

Kasey
KERBER

Weird science

Technology is making strides toward stupidity

Technology is a strange thing. Take safe sex for example. Thanks to a 27-year-old Italian physics student, there is now a "cutting edge" condom that makes music if it breaks during intercourse.

True, it's a technological marvel, yet I believe that this is just one example of technology getting out of

hand.

What are the chances that with all the huffing, puffing and "wild kingdom" intercourse noise that a couple will hear an electronic version of "Killing Me Softly" by the Fugees and cease from doing the wild thing?

Minimal to say the least. But this is not to say technology isn't a good thing.

Technology and technology alone enables us to drive a car, plow it into another vehicle, electronically file our insurance claim and have our picture appear in the newspaper the next day with a headline reading: *Dumb driver plows into livestock truck — kills 28 pigs!*

Most of the time we benefit from technology. Yet it seems we're living in a day and age when some idiot

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decides they want to benefit even more and tries to sell us some new technology we really don't need.

To prove this point, I offer Sony's new "Watchman."

The Watchman is designed for those people who don't want to miss a single moment of television. It includes a "Straptenna," enabling the portable TV to hang from your neck and let you watch your favorite daytime soaps as you walk from class to class.

Price for this "I-have-to-have-one-or-I'll-go-hit-a-truck-full-of-livestock" is a cool \$160.

This brings up another point — most useless technology is a whole heaping load of cash. This often means that only the rich have the privilege of making fools of themselves with an item as glorious as the Duckworks' "UltraDuck."

The UltraDuck is a \$875 kayak. Now you might be saying, "Kasey, that's not too much money for a brand new kayak!" This is true, but the UltraDuck is no ordinary kayak. It is INFLATABLE.

This to me seems to be a really bad idea. For nearly a thousand bucks, I'm sure it's durable, but can you imagine what the reaction would be if the rich man's duck popped its bubble in the middle of white water rapids?

Don't imagine: I'll show you... *RICH MAN: "I say old chap, this UltraDuck is quite a sport on the rough waters! I think I'll check my pocket radar gun to see how fast I'm going. Oops, I dropped my 86-tool pocketknife! Bloody hell! My UltraDuck is deflating!"*

And as the old chap goes over a nearby waterfall clinging onto his

plastic piece of heaven, I think we should all keep in mind that "stupid" technology is something we should not take for granted.

We should be more alert to what new technology is "stupid" and which technology might actually be a benefit to mankind.

I leave you with a final product to ponder and in turn, test your ability to know the "good" new technology from the "stupid" new technology.

A nameless company (I wonder why), has advertised in a wholesale catalog a new, soon-to-be best-seller.

It's a key chain a step ahead of all other key chains.

No, it doesn't shoot mace, glow or make an extremely loud shrill to ward off an attacker.

It makes a flushing sound.

Yes, the "Toilet Key Chain" is an actual mini toilet with an even tinier lever that you pull to make the "authentic flushing sound."

Oh, and in case some of you were wondering, the toilet seat really does flip up.

I guess you could say that really is six bucks down the drain.

Geez, I'm sorry ... that would be the sound of the same company's "Sink Key Chain."

Their operators are standing by.

Just don't call.

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Nick
WILTGEN

A sign of government control

Forced funding for public programs is unfair

I recently received an e-mail bearing the plea, "Save Sesame Street!!!!!" It was a petition asking the federal government and Congress not to cut funding for public broadcasting. According to the e-mail:

Currently, taxes from the general public for PBS equal \$1.12 per person per year, and the National Endowment for the Arts equals \$.64 a year in total. A January 1995 CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll indicated that 76 percent of Americans wish to keep funding for PBS, third only to national defense and law enforcement as the most valuable programs for funding.

Below were the names of 239 people. The first 10 or 20 were college students (who started the petition), but the names I found later were surprising (assuming they were legitimate).

Signature 219 was a man who works at a New York advertising firm. Now, why would someone in the business of advertising sign a petition supporting government funding of noncommercial television?

Sadly, he wasn't the only person foolish enough to support his opponents, his destroyers. Signatures 188 through 198 were employees of ABC News and ABC Sports in New York. Their colleagues in Los Angeles threw in three more signatures. And signatures 153 through 166 (except for 160) were

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all employees of MTV in New York. What does this say?

Apparently even those who lose the most by the government's interference in the broadcasting business are willing to condone the pickpocket tactics practiced by PBS and the NEA ... at my expense.

But 76 percent of Americans wish to keep funding for PBS, the petitioners cry. And it's only \$1.76 per person per year. Isn't that worthwhile?

Of course, that depends on who you ask. I never watch PBS. I'd rather spend my \$1.12 in PBS money on a frozen dinner. Come to think of it, the 64 cents they stole from me for the NEA could pay a month's cable box rental.

So why do I have to pay for programs I never watch? The obvious answer is: The majority says so. Why does the majority say so?

The only way someone could condone government funding of television or the arts is to accept one basic idea: that people should not have to exert effort to achieve their goals, but that someone should guarantee that their goals will be achieved.

Public television exists not on the merit or popularity of its program-

ming (which is at times considerable), nor does it exist solely on voluntary contributions or sponsorships. Instead, the majority of PBS's budget is government financing — i.e., extortion from the American public, with the sanction of 76 percent of that public.

So PBS does not earn its budget, but it is guaranteed a budget automatically. By whom? The taxpayers, who are forced to pay up.

When artists are guaranteed an audience by the NEA, regardless of whether anyone likes their art, the taxpayers must sacrifice.

When high-school dropouts are guaranteed a living by the welfare state, the people with college degrees must sacrifice.

When children are guaranteed a free education by the public schools, the unmarried and the childless must sacrifice.

When people are guaranteed health coverage for anything by the government health-care bureaucracy, doctors and patients must sacrifice.

When people are guaranteed an income after retirement, the rest of us must sacrifice.

And the list goes on and on. Every day, another special interest group attempts to achieve its goals,

not by its own effort, but by government mandate. Every day, the wheels of American society roll down the slow, steady hill that descends from the heights of American capitalism into the low, vile swamp of fascism — where people "own" property but the government controls it, absolutely.

It's easy to dream of a world where all is guaranteed and effort is optional — while in reality, the cart rolls downhill. It takes effort to push the cart back uphill.

Fortunately, that effort isn't really very demanding. We need only recognize that each person must be free to earn his or her own living, must merit his or her own popularity, and must buy his or her own things. We must never condone the legalization of mooching, extorting or stealing.

So if you want to watch Sesame Street, don't come after my wallet. Don't go after someone else's wallet. If you care about the future of Sesame Street, write a letter to The Learning Channel and ask them to carry it. Write to the producers of the show and ask them to consider commercial sponsorship. Or send a donation to Sesame Street's producers yourself.

But don't resort to force. Force is the enemy of freedom. Freedom requires voluntary cooperation between individuals. That freedom exists in only one economic and political system: pure capitalism.

By the way, I didn't sign the petition.

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