

TV morality or consumerism

Is anyone else worried?

Does anyone else worry about the new fundamentalism that is sweeping across North America like a pestilence? A subtle and potent fundamentalism seeping into the consciousness of every North American home via an unassuming set of wires in the wall of every living room. Symptoms include a vast devastation of culture and identity, as well as a dramatic reduction of free thought.

Just another tired take on an Orwellian motif? The unintelligible musings of an over-paranoid crank? Perhaps.

What I am worrying about is the Afternoon Talk Show.

"Oh that," you say. "I thought you were serious."

I am being serious. Consider this summary of an Oprah Winfrey segment that I somehow happened to detachedly observe.

Oprah is standing in the midst of her adoring theatre audience, affecting a pose of doe eyed saintliness. She has a camera crew in the living room of a lower-middle class black family from Suburbville, U.S.A. She has managed to coax this bewildered-looking group to remove all the plastic coverings from their furniture. It seems that the matriarch of the family is petrified that dirt or damage might occur to her living room suite. Fortunately, Oprah is present to rescue the plighted.

In the middle of the living room stands a large heap of plastic.

Oprah asks, "What will you do

with all the plastic?" The old man of the household responds by saying that he will save it and re-use it.

"It was damn expensive." Audience guffaw.

With a flutter of her eyelids, Oprah rhapsodizes, "that is an excellent idea Mr. Average, I always save my plastic baggies, rinse them out and re-use them."

Now in a condescending flourish, like a kind but firm mother, Oprah asks, "Will you keep the plastic off the furniture or the minute we turn off the cameras will you put it back on?"

Old Mrs. Average meekly claims she will keep the furniture uncovered.

Oprah now turns to the cameras with all the sweet benevolence of a Messiah and gushes, "Well, I hope you see what we tried to do today. The lesson here is that life is too short to not use your good stuff. So use your good stuff."

The theatre audience, nearly bursting with adoration and gratitude, applaud vigorously into a commercial.

Cute right? Charming. Harmless. Hmm. Frankly, I'm worried.

Let's not question for the moment the dubious right of Oprah to go prying into the living rooms of unassuming average citizens. Let's ignore for now the depressing fact that a massive, continent-wide viewership finds their own lives so uninteresting that they eagerly spend their time in other people's living

rooms struggling with issues as banal as furniture protectors. Let's even put aside the Talk Show Host's false claims of conscience and empathy for the Common Person. Wasn't Oprah the highest paid performer in the world last year? A one year take of 60 to 80 million dollars? What the hell does she know about furniture

"...I am worrying about...the Afternoon Talk Show"

protectors? Does anyone really believe she rinses out plastic baggies?

No. What truly worries me is the Talk Show Host's new role as moral agent. Talk Shows are taking the place of churches in North American society; Talk Show Hosts are the new clergy. Truth, beauty, goodness and piety are being reduced to 30 second sound bites. The similarities are striking. The Hosts strut around like gospel preachers, moralizing with self-righteous fervor. The congregation in the audience cheer and weep like an obedient flock. Sinners and saints are paraded in front of the altar and ostensibly 'healed' by the Good Host. And it all takes on a fundamentalist intensity. Each participant vies to out-moralize the other.

Isn't it worrisome that a large portion of the voting populace of the most powerful nation in the world

forms many of its views and opinions from the antics encountered on Talk Shows? How often have you heard, "Yeah, but on Oprah...?" The collective American consciousness is saturated with degradation and depravity and has itself become reactionary and paranoid.

The above Oprah segment had a clear moral. Use your good stuff. Or more simply: Use Stuff. Consumerism. This is the gospel of the Talk Show and of television in general. After all, if television is the church, money is the God. And Talk Show Hosts are the faithful preachers of God's word: \$.

The only programs made are those that sell. Everything is reduced to money value. Oprah knows where her loaves of bread come from: corporate sponsorship. There is no monetary value in Truth or Beauty. Therefore, everything is degraded to the common denominator of profit.

The distinction between marketing half-truths and reality has become less and less sharp. Consumerism is becoming our reality. Con-

sider Shirley Solomon's latest confidence game. The eminent Canadian Talk Show Fundamentalist is now doing commercials for Tide detergent. Earnest Shirley makes a big deal about how she is a tough investigative reporter determinedly seeking the truth. Through her hard work and research she has discovered that Tide is sooooo good that it has been formally endorsed by Cotton Ltd. (Is it possible that the two companies are part of the same corporation?) Solomon the Wise One's judgment: Tide truly is a marvelous product. Shirley stakes her integrity on it.

Lies! Lies! Lies! Here we see an insidious blurring of the distinction between Endorsement, Advertisement, Entertainment, Information, and Truth. Shirley wouldn't bend the truth to sell soap would she? How about snake oil?

You say I am overly paranoid. You are not worried at all. Perhaps you are right. But I cannot help recalling that ancient warning: "Beware of false prophets."

Morgan Wade

BLACKS ON BLACK

Blacks on Black was established as a vehicle for Black students to express their thoughts. Other than space, there is no limit to the topics that students may address.

We are a diverse people and we should not expect to agree on everything. However, given that we have come to university to learn, perhaps we can take this opportunity to learn about each other.

Preferably articles should be typed, double-spaced, and if possible saved on disk. Please address your submission to Blacks On Black, and bring to the Gazette office (room 312, 3rd floor, SUB) or the Black Student Advising Centre (room 100, main floor, SUB).

Sean Flynn Foy

Opinions Speak

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TRAVEL CUTS
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Week of Reflection

Thursday November 3, 4:30 pm

A meeting for those who are interested in sharing ideas and energy for Week of Reflection.

This is a national week of remembrance and action on the issues surrounding violence against women. This will be Dalhousie's 5th Annual.

Week of Reflection began as a response to the killing of the women students at the Ecolé Polytechnique in Montreal on December 6, 1989. Past events have included vigils, movies, coffeehouses, discussions and guest speakers. If you can't make this meeting, please call the Dalhousie Women's Centre and ask for Lisa.



The Women's Centre also houses a Resource Library and a Referral Service. Please drop by to check us out, borrow from our library, volunteer, drink coffee, join a committee, share creative ideas or tell us what you think.

