

# Editorial (Part II)

[This is the second part of an editorial analyzing the relation of BBS to existing journals. Part I discussed our model, *Current Anthropology* (CA) as well as: (1) specialty journals, (2) theoretical journals, and (3) review journals in the behavioral and brain sciences.]

**4. General journals.** Among journals reporting more general syntheses intended for the nonspecialist are, of course, *Scientific American*, *American Scientist*, and so on. Such journals are clearly invaluable to the nonspecialist, but considered from the special viewpoint being developed in this editorial, apart from the already described limitations they share with theoretical and review journals in terms of lack of feedback and interspecialty dialogue, their articles are not usually written at a sufficiently sophisticated level to provide a basis for real critical scrutiny on the part of specialists from other disciplines.

The problem is that there seems to be no middle ground between the educated layman, who may have a serious interest in the contents of such general articles but neither the resources nor the intention to pursue them in greater depth, and the professional colleague, whom one would never dare address in such generalities: Left out is the sophisticated specialist from a related but not identical field, who may have a profound and professional interest in a rigorous general review. Someone, in short, who may conceivably have something important to say about the work reported, were he confronted with a sufficiently thorough-going and serious exposition.

**5. New kinds of journals.** There are also some new journals that fail to quite fit any of the categories described. *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology*, under the editorship of E. O. Wilson and Hans Kummer, promises to be a semi-general journal with a more intensive approach. It will attempt to subsume the areas of behavioral biology, social psychology, and sociology. Although this journal is to be applauded for rising above the confines of a single specialty area, it is not otherwise clear how it is likely to overcome any of the other inherent limitations that have been discussed here: It will not provide the *Open Peer Commentary* feature, nor would it have sufficient interdisciplinary scope to implement such a feature to advantage.

A second new kind of journal is exemplified by *Behaviorism: A Forum for Critical Discussion*. This journal does explicitly solicit dialogue and commentary in the form of articles discussing issues in behaviorism. However, the subject matter has a somewhat political tenor – it is largely restricted to topics pertaining to Skinnerianism, operant learning, and so on – and the criticism is for the most part unilateral and unsolicited, rather than being directed at a tangible object available for comparison.

Several journals have begun to experiment with occasionally implementing a CA-like feature. For the most part, this has been

quite successful, for example: (1) the arrangement by Jerry Hirsch, an editor of *Animal Behaviour*, for multiple book review treatment of E. O. Wilson's *Sociobiology* and Gregory Razran's *Mind in Evolution*, with the author's précis, commentaries and response; (2) the multiple commentary on Donald Campbell's paper on cultural evolution in *American Psychologist*, 1975, 1976; and (3) the occasional publication of referees' comments in *Journal of Experimental Psychology (General)*. However, such initiatives are clearly limited by the fact that (i) the mainstay responsibilities of specialty journals clearly do not consist of providing the service of *Open Peer Commentary* and (ii) specialty journals, as mentioned, do not have the interdisciplinary scope to realize the full potential of the service, in terms of commentators, contributors, or readership.

One notable instance of success must be given special mention because, on the one hand, it appears to belie our earlier contention that *Open Peer Commentary* cannot be implemented in a specialty context, and also because it involves a rather unusual subject matter that reveals some unexpected virtues of CA Treatment and was developed, curiously enough, independently of any knowledge of *Current Anthropology*.

Apparently for several years now a number of statistical journals (*Journal of The Royal Statistical Society*, *Biometrika*, and so on) have occasionally implemented a multiple-commentary "treatment" of certain papers. The approach is identical to CA Treatment, with the paper accompanied by a number of peer commentaries and by the author's rebuttal. What is curious is that in this relatively well-defined specialty (although admittedly statistics has ramifications beyond mathematics, within biology, psychology, economics, etc.), with such a rigorous and nondiscursive subject-matter, the *Commentary* approach should have proven so effective and sought-after.

Our conclusion is that in fact this latter case is *not* purely an instance of the CA-like operation of the Treatment process. Rather, it foreshadows an even more powerful potential of the service of *Open Peer Commentary*, namely in actively contributing to the analysis and solution of formal intellectual problems by breaking the cognitive "sets" of individuals through high-level spontaneous dialogue and criticism, simultaneously constrained by being "answerable" to the formal medium of print (and hence posterity).

Although neither anthropology nor the behavioral and brain sciences may have yet approached sufficient formal rigor to exploit this latter feature of *Open Peer Commentary*, it too will be available whenever the disciplines rise to the occasion.

[The third part of this editorial will further discuss some unique properties of the service of *Open Peer Commentary*. This will be followed by a brief history of the BBS project and the annual list of BBS Associates.]