

Chances are that everyone in the known world over the age of ten has had at least one battle with a computer in his lifetime. There's just something about the arrogant, stubborn refusal of a machine to reconsider even its most blatantly stupid acts that seems to bring

out the beast in us. As a result, we spend most of our free time fighting a full scale war against computers. Tragically, it's a war we're all destined to lose. Let's face it: we're only human beings armed with nothing but logic and intelligence. These weapons are no

WE'RE LOSING OUR WAR

WE'RE LOSING OUR WAR AGAINST COMPUTERS BECAUSE...



... nothing will change their minds once they're convinced you've sent in 30,000 subscriptions to the same magazine.

WE'RE LOSING OUR WAR AGAINST COMPUTERS BECAUSE...



... they invariably continue to list a car as stolen for at least 6 months after it's been recovered and returned.

WE'RE LOSING OUR WAR AGAINST COMPUTERS BECAUSE...



... we make the mistake of assuming they never make a mistake.

WE'RE LOSING OUR WAR AGAINST COMPUTERS BECAUSE...



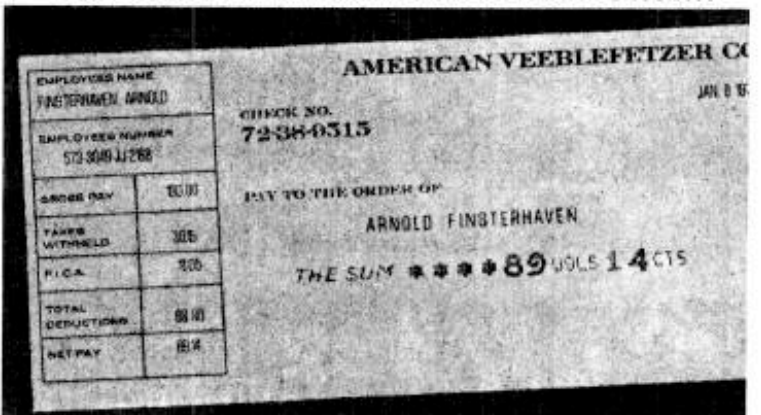
... they remember everything about us we'd like forgotten.

WE'RE LOSING OUR WAR AGAINST COMPUTERS BECAUSE...



... their screening of Police M.O. files somehow proves that every left-handed Baptist who owns a De Soto is the Mad Killer.

WE'RE LOSING OUR WAR AGAINST COMPUTERS BECAUSE...



... they're so smug about being able to solve complex equations, they won't stoop to learn simple arithmetic.

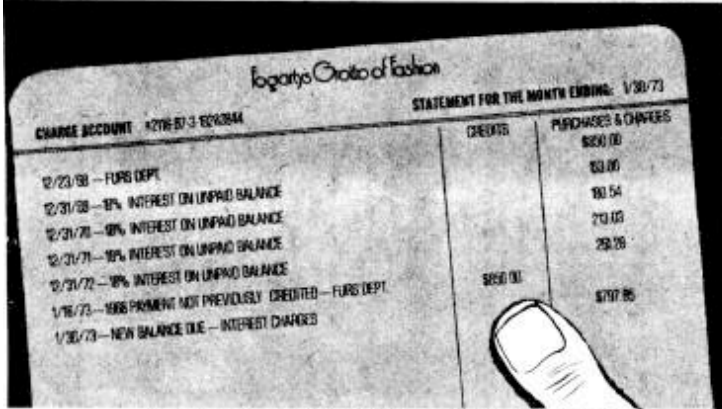
match for a computer's tireless determination to keep repeating its idiotic goofs until our spirits are broken. Worse yet, we are plagued by a cult of Computer Worshipers among our own kind who perpetuate the ridiculous myth that humans are always wrong. So, in case you're

one of those bubble-brained idealists who clings to the belief that righteousness must eventually triumph, just consider how the punch cards are stacked against you in this fight. Then, you'll agree with MAD's battlefront analysts who cite these twelve reasons why

AGAINST COMPUTERS

ARTIST: BOB CLARKE WRITER: TOM KOCH

WE'RE LOSING OUR WAR AGAINST COMPUTERS BECAUSE...



... they take years and years to find their stupid mistakes, and then they expect us to pay for them.

WE'RE LOSING OUR WAR AGAINST COMPUTERS BECAUSE...



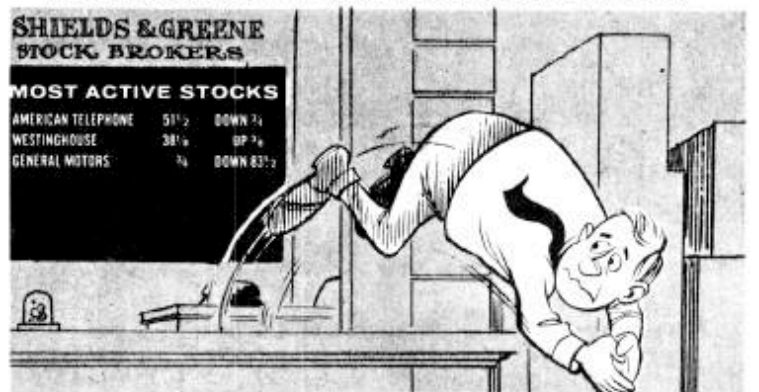
... it's futile to call up and complain about a mistake, since the machine that goofed is the same one that answers the phone.

WE'RE LOSING OUR WAR AGAINST COMPUTERS BECAUSE...



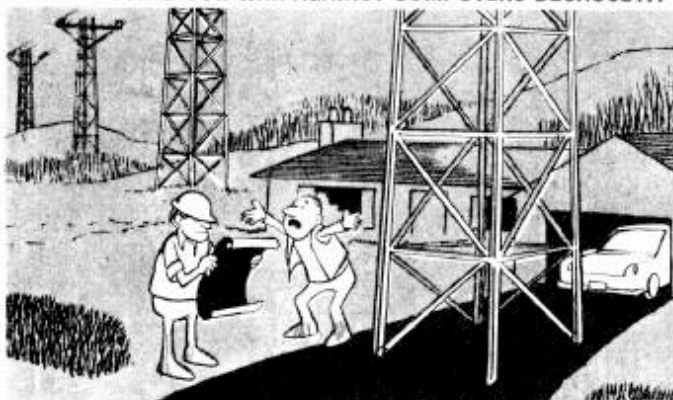
... they forget everything about us we wish they'd remember.

WE'RE LOSING OUR WAR AGAINST COMPUTERS BECAUSE...



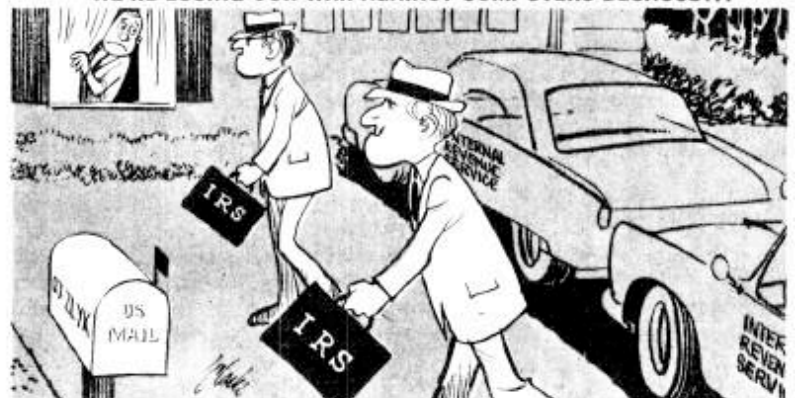
... their dumb mistakes can cause us to make fatal mistakes.

WE'RE LOSING OUR WAR AGAINST COMPUTERS BECAUSE...



... their opinion of the most efficient way to do things is definitely only their opinion.

WE'RE LOSING OUR WAR AGAINST COMPUTERS BECAUSE...



... they assume that Q.X. Zlyk, Q.X. Zlyk, Sr., and Q.X. Slyk, Senior, are three different people ... two of whom didn't pay their Income Tax.

Assignment 1:

The above comic about computers appeared in MAD magazine in 1974. Please write a one to two page paper about your reactions to the comic. Does it look hopelessly outdated? How much have things changed since this comic was drawn? How much has stayed the same? What did you find funny, or not so funny?

One page=one typewritten page, double-spaced, one inch margins, 12 point type. About 350-500 words per page. Thanks!

Assignment 2:

The following articles were written in 1983 about how humans relate to computers, and how they may relate to computers in the future. As someone who lives in the future of this article, write a three to four page paper about your feelings about these articles (How to Get Intimate With Your Computer, parts 1 and 2.)

What did the author get right, and what did they get wrong. What were they hoping for that happened, what has yet to happen, and what will probably never happen? Is there anything that you think should be different about our relationship with computers that the article missed?

If you were going to write an article like this today, what would you have to say?

THE WORLD INSIDE THE COMPUTER

How To Get Intimate With Your Computer

Part 1

Fred D'Ignazio, Associate Editor

Fred D'Ignazio is a computer enthusiast and author of several books on computers for young people. His books include Katie and the Computer (Creative Computing), Chip Mitchell: The Case of the Stolen Computer Brains (Dutton/Lodestar), The Star Wars Question and Answer Book About Computers (Random House), and How To Get Intimate With Your Computer (A 10-Step Plan To Conquer Computer Anxiety) (McGraw-Hill).

As the father of two young children, Fred has become concerned with introducing the computer to children as a wonderful tool rather than as a forbidding electronic device. His column appears monthly in COMPUTE!.

In my September column I proposed that we move beyond computer literacy – to computer *intimacy*. I have done some thinking since then, and I have concluded that we shouldn't abandon our push for computer literacy, especially among young people. But we should encourage computer intimacy *before* computer literacy.

Computer Intimacy First

If you are intimate with your computer you are comfortable, cozy, even attached to it. You know enough to put the computer to work, but you don't have to know *how* it works. Computer intimacy is a totally new relationship between people and computers, one made possible by the new developments in computer hardware and, especially, software. Once we are intimate with our computers, many of us will also want to become computer literate. But not all of us. Nor will we need to.

Many adults envy children's relations with computers. The myth is that children are computer whizzes, that they are computer literate. But this is untrue. Most children are no more computer literate than most adults. What they are is computer *intimate*. They like computers. They have a warm, affectionate, and playful relationship with computers. They don't fear computers. They aren't overawed. To them the

computer is just a snazzy appliance or toy, a cross between the TV set, the typewriter, the piano, and building blocks.

Children move rapidly toward computer literacy because they become intimate with computers first. This is the same path adults should follow. Adult computer courses make the mistake of skipping the intimacy part and moving right into computer literacy. But, in most circumstances, this strips computers of all their fun.

The first impression the average adult has of a computer is just as he or she imagined: the computer is technical, dry, and complicated. Adults know that it is for their own good to become computer literate, but that doesn't mean they want to. No wonder the adults look enviously at the children. The children look like they are having fun. For them, learning about computers is exciting, hilarious, and very rewarding.

But why should children have all the fun? For many adults, computer literacy is a huge roadblock that separates them from learning more about computers. We should clear away this roadblock and start adults in the right direction, and introduce them to programs modeled after children's programs, programs that promote computer intimacy.

Establishing A Balance

In the job market of the 1990s and the twenty-first century, very few people will be computer literate, if by literacy we mean having the ability to create real, nontrivial computer programs. Yet most people will need to be computer intimate. They will need to be able to work with computers – confidently, comfortably, efficiently, and sometimes even joyously.

But this doesn't mean we should abandon computer literacy. Computer literacy is not just a technical skill for a few mechanics and specialists. It is a doorway that many should enter. Then they can begin using the computer to its fullest potential. For people who are computer intimate and literate, the computer can become a medium for self expression, a "new age" culture for creativity and communication, and an environment for invention.

Children, especially, should be encouraged to move beyond computer intimacy to a higher level of computer literacy (appropriate to the sophisticated software tools that will be running on computers of the future). Many will not want to go, and they shouldn't be forced. *They will not need to be computer literate to live happy, productive lives in the future. Computer intimacy will suffice.*

However, as a social goal, computer intimacy is not enough, not if our culture is to keep evolving, changing, and responding to the challenges of the present and the future.

The Magician's Top Hat

How do we see computers? Today most children and more and more adults see computers as a magician's top hat. All the new software cartridges, disks, and tapes are stuffed inside the hat, like white doves, flaming scarves, brilliant-colored parrots, and soft, fuzzy bunnies. You can reach into the computer "hat" and pull out almost anything you can imagine – word processors, adventure games, file managers, video paintkits, turtles, and electronic pianos.

And the software industry is growing like a colony of healthy bacteria. In the future we will be able to pull a thousand times as much out of the magic hat.

But what fuels the software industry? What is its source of dynamic power and energy?

Computer literacy. Not among a handful of computer scientists and experts, but spread across millions of computers and millions of users. Computer literacy is the training ground for computer invention. And computer invention makes computer intimacy possible – at higher and higher levels.

Mass-produced microcomputers and increasingly sophisticated software tools have unleashed the imaginations and enlivened the ambitions of an army of youthful, would-be inventors. The inventors are firing off their software inventions like fish launched from a host of catapults mounted on canoes rushing down a swiftly moving river.

Millions Of Computer Inventors

The personal computer is more than a magician's hat. It is also a miniature toolshed, workshop, or laboratory. And as personal computers become less isolated, and enable their users to communicate with each other, they will become a *roundtable*, a forum for people to bounce ideas off each other and then implement those ideas, jointly, as new computer software.

Computer literacy – appropriate to new, higher-level computer tools – is needed in the future, not just among a few experts but among thousands and millions of young inventors with fresh ideas and with the energy and self-confidence to turn them into computer inventions. And computer inventions will be woven into the fabric of our economy, our society, and our lives.

So computer literacy is necessary. All children should get a crack at becoming computer literate, at the youngest possible age.

Yet computer literacy still does not come first. Computer intimacy comes first, especially for the majority of adults who are scared to death of computers, yet realize that computers are the wave of the future. The strident cries for universal computer literacy only increase these adults' fears. For these adults, computer literacy is not the answer – at least not yet.

A New Religion

Computers are powerful new machines, so powerful that they are treated by many people as a new "religion." Computer enthusiasts are the evangelists for this religion, and they are winning converts by the millions.

Most adults, however, have mixed feelings about computers. They see computers for what they are. Computers are valuable tools and servants, but they are not the most important thing in life. Computers are not an end. They are merely a means to more important, human-defined ends.

Also, computers, like any other powerful and pervasive technology, are valueless in themselves. Whether their impact is good or evil depends on how they are used.

Most adults have a very healthy skepticism and distrust of computers, especially when the "true believers" market them as a necessity and tout them as a new religion.

Most adults do not need a startling plunge into the icy waters of computer literacy. First they need to get their feet wet. They need to follow in their children's footsteps. They need to play with computers, learn with computers, and have fun.

On The Road With Fred D'Ignazio

How To Get Intimate With Your Computer

Part 2

Closer To Home

After my whirlwind travels across the United States and England, I'd like to take a break for a month and look at an important issue that is closer to home.

Elsewhere in this issue (in my "The World Inside The Computer" column) I begin a discussion about the difference between computer literacy and computer intimacy. I'd like to continue that discussion in this column.

Let's look at the myths that make adults so anxious and fearful about computers. We'll see how most adults who want to know more about computers should become intimate with computers before they try to become computer literate.

The Myth Of The Klutzy Adult

A pervasive and pernicious myth is being spread unthinkingly throughout our society. The myth is that our children are whizzes with computers, but we adults are klutzes. This myth is almost completely ungrounded in fact. Why are children so good with computers? They are good because they see only the colorful, musical, exciting side of computers. The first time they meet a computer, it is wearing a smile.

Children are spurred to master computers because they are so attractive. When we adults see this side of computers, we, too, can master computers just as fast, just as happily as our children.

Trust Your Feelings

What is computer intimacy? What is intimacy? Intimacy is a gut feeling. You know you have become intimate with your computer when you are totally comfortable and relaxed with it, when using it becomes a pleasure rather than a chore, and when you develop excuses just to spend more time with it. When you begin to think your computer is lovable, that's when you know the two of you are becoming intimate.

Getting to know a computer can be like getting to know an attractive yet intimidating member of the opposite sex. I think there is a great similarity between my first experiences with girls and dating, and the average person's first experience with computers. When the average person first looks at computers, he or she feels the same sense of fear and anxiety that I felt when I gazed across the gymnasium floor at the girls clustered on the opposite side of the room. That was my first school dance. Computers evoke the same sense of shyness, yet they can also be tremendously attractive, even seductive.

A New Love Affair

For almost 75 years, Americans have had a love affair with their cars. Computers will soon be like cars. Like cars, they will remain machines, and our servants, yet they will also have an emotional, gut-level appeal that will turn people on and bind them to them.

The kind of car we drive depends on the kind of person we are or would like to be. Our car's appearance, model, and year often accurately reflect our values and the kind of image we want to project to our fellow human beings. Cars project all sorts of images. They can be inconspicuous, efficient, and sedate, or they can be clunky ragamuffins. They can be flamboyant, garish, and ostentatious, or they can be sensual and adventurous.

Computers, too, will soon reflect our lifestyles, values, and self-image. They will also reflect our needs. Like cars, computers will come with model names pulled from the animal kingdom. Depending on our needs, we'll buy a Cobra (fast as lightning), or a Hippopotamus (it digests huge quantities of information), the St. Bernard (it saves your life in tight situations), the Peacock (it really struts its stuff), or the Donkey (slow and stubborn, but real dependable).

Computers, like cars, can evoke a passionate attachment, a rush of affection. But to inspire real intimacy they must throb to life at the turn of a key, and they must get us where we're going - the faster the better.

A computer can be seductive and lovable, but it is not an end in itself. Many people can get excited about a computer for its own sake. Many more, however, can get excited about using a computer to have fun, get work done, and communicate with other people.

In the future, computers will promise even more than they do today. But let's make sure they keep those promises.

More Than Tools

Computers are only machines, but they are more than tools. A hammer is a tool. So is a broom. But can you get intimate with a hammer or a broom? Not easily. Yet it's easy to get intimate with a computer, because computers are more than work-horses and tools. Computers obey our commands. They carry on conversations. They listen to us. They are infinitely patient. They can be friendly, playful, even silly.

Friendly computers? Playful computers? Silly computers? Where do you find them? Just ask a child. Children love computers because they use computers to learn and have fun. But why can't adults learn on computers, too? And why should kids have all the fun? Adults who peek over kids' shoulders at their programs find that the programs are challenging, enjoyable, and enlightening. Adults can use these programs, overcome their fears about computers, and relieve their computer anxiety. Adults can get to be just as good with computers as kids, and they can have just as much fun.

Computers That Frown And Look Mean

Most adults still think that computers are dry, cold, and unfriendly. No wonder! Most computers in the past were number crunchers, bill collectors, and tax watchdogs. Even today's computers, in their heart of hearts, do nothing more than juggle ones and zeros. But computers don't have to be technical and boring. They can be funny—if you just add people. The relationship between computers and people is often hilarious, if we keep a sense of humor. It pays to look at the lighter side of this relationship, and if we do, we find it helps to break down the barrier of fear separating us from the computer.

Coming Out Of The Closet

In recent years all sorts of groups have come out of the closet and have honestly revealed who they are and what they stand for. It's time that computer lovers do the same.

As a person who is on extremely intimate terms with his computer (it follows me into my bathroom and into my bed), I'd like to confess here and now one of the most closely guarded secrets of our relationship:

My relationship with computers is not rational.

This is a shocking revelation, but it is true. My relationship with my computers is emotional, quirky, and antic. It is infuriating, enlightening, and silly. It is happy, frustrating, and ecstatic. But it is rarely rational. And I contend that this is true throughout our society among the millions of computers and computer users. A rational relationship between a human being and a computer is the exception rather than the rule.

Take today. My assistant and I were working on a personal computer. We were sailing along, turning out letters, articles, and forms at a swift, productive pace. The world looked bright, and we were happy.

Then disaster struck. The computer made a mistake. The computer's mistake was only a little one. It wouldn't save any of our text files on disk so that we could print them out on the computer printer.

Until it made its mistake, the computer had been behaving itself. I felt very close to the computer and was extremely fond of it.

After the computer made its mistake, I had a change in heart. No matter what I did, the computer wouldn't save or print my files. So I hated the computer. I called it names. I threatened to walk out on it, abandon it, put it up for adoption.

Now I ask you, does this sound like a rational relationship?

A rational relationship must have at least two parties who are rational. First we look at the first partner—the human being. Occasionally, philosophers have proposed that humans are rational, but most of us know otherwise.

Next let's look at computers. This is more of a problem. Computers are incredibly complex machines, composed of millions of interacting circuits and thousands upon thousands of operating instructions, rules, and conditions. Computers are too complex to be simple, too complex to be totally rational.

Nevertheless, people think they are rational. For example, the popular wisdom now contains two catchy phrases that most people unquestioningly believe:

First: Computers don't make mistakes. Only people make mistakes.

Second: Computers do only what you tell them to.

As I mentioned, I am extremely intimate with computers. Since I am in this privileged position (along with two or three million children), you would think that I would be able to see through the popular wisdom and realize that the two catchy phrases above are pure hogwash—myths and nothing more.

Alas! I am as much a victim of these myths as the next human being, at least when I am working with my assistant. Whenever anything goes wrong while she is using the computer, whenever the computer acts strange, whom do I blame? Why, her, of course.

Take the other day. I was upstairs in my study and Darshi, my assistant, was downstairs in the office. All of a sudden, she yelled, "Fred! Come quick! The computer's going crazy!"

Sure enough, the cursor was rolling across the screen wiping out the words almost like Ms. Pac-Man rushing around devouring dots. I pushed every button on the keyboard, but nothing worked. The cursor was determined to eat the whole file.

Finally, in desperation, I turned off the computer. Then I turned toward Darshi. "What did you do?" I said, in a not very friendly voice. "The computer was fine just a few minutes ago. You must have done something to mess it up."

Sadly, this was the last thing Darshi needed to hear. She was already extremely timid around the computer and afraid that the next button she typed might blow the computer up. When I accused her of her worst fear, she looked ill and ran out of the office.

Why had I blamed Darshi? I blamed her because she was a beginning user and a human being. Those two facts alone were enough evidence to convict her.

Sometimes computers are agreeable, responsive, and meek. They do everything you tell them to. But then, a moment later, without any warning, they turn on you. They suffer amnesia. They pout and get sullen and write gobbledygook all over your lovely files. Or they act crazy and start doing awful things like eating up the words on your picture screen. And they get out of control. Then the only way to get their attention is to switch off their power. This, of course, is an undesirable and drastic solution. But, sometimes, it's the only way to make them come to their senses.

A Little Breathing Room

When you are in the middle of a squabble with your computer, it doesn't seem very funny. However, after things have quieted down, and you look back, you might be able to put things into perspective, and maybe even laugh about them.

But one thing you should not do is pretend that you and your computer have a rational relationship. It is anything but that. It may be quiet, sedate, and low key. Or it might be wild and boisterous. But it is not rational. It can't be. You're not rational. The computer's not rational. So how can your relationship be rational?

The sooner people stop looking at their relationship with computers as rational, the sooner they will become intimate with computers and learn to accept them for what they are. Computers are moody and complex creatures. But they try hard to please you. They really do.