



CST online is a scholarly resource and critical forum for studying television. It is our mission to enrich television studies by providing comprehensive access to information, as well as to disseminate knowledge and stimulate debate.

Latest from TV REFLECTIONS

- [Thinking Inside the Box: Heisenberg's Indeterminacy Principle, the Paradox of Schrodinger's Cat, and Television](#)
- [JFK, Don Draper, and the New Sentimentality](#)
- [Can docudrama/docufiction do justice to the legal system?](#)
- [The Butterfly Effect: The Chaos of Television](#)
- [Unknown TV Classics](#)

“The status is not quo”: Television’s *Horrible* Future

David Lavery
-A +A

January 2009.

I'm interested in being an Internet Roger Corman. He's responsible for a slew of the greatest directors of the last couple decades, because he was the only B-movie system that there was. Now the whole world can be that system.

--Joss Whedon (Rosen 33)

May 2004: the last time a new Joss Whedon show (*Angel*) was broadcast on television. Starved for fresh Whedon, the cult television master's faux grocery list (published on the Dateline Hollywood website) caused a minor sensation in 2005, with fans supposedly demanding it be made into a new television series.

In reality, Whedonians would need to wait four more years—until July of 2008—for another taste of Joss TV. *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* was quintessential Whedon: naughty, hilarious, cultish, collaborative (Whedon acknowledges assistance only from "everyone I had worked with, was related to or had ever met" [Whedon]), exhilarating, genre-bending, virally memorable (especially its catchy music and Sondheim-goes-geek patter lyrics)—a near-perfect manifestation of the "loser aesthetic" identified by Richard Burt and elucidated by Matt Hills that had been Whedon's TV auteur signature in *Buffy*, *Angel*, and *Firefly*. (Though no grocery lists figured in the tale, Captain Hammer's stalkerish groupies are obsessed with his laundry bill.)



The end of 2008 brought many accolades for this "TV show that has never been shown on TV" (*Guardian*). The American Film Institute, for example, named the Dr. one of the 10 "Moments of Significance" for the year," and *Time Magazine's* James Poniewozik perplexingly designated it one of the top ten television shows of the year. Much deserved praise indeed—except for the minor caveat that *Dr. Horrible* has never aired on television. First available free on the Internet (at drhorrible.com), then downloadable on iTunes, watchable (with commercial interruptions) on hulu.com, DHSAB was finally disseminated as a DVD (as I write, early in the new year, released in December 2008, is the fourth best seller on Amazon.com).

Related

- [Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog – A Cult TV Event without the TV](#)
- [CFP: Television Auteurs](#)
- [‘Breaking the Ninth Wall’ with Dr. Horrible’s Sing-Along Blog: Internet Creation](#)
- [Community Media and European Policy: Workshop und Panel Discussion, 12-14 March 2008, Halle \(Saale\)](#)
- [The Future of Public Service Broadcasting, 10 June 2010, City University London](#)

Works Cited

- ["AFI Moments of Significance."](#)
- Richard Burt. *Unspeakable ShaXXXspears: Queer Theory and American Kiddie Culture*. New York: St. Martin's, 1998.
- Matt Hills *Fan Cultures*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Jeff Jensen. "Are You Killing TV?" *Entertainment Weekly*, 1 June 2008: 34-39.
- Damon Lindelof. "Mourning Television".
- James Poniewozik. "Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog".
- Lisa Rosen. "New Media Guru." *Written By*. January 2009: 26-33.
- Dave Smith. "Horribly good internet plot to kill off TV: The creator of Buffy has broken Hollywood's grip by launching a superhero show on a blog".
- Joss Whedon. "A Letter from Joss Whedon."

The efficient cause (in Aristotelian terms) of *DHSAB* was the Writer's Guild of American strike, which led to the downtime, not to mention fears about entertainment's future, that brought together Whedon and his collaborators to undertake, in a "professionalish" manner (Whedon) the *Dr.* on a shoestring budget and in a Hollywood minute. The exigencies of the last WGA strike (1988) were a powerful factor in the gestation of American reality television. Will *Dr. Horrible* be seen as the breakout star of 2007-2008's picket line? The status quo, after all, was under attack from much more than a work stoppage.

In *Entertainment Weekly* four months before the strike began, Jeff Jensen asked his readers "Are You Killing TV?" (the answer is a qualified yes, with DVRs, iTunes, file sharing the murder weapons), and writing in the *New York Times* contemporaneously with the WGA's hoisting of placards, *Lost* co-creator Damon Lindelof would "mourn" the passing of television as we know it. "Convergence culture" was in the process of being born; "transmedia storytelling" was becoming all the rage; what had once been broadcasting is leaping from platform to platform.

As I write, on the same day Barack Obama is described (on CNN) as the first "multi-platform" President, a new issue of an official Writer's Guild of America publication arrives in the mail, featuring a handsome photo of Whedon and the words "Web Master: Joss Whedon Pioneers the Internet." In Lisa Rosen's excellent Roseane-to-Horrible career overview inside, her subject discounts any claim to internet guru status—claiming to be so ignorant he can't even find porn—or being a business pioneer—"Somebody coming to me for business advice is like somebody asking a guy who makes balloon animals how to pick up women" (33), but he does not deny *DHSAB*'s nature as a pathbreaking media phenomenon and admits to a possible new ambition sparked in him by its "very mid-life-crisis" creation: to be "an Internet Roger Corman." The status will no longer be quo, for Whedon or for television.

David Lavery is professor of English at Middle Tennessee State University and the author/editor/co-editor of numerous essays and books, including *Joss: A Creative Portrait of the Maker of the Whedonverses* (I. B. Tauris/St. Martin's, 2009) and volumes on such television series as *Twin Peaks*, *The X-Files*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The Sopranos*, *Lost*, *Deadwood*, *Seinfeld*, *My So Called Life*, *Heroes*, and *Battlestar Galactica*. He co-edits the e-journal *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* and is one of the founding editors of *Critical Studies in Television: Scholarly Studies of Small Screen Fictions*. He has lectured around the world on the subject of television.

User comments

Comment on this post

Your comments will be moderated before being displayed above.

Name (required):

Email

Comment: (required):

Please answer: (required):

What is a baby dog called?: