

Thinking machine myth hit by computer expert

By EUGENE BRODY

Computers are neither giant brains nor brainless giants.

The truth about computers lies somewhere between the myth of the awesome thinking machine and the myth of the giant moron that only follows instructions, U of A's computing centre director said.

Al Heyworth outlined the capabilities of computers during a recent address in the Culture 500 series.

He attempted to dispel some misconceptions the modern layman holds about computers and their role in the technological age.

"The basic problem lies in the layman's attempt to think of the computer in human terms," Mr. Heyworth told The Gateway.

SELECTIVE PROCESSING

In his lecture, Mr. Heyworth stressed the fact that computers are information processing machines, and to keep the record straight, "information was not invented by computer manufacturers to give them raw material for their machines."

On the contrary, information in its fullest sense, was, and still is embedded in the tracks of glaciers that moved across Alberta in the Ice Age.

Similarly information on computer tapes has been embedded there by man and is processed according to a formula.

Mr. Heyworth added that ani-

mals, including man, process information in a selective manner. How man reacts and what he remembers is often determined by knowledge which has been previously stored.

He also said that man has found ways to externalize information and to process it.

One way of transmitting information is by the spoken word, and in primitive societies those who speak a certain language are in powerful positions.

A written language, on the other hand, furnishes a low cost information storage medium and it is also a source of power for those who understand it.

Speaking on computers in general, Mr. Heyworth said that the computer is important in the information processing scheme because it allows man to specify information processes that are external to him and yet are fully under his control.

As an example, Mr. Heyworth cited the fact that the digital computer is the latest addition to the information processing devices already in existence.

Its development presupposes the earlier steps, just as a people without a language, a form of writing, or mathematics would be unlikely to invent a machine like the computer.

FEAR OF NEW TECHNOLOGY

In regard to the advantages that computers afford, Mr. Heyworth intimated that the achievements of computers, coupled with the indiscriminate use of terms such as "memory," "think," "see," and "talk," to explain the actions of the computer has resulted in a fear of this new information technology.

The same processes that stripped words, writing, and mathematics of their magic, will in time make computers accessible to all.

In this regard, an attempt is now being made to speed up the process of using computers for handling information and to extend their services to the maximum number of uses.

In so doing, computers are being adapted to communicate with a great number of users simultaneously.

Referring to the speed of the modern computer, Mr. Heyworth added that modern computers can



AL HEYWORTH
—Neil Driscoll photo
... dispeller of myths

complete operations at speeds that enable as many as several hundred users to receive the services at one time.

NEW TELECOMPUTERS

In future, users will be able to communicate with the computer by means of small consols, which are similar to electric typewriters, or portable television sets, with key-boards.

No longer will it be necessary for the average user to have his data processed through the use of a "middle man," known as a programmer or analyst, as long as he is willing to learn how to state his

problem and its solution clearly in a suitable language.

A data processing system of this type is now being designed for the U of A campus.

A system such as this will accept information from almost any source, store or manipulate it, according to the rules which were laid down by the user. It will also display or save the information for the user, or retain it in a form suitable for re-entry to the system.

In any event, the limitations in applying computers to the solution of the problems of mankind, are mainly human, said Mr. Heyworth.

Bulletin:

Police probe molestings in Garneau

Edmonton city police are investigating a series of indecent assaults on young women in the Garneau area during the last five months.

Four patrol cars, considered "extremely heavy" coverage for a single city district, have been on the lookout for the man or men believed responsible, Insp. W. H. Stewart of the city police morality squad, told The Gateway Tuesday.

Six or seven of the attacks, which began last October, have been attributed to one person. "But since we went over there in force, there have been no reports," said Insp. Stewart.

The officer emphasized that in no case has rape occurred, adding that a series of "wild rumors" circulating about the incidents has probably caused undue alarm among U of A co-eds and notably the dean of women, Mrs. J. Grant Sparling.

Assaults of this type, said Insp. Stewart, are nothing unusual in a city of the size of Edmonton; and often go unreported.

City police are urging victims of such attacks to report them immediately by telephoning 424-6411.

"Quite often the car is there before they're off the phone," the inspector said.

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