

JBA

JOURNAL OF BUSINESS ANTHROPOLOGY

Letter from the Editors

Brian Moeran and Christina Garsten

We welcome you to the second issue of the *JBA*, in which you will find three articles about anthropologists working with business colleagues (Bill Maurer and Scott Mainwaring), for a business client (Pedro Oliveira), and on the business of advertising (Timothy de Waal Malefyt). Each of these offers fascinating insights into the ways in which anthropologists go about trying to understand and analyse the work of their “informants”. The final “article” consists of thirteen short opinion pieces by anthropologists and sociologists about what they think business anthropology is, might be, and perhaps should not be. What we learn about “business anthropology” in this issue of the *JBA* is that it is as much about working *with* the business world, as it is working *for*, *in* or *on* it. Business *prepositions*, then, are an integral part of the anthropological study of business *propositions*!

It has been six months since the publication of the *JBA*'s first issue on line. During that time, one of the articles (by Melissa Cefkin) has been downloaded 1,000 times, while all of the others have had several hundred downloads each. (The only exception to this general trend was our editors' Introduction!) All of these articles, however, were solicited by the editors – a pattern that is continued in this second issue – if only because, ideally, we want to create a ‘flow’ between articles that takes our readers from start to finish, rather than have them dip into something they find of immediate interest and then ignore the rest (our

Page 1 of 3

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standard “reading” of every issue of most journals?). To create such a flow, of course, is easier when there are more submissions to choose from. We hope that you will assist us in encouraging colleagues “out there” to submit their work to the *JBA*, something that is all the more urgent if the *JBA* is to be more than an intellectual flash in the publishing pan.

It is with a sense of relief and gratitude that we have, over the past two or three months, begun to receive submissions from researchers who clearly believe, on the basis of its first issue, that the *JBA* has something to offer that others journals do not. We are keeping our fingers crossed that this trend will continue, and that there are still scholars who are prepared to ignore journal rankings and the like, and to risk not toeing the journal publishing line pushed by their department heads and academic institutions. They, too, deserve a very big “thank you”.

Still, it leads us to ask: isn't it time we researchers stood up and said “No!” to the (mostly) nonsense that is foisted upon us by administrators who are besotted by rankings and care little (or worse, nothing) for the nature of scholarship? Think of the number of Nobel laureates whose prize-winning early work was initially rejected by not one, but several established journals, because it did not fit in with the then prevalent scholarly opinions about a particular subject. Most leading academic journals represent the power that lies at the core of a discipline. They tend not to entertain views from the edge. Think, too, about the format and style of the average social science journal, whose introduction, literature review, research question, methodology, (minimal) data presentation, discussion and conclusion are carefully designed to preserve an intellectual *status quo*. As a result, all we find are minute increments of new knowledge in almost all the journals subscribed to by our university and business school libraries which, as a result, get very little intellectual value for the excessive amounts of money they are required to spend. We would like the *JBA* to be different in this regard (at least it's free!), and we encourage our future contributors to think about how to write what they want to write in an imaginative style that *does* contribute new knowledge (knowledge that is, as one would expect of anthropology, from both the edge and afar), in a format that does *not* necessarily conform to what is expected by the editors of other social science journals – in the manner, perhaps, suggested by Richard Swedberg in his opinion piece later on in this issue. This is why we are open to case studies and field reports, as well as articles. Let the *JBA* be an *agent provocateur* for those who wish for and seek something different in the world of academia and business!

Editing a new academic journal in a niche that has almost grown used to being marginal, in the sense of not having its own given

publication outlet, is a challenge that we do not readily recommend to anyone! First and foremost, we face the challenge of creating visibility for the *JBA* on an already crowded publishing scene. This means that we have to rely on our readers and writers to get the word out, to persuade colleagues whom we happen to know, directly or indirectly, to write and submit articles – ideally on subjects that, as editors, we think might be of interest to our potential readers. The authors published here, Buddha bless them, have contributed immensely by writing articles that not only speak of their own interest in the field, but which make an attempt to articulate what business anthropology may be about from their distinctive vantage points. We would like to extend our thanks to all of you who have written, are writing, or intend at some unspecified time in the future to write, for the journal. Without you, the *JBA* would not exist.

Editing a journal also involves getting contributions peer reviewed. For this we need both tenacity and tact. Academic conversation and contribution in general rely on having informed, relevant Others read, reflect, and comment on issues at hand. Here, too, we rely to a great extent on you as readers to make such a contribution by reviewing, every now and then, those articles that are submitted. We are deeply grateful, then, to all those of you who have been peer-reviewing submissions to the *JBA* in recent months. Your task has not been easy, since we ask for solid analyses and critiques of each article we receive, rather than a quick box-ticking exercise about its general worth, and we sometimes ask you to review again an already-reviewed paper after it has been substantially revised. Such selfless work almost invariably goes unrewarded, but it is essential to our endeavour, for peer reviewers are primarily responsible for the establishment of a standard of quality in a new journal (and it is thus our job to ensure that they are diverse in their interests and approaches to business anthropology). This in itself encourages other scholars to send in *their* submissions – even though, as we have already indicated, the current climate of journal rankings and citation indices is actively opposed to the kind of new initiatives and publishing experiments supported by the *JBA*. So, once again, our thanks.

And now, we hope you enjoy what follows. And *do* send Frederik Larsen (fl.jba@cbs.dk) your comments and thoughts and he will post them on the *JBA* website homepage (under *Comments*). If nothing else, we want to get people involved in exchanges of opinions.

Christina Garsten and Brian Moeran