

Editorial: Guilt Tripping

There is nothing duller than an academic issue, unless it is an issue of family history, and little arouses the imagination less than seeing another editorial on academic freedom.

Accordingly, let us talk about something else, and let's use that universal language: money. We are told that *Arctic* frightens off potential authors by sending them on guilt trips. The potential author says (to colleagues or supervisors), "Yes, I'd really like to publish in *Arctic*, but they have those unfortunate page charges and there's no way I could get that sort of thing past the bean counters in our head-shed, and I do not feel right about imposing on *Arctic*. Consequently, I'll have to send my manuscript elsewhere — somewhere with no page charge."

It is fascinating to note, as we did elsewhere, that most people who published in *Arctic* in the last 40 years published only a single paper in *Arctic*. Was it simply their first and last attempt to publish, or did it produce such a tremendous high on that occasion that any attempt to try to replicate it was just beyond belief? Or was it possibly that the whole operation was so totally unsatisfying because of editorial abuse from *Arctic* that, like Poe's raven, they said: "Nevermore!"

Although we go to great lengths to insist that the page charge is non-mandatory, we still find that some of our folk can't cope with that, even when we reassure them that the editor wielding all that awesome power of acceptance or rejection is never told who pays and who doesn't, and that the invoice is never issued until the paper is published and distributed, long after the journal relinquished its power to reject that paper.

It doesn't seem to help to observe that when your editor was director of a major laboratory he insisted that all projects include in their budgets an item for publication costs, just like another item for travel or a widget for better measurements. This is a fairly common practice in the physical sciences on this continent, but unheard of, it seems, in other areas of scholarly endeavour, particularly overseas.

And this seems to reveal a much bigger issue — the whole question of academic freedom. Very few people object to academic freedom, and it has many expressions, the principal one being the freedom to publish. Our universal library system is fundamental to this freedom. Information is, and must continue to be, fundamentally free. And while this has been true since the beginning of time, we get very nervous when we see ourselves moving into the newest bit of jargon — the information society — because we see a lot of things being reduced to the jungle law of the marketplace with slogans like "User pay!" popping up in a variety of unaccustomed places, including funding agencies. Just image what would happen if our libraries started selling their information to the highest bidder!

Academic scholars have a universal right to have their material published. Self-professed scholarly journals like *Arctic* have a universal responsibility to publish it. We must never say, "Because you have no money to pay for publishing your material, you therefore have no right to be published." We must not even say, "Because you have no money, you must wait until we publish these other manuscripts because their authors do have the money." There must be no sorting based on ability to pay,

and editorial policy in *Arctic* strictly forbids any potential drift in that direction.

But there must be sorting. We cannot publish everything that comes our way, but we can publish all the best, and that is what we strive to do and we are extremely grateful to those hundreds of reviewers who help us sort out the best and give sound judgement as to how the best can be made even better.

Arctic costs about \$245 per page to publish, and page charges at \$75 per page do not meet those total costs. Yet they help significantly. The principal publishing costs are borne by the members of the Arctic Institute, both individual and corporate, and by subscribers, both individual and institutional. Other funding comes from national funding agencies. All respect academic freedom and want to see it reflected in this and other journals.

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Now, it is fascinating to look ahead in this information society and visualize the future for academic publishing. The printed word will persist — it has for thousands of years already — but it will be augmented by a variety of high-tech systems, not the least of which will be full-text electronic storage and retrieval. It is not hard to imagine every word in the entire Arctic Institute library of some 40 000 volumes becoming available on a couple of pizza-sized CD-ROM optical disks, and then the whole thing going on-line for universal distribution around the world. Built into such a system will be indexing systems for coherent search-and-find operations, and they will become the basis for tentative artificial intelligence assessment of the published data. Through all of this, scholars will be freed up to do what they should do best — think and teach the next generation!

In this context, the management of *Arctic* has puzzled over the question of how it might better do what it does. This is not a matter of solving an identity crisis in *Arctic*, but rather a genuine searching for improvement. Should we strive for a circulation of say 30 000 rather than 3000 for this venerable and traditional journal, or is there something quite different that we should be doing as well? Where are we going in the information society? Should we be going to full-text electronic publishing for *Arctic* using existing bulletin board publishing systems? Should we be getting into interactive electronic publishing schemes? Should we provide for consolidating all northern libraries into a single CD-ROM library? Should we take the lead in machine translation while we are about it? Should we recognize that non-academics exist also, and pitch some of our information handling toward the great (academically) unwashed?

In the course of all this, however, we must continue to respect academic freedom, still treating free access to information as one of the greatest public services imaginable, comparable, for example, to universal health care.

— Gordon Hodgson