

# Faster is better, don't hold back

I disagree with Colin Mac Donald's article of two weeks ago which expressed that many commercial products are improving constantly. He also argued that constant advancements in technology are making us increasingly lazy. He further suggested that "technology should slow down". On the contrary, it should be argued that the (present) adequate status quo is neither adequate nor suitable. It will never be.

First of all, what is an adequate or suitable technology? Take computers for example. Is there a computer that is fast enough? For whom? I'm quite sure that the fastest supercom-

puter would be able to keep up with my typing, but would it be able to keep up with an astrophysicist who wants to create a complex model of colliding galaxies? No matter how fast the computer, it would take time (days... weeks) to do this and in the meantime, our astrophysicist friend would have to wait. Until computers can do this type of task instantaneously, they are too slow and in need of improvement.

I emphasize the word "wait" because it helps to dispel this notion that faster technologies tend to make us lazy. I once had to design ads using computers — some fast, some slow. It was creative work, so I would often

experiment with an ad in order to see what looked best. However, I only did this on the faster computers, because the slow ones couldn't keep up with me. I had to wait and as a result I became backlogged.

My work suffered directly from using slow computers because they forced me to become "lazy" and to simplify my designs. Even the "fast" computers would keep me waiting. I can remember waiting 40 minutes for one page to print out. Is this

"suitable"? The end product has nothing to do with laziness, but instead, making compromises because of a limited technology which needs to be improved.

Nothing is adequate in science. Nothing will ever be fast enough. To suggest such is to suggest that everything has already been done. And picking an arbitrary point in time and saying that such-and-such is "good-enough" goes against what science is ultimately about. In the

end, it seems that the only lazy persons with respect to technology are those who do not challenge it by pushing its boundaries.

It should be the aim of science to improve itself for the benefit of the world at large. Whether this manifests itself in a better laundry detergent, faster computer or better mousetrap doesn't really matter. All of these pursuits are worthwhile.

Michael Graham

## Science can be fun

There is a conception out there that science is just cold hard facts, and that scientists just sit in their sterile labs and pick through the genetic code of the South American Spotted Salamander or the subatomic structure of a gluon.

This is simply not true... some-

times. Science does not have to be ordinary. We can sidestep normal boundaries. As a friend of mine (who has a degree in philosophy) is fond of pointing out:

"Biology is really chemistry, chemistry is really physics, physics is really math, and math is really phi-

losophy." From here we can have some real fun. As Monty Python reminds us in "The Philosopher's Song", philosophers can be a wild bunch (here I would like to apologize to any philosophers I might offend).

Speaking of drinking, there is a story about the man who came up with the structure of benzene (a very important organic molecule). The story has it that this man and his colleagues had been stumped for months trying to determine the structure. One night, the man stayed up late drinking laudanum (an opium derivative), listening to Mozart and staring into the flames in the fireplace. According to him, he 'saw' the structure of benzene in the flames. So this guy gets stoned on consciousness-expanding drugs and hallucinates the answer to his problem. Ha! Timothy Leary, eat your heart out.

I have a theory about Einstein. Dear old Al was a patent clerk who taught himself math and physics, and we are expected to believe that he came up with a theory, unaided, that revolutionized our entire world? I don't think so. I figure he got really loaded one night and started to play with numbers. Now just about all of us, who drink at least, have had moments of inspiration that we can't seem to remember the next day. The same probably happened to Einstein, except he was right and wrote it down. Next thing he knows, he's world-famous and gets to play the violin with the Queen of Austria anytime he wants. Not bad for the price of some cheap brandy!

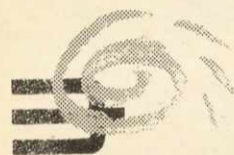
Now I am not saying that all great science has been brought about by drunks and junkies. Oh no. A lot of great discoveries were accidents.

For example, Lucite, the first plastic. Lucite was discovered because a lab technician forgot to throw out a beaker of stuff before they left for the night. The next morning plastic was a reality. Teflon, of no-stick frying pan fame, was created when a guy left a container of refrigerator coolant under high-pressure for too long. Even Newton's 'discovery' of gravity was an accident. If Newton had worn a hard hat, we might still be wondering why things fall down instead of up.

So science isn't always dry and boring. Scientists often draw inspiration from the same sources as artists: Nature, stuff from the fridge and the occasional foray into the realms of intoxication.

Todd Raine

In January of 1934 the Gazette's lead headline was "McGill and Dalhousie debate, over radio!". The story detailed a debate between the McGill and Dal debating teams that was held over a wireless radio.



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CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

### THE NEW CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

During the 1960's and 1970's, generations of Canadians believed in the vision of a better world through international development. False, answers Dr. Bezanson, President of IDRC. Dr. Bezanson argues that while the context in which development finds itself has dramatically changed, this new context can be the basis for a rejuvenated vision of global development.

Dr. Bezanson will discuss this issue at an upcoming public address at Mount Saint Vincent University on February 3, 1994. EVERYONE IS WELCOME TO ATTEND.

FREE ADMISSION

7:00 pm, February 3, 1994

Auditorium "D", Seton Academic Centre  
Mount Saint Vincent University

This event is jointly sponsored by Dalhousie University, Mount Saint Vincent University and Saint Mary's University.

The International Development Research Centre, (IDRC), is a public corporation created by an Act of Parliament in 1970 to assist developing countries in finding their own solutions to development problems through research. In June 1992, during the occasion of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (The Earth Summit), the Prime Minister of Canada announced that IDRC's mandate would be broadened to emphasize sustainable and equitable development issues.

Dalhousie Chaplain's Office presents:

### ECOLOGICAL FEMINISM

with Heather Eaton

#### ECOLOGY AND THEOLOGY

Why is the ecological crisis a theological issue?  
Henson College Auditorium, 7:30 pm., Feb. 1.

#### ECOLOGICAL (ECO) FEMINISM

Exploring the link between the oppression of women and the destruction of the earth. Room 224-226 S.U.B. 7:30 pm. Feb. 2

Heather Eaton is a feminist theologian studying and teaching in the areas of Ecology, Feminism, and Theology at St. Michael's College, Toronto School of Theology, University of Toronto.

