



## On the Role of the ACM Journal

During the calendar year 1969, fifty articles were published in the *Journal* of the ACM, falling approximately into the following categories:

automata and theory of computation	22
numerical mathematics	13
computer applications	13
computer systems	2

This list is indicative of the policies which have governed the *Journal* over the last fifteen years: the *Journal* is relatively selective in what it publishes, and the concentration in the theoretical areas and in numerical mathematics is heavy.

It is appropriate once again to inquire whether such a policy fulfills an essential need at a time when the role of computers is growing and the number of active people in the computer field becomes larger every year. In particular, there is some concern that a great many worthwhile manuscripts never come to the attention of the editors, or, alternatively, that manuscripts are not accepted when received because of editorial preferences for theoretically oriented material.

While such arguments may in fact apply in isolated cases, they surely do not accurately describe the general situation. Concerning first our orientation, we feel that it is essential that an outlet for important theoretical papers in computer science be maintained, and it is entirely proper that this outlet should remain the ACM *Journal*. Even so, we are making efforts to broaden our coverage, and almost half of our editors now handle various applied fields. As to the possibility that definitive material exists which for one reason or another escapes our attention, no conclusive proofs can be furnished either way, but all available evidence indicates that important developments will emerge from obscurity and cannot long be suppressed, even if one were to make the attempt. (In at least one well-known case, important material was believed to have been ignored through a variety of circumstances; however, the story about this material eventually turned out to be a fabrication.<sup>1</sup>)

In the end, one must proceed under the assumption that a large proportion of the important information is eventually submitted for publication, in addition to many other items of more doubtful merit. This then brings up an editorial function which is often unrecognized, but which in these days of rapid information growth becomes ever more important, namely, focusing the reader's attention and energies on preselected items of reasonable merit.

Should a situation arise in the future when we should suddenly be confronted by greater amounts of meritorious materials than we can handle under present conditions, we should see to it that the budget became sufficiently flexible to permit us to include all such acceptable items. In the meantime we are confident that our

<sup>1</sup> Oettinger, A. G. An essay in information retrieval or the birth of a myth. *Inf. Contr.* 8, 1 (Feb. 1965), 64-79.

present budget allows us to disseminate a large proportion of the outstanding items which come to our attention.

We hope that most readers will agree that a selective publication policy, fairly and broad-mindedly administered, protects their own interest, while at the same time it safeguards the development of the computer field as a whole.

—G. SALTON