



It's Not Too Late

As recently noted in, "It's So Damn Simple," the primary focus of Joseph Chilton Pearce's life-quest was to understand our "Astonishing Capacities and Self inflicted Limitations." Summarized as Joe shares below:

"If we develop the higher structure of our brain/mind, it automatically integrates these lower ones into its service and employs the previous drivers to the best advantage of all. If, however, we fail to develop the higher and just use it by default, we invariably employ its intellectual capacity in the service of our more primitive "defense" systems. This means that those ancient inflexible drivers have fragments of the new power infused into their old ways, which proves devolutionary."

Written thirty-three years ago, "Evolution's End, Calming the Potential of Our Intelligence," dives deep into the ways modern society, especially through childbirth practices, early schooling, and media exposure, disrupts the natural development of human intelligence and creativity. He argues that if we remove these societal blocks, we can unlock our "unlimited, awesome, and unknown" human potential, the culmination of billions of years of evolution.

Little has changed, perhaps generally what Pearce predicted has gotten worse. But Joe's premise and invitation still holds. Highlights from the introduction to Evolution's End."

"The real thesis of this book, however, is the magnificent open-ended possibility that our higher structures of brain/mind hold, the nature of their unfolding, why many of them don't unfold, and what we can do about it."

"All of our perennial philosophies, spiritual paths, religions, dreams and hopes, have spun out of an intuitive knowing that these higher intelligences exist, that life is more than just an economic knee-jerk reflex, that we are not just glorified Skinner-box pigeons or naked apes. On the one hand we have divinized our potential, projecting who we are designed to be onto an abstracted cloud nine rather than fulfilling our evolutionary potential, and falling victim to the politics of that projection. On the other hand, and far more destructively, we have denied our evolutionary nature, grounding ourselves in the more primitive, physically bound modes of our brain/mind, and subjecting ourselves to the magician-priests who can best manipulate that physical realm."

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"If, however, we fail to develop the higher and just use it by default, we invariably employ its intellectual capacity in the service of our more primitive "defense" systems. This means that those ancient inflexible drivers have fragments of the new power infused into their old ways, which proves devolutionary. The new potential is lost and, to compensate, we employ the old system in nefarious ways and make awful creatures, behaving as no decent "lower" animal ever has or will."

"Our personal awareness, with its ego-intellect, makes up an estimated 5 percent of the total intelligent energy of our brain/mind. (The rest provides the environment and maintains the conditions of, this personal 5 percent.) yet with this paltry percentage we try to manipulate universal forces of unknown magnitude and then wonder why everything goes wrong."

"In 1979 the government of California funded the first scientific study ever made of the root causes of crime and violence. Their first report three years later stated that the first and foremost cause of the epidemic increase of violence in America was the violence done to infants and mothers at birth. It is the primary cause of our explosive rise of suicide, drug abuse, family collapse, abandonment and abuse of infants and children, deterioration of schooling, and social disintegration in general. Only television, to be discussed later, comes close in destructive force."

Play's End

Note: What Joe describes about Television applies equally to computers and AI.

"Play develops intelligence, integrates our triune nature, prepares us for higher education, creative thought, and taking part in and upholding a social structure; and helps us prepare for becoming an effective parent when that time comes. Play is the very force of society and civilization, and a breakdown in ability to play will reflect in a breakdown of society. We are a tough, resilient species, our capacity to compensate for damage is enormous. Our children could compensate for hospital childbirth and the ensuing separation anxiety of day care and its abandonment, but children can't compensate beyond a point, and we went beyond that point years ago. Some ten years after we began to systematically separate infants from mothers in hospitals, eliminating bonding and breaking down development of the limbic-heart dynamic, we introduced television. The major damage of television has little to do with content: Its damage is neurological, and it has, indeed, damaged us, perhaps beyond repair.

First, television replaced storytelling in most homes, and it changed the radio from a storyteller to a music box. When television is criticized, its apologists point to similar warnings made when radio burst on the scene early in this century, but radio as an endless storyteller sparked the imagination of and helped give rise to a generation whose creativity changed the face of the earth (for better or worse). Television, on the other hand, has now been with us far longer than radio was before television's introduction, and its programming has deteriorated at an astonishing rate for the same reasons that it damages us.

Television also replaced family conversation in general. The television tray replaced the dinner table and its captivating table talk. Carol Gilligan points out that grandmothers used to sit and relate their childhood stories to a rapt audience of grandchildren. That remarkable series of books by Laura Ingalls Wilder grew out of her parents and grandparents "telling their stories." Gilligan saw this as a primary need that grandmothers had (a recapitulation that rounded out their lives), but grandmother tales filled many needs: they provided a continuity between generations, gave children a sense of history, and established a continuum of meaning to life. I heard both my grandmother's and grandfather's stories either directly or indirectly through my parents. And I knew my mother's childhood as I did my fathers by their reminiscing, which would hold us spellbound on a winter's evening or at the table. I clearly saw my father's boyhood on the river at Milan, Tennessee, so clearly that to this day those images, formed as he told his tales, shine so vividly in my mind I mistake them for my own childhood. I see him as a little boy skipping school to play with his handmade boats, harbor, and wharf; when he forgot them one evening and the river's rise carried them all away, the loss felt like my own. My mother's childhood played out in such clear images that the last decades of the nineteenth century were as real to me as my own day. Both my paternal and maternal grandmothers' far less gentle stories of escaping the Yankee armies in the Civil War made that conflict intensely real, my very own struggle. In passing their stories on they gave us tradition, continuity, place, and meaning. We knew who we were and where we came from, our lives had significance, drama, meaning. "Tell me about when you were a little boy" my daughter begs, and never tires of listening (even to my repetitions and elaborations).

Second, with television on the scene, parents rarely played with children. All sat around the box, and even playing among siblings disappeared. Thus, no capacity for play and its internal imaging developed. Nintendo does not and cannot replace imaginative play.

Third, and perhaps most critical, television floods the infant-child brain with images at the very time his or her brain is supposed to learn to make images from within. Story telling feeds into the infant-child a stimulus that brings about a response of image making that involves every aspect of our triune system. Television feeds both stimulus *and* response into that infant-child brain, as a single paired-effect, and therein lies the danger. Television floods the brain with a counterfeit of the response the brain is supposed to learn to make to the stimuli of words or music. As a result, much structural coupling between mind and environment is eliminated; few metaphoric images develop; few higher cortical areas of the brain are called into play; few, if any, symbolic structures develop. $E=MC^2$ will be just marks on paper, for there will be no metaphoric ability to transfer those symbols to the neo-cortex for conceptualization, and subsequently, no development of its main purpose: symbolic conceptual systems.

An equally insidious effect is habituation—the natural condition of our two animal brains with their hard-wired response to “concrete information.” Unable to adapt to novelty, these primitive systems avoid it. They seek out compatible stimuli and feel “comfortable” with familiar input unless moved by the novelty seeking of the neo-cortex. Recall how a new story told to a child ties up a majority of the neural fields and locks in all three systems to create a flow of new imagery matching the new stimuli. Repetition brings myelination and stabilizes the creative action. That imagery pattern becomes an integral part of the neural system and is then played out on the external world, part of the general reference maps called on in an expanding world. Note that each new story requires a whole new set of patterns to accommodate the new stimuli, requiring entrainment of all three brains over and over. The brain is challenged anew and continually enlarges the number of neural fields involved in new image-pattern flows.

Television, as a source of paired image and sound, can be assimilated by a single set of neural fields. The same neural fields initially worked out to handle such a paired stimuli-source fires in, that singular field responds. Note that we *habituate to television within a few minutes of viewing*, from the very first exposure on—since no creative response to such stimuli need or can be made. That response is already part of the stimuli coming in. This means, in effect, that those six thousand hours of television the average child in the United States sees by age five might as well have been all one program.

Recently groups of five- and six-year-olds were shown a number of regular television shows designed for their age group. For this experiment, the sound tracks were switched so that the sound did not match the imagery on any of the programs. The children did not recognize the discrepancy. The reason is that the brain habituates to the single source of stimuli; primary autonomous processes take over at any repetition of that stimuli, regardless of its apparent variety. So, the nature of the stimuli, the program, is beside the point, and so much for the wonderful information and learning programs often proposed for those six thousand hours.

Habituation also pacifies the brain, puts it to sleep, since the stimulus includes the brain’s own response and so demands almost no output of energy from the brain, while it occupies the mind so that no other stimuli are sought. This again indicates that habituation is a primary reptilian response. Paul MacLean shows that the R-system takes over all learned physical patterns of the neo-cortex. Once the R-system can handle a source economically, it doesn’t need to carry the signals higher. With the rapid turnover of imagery, the apparent novelty of the programming fools the novelty seeking aspect of the neo-cortex. Combined with the habituation, we have difficulty turning away even when we hate the program playing.

Failing to develop imagery means no imagination. This is far more serious than not being able to daydream. It means children who can’t “see” what the mathematical symbol or the semantic words mean; nor the chemical formulae; nor the concept of civilization as we know it. They can’t comprehend the subtleties of our constitution or Bill of Rights and are seriously (and rightly) bored by abstractions of this sort. They can sense only what is immediately bombarding their physical system and are restless and ill-at-ease without such bombardment. Being sensory deprived they initiate stimulus through

constant movement or intensely verbal interaction with each other, which is often mistaken for precocity but is actually a verbal hyperactivity filling the gaps of the habituated bombardments.

The average child in the United States sees six thousand hours of television by their fifth year, at which point, in the midst of what should be the high point of their dreamlike world of play, we put them in school, prevent bodily movement (most purposive learning is sensory-motor at this age), and demand they handle highly abstract-symbolic systems (alphabets and numbers) for which most of them have no neural structures at all. Driven by nature to follow their models, they try and can't. Their self-esteem collapses and failure and guilt give rise to anger. Even after beginning school, they continue their time-percentage of television viewing unabated. They spend more hours looking at television than attending school, and our national daily viewing time grows year by year.

Having no inner imaging capacity leaves most the brain unemployed, and a child who can't imagine not only can't learn but has no hope in general: He or she can't "imagine" an inner scenario to replace the outer one, so feels victimized by the environment. A recent study showed that unimaginative children are far more prone to violence than imaginative children, because they can't imagine an alternative when direct sensory information is threatening, insulting, unpleasant, or unrewarding. They lash out against unpleasantness in typical R-system defensiveness, while the imaginative child can imagine an alternative, that is, create images not present to the sensory-system that offer a way out. True playing is the ability to play with one's reality. Thus, imagination gives resiliency, flexibility, endurance, and the capacity to forego immediate reward on behalf of long-term strategies.

Forty years ago, along with the epidemic of day care and television, a new phenomenon burst on the American scene: the toy store. Until that time, the average American child had a maximum of some five toys. I can recall each of mine; they were precious. Christmas, the only time we ever got a toy, was a time of near unbearable excitement. My Flexible Flyer Sled was secondhand, but lasted my whole childhood. My Radio Flyer wagon was new when I got it and lasted from my fifth year until my twelfth year as a major item. My Rollfast skates were new and lasted until my fourteenth year. I used them hard. (a new pair cost 79 cents, no small sum.) I bought, for \$2.87, my bicycle at age eleven, an ancient relic for which I saved for two years, and it lasted till I left home at fourteen. I never heard the word bored until I was in the armed service in World War II. I never knew a bored child in my own childhood. There was far too much to do, yet we had only a few toys.

When today's toddler sees her mother making cookies and wants to take part, she need not resort to jar top, stick, and mud, like some primitive. She probably has a complete miniature kitchen, scale-model perfect with battery operated appliances. When a five-year-old sees the road-roller he doesn't need to find an old spool: The massive toy industry provides a complete road-roller, exact in detail, battery powered so that the child can watch passively as he does when the same item is advertised on television. Children are inundated with objects that don't stand for something but already are. A clothes-pin need not be draped with an old rag to make a doll; our daughters have shelves bulging with dolls of every description—life-like, sexy, indeed complete with all the organs for real precocious sophistication if you like. Where is the metaphoric-symbolic learning or the dream-world of play-acting the adult?

The electronic toy that does everything at the push of a button itself habituates. Boredom sets in immediately; what's next? Even playing with such objects children often merely act out the images advertised on television. When they identify with the television children playing with the same toy they feel some group authenticity, a belonging not found elsewhere. Television, of course, is the way to sell those toys that then represent the television images flooding the young brain, reinforcing the television stimulus when that stimulus is absent.

The 30 percent or so of our children still capable of learning in school have been read to and played with by their parents, generally in addition to television and mountains of plastic junk. This shows how little attention is needed to nourish the brain and get its creativity going. While the screen itself prevents neural development, its content affects behavior. By 1963 studies had shown a direct one-for-one correspondence between the content of television and behavior. Violence on television produces

violent behavior in young people. Everyone knows that. Once one has habituated to violence as a way of life, however, anything less is boring. There are sixteen acts of violence per hour of children's programming, only eight per hour on adult's. By the time our children become teenagers, they have seen an estimated 18,000 violent murders on television, their primary criteria for what is "real." Life is shown to be expendable and cheap, yet we condemn them for acting violently.

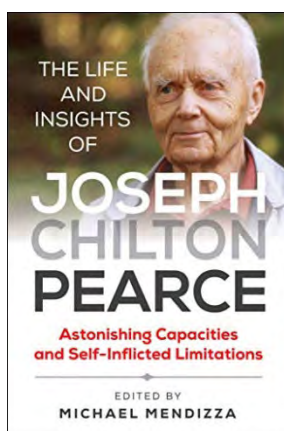
One final point that needs mention in this parade of intellectual interference with the intelligence of childhood is minor but has its effect too. In the last chapter I showed how play in the pre-puberty and early adolescent period centered around the concept of *us*, group action, and the need for self-constraint on behalf of us, the team, club, or organization. My concern here is over our sand lot football, baseball, and street games. Sometime after World War II, society suddenly had no room for children, our quiet childhood streets filled with speeding autos, many new communities had no sidewalks; yards were status symbols, and children's play was relegated to playgrounds with professional playground supervisors. Child safety became a paramount concern. Supervised play replaced child play. Adult rules, regulations, and decisions began to replace our passionately defended personal criteria and judgments.

The high point of this adult intrusion on childhood centered in Little League. Gone were the choosing up of sides, the striving for fairness, arguing the rules and infringements, the heated hammering out of decisions. Everything was managed by adults. They created the teams and provided the uniforms, which of course soon carried advertisements of "sponsors", adults made the rules and regulations and enforced them; adults called the shots, children stood, grim-faced and serious while parents on the sidelines shouted invectives for victory at all costs. This new child carried the team, sponsor, parents, and social image on his or her shoulders into victory or defeat. Insidiously, Little League targeted younger and younger children, until even the little tots were dutifully marching out in full advertising array to do battle with the enemy. Whatever might have been left of play after television was killed by Little League and other organized sports leagues, substituting a deadly serious adult form of win-or-lose competition for what had been true play. Gone are the invaluable social learnings, self-restraint, and ability to decide.

There are many other facets to the current collapse of childhood. I have touched on the issue only briefly, but one thing is clear, our schools have deteriorated because they must deal with damaged goods. Most responsible for this damage is hospital childbirth; second comes television. Next comes day care, which fosters television and is a result of hospital childbirth. Premature schooling runs fourth. (A fifth must wait a bit for discussion.) and as our damaged children grow up and become the parents and teachers, damage will be the norm, the way of life. We will habituate to damage. Nothing else will be known. How can you miss something you can't even recognize, something you never had?"

Note: For much more by Joseph Chilton Pearce please visit <https://ttfuture.org/joseph-chilton-pearce/>

For the most intimate and concise overview of Joes' life and insights, please pick up a copy:



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