

Editorial [:] Control

The editor's seat is an interesting vantage point from which to introduce this issue's theme of control, given the myriad of control mechanisms which I exercise from this position. Whilst I might celebrate the multi-disciplinary discussion of control in all its guises, I will be, all the while, surreptitiously the Queen of Control, with every action taken to compile this fascinating issue subject to what I regard as rigorous process, and experienced externally as painstaking control. Writers, designers, copy-editors, printers and dispatchers, all are under the unwieldy grasp of two single-minded editors: themselves the quarry of academic managers, disciplinary constraints, linguistic imperatives, database selection processes and status mongers. Every phase in the trajectory from idea to publication in the pages of this journal is controlled at each instance by human beings like myself and inflexible processes like those I, and the culture in which I operate, impose.

Already from the moment a prospective author lets her fingers slide into the industrially pre-worn dips of the plastic keyboard, perhaps playing as I do, with little pressureless staccato runs as warm-up for the words she hopes will appear on her screen, she is already under the insidious grip of external control. Forced to place digits on either QWERTY or AZERTY depending on the language of the country in which she composes her text (index finger stretch to 't', thumbs 'gently touching the space bar' if she acquiesces to the rules of touch typing); constrained to the use of English (although we'd accept te reo Māori, but not French); compliant to the disciplinary idealisations of the human conceived in the HCI (human computer interface) and imposed by Microsoft¹, itself mandated by clearly articulated submission instructions; the author unwittingly labours under awesome control.

Her peers, or those whom we editors mandate as her peers, will determine whether her words make the final cut, and if a young academic, she may tremble under their scrutiny; if more mature, may shake her head at their dastardly control, picking her publication destinations strategically, and hoping that the chosen journal may allow her, as do the *Annals of Internal Medicine* and the *New England Journal of Medicine* (and we don't), as I recently found out when I myself submitted, to nominate 'preferred referees', and 'referees to avoid'.

I might speak a word of the history of peer review, because its control has so often intrigued me. (And perhaps before I do so, I might also mention how controlled query language makes

peer review a difficult topic to research. Imagine, if you will, putting the words 'peer review' into a Boolean search strategy! There's an easy fix: try restricting to title. Six thousand-odd hits.)

In 1752, The Royal Society of Edinburgh in its *Medical Essays and Observations* described an editorial process whereby:

memoirs sent by correspondence are distributed according to the subject matter to those members who are most versed in these matters. The report of their identity is not known to the author. Nothing is printed in this review which is not stamped with the mark of utility.²

This constituted an effective means for guarding (controlling) the authority and credibility of learned societies which was transferred by association to those who published within their bulletins.

Reasonable, perhaps, one might think, unless one were Solomon Berson and Roselyn Yalow, whose work on immunoassay (which was to receive a Nobel prize in 1977) was rejected by the *Journal of Clinical Investigation*. "The experts in the field", read the editor's letter to the authors, "have been particularly emphatic about rejecting your positive statement [about insulin binding]".³ The article was finally accepted for publication but required the authors to modify their wording.

As publishers, we also struggle with the control which we dispense. Unwilling to reprimand our authors in the manner that at least one of us has endured herself for poor referencing style at the hands of the editor of a prestigious medical journal (whose email signature line reads "No passion in the world is equal to the passion to alter someone else's draft") we nonetheless mandate consistency. Our instructions to authors are gentle rather than authoritative, but have the same effect as the passionate editor to whom I made reference. We point out how much it will please us for notes to follow our nominated Chicago style (which also controls the manner in which our readers must confront the text, to-ing and fro-ing between text and notes, if they are to follow the authors' drift); our pleas are no less controlling than the dictates of rougher counterparts in those publications with a more muscular approach.

Clearly, control features prominently in the production of this journal. However, if we can make an abstraction of our own controlling devices, we might on the other hand, pause to appreciate how our contributors have controlled their reflection. This issue presents a potpourri of interesting contributions.

Kenneth Surin launches the issue with a Deleuzian reflection on control society, which is also captured in Thierry Jutel's discussion of the media in the transformation of the neo-liberal subject.

Chris Anderson and Brendan Hokowhitu challenge us to consider who is in control in the promotion of Indigenous culture, presenting a *petit récit* to argue that the void of the unknown is still being plugged by those who may act as if they do, but don't really know what they are doing.

Gertrud Pfister contemplates the mechanisms of control which shaped the emergence of ski-jumping as a competitive sport, while Arthur Stevens proposes an engineering model for

understanding how control systems modify the behaviour of a dynamical process without physical alteration.

Poetry by Sue Wootton and Bob Maracacci and fiction by Michael Martin underline a number of loci of control, from the biophysical to the social and the psycho-emotional.

Artist Christine Keller provides a perspective from personal experience on how control can be exerted on the creative process through the limited accessibility and the problematics of technology. Craig Hilton contributes a perspective on an art installation by Billy Apple entitled *Severe Tropical Storm 9301 Irma* in which Hilton variously questions, affirms and problematises the controlling aspects of categorisation.

Johanna Zellmer's artist's pages implicitly critique the control implied by her material, German commemorative coins complete with national emblems and images of iconic personalities; while emphasising the interaction between control and freedom in her creative process as distanced from her native country. Also through artist's pages, Paul Cullen and James Robinson contribute images (and a parallel text in Robinson's case) that speak of the precariousness of control and of its obverse: movement, or even decay or chaos.

Rod Barnett reviews *The Landscape Urbanism Reader* (2006) and points out how his discipline is vying for control of the cityscape over the more traditional control held by architects and city planners.

Some things are, however, completely beyond our control, and the amount of suitable material submitted for publication is one of those. We look forward to a second issue on control in a year's time to enable a continued discussion on this fascinating and fruitful theme.

- 1 See M Fuller, *Behind the Blip: Software as Culture* at http://www.noemalab.org/sections/ideas/ideas_articles/pdf/fuller_sw_as_culture.pdf as last accessed on 21 May 2007.
- 2 DA Kronick, "Peer Review in 18th-Century Scientific Journalism, *JAMA*, 9 March 1990, 263(10): 1321-2.
- 3 CR Kahn, J Roth and J Berson, "Yalow and the JCI: the Agony and the Ecstasy", *J Clin Invest*, 15 October 2004, 114(8): 1051-4.