

### MULTIPLE CHOICE

#### Julia Scott, *He Doesn't Like to Watch*

That intrusive moment — in a bar, on a subway, at the airport — when a loud television dominates a public place was the original inspiration for TV-B-Gone, a lightweight remote control created by San Francisco engineer Mitch Altman. TV-B-Gone can hang on a keychain and can turn off almost any television, anywhere. The device was so popular that it sold out within hours of its launch in October 2004. And now Altman's remotes are in particular demand, as Adbusters magazine promotes their use in conjunction with TV Turnoff Week. . . .

After Adbusters started it in 1994 with the goal of improving our quality of life, TV Turnoff Week has become a bit of a mainstay. The TV Turnoff Network, a Washington group that promotes TV Turnoff Week mostly in schools, estimates that 7.6 million people participated in the campaign last year. Still, publicity for the event has waned in recent years, so Adbusters took a more radical approach. The magazine's staff believes that some 2,500 TV-B-Gone devices have been bought so far through Adbusters' Web site; there's no way to tell how they'll be distributed in its "Jammer-Group" network of more than 10,000 people. But, for \$15 a pop, the small army can (temporarily) silence that fuzzy white noise in restaurants, coin laundries and waiting rooms.

But does every public TV need to be turned off? Do nature shows get privileged treatment? And does culture jamming run the risk of becoming more annoying than watching Bill O'Reilly in the grocery checkout lane? Salon spoke with Kalle Lasn, Adbusters' editor in chief and the patriarch of TV Turnoff Week, from his home in Vancouver.

**Why did you decide to combine TV-B-Gone with TV Turnoff week?** We brainstormed here at Adbusters and figured that TV Turnoff Week was losing a bit of its oomph over the last few years . . . TV-B-Gone has given our TV Turnoff Week campaign, which was sort of dormant, a bit of magic. TV-B-Gone doesn't exactly give us our voices back, but it helps us get some control. It shuts up that corporate, commercial ad agency voice. In public spaces, they have the right to put up a TV, but I think that we the people who have to live in those public spaces have the right to switch those things off.

**How do you see this working?** I go to a bank every Saturday here in Vancouver. When I'm standing in line I have this group of three TV sets that I'm looking at, whether I like it or not. Last Saturday, I had my TV-B-Gone with me while I was standing in line, and I pressed the button and I switched those TVs off. It was a beautiful moment. It was a moment where I felt that we were in control, rather than the bank with its TV sets.

People's reactions were interesting. Before, everybody was kind of standing there with their heads slightly lifted toward the TV sets. Nobody was talking to each other.

But a few seconds after those TVs went off, people were suddenly talking to each other and looking around. It felt like real life again. It was an epiphany — and the bank didn't even notice.

**But when is it appropriate to turn off someone else's TVs?** I think everybody has to decide for themselves what's off-limits. I know there are some edgy people who will, for the sheer fun of it, switch everything off. But I was at the airport the other day, and there was a big TV set that a number of people were watching, and for some reason I didn't want to switch it off because it was some nature show. I think it's a decision that people can make in the moment it's happening.

**Do you anticipate a number of television vigilantes who will go into stores and bars, switching TVs off?** I think the real question here isn't whether there's going to be a few vigilantes who switch off TV sets. The question is, what right do airports and bank managers have to force us to watch TV in public places?

If you treat this device as a little lark, you're missing the point. It's the tip of the

iceberg in addressing an incredibly polluted mental environment that is now causing  
 mental diseases to the point where the World Health Organization is predicting that  
 by the year 2020, mental diseases will be more widespread than heart disease. We live  
 in an age of mood disorders and anxiety attacks, where depression has gone up by 300  
 percent in two generations. It's gotten to the point where there are ads in fortune  
 cookies, and here in Vancouver, you walk into the bathroom and a TV set suddenly  
 goes on in front of you.

**What do you think of someone going into a sports bar — where people have  
 gone to watch a game — and turning the TV off there? Do you think that's a justi-  
 fied use?** Well, we've done that, and occasionally we had to hightail it out of there  
 really fast because there was going to be a fight. But at the beginning of movements  
 like this one, I think a certain amount of civil disobedience, even if it gets physical  
 after a while, is good.

**But are you sacrificing any educational aspect of TV Turnoff Week this way?**  
 I  
 don't think the educational component has been sacrificed; I think what has been  
 sacrificed is the debate over the larger issues: What is happening in our mental com-  
 mons? What does a commercial do to you? What does media concentration really  
 mean for a democracy? How can so many Americans still think there was a connec-  
 tion between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaida? There's an incredible amount of disin-  
 formation floating around.

1. Kalle Lasn does not explain why he considers “nature shows” (line 18) more appropriate viewing than other programming. Which of the following statements is the most accurate explanation for his viewpoint?
  - a. Nature shows generally air fewer commercials.
  - b. Nature shows are more fun than sports or news.
  - c. Nature shows are less likely to make people want to buy things.
  - d. Nature shows generally promote a liberal viewpoint.
  - e. Nature shows are quieter than other programming.
2. Scott quotes Lasn as saying, “In public spaces, they have the right to put up a TV, but I think that we the people who have to live in those public spaces have the right to switch those things off” (lines 28-30). Which of the following is an appropriate argument against that statement?
  - a. The TVs are actually private property in public spaces.
  - b. The TVs should be automatically tuned to nature shows.
  - c. Corporations are prohibited from forcing people to watch TV.
  - d. Travelers in airports should watch only certain kinds of programming.
  - e. Public TV-viewing should be limited to sports, news, and nature shows.
3. What method does Lasn use to advocate turning off public TVs?
  - a. He pleads with readers to see the issue from his perspective.
  - b. He cajoles the author to tell his side of the story.
  - c. He outlines his ideas and lets readers make their own decisions.
  - d. He presents turning off TVs as a personal decision.
  - e. He presents turning off TVs as a basic human right.

4. How could Lasn strengthen his argument that public TVs contribute to the increase in mental diseases (lines 52-57)?
- recount a personal story of public TVs contributing to his stress
  - cite scientific studies linking public TVs to mental illness
  - recount seeing several people in an airport reacting negatively to public TVs
  - detail more instances in which he turned off the TV in public
  - list several prevalent types of mental diseases and their causes
5. Suppose the author decided to rename this piece. Which of the following titles would be most appropriate?
- “Don’t Miss the Point: TV-B-Gone Is No Little Lark”
  - “Do It Today: Take Control over Your TV”
  - “According to Adbusters, It’s Time to Turn off the TV”
  - “Shut off That Commercial”
  - “Nature Shows OK; Use TV-B-Gone for Everything Else”
6. To what do both Julia Scott and Adbusters attribute the organization’s reinvigorated promotion of TV-B-Gone?
- Publicity for its key event, TV Turnoff Week, had waned in recent years.
  - Hundreds of people complained that they were forced to watch TV in banks.
  - Hundreds of people got into bar fights after they ran in and turned off the TVs.
  - People were refusing to do business in banks that did not show TV.
  - TV-B-Gone’s inventor paid the group to do commercial advertising.
7. Julia Scott’s tone in this article is best described as borderline
- naïve
  - hostile
  - incredulous
  - accepting
  - annoying
8. When Lasn tells Scott he wants people to turn off TVs in public, he is really advocating for peoples’ rights
- not to be accosted by advertising
  - to assert themselves in airports
  - not to be forced to watch nature shows
  - to gauge the public’s reaction to silence
  - to watch what they want to in public spaces

1. *Lasn holds up nature shows as generally less intrusive than other programming, to the point where he declined to turn off a nature show in an airport.*
2. *Lasn glosses over the fact that he is advocating that members of the public manipulate private property and that they could face consequences.*
3. *Lasn uses phrases such as “we the people . . . have the right” (line 29), mimicking the words of America’s founding fathers.*
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5. *Julia Scott is careful to present Lasn’s ideas as his own, making a title crediting Adbusters the most appropriate.*
6. *The author is careful to point out that Adbusters’ embracing TV-B-Gone is an attempt to garner more support for TV Turnoff Week (lines 5-7).*
7. *Scott repeatedly asks Lasn to explain his point and outline how using TV-B-Gone in public works in practice, almost as though she cannot quite believe that it does.*
8. *Lasn makes it clear that his aim is to help people find calm and quiet by keeping advertising out of public spaces.*