

Simply Irresistible

The impact of media saturation in our culture

TV Turnoff Week will be celebrated April 21-27 all over the world this year. It's a week devoted to encouraging children to find other activities than watching television, playing video and computer games and watching videos. Conversations here in Eugene have already begun, stating what many parents already know: The content of most television is lousy, and soaking up the images offered on prime time does nothing to make it any easier to be a child in our modern world.



What puzzles me is how exclusively these opinions center around the content of TV and movies, rather than the act of watching, and how they focus just on children. Some of what I've heard sounds like the same slightly Puritan rant against sex, drugs and rock and roll that adults have been making to their children for generations. That rant cheapens the real argument against media saturation in our culture.

When I was parenting a young child, national TV Turnoff Week was something I dreaded. My son was little, I stayed at home without a real parenting network and I used TV to get some much needed head space. I had read the statistics, I could see what was harmful for me, but I still "used" media. All the week brought me was more guilt. I strongly believe that if we as a society want to address limiting or eliminating media use, we can't just treat the symptoms; we are responsible for finding the root causes.

Media is addictive for children and adults. A good movie is irresistible to me even now, as is a good game or web link. In her book *Endangered Minds: Why Children Don't Think and What We Can Do About It*, Jane Healy writes about the creation of the seemingly harmless *Sesame Street*. She writes about how the show was developed by having children in a room with the TV show on and then exposing them to other stimulants as well: flashing lights, sounds etc. The creators of *Sesame Street*, she says, kept refining and changing the program style until the children were no longer distracted or able to turn their attention from the program to the other distracters. That's quite some trick with the average preschooler, probably the most distractible creature on the planet. In my mind, if you add that to peer pressure, sports and consumerism, an addiction to screen watching is quite reasonable. The medium of television is designed very carefully, deliberately and professionally, to be irresistible.

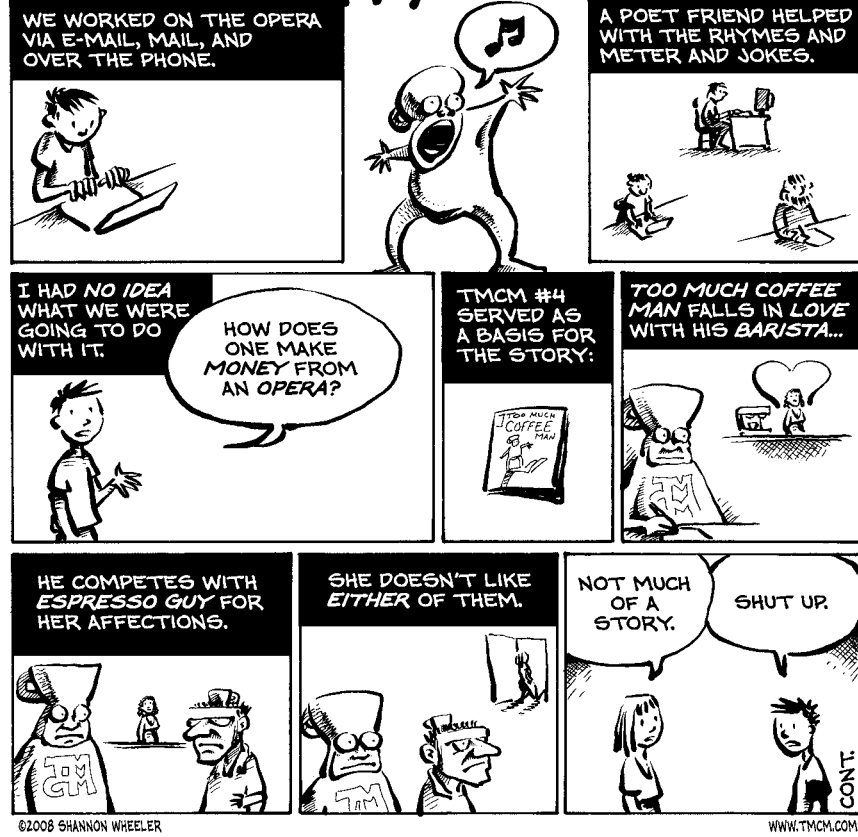
But it's an easier addiction to resist than others. Dinner time, for example, is a time when a parent might just like to work in solitude in the kitchen for a moment, and the busy activities of the day have taken their toll on patience and creativity. If we call that exhaustion a symptom, what might be its cause? Are we doing too much the rest of the day so we don't have the energy to make our children help out in the kitchen? Are we doing enough for ourselves so we have deep wells of creativity and good humor? If we make sure that we and our children are entertained all the time, where is the space to integrate, reflect and simply be in the moment?

The organization which began TV Turnoff Week in 1994 has broadened its approach to include all media, and they now call themselves the Center for Screen-Time Awareness. Their mission is to "provide information so people can live healthier lives in functional families in vibrant communities by taking control of the electronic media in their lives, not allowing it to control them." That's quite a fight they have on their hands. We can't live without media now: Can you imagine a week without access to email, web news, television shows? And what about the fabulous medium of newspapers? We are global citizens, and we live in a world where information is available to us, social change and the arts are available to us, through media. Our culture is well beyond denying those gifts.

TV Turnoff Week is a good time to look at the hidden price of media for us all. In hooking up nationally and internationally on the web, are we neglecting our local connections? Are we medicating ourselves with television to fill emotional and energetic gaps elsewhere in our lives? This is the week to simplify and reconnect with the rest of our lives, and especially the lives of our children.

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How to Be Happy (OPERA ORIGIN) by Shannon Wheeler



Letters TO THE EDITOR

OBAMA'S RISE

I love reading reading *EW's* letters, but they routinely test my ability to restrain my inner cynic. After reading that gem by concerned citizen Deb Huntley (4/10), I was on the very brink of suggesting that many of Hillary Clinton's supporters would nominate Ann Coulter for a Democratic presidential bid if she was the only woman on the ballot even though I know better.

Then again, anyone who's so cynical as to suggest that the Obama juggernaut is merely a conspiracy to prevent a woman from becoming president is probably beyond the reach of a well-informed discussion. Have the Deb Huntleys of the world ever paused to consider the possibility that Obama's rise is in fact a mandate from millions of women and men who are sick to death of the spineless pandering and corporate-sponsored politics of the Humphreys, Kerrys and, yes, Clintons who have long dictated the status quo of the Democratic establishment? Have they not noticed that he has captured the energy of so many people who want to bring change to a party that has failed to challenge the extremism and divisiveness of the Bush administration?

What we all must do, and what Huntley fails to do, is to speak up to prevent sexism, racism and cynicism from infecting our politics. Only then can we rest assured we have the right candidate. I'm voting for Obama not because he's a man, not because he's black, but because I'm longing for something the Democrats have yet to produce in my lifetime, until now: leadership. But if you must insist on nominating the only candidate who can even remotely lose to John "Bomb Iran" McCain (and not for the right reasons), suit yourself. I'll stand behind Clinton if she's nominated, but it will be difficult, knowing we could have done so much better.

*Paul Anderson
Eugene*

SIGN THE PETITION

I want to encourage citizens of Eugene

to sign the petition being circulated to bring EWEB's spending \$85.5 million dollars to move their facilities to a vote. I'm continually surprised by the disconnect of groups and individuals who will acknowledge the problems of pollution, development, paving over farmlands, wetlands and wildlife habitat and species extinctions and then continue with the "business as usual" way of life.

Many scientists believe we have approximately 18 months to slow down our carbon input before the tipping point of no return changes our world drastically. We have also reached the world's peak oil production. Ignoring the facts will only make dealing with the problems in the future more difficult. Since EWEB is a publicly owned utility, I think the public should always vote on large expenditures.

Wouldn't it make more sense to invest in subsidizing solar hot water heaters for businesses and homes, weatherization, gray water systems, green roofs, etc.? To spend this money on an unnecessary move when our entire planet is hanging on the brink of ecological collapse so a shopping/café center can be built in its place is insane. We also have a recession and shouldn't begin big developments for that reason alone. Hello!

Sign the petition if you are an EWEB owner, yes, owner. April 28 is the deadline. You can find petitions at the Eugene Library and Saturday Market.

*Pam Driscoll
Dexter*

TORREY CAN'T HIDE

No matter what camouflage he tries to wear, Jim Torrey always comes over as what he is — a fat cat who serves the agenda of only the fat cats. He is unable to disguise himself, as one sees in published reports of donations to candidates for mayor. In early April, his donors included many who gave in the thousands, in great contrast to donors to Kitty Piercy.

Piercy is the mayor "of the people," a role Torrey only pretends to have. Remind