Letters to the Editor

On guard against male chauvinism

Sir:

I feel compelled to comment on your March 1977 cover on behalf of struggling feminists everywhere. Not only do you portray the woman as having no ideas about how she would use the personal computer being considered but the ideas she has for her husband and son are both wrong. As recently as five years ago I would not have noticed such errors, but times change. I believe your cover was unimaginative and unfair.

Kenneth R. Peal
Staff Engineer
Information Processing Center
Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution

Actually, we thought the woman came out ahead. She appears to be the only one with any practical uses in mind, while her husband and son dream only of playing Space War.

Ed

Alternative version of SOL available

Sir:

In the article "Computer Simulation: A Tutorial" by Adkins and Pooch (Computer, April 1977, pp. 12-16) the authors have misclassified the SOL language' with SIMULA under the "PROCESS ORIENTED" category when it clearly belongs under the "TRANSACTION FLOW" category with GPSS. The confusion arises from the appearance of the word PROCESS in the SOL language as the name of a program section which corresponds to a separate portion of the system through which a certain set of the transactions flows. The terminology and system view of SOL are exactly that of GPSS with respect to "transaction flow" while SIMULA supports an inverted view of the system through its own concept of a controlling PROCESS.

The contrast between the view of a discrete system through SIMULA and the view through GPSS/SOL we find to be instructive. SOL is not generally available, and for this reason we have produced a functioning version of SOL which uses a SOL to standard Fortran translator. We would be happy to make this available to anyone having an interest.

Allen H. Brady
Dennis L. Ghiglieri
University of Nevada
System Computing Center


More on Jim Warren's survey

Editor:

Jim Warren's excellent article, "Personal and Hobby Computing: An Overview," in the March issue, notes briefly that "...an organization called the Amateur Computer Society has existed for some years. However, it has not been a leader in the computer hobbyist activities and, in fact, appears to be unknown by the majority of present-day hobbyists."

The low profile was maintained deliberately, as I was publishing the ACS Newsletter entirely by myself, from August 1966 (which makes it the oldest hobby-computer publication in the world) to December 1976. Originally I'd intended to also start a lower-level organization, the Amateur Digital Society, and tried for some time to get a grant to operate both groups full-time, hoping to publish in both areas, and to start clubs in the main centers of activity in those homebrew days. But no foundation or corporation wanted to take a chance on supporting a hobby activity that was then, because of its complexity, largely confined to a small group of engineers in the computer industry.

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who by 1975 had built no more than a couple of dozen computers of their own.  
So the Amateur Computer Society never became a membership organization, but a newsletter publisher instead, with a newsletter circulation mainly among professors and students of computer science, as well as computer-industry engineers. Publications ceased because, as the closing notice put it, "Times have changed, and now that kits are so prevalent, there are other publications that serve the readers' interests better than the ACS Newsletter. Also, the ACS Newsletter always depended heavily upon reader input, and this input has dwindled."

One reason the ACS Newsletter lasted so long was because the circulation kept low. To quote from the June 1976 Newsletter, "Anybody who has started a hobby-computer newsletter soon discovers that there's a point where the growing number of subscribers will make it necessary for him to either have his list of subscribers handled by a professional 'subscription maintenance' organization, or else find volunteers who will spend a great deal of time changing addresses, taking care of renewals, etc.

And there's also the big (and expensive) problem of getting the newsletter printed, collated, and addressed. This all costs money, but the subscription price has to be kept reasonable, so that unless the newsletter sells advertising...it may lose money. So it all has to be a labor of love."

Hal Singer stopped publishing his jam-packed "Micro-8 Newsletter" last year because it just took too much of his time. And several current newsletters are about to phase out, for the same reason.

Although the Amateur Computer Society no longer publishes a newsletter, its name lives on, through adoption by a number of clubs, including the Amateur Computer Societies of Westchester, Denver, Tallahassee, Washington, Columbus, Central Oklahoma, Bloomington (Indiana), and perhaps one or two more since this was written.

The full story of the Amateur Computer Society will be told in a future issue of Creative Computing which, incidentally, as Jim Warren's article puts it, did in the past tend to "focus on social impact and philosophy," but which in recent issues has started emphasizing hardware as well. And it has been publishing software since the first issue.

Stephen B. Gray  
Editor, Creative Computing

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**Warren replies**

Editor:

This is in response to both Steve Gray's letter, and also to Jonathan A. Titus' letter published last month. First, to Steve's comments:

I am delighted to see these historical comments regarding the Amateur Computer Society. I had not realized that the ACS had no members; only readers. These notes help explain why the ACS has not been in a position of leadership in the computer hobbyist movement, in spite of its elder state-group status.

Though it was somewhat implied in the letter, it was not illustrated by the title Steve used in his logoff: He was the Founder of the ACS. Incidentally, it is my impression that the various clubs using 'Amateur Computer Society' in their name chose to do so, independent of Steve's ACS. I would be interested in receiving documentation from those organizations concerning the validity of this impression.

It should also be noted that the software published in Creative Computing has, to date, been limited to small programs written in Basic, sometimes reprinted from issues of People's Computer Company. As Creative Computing's new editor, I suspect that Steve may improve and expand their software content.

To Mr. Titus' letter:

Mr. Titus is correct in pointing out that the 4004 and 8008 were developed in 1971, and shortly thereafter. My article incorrectly stated that the 4004 was a 1974 product. It should have stated that the 8080 — the dominant microprocessor in use by hobbyists — was developed in 1974. Although the ACS, beginning in 1966, and the Micro-8, published in the July, 1974, issue of Radio-Electronics, both predate the Altair, I suspect that most people would date the onset of the computer hobby — as a significant and widespread movement — from the publication of the January, 1975, cover story on the MITS machine in Popular Electronics. Either way, it's a quibble.

My article was seriously remiss, however, in failing to give credit to Hal Singer and his "Micro-8 Newsletter." Hal produced his first newsletter on September 14, 1974, with the second issue following 15 days later. It was explicitly for active owner-users of 8008-based Micro-8's, was a patch-quilt of pasted together letters, notes, documentation, programs, and what-have-you — photo-reduced to tiny print and distributed to whoever asked for it. It was packed full of information and communications, far in excess of the content of even the best newsletters of the largest computer hobbyist organizations today. Hal made a significant contribution in creating and maintaining — with the help of John Craig for awhile — this homegrown information exchange medium that was so useful to Micro-8 homebrewers. Sadly, the demands of his high school teaching position have forced him to terminate publication of his NL. It is particularly sad for those 500-1000 owners of 8008-based machines, for none of the current hobby publications carry significant information concerning such "antique" computers.

Jim C. Warren, Jr.