

# up against the future

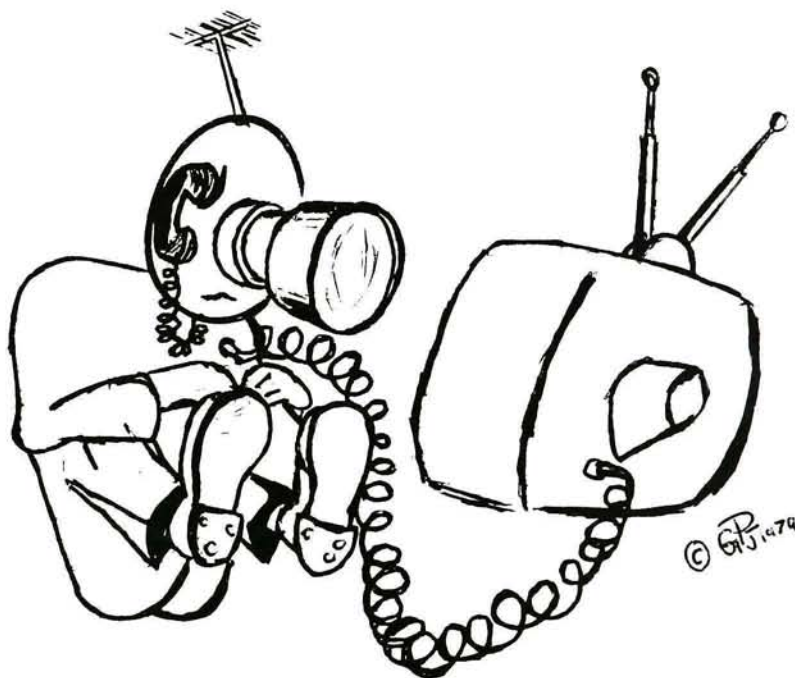
or why the issue isn't pay tv ✱

$$70 \times 18 = 1260 \times .02 = 25.20$$

Want to watch yourself partake in *Deep Throat*?  
Want to see yourself step out of the latest Eaton's  
catalogue? All this and more maybe possible through  
the use of Pay-TV and a highly controversial Matrix  
Card. Take a futuristic look with G. Philip Jackson.

by Philip Jackson

## BIRTH



a tv tube baby

I wanted to write a strictly imaginary story.  
It would go like this:  
A boy explores the forest area about his cottage. He is not

certain what will happen to him, but he knows that the day  
will present him with a number of extraordinary events.  
It does.

He finds an abandoned city in the forest. It is a strange city that belonged to the energy-rich past, but was closed, like so many others, as part of the "urban rationalization" programme imposed by the government in the years of adaptation to the real energy crisis.

The boy wanders through the city trying to imagine what it was like when it was populated, in the days when people drove cars.

A large and frightening man emerges onto the street. He is a derelict who lives in the ghost city. He staggers, says he is not well, and begs the boy to help him.

This is the problem. The man looks menacing, and the boy is alone. He hesitates.

The picture of the man freezes. The hypnotic pulse of the set is broken off, allowing the boy to snap out of his super concentrated state. The teacher's image is superimposed on the screen.

"Why are you hesitating?" the teacher asks.

"Because I don't know what the right thing to do is," explains the boy.

"What do you think it is?" asks the teacher.

"I don't know," insists the boy. "He scares me."

"Perhaps you should have considered such a possibility before you chose to go exploring alone," the teacher says.

"You mean I made the mistake at the beginning?" asks the boy.

"What do you think?" replies the teacher.

The story would continue with the boy and the teacher agreeing to try another scenario, the set changes image. The boy has never been to a cottage — not really — most of his waking hours are spent watching himself behave on a screen, in which he controls his actions, but in a world which is drawn from libraries, its images integrated with his choice of actions.

The boy virtually lives within these scenarios where he is penalized or rewarded for making the right or wrong choice.

The boy's choices are adapted to his environment and situation by a complex computer and communications system, the product of the meeting of technologies.

It is, an imaginary story. An expert in computer and communications technology might want to call it "facile."

So I will tell you another story.

I did *not* make it up.

It was told to me by an expert in communications technology.

He advises the government on the future.

He told me that in the future, the future I can expect to live in, I will be able to dial a number on my telephone (by this time it will be unusual to talk to people by telephone) and that this number will, for instance, correspond to the Eaton's catalogue. I will dial the sub-number that corresponds to "men's fashions." The result will be that a video program demonstrating "Men's Fashions" will play on my "television" screen.

That is not remarkable.

What is remarkable is that I will have a card. It is called a "Matrix Card" and it will tell a certain computer what my bodily proportions are, what the shape of my face is, and color of my hair. I insert the card in a device subsidiary to my telephone, and the tape of the mens' fashion begins to play. The computer will correct the proportions and appearance of the model who wore the clothes when the tape was made, to resemble my own. The computer, I am told, will separate the models form from the rest of the picture, and use the information from the matrix card to place me there, by way of an ingenious paint-by-number system not unlike the one used to broadcast the image of Jupiter to Earth from the Pioneer 10 spacecraft.

What is happening now, is that I think I see myself on that screen, wearing the latest in men's fashions, moving, turning, smiling.

I don't know a thing about computers.

I was assured that such a technology would just as easily allow me to watch myself partake in Deep Throat.

Quite a thing, that matrix card.

I must in fairness say that the expert from whom I learned these things never claimed to love the system he was envisaging.

I, of course, hurriedly qualified his story saying that for the moment such a system was strictly a speculative thing, noting that developing technologies often evolve to be applied in manners totally unlike what had been foreseen by those closest to their invention.

He agreed, but cautioned me saying that in terms of strict hardware, all the components needed to develop such a system exist. All that remains to be done, he said, is integrate them.

"What would some of these systems to be integrated be?" I asked.

"To begin," he said, "cable television systems with information retrieval systems, Pay TV systems, computerized banking, and the phone system, the full range of telecommunications integrated and accessible to the individual..."

To begin.

So now I think back to this half-hearted controversy over pay-TV. Pay-TV means a lot to us we say, because it is the system which may allow us to assert a degree of cultural independence. It might be our last chance.

But Pay-TV is also something else.

Pay-TV, when it comes, will be the first true thread integrating these technologies, particularly to the extent that it is developed with direct feedback capacities (as we have seen it done experimentally in the States) and with growing information retrieval capacity.

The feedback ability will, as it has been said, bring referendum politics of a new sort into the realm of the possible.

The near 600 channel capacity of fibre optic cables could revolutionize the fundamental financial and organizational premise of the television production and broadcasting business, perhaps — in a few years, that fashion catalogue.

Of course, people know this. They know it in the CRTC, in the telephone company, in government and private information service organizations, in telecommunications and broadcasting.

Which is to say that when you hear Ottawa talking about Pay TV, they're not really concerned with Pay TV itself at all.

I didn't make that up either.

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*G. Philip Jackson, once of Jackson-Lorrimer Film, heads-up Lightscape and is in production with four films. He is also starting a distribution company for Canadian, experimental short films in Paris.*



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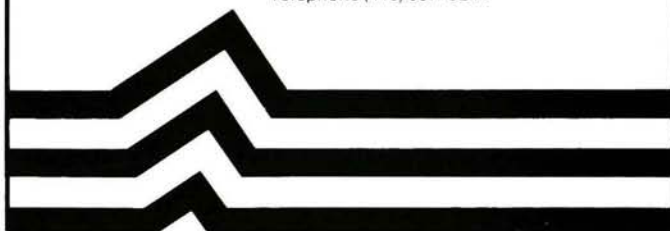
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