

BBS Valedictory Editorial

BBS was an idea 25 years before its time – 55 years if you reckon it by the advent of its model, *Current Anthropology*, CA, founded by Sol Tax in 1957 (Harnad 1978, 1979). It is only now, in the online era, that the Open Peer Commentary feature will at last come into its own. I wish BBS every success in its 2nd half-century. I expect that BBS's Commentary feature, inspired by CA, and emulated by several other journals across the years, will become ever more widespread online. I never believed that only 12–15 target articles a year deserved this treatment, but limits of time and journal space and budget made it impossible to treat more. This will change now.

But what will not change is what must come first, for every target article accorded open peer commentary first undergoes a particularly rigorous form of classical peer review. The rigor was partly because we could only afford to accept so few, yet I've often wondered whether many of the papers we had to turn down across the years, some of which went on to appear in excellent journals, would not have generated BBS treatments that were as valuable for both the readers and the authors as the ones we did publish.

This does not mean a decline in my belief in peer review! There are at least 20,000 peer-reviewed journals, across disciplines and around the world, publishing at least 2,000,000 articles annually. No reader should ever have to face the raw, unrefereed drafts out of which those 2,000,000 articles grew – that is the job of the intrepid editor and those unsung heroes, the selfless referees. The filter of peer review protects the scarce and precious time of all researchers, in ensuring that what does appear can be trusted to have met established quality standards of the journal in which it appears. But after that, after the respective quality-standards

have been met, that is certainly not the end of it. We know, of course, that many published articles are never cited, and probably many more are never even read. And no doubt many do deserve that fate. But my concern is with those that do not: those stillborn brainchildren that would have needed some peer commentary to draw attention to their merits (and perhaps also their defects).

In the paper era, the turn-around time and the costs minimized the possibility of such formal (i.e., published) peer feedback, but the PostGutenberg era of Scholarly Skywriting seems almost made to measure for it. BBS already uses the online medium more efficiently, extensively and creatively than most journals. Let me close with the confident prediction that this is but the beginning. Vale atque ave!

Stevan Harnad

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Editorial Transition Letter

Behavioral and Brain Sciences is one of the institutions that established cognitive science as the thriving research area it is today. Stevan Harnad, its inventor, is now stepping down from his 25 years of editorship to join that research full-time. Such is his breadth of knowledge and ability that it will take three of us, assisted by a number of Associate Editors, to replace him. The domain of BBS includes perception, cognition, action, emotion, language, social behavior and culture; and it draws from the disciplines of philosophy, computer science, psychology, clinical neurology, neuroscience, anthropology, linguistics, and evolutionary biology. Our goal is to maintain exactly this breadth, cross-disciplinary integration and fundamental editorial policy. The ideal BBS article is a new theoretical synthesis of the empirical results or viewpoints of several fields, bold enough to ignite controversy. The basic editorial process, which solicits a relatively large number of reviews from experts in all relevant fields, is designed to recognize these cross-disciplinary syntheses and will not be changed.

Some changes are, however, planned. First, the speed and accuracy of the review process is under repair. Due to relocation of the central office and various changes in staff, BBS developed a substantial backlog in the last two years. With the combined efforts of Stevan Harnad and the three new editors, and the allocation of new staff by Cambridge University Press, the backlog has been nearly eradicated. We calculate that it will now be possible for an article to go through first submission, substantial revision and re-review,

commentary and response in under 12 months. Second, the number of commentaries each BBS target article inspires has become unwieldy – 30 to 40 commentaries per paper showcase a wide range of opinions, but are difficult to read and synthesize. *We will bring the number of commentaries published with the target article to a more manageable number (approximately 20 published with each target article), but plan to expand the opportunity to comment through the electronic medium.* In both media, as before, the commentators will represent a broad spectrum of fields, seniority and opinions about the target article.

As always, we shall welcome manuscripts contributed to BBS from all comers, subject only to their scientific and scholarly quality. We shall have no truck with boycotts or any other form of censorship on non-academic grounds. We shall also continue to solicit the best authors to contribute to BBS as new areas evolve that impact the behavioral and brain sciences.

Stevan Harnad had the highest standards, but was also kind and encouraging, getting his authors to go the extra distance, with the help of BBS's extensive editorial process, to produce superior writing as well as superior science. We hope to continue this tradition, and to protect and extend BBS's unique combination of breadth and depth.

Barbara Finlay
Jeffrey Gray
Paul Bloom