

# Adbusters strange mix

by Ira Nayman

There is a lot to be said for a magazine that casts a critical eye on advertising in the mass media. There is a lot to be said for a magazine that offers ways individuals can get involved with the fight to save the environment.

It's when the two ideas for a magazine are incorporated into one that things get weird.

The magazine, *Adbusters Quarterly*, has been publishing for about a year. Although it may seem that the magazine is trying to do too much, it is stimulating reading.

Publisher Kalle Lasn believes that individuals can take back the airwaves; by making use of relatively inexpensive non-prime time hours, points of view can be put on television which

the medium would otherwise ignore. His belief is that, if used in this way, television can be used to revitalize North American democracy.

The primary cause the magazine espouses is environmental responsibility. Here is where it's two themes merge: by airing television commercials promoting environmental health, the publisher hopes to spread the environmental movements message.


The Media Foundation, which publishes the magazine, has created two commercials for this use, although it encourages people to create their own. In one 30 second spot, done in clay animation, an old tree tells a young one the difference between a forest and a tree farm; in the other, which uses regular animation, a hog literally bursts out of a map of North America.

A second cause is beating North America's love of television. As Lasn describes the commercial: "The actor who appears on the TV screen looks relatively normal. With one exception. On top of his shoulders sits a TV set. *Tubehead*, as he is called, spends the next 15 seconds trying to yank the set off his head. At the climax of his desperate struggle, this message appears on the screen: **TV Addiction — North America's Number One Mental Health Problem.**"

*Adbusters Quarterly* does some things very well. Each issue has a section devoted to dissecting the hidden messages in print advertisements, a debunking we could use a lot more of. The magazine's media analyses are insightful, its environmental analyses fresh.

Unfortunately, the stories tend to be quite short; longer features, giving writers an opportunity to develop ideas in more depth, would be appreciated. Furthermore, inevitably, the split purpose of the magazine tends to blur its focus; obviously, either subject would be a worthy one on its own (companion magazines, perhaps?)

Also, the premise of progressive activist advertising is dubious. Lasn shrugs off the suggestion that if advocacy advertising were widespread, corporations with vast sums of money at their disposal would swamp individuals with limited resources, but it does bear concern. If use corporations use television advertising to defend themselves repeatedly in

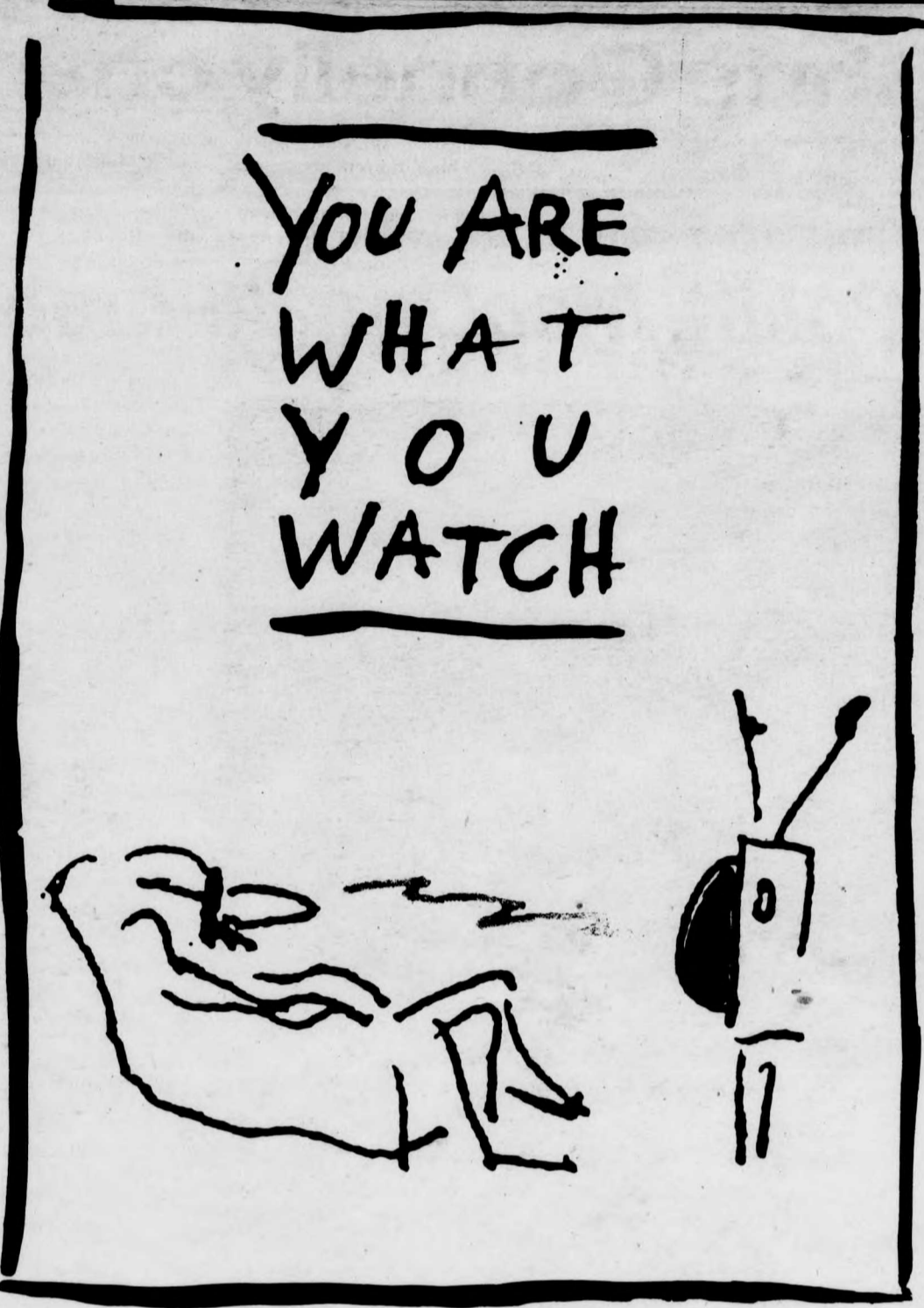


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prime time, the individuals who advertise once or twice late at night to promote their positions will be at a disadvantage.

Still, in an age where most magazine are candy for the eyes, *Adbusters Quarterly* is a feast for the mind.



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