

This is why it is so important to develop the theoretical research dimension to indexing. Indexing seems to be in the situation now which medical science was in a couple of hundred years ago. That was a time of case studies, of anecdotal observation, of speculative generalization. Medicine has moved on from this primitive empirical stage, thanks chiefly to vast numbers of experimental studies, motivated by testable hypotheses, and prompted by fruitful theories. And indexing must move on, too.

Thumbing through the copies of *The Indexer* since I became President of SI in 1992, it is plain that most of the major papers fall into the category of extending the empirical range of the subject at a descriptive level, with several authors telling us about the particular problems of indexing a particular category, whether it be newspapers, law reports, personal names, hymns and psalms, or museum objects. Regional differences also attract their fair share of attention. There is a proper concern with methodology, which these days is heavily biased towards taking into account the consequences of the electronic revolution. Educational methods (e.g. training of indexers) and points of interdisciplinary connection (e.g. with library science) are in evidence. But theoretical articles are few—a point probed by Ken Bakewell in his piece on 'Research in indexing' (*The Indexer* 18 (3) April 1993, page 147).

There are exceptions, as shown by the paper by Ross Todd (*The Indexer* 18 (2), October 1992, pages 101–4), who reminds us of the importance of distinguishing between 'the mental processes that take place during subject analysis' and 'translating the outcomes of subject analysis into a specified indexing language', and asserts that 'the focus of our literature is very much on the translation stage'. 'There is little about how indexers decide what the subject of a document is, how they determine its aboutness.' What are the rules which guide us in our decision-making? Todd points out that there are huge variations in inter-indexer consistency, when indexers are asked to index the same document. He might have added that there are also major variations when the same indexer is asked to index the same document—a point commented upon in a different connection by Hans Wellisch (*The Indexer* 19 (2), October 1994, page 132). I very much agree with Todd's conclusion, that 'a productive step forward in research would be to begin investigating indexing practice that focuses on the first stage of indexing, subject analysis, and examine how indexers in practice actually undertake this process' (page 104). We now need to refine our methodologies so that this can be done, and to find the time to step back from the daily grind, as the first pathologists did, to put these methodologies into practice.

I conclude my encyclopedia section on unusual types of monologue by saying, 'the task of indexing is a difficult one, requiring exceptional communicative commitment'. If there is anything I have had confirmed in my presidential period of office for the Society of Indexers, it is the truth of this last observation.

DAVID CRYSTAL  
*President, Society of Indexers*

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### Coming events

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#### 1995

June 8–10 **ASI/IASC Convention and workshops**. Delta Hotel, Montréal, Canada. *Details from McGill University, 550 Sherbrook Street West, West Tower, Suite 490, Montréal, Québec, H3A 1BQ, Canada.*

October 9–12 **American Society for Information Science Annual Meeting**, 'Converging technologies: forging new partnerships in information'. Chicago, Illinois. *Details from ASIS, 8720 Georgia Avenue, Suite 501, Silver Spring, MD 20910-3202, USA.*

November 13–15 **Forum 95, 'The Interacting Communication Conference'**, Dortmund, Germany. IEEE/ISTC/STIC-QTD/tekomp. *Details from tekomp (Forum 95), Markelstr. 34, D-7000, Stuttgart 1, Germany; fax to: Germany +711 650767.*

#### 1996

April 12–14 **Society of Indexers Conference**, Bristol. *Details from James Pargiter, Stuckey Farmhouse, Winsham, Chard, Somerset TA20 4DY.*

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□ 'The world is really, when you think about it, just another book that we read with our eyes and interpret in our heads. The pages are an effort to turn over, there are chapters that are incomprehensible to many... There are continuous arguments about the lexicon, the grammar and the interpretation. The index, too, is in pretty poor shape.'

—Tim Radford, reviewing *Black holes and time warps* by K. S. Thorne in *The Guardian*, 30 July 1994.