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Editorial

The fascination of the papers in this issue for me is in the complementary or alternative worlds we, and to a greater measure engineers live in. Complementary in the sense that the LabVIEW related papers in the first part of the issue can be classified as the 'Virtual World', complementary to our real world represented in the second 'regular' section of the issue. Is there a contrasting world between papers such as the PSpice simulations by Litwhiler and Porter and the real experiences of women engineers in the worklplace after graduation (Ingram) or the experience of students in industrial practice (Jawitz, Case, Ahmed). I reflect on the statement by Sir Martin Rees, the Astronomer Royal that 'life, the universe and everything, may be no more than a giant computer with humans reduced to bits of software. The possibility that what we see may not actually exist has been a traditional occupation of philosophers dating back to the Greeks. On the other hand our Universe' may be too complex and structured to be just a simulation. In the book by Adams 'The Hitchhikers Guide to the Universe', Deep Thought creates the earth and its human inhabitants as a giant calculating device to answer the 'ultimate question'.

Over the past few decades computers are evolving from being able to simulate simple patterns to being able to create detailed virtual worlds. If the trend continues we can imagine computers which will be able to simulate worlds perhaps as complicated as the one we 'think' we live in. Science fiction has been actively toying with such ideas as exemplified by the movie 'Matrix'.

A world apart from these philosophical digressions, I would like to express my very real thanks to Jay Porter who has selected and edited the papers on the applications of virtual instrumentation. He is particularly to be commended on the diversity of international sources for these applications. The papers stem from India, Venzuela, Romania, South Africa, China and the USA, highlighting the near universal application of these simulations in engineering higher education.

Michael Wald