

TELE VALIUM

When I started doing Movie Monday the main goal was to provide an option for patients, like myself, to the environment on the psychiatric ward. The common area was dominated by two big TVs at either end of the only common space, usually tuned to talk shows or game shows. In the evenings it was sitcoms, cop shows, and the odd movie laced with commercials. The cacophony of image and noise made spending time there really difficult, and there was lots of time to spend. Visiting with family or friends was sometimes ridiculous.



When I realized the theatre was available downstairs I resolved to try showing movies, an option for patients (and ex-patients as I had become) that would be a well-chosen entertainment, an uninterrupted hour or two, a chance to focus on something in an often distressing and tumultuous time.

Only in my wildest dreams did I think I'd still be showing films there 8 1/2 years and 500+ events later. Sometimes wild dreams, with a little perseverance, come true.

Still, the most gratifying responses I get from any of the MM patrons are from people who are recovering, still patients wearing the EMP bracelet, who are grateful for that option, a sane place to come and focus on something different for a while.

Years later, when I noticed this graffiti on the side of the Schizophrenia Society building on Kings Street, **Tele valium**, I thought how concisely that term describes the role that much of the pop TV programming plays in our lives.

Hey, sometimes a little break from the tension and grind of our reality can be a relief, helpful, even therapeutic. My wife reminds me that for a lot of people in our society TV is a godsend, breaking some of the isolation and tedium that is inherent in our society, especially for the marginalized.

But it can also become like an abused drug. A way of dealing with the pain of that same isolation, poverty, powerlessness - a comfortable habit that perpetuates itself.

At its best film and the TV medium are terrific. Well chosen comedy, drama, and documentary watched critically and shared can be very rewarding.

I think film is the most powerful medium of our time. One of MM's enthusiasts passed me a quote from Carl Jung from a video "The Wisdom Of A Dream".

"The movies are more efficient than the theatre. They're able to show the collective unconscious since their methods of presentation are so unlimited". The commentary in the video went on: *"In our own life, we only get a chance to see perhaps one little piece of a whole archetypal pattern, but in a movie we can have the whole pattern laid out for us in a couple of hours, and in a great enough film, there's really a sense of having been translocated from one's own personal experience ... to something truly universal."*

To watch a good movie in good company, especially in a theatre audience, is a whole better thing. I'm pleased to be able to offer this viable alternative.

When I stick my head in the EMP Theatre during one of our presentations and hear the ripple of laughter over an audience, or when the crowd is buzzing after a show, spinning off ideas about another great film we've presented, I realize we're doing more than just showing the content of movies.

Movie Monday is inviting people to break out of the comfortable isolation of tubing out at home, turning the tele valium technology into an accessible sharing experience that enhances "real" life.

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