
Editorial

We have always known that document processing and electronic publishing are marvellous stamping grounds for computer scientists—an observation which is soon confirmed by a glance through the authorship of the papers in EP-odd so far. As contented computer scientists ourselves we are not going to object to this phenomenon, but we have been anxious for some time to widen our author base and to dispel the impression that EP-odd will be an exclusive preserve for western letterforms and anglo-saxon typeface designs.

In the first paper of this issue we begin to address some of these shortcomings. A fascinating contribution from Zeev Becker and Dan Berry (yes—they are Computer Scientists too, but we have to progress one step at a time) describes the typesetting of Hebrew, Japanese and Chinese using an adapted version of the UNIX `ditroff` program called `triroff`. Their paper was typeset using `triroff` itself but time constraints did not permit the installation of this software at Nottingham. Instead, we have used this paper as a first test of a policy allowing authors to submit ‘difficult’ copy in the form of a PostScript file. We are very pleased with the quality of the result, which testifies eloquently to the hours that Dan Berry was prepared to spend in circumventing undreamed-of problems in the EP-odd macros and in getting the pagination and layout right. The fact that `triroff` cannot currently handle the preparation of newsletters, let alone academic journals, for the Mongolian-speaking Xinjiang Uighur region is a source of some distress. However, we are comforted to learn that a small enhancement to one of the back-end processors will soon put everything right.

The position of PostScript as a *de facto* standard for page description languages is well assured, but those who have struggled with its stack-based model may have longed for a more programmer-friendly interface. Jakob Gonczarowski’s paper addresses this need by describing INSCRIPT, a pre-processor for PostScript modelled on the lines of the ‘C’ language.

Victoria Burrill and John Ogden’s paper makes an interesting foray into the area of user interfaces and user / machine interaction. Their VORTEXT software presents the user with a screen representation of an open book, complete with closed pages, bookmarks and so on. The book metaphor can be extended even further to encompass thumbing through an index or making margin notes. But will the naïve user react positively to this model of interaction? Or are we all so familiar with windows, mice and menus that such assistance is no longer necessary?

Finally, who could resist a paper entitled ‘Can structured formatters prevent train crashes?’ ? It conjures up the possibility of a long-running series which further expands the horizons of creative causality : ‘Can serifed fonts alleviate influenza symptoms?’ ; ‘Will WYSIWYG software help to locate the top quark?’. But just in case readers should think that novelty titles are sufficient to ensure publication in EP-odd we hasten to add that Jacques André’s paper has a serious point to make, and one which illustrates again that issues in the wider world of Computer Science can reappear in new guise in the EP arena. This time it is the problem of program layout and related execution semantics,

encompassing such issues as program beautifiers, the harmfulness of (implicit) *go to* statements and so on. The paper relates how the everyday equivalent of an *if ... then ... else* statement was badly laid out in an instruction manual for train drivers. When the human reader 'obeys a program' the flow of execution depends very crucially on the layout used and in this case bad layout caused a vital instruction to be overlooked — with disastrous results.

The process of getting the next issue (Volume 2 Number 4) to the publishers is under way. David Barron, a member of our Editorial Board, has agreed to act as Reviews Editor and we hope to include reviews of textbooks and EP conferences in future issues.

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