

# LIVING IN THE SPACE AGE

BY SHARON MCIVER

Whereas my long term infatuation with chocolate has never left the honeymoon phase, I can't say the same about my feelings towards this week's topic, technology, with which I have more of a love/hate dare I say it, co-dependent relationship. I'm grateful for the wonderful gifts bestowed by my laptop, MP3, cellphone, and aging TV and video player, but....

The stereo is probably my favourite item of technology, and absolutely necessary in cancelling out the evils of power tools. Fortunately, the best quality stereos are usually vintage. My first was a used three-in-one Fountain with a warm, but gutless sound that suited my worn Billy Bragg records. Next was the only version I bought new – a midi system with separate CD player – so that I could play the Erasure CD that wasn't available on vinyl. My sister took it when I OE'd and I think it's still in use.

My first experiment with separate components was ill advised by store guys who wouldn't take me seriously – but it still sounded a damn sight better than the silver monstrosities available new. A few years later, I scored some tasty speakers from a friend going overseas, which I combined with a top of the range '80's amp. Ten years later, I'm still in love with how it sounds, even though it's probably not up to a proper audiophile's standards

## THE PHARMACY ON CAMPUS

ALL YOUR STUDY NEEDS...

- INCREASE CONCENTRATION
- STAY AWAKE



- HELP ON SLEEPLESS NIGHTS



**10% STUDENT DISCOUNT**  
With all student I.D cards (conditions apply)  
Does not include items already on special

**University Pharmacy** (Canterbury) Ltd

The Pharmacy on Campus  
In the UCSA Building  
Ph/Fax: 364 2215

8.30am - 5.30pm Monday to Friday (Open during the holidays)

The stereo is technology that was built for durability; whereas an MP3 player or laptop has been designed for obsolescence, and neither will ever do justice to how music should sound. I bought both these items new when I moved into a van, and whereas I quite like my four-year-old chunky music player, how I feel about the portable computer is more problematic. Creativity wise, it's my skill saw, and I hate to think what whittling down a thesis would have been like without word processing software. Increasingly, I am respectful of the freedom the laptop gives me to chip away at a draft, but it freaks me the hell out as well. I can't imagine what sitting in front of one of these things for up to eight hours a day is doing for my aura. Actually I can – excuse me while I go find my crystals.

Perhaps this unavoidable attachment to a computer is why I have no desire to socialise, shop, or date via a screen. Texting and emailing are bad enough, and a sudden attack of text tics (when you send to the wrong recipient, or make unintentional Freudian slips) make communication via this medium a social mine field. And no one wants to check their phone in the morning and find that they *did* send *that* text.

One form of communication I don't do enough of is letters. A few years ago I corresponded with a friend living on the Milford track where there was no phone or Internet coverage. For two summers we wrote to each other, rediscovering a form of dialogue that we'd been taught as children. Her bright orange writing set would stand out from the bills, and I would spend half an hour crying with laughter over the hilarious escapades of a fully staffed 'hut' (read hotel) in the middle of Fiordland.

I would reply using back-pocket sized notebooks that I took on walks, so as to find the most idyllic spots to write them in – which on the Coast were plentiful. It was a little unnerving when I trekked in to the Lodge and was greeted with "oh, you're the one that sends the notebooks". Apparently they were known because on receipt, my friend would disappear into the bush and the shrieks of laughter would echo around the valley. I imagine us cackling over them in our 70's (because I can guarantee our emails will not survive that long), but if they ever get published, I'm coming back to kick some arse.

So much of my life is spent communicating for a living, that I prefer the 'in the momentness' of genuine conversation; when there is a machine present there is a loss of natural flow, as well as electricity. For long distance, I like to pull the curtains, as it were. I'm not big on group emails, and I can't think of anything worse than having my life broadcast on the internet for *fun*. In this regard, I have an unlikely ally in George Clooney, who said recently that he would rather be given a rectal examination on live television than join Facebook.

Occasionally, I take a look over my friend's shoulder to see what's happening in Facebook world, but my favourite kind of social networking is the impromptu kind. Recently a bakers' dozen of friends gathered in my garden to catch up, share advice, and have their hair cut by our resident hairdresser. The food kept coming, we soaked up the sun, and remembered to check occasionally that the boys weren't terrorising the frogs, the neighbours, or each other.

And that's something that technology can never deliver. No matter how multi-sensory a virtual world, this kind of spontaneity can only be felt in *real* time.

Of course, environmentally, the less technology we need, the better. Along the line, we've invented machines that suck up energy even when we are sleeping, eating, and socializing with friends. That said, being a complete Luddite is only an option for a tiny percentage of the developed world – and sustainability is more about recognising the convenience and benefits from some technologies, but at the same time being more discerning about how we manufacture, use and dispose of them. We also need to be aware when our reliance on technology is too easily abstracting us from real full-sense connections with people and the natural environment.

Of course, as students in the midst of final-term hell, you're pretty much captive to your computer for the foreseeable future. Sorry to state the obvious, but if you plan to at least take people breaks where you catch up with flatmates or family in person, or even occasionally unplug it and go outside and reconnect with nature for a couple of hours, the whole experience can at least not totally suck the life out of you and your environment.

Love your technology, but remember that space in a relationship can be a wonderful thing.