

Editorial

The following "chain letter" was sent to a number of colleagues in late 1975 and early 1976. The genealogy of BBS Associates which has resulted appears on the next page. [Please feel free to duplicate this letter; nominations will continue to be considered.]

Dear _____:

I must start by enumerating the reasons why someone should not start a new journal: The first and strongest is that there are already too many of them. A second is that all specialties worth the coverage seem already to have their well-established outlets, and there is hardly more research worth reporting than what we are already oppressed with on all sides. Finally, who can afford more journals, either in terms of expense or time? Need one say more?

My reply is based on a Cartesian *reductio* I have performed on my own priorities. There are several specialty journals (in my case in the area of brain function and cognition) which I would under no circumstances give up having and reading regularly. Then there are some more peripheral journals which I would with reluctance sacrifice if forced by time or finances. But among these more peripheral journals (from my own point of view) is one to which I would cleave through thick and thin, even though it happens to number, even relative to these peripheral journals, among the farthest-removed from my own central interests.

My attachment to this journal is due to a special feature it has, and to my knowledge it is quite unique in this respect. The feature combines the virtues of a report of current research in a review article, a "live" interdisciplinary conference, and (as anyone who has read my "Interhemispheric Division of Labour" would know I would find especially felicitous) an *epistolary* element which can be provided by no other medium than the direct and spontaneous letter.

The journal of which I speak is published by the Wenner-Gren Foundation, it is called *Current Anthropology*, and, strangely enough, no, I am *not* an agent for that admirable organization or its journal! I am merely a profound admirer of the "CA Comment" feature, in which a current article is followed in the same issue by over a dozen commentaries by researchers specializing in its subject matter, as well as by representatives of related fields with which the contents are judged to resonate—all followed by a response by the authors.

Perhaps those unfamiliar with the journal would anticipate that such a combination might prove quite volatile, but in the vast majority of cases everything is quite benign and amicable, even in criticism or dissent, for the simple reason that everything is knowingly and consensually in the open. Indeed the CA treatment is greatly sought-after by authors.

I will not continue to sing this journal's praises. Anyone who has even the remotest interest in the Sciences of Man ought to examine the CA feature for himself and judge whether it is not a radically different and extraordinarily effective means of communicating scientific and scholarly information. On innumerable occasions I have had the experience, after reading a CA treatment, of having gained a far more profound and comprehensive exposure and insight into a topic*—even one in which I had very little prior competence—than by any other means (such as the list of virtues above, for example).

I am inspired then to try out this feature in another area of scientific communication. It must retain its interdisciplinary character (no parochial vehicle, this), but focused a little closer to home. So I propose to form a new journal called: "Current Commentary in the Behavioral and Brain Sciences" modelled entirely on the CA feature. Instead of a regular Board of Editors, it will have a Board of Editorial Commentators, as well as a body of Corresponding Associate Commentators (modelled on CA's Associates), the latter gradually selectively recruited from the competent readership.

The scope of the subject matter appropriate for CCBBS will be wide: everything from molecular neurobiology and invertebrate behavior to cognition, language and artificial intelligence. Even topics in the philosophy of science and mind will have a place. And if any of this sounds too grandiose, I remind you that the virtues of the CA approach are only realizable if given sufficient room! We all occasionally hear and voice laments about excessive

specialization and insufficient access or inclination toward fields other than one's own. Yet we rightly deplore dilettantish "syntheses" and naive or idle cross-disciplinary dabbling. I believe that the CA feature, as focused on the behavioral and brain sciences, will, among other things, have a contribution to make toward remedying this situation, and at the highest scientific and scholarly level.

However, I see the primary role of CCBBS as providing a forum for significant findings, sophisticated analysis, and enlightened controversy. The appropriate submission will be an empirical report from anywhere within the interdisciplinary spectrum I have specified (psychology, behavioral biology and neuroscience), but which is judged to have broader than usual implications, upon which the author wishes to invite commentary. Significant theoretical articles, reinterpretations and critiques of research findings (and occasionally the author's *précis* of a book of this kind) will also be considered. Editors of specialty journals will be asked to recommend CCBBS treatment for their submissions where they judge it more appropriate, and CCBBS will in turn redirect its own submissions to specialty journals in cases where CCBBS treatment does not appear to be warranted. Far from competing with the specialty journals, I hope we will complement them in a unique and important way.

So that's my *apologia* and advertisement. It happens that you are also the first-generation recipient of an academic chain-letter (I mean this literally!), by which I propose to recruit the Board of Editorial Commentators for CCBBS. Among other things, this heterodox strategy has the virtue of partaking of the epistolary spirit of that very CA feature on which CCBBS is to be modelled. In fact, I propose to publish in the first volume of the journal, along with a permanent acknowledgment of our legacy from CA, the complete genealogy of the Board of Editorial Commentators as it actually materializes through this means.

What I respectfully ask of you is the following: If you accept my invitation to join the Board (and indeed even if you do not accept but are nonetheless willing to play the game), please besides replying directly to me, make two (or more if you wish) xerox copies of this letter and send them to nominees of your choice, in accordance with the following criteria: In addition to being gifted in their specialty, they should be acute critics, highly articulate, and with a considerably more than parochial breadth of interest and competence within the behavioral and/or brain sciences area.

Latter-generation nominees are asked to do the same, but with the understanding that I must reserve the right to decide whether to accept them as members of the Board of Editorial Commentators, as Corresponding Associate Commentators, or not at all. Any supporting information from either nominator or nominee would of course be most helpful. And, for the purposes of the genealogy, all nominees are asked to specify who nominated them.

I would also be grateful for indications as to the kinds of articles you feel would be appropriate for CCBBS. It would be most helpful if you would cite some previously-published articles that would have been suitable, as well as topics and/or authors that you would recommend for actual CCBBS treatment in the future, together with possible commentators.

Where this chain-letter will lead is anyone's guess. It may turn out to be endless, with my receiving nominations for the rest of my earthly days, and that may be a just punishment! But ideally it would do a full circle eventually, and then we would all know that the Board had had a destiny of its own.

As my first-generation choices, immortalized on the chain-letterhead, much of this destiny is in your hands. . . . Just remember that this letter has been around the world 17 times, and the last person to break the chain lost all his grants!

Sincerely,

Stevan Harnad

* In fact it is noteworthy that our idea for the *New York Academy of Sciences Conference* on "Origins and Evolution of Language and Speech" was actually stimulated by a CA treatment of Gordon Hewes's article on this topic.