

Information Science Then, Now, and  
Tomorrow--Or, Will the Real Information  
Scientist Please Stand Up!

September 27, 1972

Ten years ago I commented on a transformation that seemed to be taking place in the meaning, that is, in the inclusiveness of the term "information scientist."<sup>1</sup> For a time, as some readers may remember, I used the name "The Information Scientist" as the title for these now weekly columns. I subsequently dropped that title when the Institute of Information Scientists (IIS) of London adopted it as the name of its journal. There is enough ambiguity and confusion in the world, and I saw no good reason to contribute to it by insisting that my "journal" retain the title. Considering the paucity of papers since published in the *Information Scientist* I frequently wonder whether my decision was correct.

In just one decade there has accumulated ample evidence that my "forecast" was not ill-conceived. The number of professional "information scientists" has increased. This is demonstrated by the membership of IIS and other organizations like the American Society for Information Science, the Drug Information Association, etc. But that does not, in itself, justify my claim to have forecast correctly. It is much more significant that more and more individual scientists have come to recognize the importance of information handling in their own work—and as their own work.

This trend is epitomized by a recent publication of the Linnean Society. An entire journal issue<sup>2</sup> is devoted to a series of lectures arranged by the Society's Committee on Biological Information, whose very existence shows that even the most conservative organizations have felt the impact of the computer revolution. I find it somewhat amusing, however, that they should have discovered in 1972 methods already in use in 1952.<sup>3</sup>

Much of this new information--technology consciousness has been fostered by the revolutionary development of instruments that capture data and of computers that

store and manipulate it. But their effect on research goes—or hopefully will go—much deeper than mere acceleration of those basic and still necessary processes of input and filing.

How deep the impact of the new technology can and should go seems to me beautifully summed up by Cutbill of the Sedgwick Museum at Cambridge. "... we do not know how much of biological practice stems from the [inadequate] existing technology of information handling. It won't help much to automate what is already done. We must examine the reasons for everything we do. . . . It is time that professionals came to grips with the obvious. Their product should be information, not books, specimens, or other arbitrary package."<sup>4</sup>

If the Linnean Society is typical of what we have witnessed in one generation, then surely within another the existing difference between a scientist and an information science will be purely nominal! And probably many people today who call themselves information scientists will recognize that they are in reality information engineers or information technologists. Perhaps, therefore, my colleagues in the American Society for Information Science will better understand my recent suggestion that it become the American Society for Information Science and Technology.<sup>5</sup>

1. Garfield, E. Who are the information scientists? *Current Contents/Chem. Pharm. Med. Sci.* No. 32, August 7, 1962, p. 4.
2. *Biol. J. Linn. Soc.* 3(3), September, 1971.
3. Garfield, E. The preparation of subject-heading lists by automatic punched-card techniques. *J. Documentation* 10(1) :1-10, 1954.
4. Cutbill, J. L. New methods for handling biological information. *Biol. J. Linn. Soc.* 3(3) :253-60, 1971.
5. Garfield, E. Private communication to H. Koller. May, 1972.