

spread consensus, although this is easy to forget in the heat of the review process.

Can the new electronic media help us with peer review? As Langer points out, articles of low interest published on the Los Alamos e-print archive are ignored; he indicates this is a form of peer review. Why not formalize this process, making it possible for readers to submit comments, reviews, and reference links for an article they find interesting or relevant? Articles that generate lots of discussion, either positive or negative, would be perceived as impor-

tant based on the number and quality of the comments. The extent of interest generated by an article might even be used in tenure and promotion decisions.

I have used the Web for peer review of student papers (students were allowed to rewrite papers for a higher grade after anonymous online feedback from others in the class). Such review is used currently in several English courses here.

Using a similar mechanism, authors could clarify, answer questions, and extend their work in response to criticism. An obvious role

would exist for an editor/monitor, but less so than with most printed journals. I encourage the American Physical Society and the American Institute of Physics to break out of the printing-press mind-set and think of ways to use the new electronic media for more than one-way communication. Let's create a genuinely interactive—and democratic—electronic journal similar to the Los Alamos archive, where almost anything can be submitted, but where any peer can review or comment on it, as occurs, for instance, in really good list server discussions.

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The future of electronic publishing is indeed bright, but two changes in current approach will be important.

First, the paper in our “paperless” offices multiplies every time we touch the computer. Reading a paper on the computer screen is uncomfortable, hard on the eyes, and does not allow marginal notes. And an article pulled from the Web is usually printed single sided instead of double sided. Because information on the Web sprawls over several pages when one page would do, wasting paper is too easy. Serious digital publication will require compact formatting and the near-universal use of two-sided printers.

Second, as anyone who uses e-mail can attest, electronic communication is too easy. Surely users can be strongly tempted to throw some half-digested results up on the Web with a few keystrokes. Perhaps this problem has solved itself among string theorists, but can we trust ourselves to objectively review our own work?

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LANGER REPLIES: I agree with Kyle Forinash's remark that a fundamental strength of the Internet is its potential for interactive communication among several parties. In fact, taking advantage of this strength was what I had in mind when I predicted that the American Physical Society is headed toward some powerful combination of the unrefereed e-print archives (which already include lots of online interaction) and the refereed journals. But it's not yet clear to me how this merger will work. Our main