

We Get A Computer and Hate It!

reprint from FE #342, Summer, 1993

Fifth Estate Collective

2005

Until now, I've tried to avoid computers at all costs, but now having had this forced upon us, I've begun to consider what effect this will have on our publishing efforts and those of us who work on the paper. Upon beginning to learn their use, computers seem like fiendish apparatuses which order you about on their terms, not the reverse.

The labyrinth of programs within programs, windows within windows, macros within macros, reminds me of the infinitely descending portrait of the little girl on the Morton Salt box. I'm sure the people who designed these machines would have been, in an earlier age, hobbyists who constructed large model battleships out of toothpicks.

Computers, like all technical/industrial inventions before them, came from stretching the capacity of human ingenuity beyond the immediate, to produce a device theretofore unknown to be presented for sale on the market, and create a need not previously there.

The capitalist world, defined by the religion of science and technology, has endlessly created what immediately becomes a necessity. Just as today no one can imagine publishing a newspaper without computerized equipment, in twenty years (or twenty months!) we will be told that such machinery is hopelessly outmoded, too slow, inefficient, and only artificial intelligence which downloads thought direct to a hologram can fulfill our needs to file recipes, plan wars, balance our checkbooks, manage production, etc.

A hundred years ago, anarchists printed weekly newspapers with handset type; none of them dreamed of desktop publishing systems to do on-screen composition. Instead, they dreamed about what the words in their paper desired: revolution, the elimination of capital and the state; a new world, not a new PageMaker program.

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