, education, research—albeit with glass ceilings at the most senior levels (Valian, 1999; Douglas, 2010)—women’s roles and creative involvement in film production have narrowed or decreased over time. Contemporary women’s film roles are generally limited to wife, mother, sex object, and victim; while women in the 1940’s had more diversity in movie roles. Today, the Hollywood filmmaking industry also suffers from a lack of women in the upper creative positions. “In 2010, women comprised 16% of all directors, executive producers, producers, writers, cinema-

tographers, and editors working on the top 250 domestic grossing films”—a decline of 1 percentage point from 1998, and with only 7% of directors being women (Lauzen, 2011: 1). Martha Lauzen (2008: 10) has also documented the domination of men in the reviewing of films and concluded that: “In short, men dominate the reviewing process of films primarily made by men featuring mostly males intended for a largely male audience. The under-employment of women film reviewers, actors, and filmmakers perpetuates the nearly seamless dialogue among men in US cinema”. The film industry needs to address the reality that its institutional structures have enabled a small elite of white men to maintain an unequal advantage over women, people of colour and less powerful men. This is an outcome of what R.W. Connell (2002: 142) calls the *patriarchal dividend* where men, as a group, maintain “an unequal gender order”. The process of identifying the unequal order in filmmaking has begun. Hollywood producers, Susan Davis, Susan Valdes and Steve Mills, created the 2005 film *Invisible Women* to address women’s experiences in Hollywood, and Jennifer Siebel Newsom wrote and directed *Miss Representation* in 2011. I am confident that as the number of women in senior creative positions within the film industry increases to above 50% that the amount of killing in films about the future will significantly decrease.

American/Hollywood global dominance of film industry and images

Another repeated pattern in films about the future is that the story takes place in the US, even when the films are international co-productions (*The Awakening*: India/US; *The Fifth Element*: France/US) reinforcing the concept that *the future* has been fully colonised and it is American (Sardar, 1999). This is not to say the US does not have place in the future, rather that the US is only one of many countries in the world, each with their own culture and landscapes that are worthy of futures visioning. But at the present, American futures dominate in the films, and American films dominate the screens of the world.

In 2007, according to the Motion Picture Association of America statistics (MPAA, 2008a), the total Hollywood domestic (US and Canada) box-office gross was \$9.63 billion, while the total international box-office was \$17.1 billion (64% of total revenues). The international market includes: \$8.92 billion Europe/Middle East/Africa, \$6.92 billion Asia Pacific, and \$1.25 billion Latin America. This translates into a total of 5.54 billion international paid moviegoers (79% of 7.04 billion world wide admissions) (MPAA, 2008c). Therefore, as Scott (2005) argues, Hollywood may not dominate internationally in the total number of films produced, but they do dominate

in terms of revenue and in the number of people who watch films.

Economists Acheson and Maule (2005: 339) argue, “to our knowledge, no other industry has been persistently dominated in the same manner”. These two authors attribute the early historical dominance partially because the US was able to attract talented creative people who were fleeing hostilities during both world wars. They also argue that Hollywood’s international dominance is based on the efficiency of a system that provides them with an unfettered free market to the US domestic market (including Canada), which is the single largest English speaking market in the world, as well as Hollywood’s success in assimilating large numbers of viewers from different ethnic backgrounds (Acheson and Maule, 2005). This economic efficiency has significant support from the US federal government, which lobbies hard for Hollywood at international economic negotiations, such as World Trade Organisation (WTO) (previously General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade or GATT) and North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), arguing that film is a product or commodity like any other and that Hollywood should have open, unlimited markets for their films and television programs in all countries.

The [US] Department of State, Office of the United States Trade Representative, and the MPA [international arm of Motion Picture Association of America], often referred to as the “Little State Department”, are critical to the success of American films and television programs in international markets. The American troika demands that foreign markets are open for Hollywood to exploit, while the oligopolistic nature of the American market makes it all but impenetrable to foreign products. The exportation of cultural products improves the trade deficit, but the US government also argues that “trade follows films,” that motion pictures and television programs provide a mechanism through which to advertise American products and disseminate ideologies (Kunz, 2007: 6).

The Motion Picture Association (MPA-Int, 2012) openly flaunts this role on the MPA-Asia Pacific website as a “little State Department” and describes their foreign country activities in “diplomatic, economic and political arenas”.

Therefore, the global reach of the blockbuster Hollywood films about the future is significant. The worry in this global nature is that that powerful, intoxicating imagery dominates people’s thinking and they lose the ability to imagine a future different than what they see in the films. Without our *futures imaging literacy* we cannot engage our imagination to envision positive futures for our own community—our localised preferred futures (Boulding, 1988). There is also the possibility that with America being seen as *the fu-*

ture that non-US communities and nations will see themselves as lesser, not as valuable now or in the future. But, as Wangari Maathai (2004) wrote about Africa, it is from the love of one's own community and culture that diverse and peaceful future communities are possible.

The way that films are created today also contributes to the movement away from localised ideas because of the global business nature of the film industry. Hollywood films used to be made in studios that existed only to make movies. In today's New Hollywood, film production is only a small part of large companies that, in turn are part of "an increasingly diversified, globalized entertainment industry" (Schatz, 1997: 75). And often, within the conglomerate, the media/entertainment component is small compared to other activities. For example, General Electric owns Universal Pictures¹ as well as 80% of NBC television, many local US television stations, the Sci-Fi cable broadcaster, and a new pay TV company USA Network (Columbia Journalism Review, 2011). GE/Universal/NBC is also extending its reach further into India via a joint venture with the Indian media empire Network 18 (Overdorf, 2007). The film component of the GE conglomerate had box office gross of \$933 million USD in 2006, while the total parent company revenue was \$149.7 billion USD. And according to a study by the Centre for Public Integrity (Makinson, 2004), General Electric is number 7 in the list of the top 100 contractors to the Pentagon, further reinforcing the ties between Hollywood and militarism.

Hollywood has also changed from making many movies a year to an increasing reliance on the big blockbusters to reach the annual corporate profit projections. Sedgwick and Pokorny (2005) argue that part of Hollywood's success and survival over time is the focus on the hit movie, the blockbuster, with large production values that work to differentiate films from television productions. The reliance on blockbuster films, especially sequels, is more likely explained by the notion that blockbusters are viewed by executives to have significantly less risk, and more opportunity for revenue than other films (Ravid, 1999; Scott, 2005). Blockbusters dominate in films about the future, and high cost/ high revenue sequels have been a consistent pattern (*Matrix*, *StarWars*, *Terminator*, *Star Trek* series).

As discussed above, Hollywood now sells the majority of its tickets in its international market (79% of global admissions and 64% total revenue) so there is financial pressure to keep the international market strong. Violent action films about the future travel well into this market.

¹ This may be changing as General Electric is in negotiation for a partial sell-off of Universal to a sports media corporation.

Action movies don't require complex plots or characters. They rely on fights, killings, special effects and explosions to hold their audiences. And, unlike comedy or drama—which depend on good stories, sharp humour, and credible characters, all of which are often culture-specific—action films require little in the way of good writing and acting. They're simple, and they're universally understood. To top it off, the largely non-verbal nature of the kind of films that journalist Sharon Waxman refers to as “short-on-dialogue, high-on-testosterone” makes their dubbing or translation relatively inexpensive (Media Awareness Network, 2011).

To reform or transform Hollywood filmmaking, to move out of the focus on profits based on violent films and into filmmaking that supports nonkilling futures will be challenging, but not impossible if there is the will for change at many stages in the process.

Filmmakers within and outside of the Hollywood studios, have an opportunity to create films with non-US based, diverse, peaceful communities, as images of nonkilling futures. This will not be easy, at least not in the beginning, because Hollywood has become such a dominating cultural force in the world. Juan Mayr (2008) suggests that:

Throughout human history, dominant powers have imposed their language and their cultural vision on other territories and cultures. It is time to take pause in the present process of globalization while we consider ways of overcoming problems confronting our civilization... We must pursue these efforts in order to protect the heritage of humankind.

The UNESCO (2001) *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* provides principles for protecting cultural diversity, creativity and international solidarity. It acknowledges the current imbalance in cultural products and Article 11 suggests that public policy is required to promote cultural diversity in the world. Convincing Hollywood that they do not have an inalienable right to the theatres and television screens of the world will take time and diplomacy, but the distribution and screening of films is part of the technology of filmmaking that requires reform if nonkilling futures in film are to emerge.

Transforming the filmmaking process to contribute to nonkilling futures

Ursula Franklin (1999) sees *technology as systems of practice* that go beyond the things one normally relates to technology (such as cameras, film, editing equipment, lights, computers for creating visual effects) to include also *organisation, the people, procedures, policies, myths, and, ideas*. In the case of

feature films, the systems of practice include: the studios within conglomerates, writers, directors, actors, editors, sound engineers, accountants, unions, marketing people and processes, production assistants, the pitch, the script, merchandising, caterers, traffic and parking attendants, star-system, scheduling, critics and film schools. Franklin (1999) argues that of all the processes and practices that make up the technology the most important of all is *mindset*. It is mindset that can entrench ways of practice without reflection. Mindset can inhibit people from seeing even the possibility that patterns of images or systems of practice can be different. Mindset can tell us that there is no point in examination or protest because nothing will be different. For example, some people have the mindset that war is inevitable because humans are intrinsically violent or that human activity will always harm nature in some way. But we can create a mindset that is open to possibility and change. We could develop a mindset that sees violent conflict only as a temporary phase in human development, and that people can live in harmony with each other and with nonhuman nature. Shifting mindset, however, is challenging and will require recognition of power injustices and shifting to shared power.

It is my conviction that nothing short of a global reformation of major social forces and of the social contract can end this historical period of profound and violent transformations, and give a manner of security back to the world and its citizens. Such a development will require the redefinition of rights and responsibilities, and the setting of limits to power and control (Franklin, 1999: 5).

Filmmakers could be part of this shift in power by transforming the systems of practice, the technologies of filmmaking, to one of shared power and to depicting nonviolent societies—past, present and future—in their films. According to Riane Eisler (1987) and Marija Gimbutas (1982) humans have been peaceful and nonkilling in the far past, therefore, we have historical precedents to initiate system change; humans have not *always* been violent and warring, as many argue. Filmmakers can provide a leadership role in shifting mindset toward nonkilling futures by depicting communities that solve conflict without violence and where killing does not exist.

Glenn Paige's vision of a nonkilling society is one where there is no killing of humans nor threats to kill, and that this nonkilling may extend to animals. It includes a society where:

there are no weapons for killing and no legitimizations for taking life; governments do not legitimize it; patriotism does not require it; artists do not celebrate it; no relationships of dominance or exclusion—boundaries, forms

of government, property, gender, race, ethnicity, class, or systems of spiritual or secular belief—require killing to support or challenge them, and no social conditions that depend upon threat or use of lethal force (2007: 1).

In its present form, the majority of the filmmaking industry does not meet Paige's (2007) criteria of a nonkilling society. It legitimizes killing and war in cahoots with the government; its artists celebrate killing; its racist and sexist practices are based on relationships of domination (Hurley, 2008); and it contributes to social conditions in its glorification of lethal force. Paige (2007: 13) quite accurately identifies mass media, which includes industrialised, corporatised filmmaking, as part of the desensitization of life through violent images that demonstrate "dramatic ways in which people, property, animals, and nature can be destroyed by heroes and villains". And yet, Hollywood also is responsible for some of the finest, most joyful and creative films ever made, which celebrate the best of humanity including: joy, love, compassion and empathy. Therefore, there is no reason why films about the future cannot depict positive, nonkilling societies, which include conflict and romance and intrigue, but without violence or killing. It is true that contemporary films about the future sometimes contain moments of love and compassion, but these aspects are overwhelmed by the dominant images of despair and violence. It is time for some filmmakers to claim a leadership role by depicting alternative and diverse futures, including nonkilling futures.

Hans Richter (1986: 163) refers to *progressive cinema*, as a filmmaking genre or style where filmmakers understand their responsibility to "make an incomparable contribution to the welfare, the recovery of humanity". I interviewed filmmakers in my recent research and most agreed with Richter's argument that film can make positive contribution. They were in filmmaking to make a difference in the world, but some did not want to feel an obligation to do so, while others were comfortable with the responsibility to provide a positive way forward. Hollywood publicist, Paula Silver (in Hurley, 2009) suggests that "all films have a social impact, the question is: is it good or bad impact? And that all films can be a *catalyst for change* and challenge filmmakers to ask themselves: what images do we need to create hope—to inspire people to take action—to do something?" Filmmaker/ futurist Kate McCullum (in Hurley, 2009) argues that filmmakers are beginning to understand that they need to be wiser with their craft.

There is a tremendous opportunity for filmmakers to choose to participate in the movement toward positive futures. The films could still contain conflict, drama, spectacular visual effects, even the odd flying machine, but by wielding

the tool, the technology of filmmaking, more wisely, the films could offer hopeful alternatives to a generation of moviegoers who badly need them. Academy Award winning, director/ producer Norman Jewison (2004: 281) understands this need when he argues, “Hope is what we hang on to. It’s our anchor in a sea of despair. Hope, like faith, remains constant, independent of evidence. When we lose hope we lose everything. People who have no hope become desperate. But hope is a gift of the spirit”. Not everyone agrees that hope is important to creating positive change (Jensen, 2007), but I have witnessed numerous classroom and community situations where individuals without hope are unable to envision positive futures or participate in action planning.

Elise Boulding’s (1988) visioning workshops focused on creating a *World Without Weapons*, and she observed that a *social imaging* process happened when people began to see hope for a peaceful world within the workshop setting. Most people arrived at the workshops feeling ineffective about peace and disarmament and left feeling empowered to varying degrees because they gained hope that a world without weapons is indeed possible (Boulding, 1995). The link between hope and action is created during act of collaborating on desired futures. In addition, as Anthony Reading (2004: 17), argues, “hope depends on being able to predict that a desired future is potentially achievable”. Therefore, stories and film images of nonkilling futures are important because they make our desires for peaceful, nonkilling futures plausible, which creates hope for positive change, and actions toward change can begin.

A filmmaker who creates a film about the future without violence, militarism and killing will risk having her or his film being labeled as a ‘message film’. But all stories have a message. It reflects the power of the neo-liberal paradigm that *their* messages are not seen as *a message*. Any works that stand outside of the dominant story, or challenge it, run the risk of being belittled or of being the recipient of critical unkindness, tinged with cynicism. As Marge Piercy (2003: 141) argues “contemporary critics often assume that there is something wrong with fiction that has an ideological content, as if all fiction does not”. It hasn’t always been this way. Hollywood writer Bob Thomas (in Hurley, 2009) described how in previous decades there were many message films that were box office successes. Some of the films were not immediately successful, for example Stanley Kramer (1984) produced and directed *On the Beach* (1959) with the clear purpose of ending the use of nuclear bombs. Many people avoided the film in the theatres because of the theme and the critics derided it as “another message from Kramer, taking a subject too seriously, the do-gooder at work or good intentions swallowed by speculation”, but the film went on to have strong success on television “probably due to the activism of

citizens' groups, the clergy and women's organizations in protest of the nuclear arms race" (Kramer, 1984: 118). According to James Goodby (2011) the contemporary global "obstacles to ending the nuclear threat are more political than technical or military". Therefore, filmmakers today have great power to affect change through their films by addressing the public and political institutions, and as Stanley Kramer did, they could choose to be part of a less violent future by envisioning futures without nuclear weapons.

In addition, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI, 2011), "small arms and light weapons are involved in more violent, conflict related deaths each year than any other type of weapon system". Filmmakers could have a major impact on the reduction of small arms by making choices not to include them in their films, not valorizing the use of guns, or not associating guns with masculinity.

Perhaps films about the future that is not based on violent conflict would be derided by most critics, because such films would lack the high action fight scenes that are so common in films about the future, but I hope that those critics would see the dramatic tension in other parts of the films (after all, conflict does not require violence). There will certainly be cynicism directed toward the first brave film that dares to provide an image of the future different from the dominant, hegemonic images. But with luck, some critics will support the film, and audiences will go in large numbers to the film, and a new, more diverse, fan base will emerge.

German film director/producer/writer, Wim Wenders (Dixon, 2011) is considering a futures-based film in 3-D: "I think 3-D is a still unexplored cinematographic story. In my book, it's the ideal medium for the documentary of the future. It's not invented to show us different planets [like in *Avatar*]. It's invented to show us our own planet". Based on Wim Wenders previous films, and his recent focus on joyful music and dance, I believe there is a good possibility that his futures 3-d film will envision nonkilling futures, and a flourishing Earth.

There is also tangible reason for optimism about a nonkilling film about the future because American author Starhawk (1993) has begun production on the film version of her novel *The Fifth Sacred Thing*. Starhawk's approach to the film diverged from the patterns in Hollywood filmmaking right from the beginning: when she and her team used crowd sourcing (Kickstarter) to gather funds for the development stage instead of pitching the idea to a studio. And congruent with Alfonso Montuori's (2011) argument for a *new collaborative creativity*, Starhawk is creating a community-based, collaborative approach to the images of the future in the film by encouraging people to contribute ideas and designs for the film via the website. The story in the

film will also break with Hollywood patterns by offering a vision of a caring, green, nonviolent, nonkilling society, with women in positions of leadership and heroism. *The Fifth Sacred Thing* juxtaposes a dystopic Los Angeles as a projection of the hegemonic present with water used as tool of control by the elites, with a green, permaculture-based, utopian San Francisco where “No one in this city goes hungry. No one lacks shelter. No child lacks a home. There is sickness here... but no one lacks care. We have guarded our waters well, our cisterns will not run dry, no one thirsts, and our streams run clear” (Starhawk, 1993: 19). It is a hostile world around them, but San Francisco is kept safe by the Defense Council: nine old women with their magic, dreams and vision. Collectively the citizens make a decision not to pursue military style defense, but to focus their resources on healing the Earth and providing high quality of life for all, including no tolerance for violence or sexual assault. One of the Defense Council elders explains, “War is the great waste, as much in the preparation for it as in the waging of it. We learned that, at least, from last century, as that same military drained the country and destroyed our true wealth” (Starhawk, 1993: 154). They are able to save their city by offering the invading soldiers ‘a place at their table’, a home and healthy work. There are many heroes in the book, but the main hero’s journey in the story is taken by Madrone, a young woman who is a healer and community leader. Starhawk’s film will depict beautiful, positive images of alternative futures, including a nonkilling city. It will do much to inspire people, especially youth, to envision their own images of nonkilling futures.

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Filmography

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