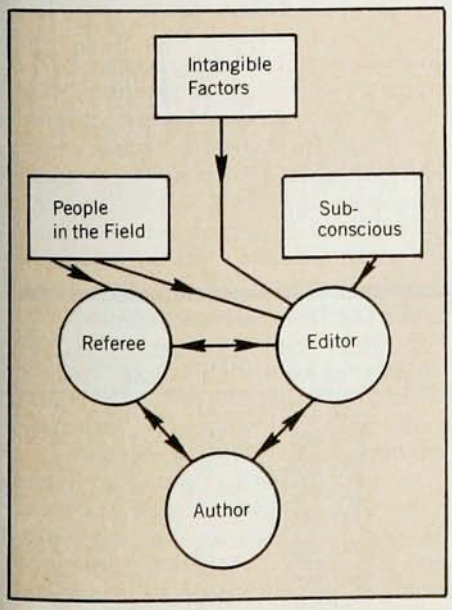
letters

More on editormanship

It is unfortunate that Author (A) Agnes M. Herzberg is not up-to-date with the bibliographical list of her otherwise challenging article (April, page 9). It is distressing that the Referees (R) and Editors (E) of PHYSICS TODAY did not notice that her most recent reference dates back 10 years!

In the course of these years the Game of Editormanship underwent some subtle changes. In one variety, the number of players is not limited to three (A, R, E) any more, but is open to People in the Field (PF) as well. Thus Referees of *Solid State Communications*, in order to be able to "arrive at sensible decisions" are urged to "use as a guide" the following question: "Will people in the field be 'glad to have seen it'?" (the article).[1] It would be erroneous to conclude that the R is required to poll the PF: Virtual interaction is perfectly acceptable. A similar interaction may also take place between the E and the PF: ". . . . the E has other factors to consider . . . there is his view of what the journal should be like, subject to possible gradual modification as a result of feedback from the community he serves." [2]

Another entertaining possibility is that the rules are changed midgame by E and, moreover, the new rules are kept undisclosed to both A and R: "We insist . . . that as long as we are called to make judgements, we are not obligated to disclose all the factors that were considered. Indeed, some of them are obviously intangible and may often even be subconscious." [2] Clearly one is confronted with a manybody problem: The relevant interactions are shown in the figure.



Incidentally, the present letter illustrates well the art of Pointsmanship, as practiced by an A. The Pointsmanship Index (PI) is defined as the number of readers of an article divided by the number of *work* days dedicated to writing it (estimates). (The definition may be readily generalized to the cases that the paper is coauthored by two or more authors and that the same work (with slight changes) is published in two or more journals.) For example, PI $\sim$ 1 for a typical article in the *Physical Review* (100 readers/100 days). On the other hand, for this letter PI $\sim 10^5$ (30 000 readers/0.3 work days)!

References

1. Solid State Commun. **28**, v (1978).
2. Phys. Rev. Letters **42**, 545 (1979).

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France in 30's = US in 70's?

I enjoyed Spencer Weart's article "Jean Perrin and the Reorganization of Science." (June, page 42). However, the description of the situation in the French physics community in the early 1930's seems strangely familiar; "The operating expenses of most laboratories were dictated . . . by government bureaucrats (who) . . . worked closely with a small circle of established professors, some of whom had done little productive research for many decades . . . There was little room for new blood . . . the number of science students rose to about double . . . but the number of university professors actually declined . . . students whose careers were blocked . . . the academy of sciences dominated by aged conservatives" and so on. If I had not read the introductory paragraphs, I would be almost certain that this was a description of the situation in physics in the US in the