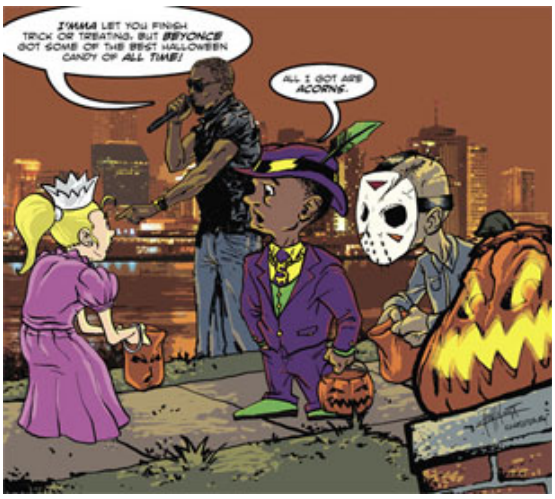

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Television: Better Than Reading

By Thomas Eldredge

The newspaper you are reading is obsolete. The fiber paper, the ink, and even the printed words themselves are as outdated as a two-week-old security patch from Microsoft. You are forcing yourself to endure this excruciatingly boring and exact method of information conveyance because you're a self-loathing intellectual. If you didn't hate yourself so much, you'd be watching television like everyone else. Fortunately for me, this newspaper exists, and you do hate yourself.

The core technology utilized by this archaic publication is over 500 years old. The movable-type printing press was invented in 1439 by Johannes Gutenberg, who was as German as his name suggests. Germans have always been on the cutting edge of information technology.

Having pioneered the process to create books, Germany later took on the task of destroying them, honing the techniques of modern mass book-burning in the 1930s. Variations of this time-honored tradition are still practiced worldwide by pretty much anyone with a gallon of gas and a grudge.

Even with the advantages of mass printing, fire remains a threat to information stored in things that burn, occasionally including people. Not surprisingly, the terms incendiary and inflammatory are applied to statements and publications that make people angry and confused, primarily because historically, angry and confused people tend to address their frustrations with fire.

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Until the 20th century, information was still very difficult to reproduce. Anything that wasn't carved in stone or set in metal was subject to becoming illegible ash. Radio was created as the first flame-resistant method of conveying information to large audiences. Radio also reached beyond the boundaries of illiteracy at a time when education was scarce.

Though radio had obvious advantages, it also had severe limitations. It took some time for engineers and financiers to recognize that the intrinsic problem with radio is that it is very boring to look at. Moving pictures in film were widely accepted and enjoyed by the 1900s, but these pictures had no synchronized sound and occasionally required audiences to read words off the screen. Never had there been a better time to synergize backwards overflow.

The public bayed for a new, less engaging form of mass media. America wanted a device that would allow them to experience the world as distracted voyeurs without sullying their own imaginations. Radio programming required active listening, and movie theaters required wearing clothes and sitting next to unpleasant people. The perfect media format would have picture and sound, and would fit snugly in the average living room.

The concept of such a device was well known, but the practical problems in creating one prevailed. Several approaches to broadcasting images were implemented. Some of the first successful trials in television were mechanical devices utilizing spinning disks to serialize visual information into analog radio waves. While functional, it was widely believed that a fully electronic television would be the most efficient.

In 1923, a pimple-faced 17-year-old from Utah named Philo Farnsworth found himself without a prom date. The '20s were an especially bad time to be a dateless nerd. It was a decade before Heinlein or Bradbury got started publishing science fiction, almost 50 years before *Star Trek*, and the better part of a century before *Lord of the Rings* came out on DVD.

As prom night approached, young Philo called every pimp and escort service in town, but could not find a date. Defeated, the night before prom, Philo sat down and invented the first fully electronic television. Unfortunately, on prom night, Philo discovered that no one had invented the television network yet, so he went barking mad and was later cast as the professor on *Futurama*.

The landscape of American mass media was changed forever that fateful prom night. The way we distribute information was transformed from a two-way system, dependent on literacy and discourse, to the efficient, modern, one-way pipeline, spewing high-velocity, low-density information into America's face.

Television is the new newspaper; it is also the new family hearth, babysitter, tutor, moral guide, political advisor, and, occasionally, the entire legislative branch of government. Television has become part of the infrastructure of Western Civilization, and without it, we would be at the mercy of the ancient, tedious traditions of reading and writing.

Television is on the cusp of a much-needed renaissance. The

United States will soon shut down all full-power analog-broadcasting stations, and on that day, the age of digital television will begin. On February 17, 2009, your old rabbit-eared clunker will quietly congratulate itself on never having to suffer another episode of *Sex and the City*, and then it will fall silent forever.

Of course, you could buy a converter, but you'll probably decide to buy a new television instead, so that you can enjoy watching lecherous skanks in 720 lines of resolution instead of only 480. Or you could choose the high-end option and enjoy twice the skank in 1080i.

The move to digital and HD takes us only one step further in the progression of digital motion pictures. Optical and display technology is developing at an astonishing rate, and the foreseeable horizon in the field actually has better resolution than the actual horizon.

On November 9 this year, Red Digital Cinema released specs for their new line of motion picture cameras: Scarlet and Epic. The pricing and capabilities of these devices is making the rest of the digital camera industry sweat like Rush Limbaugh in a Mexican pharmacy. The low-end Scarlet at 3K is three times the resolution of HD and costs less than most prosumer camcorders. The Epic, with a shocking 28K resolution, is still priced less than the CineAlta that shot the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy.

Though there are no displays that can register anything near a 28K image, resolution is only one component of a convincing picture. Innovators like Mitsubishi are poised with technologies such as the laser television, with color depth and contrast latitudes that begin to rival the perceptive range of the human eye.

Though a boon for entertainment, these mind-boggling optical and display technologies will inevitably result in the fall of the human race and the ascendance of the stomatopod, or mantis shrimp. These astonishing creatures are uniquely capable of hyperspectral vision, making them the only life form able to tell the difference between reality and reality television in the emerging LudicrousHD format.

Also, the mantis shrimp really is an astonishing creature and is well worth a search on Wikipedia if you happen to get bored after or while reading this article, or you could just wait until The Discovery Channel makes a show about them.

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