



A Lasting Journey

A few years ago, I was asked by my university's president to join a reception honoring some dignitaries from another country. A woman who appeared to be of nobility asked me what type of work I do.

"Signal processing," I said. Her eyes lit up with excitement and said that the traffic signals near her home were operating strangely and asked if I could perhaps offer my expertise. Not knowing how to respond, I pretended to be busy eating my soup...

After the 2008 International Conference on Acoustics, Speech, and Signal Processing ended in Las Vegas, I was one of the last to leave since I stayed for the Board of Governors meeting immediately after. On my way to the airport, the taxi driver asked me if I was in town for the game.

I responded simply, "No, for a conference." The driver replied, "For the signal processing conference?" I was quite impressed that he was aware of our field! When asked how he knew, the driver replied that he had taken quite a few attendees to the airport, and they told him what signal processing is about.

So the world is not that hopeless. Since I raised the "signal processing inside" phenomenon [1] in 2004, however, it seems that signal processing is still quite inside. Over the past decade there has been an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness in terms of how/where to address this visibility issue that is unique to our field.

When I was a member of the IEEE Technical Activities Board, more than 40

presidents of Societies and/or councils would gather and often remark how signal processing is ubiquitous when we were working together. Our field of interest as officially approved by that body is defined by this opening statement: "Signal processing is the enabling technology for the generation, transformation, extraction, and interpretation of information."

If you were to refer to this statement among your colleagues in engineering, or even science, they would most likely know what you are talking about.

Nevertheless, when we go beyond our comfort zone, signal processing becomes an unknown. So who is to speak for us? Is it important for "the public" to know more about us?

Well, of course! Otherwise the field may not receive the recognition and influence it deserves, as well as the research funding to accompany. But the visibility of our field is certainly about more than sheer pride and ego.

The taxi driver knew about signal processing because people had repeatedly talked to him about it. I would bet that if the lady of nobility had been exposed to or heard of signal processing a couple of times, she would have instead asked me to fix her TV or cell phone, both better propositions than the traffic signals...

As a result, the IEEE Signal Processing Society (SPS) Executive Committee has decided to face this daunting issue again by establishing an ad hoc committee that will work with John Cozzens of the U.S. National Science Foundation. I hope that we can at least have a starting point for us to work toward developing a concrete plan in the near future.

Over the past few years, the SPS has changed significantly and grown a lot. It

has been my honor and privilege to work with so many dedicated colleagues who offer their unselfish volunteer time and effort to make our Society better. There are so many people to thank, and I would definitely miss some names if I tried to name them all. Please allow me to say "Thank you so much!" to all of you.

It has been my pleasure and good fortune to have had the opportunity to work with the incoming SPS President Alex Acero over many years. As an outstanding researcher and experienced industry leader, Alex is ready to move the Society to a higher level. I wish him and the Society all the best!

I would like to thank all of the SPS staff, especially Rich Baseil and Theresa Argiropoulos. The last two years were perhaps the most difficult time for our office due to a severe shortage of manpower. But under their amazing leadership, not only did the staff manage to provide outstanding services but they also made the quality of member services a new priority.

I would also like to thank Tracy Chung for helping to proofread every draft of my message in an effort to make the reading more enjoyable.

And so a chapter is over, yet another is about to begin. It is time for an old soldier to fade away. But the journey continues...

REFERENCE

- [1] K. J. R. Liu, "Signal processing inside?" *IEEE Signal Process. Mag.*, vol. 21, no. 5, p. 2, Sept. 2004.