

image



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dissector

image



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dissector

it was the season of drying-out.
the air had dried
the grass had dried
you were plowing a field
of golden hay. fourteen years old
and you had known hay and potatoes and the town of
rigby, idaho
and the log cabin in utah where you were born and
what else did you know? as the hay fell
it slanted in alternating directions, one mechanically
crafted row
then the next line of bright parched grass,
and it occurred to you
that perhaps the way to take apart an image was
row
by
row.

i picture your image erased in horizontal rows, that sort
of a death
i know it wasn't a complete defeat
i know you kept television out of your house, couldn't
bear to lay eyes on her, but
i know that you kept on fighting long enough
to make an exception
for when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon
and you said that moment
made it all worthwhile,
the giant leap for mankind
shared through television with all of us & knowing that
you made this possible
so while i might curse you i might also thank you,
knowing
that even the most cruel of devices start with the elec-
tricity in somebody's head,
with light, with a field of hay long made into soil now...

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you married your high-school sweetheart,
the one with the lush brown curls,
the one that you danced with
at all the fridaynight mormon mixers,
and on your wedding night i hear you grabbed her by
the shoulders (passionately?)
“I have to tell you there is another woman in my life—
and her name is Television.”
other men envisioned her mechanically,
with little whirring parts,
but you... televisioneer... perceived
electrons, imgagically invisioned
her new mysterious shape.
by the time you were twenty-one,
you’d applied for a patent
“The damned thing works.”

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Grandly
“Out of the West like the realization of a prophet’s
dream has come the greatest magic of the civilized
day... the perfected miracle of the new plaything of the
world’s millions.”
They said.
Or
“Television? The word is half Greek and half Latin.
No good will come of it.”
They said.
But not to Philo
Since the suits from the Radio Corporation of America
came down to visit his lab, took notes, and promptly
came up with their own electron scanning
image dissector
embroiling him in patent suits that would siphon
Philo’s money and life
while they built the greatest telecommunications
empire the country knew.

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was it like having a child stolen, a woman stolen,
a thought
painfully plucked straight from your neural circuitry,
or worse? could anyone ever know the feeling?
...anyone could know what it's like
to be tired of fighting and want to die
could know what it's like to be addicted to sedatives,
though we might not know the taste of chloral hydrate,
could know what it's like to
whisky one's self into oblivion
the electroshock therapy, harder to know, and here i
stare at you though a blank screen,
the hollow sound of rapping on heavy chemical glass

(did you have a special relationship with the electron?
when the jolts came, was it a kind of ecstatic merging
with the electricity you'd so carefully come to under-
stand? or a kind of betrayal?)

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For the year was 1921
and Philo T. Farnsworth as he plowed
was puzzling over the problem of how to send and
receive images.
He asked his chemistry teacher for advice.
His teacher knew Philo was a genius
so all he could say was
"Study like the devil and keep mum."

you studied like the devil.
the devil had cathode rays in the palm of his hand
changing invisible electrons into gleaming light
he enchanted dead vacuum spaces,
captured light in a bottle.
this witchery alive in your mind,
while your hands tried
to make the glass and orange shellac comply...

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