Editorial

Value and price, classic and modern

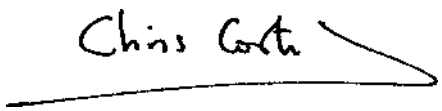
I was reading the latest issue of a well known materials journal* recently and the first and last articles caught my eye and both resonated with me (but not Plasmon Resonance as we often read between the pages of this journal!).

In the first article, David J. Eaglesham (First Solar, Perrysberg, Ohio) started with Oscar Wilde's view of the cynic, "He knows the price of everything but the value of nothing". David suggests the opposite is true of materials scientists: "He knows the value of everything and the price of nothing". He goes on to say that most scientists do not know the basic price of the materials that they study, even though they can reel off the values of all sorts of properties and the potential benefit of their material to mankind. He explains that this may be partly due to the difficulty in accessing such price information via the internet.

As we all know, the choice of material in a real application often comes down to a cost-performance trade-off. Why do we choose gold when copper has the best conductivity, for example. David suggests that we should incorporate price information on materials into our materials education. And that all research proposals for funding should require a line item of the cost of the material under study. That might focus minds as to the realities of commercial exploitation. Food for thought, don't you think! So test yourself – what is the current price of gold? (Hint: You will find it on the World Gold Council website, www.gold.org)

The second author, Alex King, speaks about young researchers handing in their research reports and how he often responds by telling them to go and start their survey of the literature with the original papers on the topic. The point he makes is the modern tendency to limit background research to electronic archives. Only recent papers can be found on such archives in many cases (but not true with *Gold Bulletin*!), although more and more are reaching further back in time. He makes a good point that many articles are in .pdf format which is not searchable text. I referee papers for various journals as well as *Gold Bulletin* and that is often a criticism I make in my assessment – that early literature is not mentioned. These are often the classic papers on the topic. King goes further to discuss what constitutes 'modern' and how we define it. When does 'modern' (papers, theories, opinions) become 'classic'. In materials science, there is no clear definition, he claims, unlike physics. Is that also true in chemistry? Does it all matter?

King finally speaks about experts and the classic definition, "knows more and more about less and less" and that materials science provides a 'hint of the asymptotic limit of such a definition'. He asserts that we now have scales of nothingness to serve as denominators of our coefficients of expertise. Hmmm! I give up! It must be my age; I want a simple life!



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