

JBA

JOURNAL OF BUSINESS ANTHROPOLOGY

What's in a Name?

Editors' Introduction to the *Journal of Business Anthropology*

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Welcome to the *Journal of Business Anthropology* – an Open Access journal which aims to publish the very best ethnographic research on business organizations and business situations of all kinds, together with ground-breaking theoretical insights and reflections on what such research has to tell us.

For this we need your help and support. We do not yet know who you are. Anthropologists (and, if so, of what persuasions)? Scholars in fields other than anthropology (if so, which)? Students (at what level: undergraduate, graduate or doctoral)? People employed in, or running their own, businesses (small or medium enterprises, large corporations, family firms)? Practitioners? Consultants? Stock market analysts? Civil servants? NGO, aid or charity workers? Event managers? Marketing gurus? Publishers? Journalists? Detectives? Librarians? Wo/men on the verge of a nervous breakdown? Internet surfers looking for an alternative to Facebook and 'twittering'?

Hopefully, together you are all of these (without the nervous breakdown) – and more. Hopefully, too, what we have to say will be of interest to you and encourage you to contribute – and contribute regularly – to the *JBA*. Without your articles, case studies, field reports, and book reviews, this journal will go the way of most new products and

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sink into oblivion. At the same time, supply must also meet demand. Otherwise, however great our dedication and enthusiasm as editors, the journal will have a short shelf life in the supermarket of ideas. We hope, therefore, that you will join us in making the *JBA* stimulating, intellectually rewarding, exciting to read and reflect upon – and not just another journal that you occasionally turn to once a year, or less, when looking for something specific (like Project Camelot, or Dinner at Claridges?). In beginnings, we must, as editors, have hope.

It is our business, though, to make sure that a journal devoted to the anthropological study of business be based on more than hope. Its offerings must first strike a chord, then play a symphony, in which ethnographic practices, anthropological curiosity, and good old theory come to form a pleasing unity in performance. It is with this in mind that we have taken advantage of the freedom of Open Access to break up the *JBA* into complementary parts. We publish field reports and book reviews as they come in. Case studies and special issues, too, are published on line as soon as they have been reviewed and revised, and we intend to run a news and information section that outlines activities, people and organizations with an interest in business ethnography. As for regular issues of the journal itself, the first two or three will contain articles written to establish the field of business anthropology. Where did it arise? Which scholars and organizations were and are involved? How has it been affected by, and how does it affect, other branches of the discipline? To what particular forms of social practice does it apply? What methods should it use, and what barriers does it face in applying those methods? What are its overall strengths and weaknesses?

But this is only the beginning. As editors, we want to push the boundaries in later issues of what we perceive to be theoretical and methodological limitations in both business anthropology and in anthropology as a whole. We also want to bring together different geographical and disciplinary traditions in the broad field of ‘business anthropology’, in order to explore its untapped potentials. In other words, we believe that it is time we practised more fully the basic tenet of anthropology – that it be truly comparative.

What’s in a name?

Why do we need to establish the field? For two reasons: firstly, because the discipline of anthropology is fragmented (more of which below); and secondly, because the concept of a ‘business anthropology’ does not yet appeal to and encompass all those who, knowingly and unknowingly, might constitute its field of interests. This is the basis for the launching of the *JBA*, which is designed to draw together people from all walks of life (that is, you) and provide them with material that they can read, discuss, and share with others like them. Hopefully (yes, that word again), you will realise that what you might perceive as ‘differences’ are not as different

from one another as you first imagined. As an anthropologist, for example, you might have seen yourself as being of the 'organizational' rather than 'business' persuasion, until the journal shows you that *all* anthropology is concerned with organizational forms of one sort or another, and that what makes 'organizational anthropology' different is its primary focus on *business* organizations. Similarly, as a manager, you might think of yourself as a businessman (or woman), as well as manager, but not as an anthropologist. Such differences in perception, as we will show below, are often made out to be more 'different' than they actually are.

In our opinion, there is a double confusion surrounding the name of 'business anthropology'. The first concerns the word 'business', which reflects some of the terminological uncertainty over anthropologists' study of work and its surrounding institutions in contemporary societies. In addition to 'business anthropology', we find 'industrial anthropology', 'corporate anthropology', 'organizational anthropology', and 'enterprise anthropology', as well as the 'anthropology of work', 'anthropology of management', 'applied anthropology', and 'economic anthropology', to name but some of the variations associated with the concept of business and anthropology. For better or for worse, the aim of the *JBA* is to subsume all these terms under the single heading of business anthropology.

Why do we feel that to do so would be advantageous? Because the discipline of anthropology has fragmented, and continues to fragment, into so many sub-disciplines (cognitive, educational, feminist, humanistic, legal, media, medical, political, psychological, symbolic, urban, and so on, anthropologies) that it is virtually impossible to keep up with the research conducted and theories developed in each – practices and theories that might – or again might not, we just don't know – contribute significantly to our studies of and reflections on business in general. Given that there are already so many specialised versions of anthropology studying more or less the same field of business relations – corporate and organizational, economic and applied, industrial and work – why not bring them together under a single parasol (in our present spirit of hopefulness, we prefer an image of sunshine to rain)? There is, after all, something to be said for strength in numbers – especially when business anthropology also encompasses parts, at least, of other sub-disciplines: consumer, design, development, marketing, media, and visual anthropologies among them. By doing so, we do not wish establish or stake out yet another sub-discipline – there are too many of them as it is! – but rather to suggest that business anthropology is not a marginal enterprise, but solidly rooted in mainstream anthropology.

At this point some of those among you may well argue that we are proposing a new form of intellectual imperialism (more of which a little later). There is nothing to connect the social relations found, for example, on a Norwegian oil rig or in a Peruvian craft market; in a tea

plantation in the Himalayan foothills or in a Bulgarian rose field; or among drivers of a camel train in the Saudi Arabian desert. Our counter-argument is that, indeed, there is. Riggers, weavers, dealers, planters, farmers, and camel drivers are all involved – or, in Melissa Cefkin’s formulation, *engaged* – in business of some sort or other. They all *trade*. And in trade they engage in practices that form many of the building blocks of anthropological theory: material culture and technology; gifts, commodities and money; labour and other forms of social exchange; (fictive) kinship, patronage, quasi-groups, and networks; rituals, symbolism and power; the development and maintenance of taste; and so on. Precisely because business anthropology is an anthropology of trading relations, it also reaches out to other disciplines such as business history, cultural studies, management and organization studies, some parts of sociology, and even cultural economics. The *JBA*’s parasol may be broad indeed, but, unlike those found on a Greek island beach, it is forever free!

The second confusion concerns the word ‘anthropology’, and, more specifically, ‘anthropologist’. What we aim to show is that distinctions between anthropologists and other professions are not always that clear cut. In her everyday practices and planning, for example, a manager is in many ways an anthropologist who talks and listens to the people with whom she deals, who tries to understand what they are *not* saying and why, and who plans organizational and business strategies accordingly. She experiences three ‘constants’: exposure to others, revalidation of formal accounts *vis-à-vis* informal practices and perceptions, and self-reflexive scrutiny of her role. As Linstead (1997) further points out, managers all have ‘some degree of ethnographic skills’ (see also Moeran 2007). Indeed, it is becoming both commonplace and necessary for top-level managers to engage in a sort of ethnographic practice to understand, interpret, and figure out how their strategies can best tune in with expectations of potential partners and clients. This form of knowledge creation, what Holmes and Marcus call ‘para-ethnography’ (2006), has integrity in its own right, an integrity with which anthropologists have a keen familiarity.

Similarly both detective and journalist make their living out of asking questions, not of one, but of numerous persons, each of whom provides a different facet in his explanation of the matter at hand. Detective and journalist observe the scenes to which they are called – a murder here, a plane crash there – and try to find out what (surviving) participants saw or did not see, where they were at the time of the incident, who and what they know about what and whom. Like the anthropologist, each makes note of what is said and not said; each reads between the lines and writes a report; eventually, each is a seeker of truth about what was once called ‘the human condition’ (see, for example, Van Maanen 1982; Hannerz 2004).

These are not the only professions to practice ethnographic methods. Advertising executives, too, resemble anthropologists in several important ways. As Steve Kemper (2003: 35) points out, advertising executives are folk ethnographers who, like anthropologists, 'get paid for making claims about how the natives think'. Both need to learn about those whom they intend to study, before carrying out their research in the field (or market). Both zigzag back and forth 'between the observation of facts and theoretical reasoning, where new facts modify the theory and (modified) theory accounts for the facts' (Hylland Eriksen 1995: 18). Both are driven by experience, politically mediated, historically situated and 'shaped by specific traditions of their respective professions – including narrative and rhetorical conventions' (Malefyt and Moeran 2003: 13). As Timothy Malefyt and Brian Moeran further observe, both pay at least surface attention to the idea of 'culture' and, in seeking to understand it, intervene in areas far beyond the strictly defined boundaries of their expertise (Mazzarella 2003). As anthropologists, therefore, we should be careful not to make a fetish out of our practices.

One or two things that need to be said...

It is customary for those introducing the subject of business anthropology to go back to its perceived origins, and thereby (like auctioneers selling an art object) to establish a 'pedigree' for their nascent sub-discipline. There are now quite a few – in our view, almost too many – historical overviews of anthropologists' encounters with the business world (e.g. Baba 2000, Bate 1997, Burawoy 1979, Holzberg and Giovannini 1981, Schwartzman 1993, Wright 1994, among many). In this first issue of the *JBA*, however, we have included two articles – by Marietta Baba and Melissa Cefkin – which add significantly to these discussions. Refreshingly, Baba introduces documentation on the part played not only by American scholars such as Elton Mayo and Lloyd Warner, but also by two 'British' social anthropologists, Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, in the early engagement of their discipline with business interests. This is an important point because, right from its origins in the mid-19th century, anthropology in the United Kingdom was predicated on its practical use to 'the utilities and requirements of society' (Reining 1962: 594). It was, in short, an *applied* science.

These overviews, together with other histories of the development of anthropology as a discipline (e.g. Kuper 1983), have concentrated on certain 'facts', which have been cited so frequently that they now form 'myths' – in the sense of a particular 'mode of signification' or 'form' (Barthes 1957:193). These include: British anthropologists' dealings – some would say 'complicity' – with their country's colonial administration; American anthropologists' involvement in the 'Hawthorne studies' at the very beginning of the 1930s and Elton Mayo's human relations school; the founding of the Society for Applied

Anthropology in 1941 and of the Tavistock Institute in 1946; Max Gluckman and the Manchester factory shop floor studies of the 1950s and 60s; the involvement of the Carnegie Corporation and Rockefeller Foundation in the funding of anthropological research; the call to 'study up' (Nader 1972). Such 'myths' extend even to the division of anthropologists' engagements with industry, work and business into historical periods.

The net effect of such 'myths' is not one of which, as editors of a new journal that seeks to define the field of business anthropology, we disapprove. Indeed, we are publishing two articles here precisely because they throw new and scholarly light on what has often in the past been given the 'light fandango'. We feel, though, that perhaps it is time to move away from what might well seem like an underlying insecurity of such myth making and to celebrate the fact that we can and do contribute research that is important for the discipline of anthropology as a whole and, by our own argument, for you, our readers, in your varied walks of life. Enough, then, of myths. It's time to look into the future and theorise our current research.

For this, though, we need broad scholarship. And here we have to face what strikes us as an unfortunate development in the discipline of anthropology, as well as in its branch of business anthropology. During the past two to three decades, it seems to us that American anthropology has turned in on itself; its proponents have talked mostly to themselves and often ignored the work of those who live and work elsewhere. This may be seen in the list of contributors to each issue of journals such as *American Anthropologist* and *American Ethnologist*. Perhaps because of their titles, these tend to publish the work of 'American' scholars – by which we mean those born, as well as of foreigners employed, in the United States – and largely ignore that of anthropologists in the rest of the world. Having said that, we also have to admit that many Europeans have not been entirely *au fait* with developments in business anthropology in the United States. This is, as we said, unfortunate, but, on the plus side, we might note that there are recent and welcome signs of change on both sides of The Pond, and we hope that publication of the *JBA* will contribute to the coalescing of such geographical fragmentation – in part, at least, brought on by the disciplinary fragmentation referred to earlier – into a single shared approach to anthropologists' study of the business domain.

Such fragmentation has not been entirely unexpected. After all, anthropology has developed at different historical stages in each of the countries concerned (e.g. Brazil, France, Sri Lanka, Sweden, or Japan), under different social, linguistic, and educational conditions. Each has, in its time, produced, and still produces, extremely able anthropologists. Yet, with important exceptions (one thinks of Pierre Bourdieu, Ulf Hannerz, and Fredrik Barth, for example), their work has rarely been read, or paid attention to, outside their national boundaries. Two factors are helping

change this landscape. First, more and more scholars living and working outside the powerful Anglo-American axis are communicating in English (thereby, admittedly, reinforcing the power of the centre). Second, they are forming, and actively participating in, regional associations of anthropologists in, Europe (EASA, or the European Association of Social Anthropologists), Scandinavia, South America, South East Asia, as well as in activities hosted by the all-embracing World Council of Anthropological Associations. It is to support this development that we intend in the future to include an essay on one national or regional anthropology in each of the early issues of the *JBA*. It is not simply in its methodology, but in its general approach and attitude, that anthropology needs to be holistic.

This strikes us a particularly important in the context of the phrase 'business anthropology'. It is our abiding impression that the anthropological study of business is an *American* development, and that the businesses studied are themselves either American or located in the United States. In a way, this is fair enough. It is in the USA that applied anthropology, in its multiple forms, has been most institutionalised in the tertiary education system (Baba 2006). But other anthropologists in other parts of the world have also been conducting research on different aspects of business relations: for example, Norwegian herring fleets (Barth 1966), labour migration in Uganda (Elkan 1960), family firms in the Lebanon (Khalaf and Schwayri 1966), and transnational mining and the 'corporate gift' (Rajak 2011). So, while Lloyd Warner and his colleagues at first Harvard, and then Chicago, conducted pioneer ethnographic studies of corporations like IBM, Sears & Roebuck, and Western Electric, the studies mentioned here makes clear the fact that 'business' does not consist solely of corporations (although the limited stock company probably is *the* most extensive social formation throughout the world). Other social forms such as family, extended kinship, residential community and networks also play an important part in business relations.

In some respects, perhaps, we are espousing here a straw man argument. After all, members of EPIC, as described by Melissa Cefkin in her article in this issue, are not just American by birth or employed in the United States. They include numerous Europeans (who held their own EPIC meeting in Barcelona in May 2011) and Japanese. But when we read their work (in, for example, Cefkin 2009), we find ourselves hard put to find references that are not American. The same is true of American submissions to the *JBA*. This saddens us, given how much attention overall European and other scholars pay to American authors' work. The time has come to reach out across the seas and engage in comprehensive scholarship.

Small is still beautiful?

We do not wish to imply that *all* anthropological scholarship in the United States is so introverted. This would be doing extreme injustice to people who, by the very nature of their profession, should be, and are, looking outwards beyond their own national, university, and other group boundaries. Take, for example, Marietta Baba and Carole Hill's (2006) examination of developments in applied anthropology in Britain, Russia and the United States during the past century and more. Not only do they gently chide those of their American colleagues who might imagine that there is 'one true way' to practise anthropology; they carefully trace how theory and practice came to be separated in the discipline, with 'pure' forms adopted by scholars (wishing to be) employed in elite universities, and 'applied' forms left to the *hoi polloi* lower down the academic hierarchy.

The idea that an 'applied' anthropologist, of whatever ilk, is somehow faintly disreputable, and not true to her discipline, is by no means new. In the words of Evans-Pritchard (1946: 93):

It may be held that it is laudable for an anthropologist to investigate practical problems. Possibly it is, but if he does so he must realise that he is no longer acting within the anthropological field but in the non-scientific field of administration.

Yet, Evans-Pritchard himself worked for the government of what was then the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, while most of his generation of anthropologists in Britain – including John Barnes, John Beattie, Raymond Firth, Meyer Fortes, Maurice Freedman, W.R. Geddes, Max Gluckman, Edmund Leach, Lucy Mair, Clyde Mitchell, S.F. Nadel, and Isaac Schapera – engaged in applied anthropology at some point in their careers (Benedict 1967: 584). The same can be said of such American anthropologists as Conrad Arensburg, Ruth Benedict, Elliot Chappel, George Foster, Burleigh Gardner, Laura Nader, Frederick Richardson, Donald Sayles, Sol Tax, Lloyd Warner, and William Foote Whyte, among many, many others.

This denigration of the practical uses to which anthropology may be put surfaces even more clearly in the field of business. Why so? Here, there is in fact a double set of beliefs, each of which reinforces the other. Firstly, anthropologists who work in, or with, various forms of business organizations are tainted by their perceived 'commercialism': in Batteau and Psenka's words, by 'getting their hands dirty'. The implication here is that either they are paid by the business organization concerned, or their research will be used to further that organization's business aims and profits (usually, it is further implied, at the expense of some underprivileged group or other). In this respect, the world of anthropology resembles that of cultural production in general, where we find a distinction clearly made between 'creative' and 'humdrum' personnel (Caves 2000), with the former praised for their lofty 'artistic'

ideals and the latter damned for being concerned with financial administration. 'Pure' anthropologists, then, are to film directors and editors, for instance, as 'applied' anthropologists are to producers and publishers. The sub-text here is that money is the root of all evil. Ironically, this uneasiness in exploring the boundary zones of applied and 'pure' anthropology has stalled the investigation of what business anthropology is, and what its scholarly potentials are.

The second set of beliefs centres on the well-known fact that anthropologists have tended to carry out their fieldwork in pristine wildernesses inhabited by 'primitive' peoples, who had no knowledge of, or little interest in, the modern industrial, highly urbanised societies from which they came. Rather like William Morris and others involved in the formation of Britain's Arts and Crafts Movement in the latter half of the 19th century, these earlier anthropologists developed in their writings an implicit critique of both industrialism and, to a lesser extent, urbanization – writings that exhibited a fond romanticism for, and exoticization of, 'the rest' against 'the West'.

Although anthropology has moved to embrace the study of complex societies and no longer concentrates exclusively on non-Western or primitive societies (Hannerz 1986), many of the discipline's proponents seem to hold fast to a romantic idea that 'small-scale' is good, while 'complex' is somehow bad. Better pigs and ancestors than mills in Manchester; better the circulation of *kula* objects than of advertising agency accounts (Moeran 1996). It is precisely because most business anthropology, as it has taken place hitherto, is conducted in highly (post-) industrialised countries like the United States and Japan, that it receives the Evans-Pritchard treatment of faint, but damning, distaste.

There is a way to overcome this prejudice, and that, we are convinced, is through the development of theory. By this we mean the need to face head-on 'the difficulty anthropologists have had in giving a balanced attention to culture and to social structure; the relationship between actor and system, and between micro and macro levels in analysis; and our shifting understandings of what anthropology is really about' and so 'build a comparative understanding of human ways of life and thought' (Hannerz 1986: 363), in business as much as in society. Precisely because business anthropology is not a discipline in itself, it must be firmly grounded in the theories and methods of anthropology as a whole. It needs more, not less, intellectual rigour than academic anthropology (Benedict 1967: 586). In this respect, it will do us no harm to remind ourselves, as do Batteau and Psenka, that anthropologists have been thinking and writing about the comparative and theoretical implications of their research for many, many decades – in spite of appearances to the contrary in recent anthropology journal articles, some of whose authors seem reluctant to recall anything that happened by way of theorizing before the start of the present millennium, other than a

token nod toward the publication of *Writing Culture*, edited by James Clifford and George Marcus, in 1985. Let us, please, not emulate our students in thus ignoring time!

The sun also rises?

An appeal to theory in business anthropology is an appeal to the core of our discipline. Whether we are 'ivory tower' academics or professionals – like the members of EPIC discussed by Melissa Cefkin in this issue – who make an everyday living out of practising anthropology on behalf of clients (e.g. Sunderland and Denny 2007), we need to bring in and update old theoretical formulations when they are appropriate and work, and to develop new ones as our ethnographic research requires.

It is in this respect that we now turn to the anthropology of Japan. Our argument is that an intriguing set of historical turns in the anthropological study of Japanese society and culture has spilled over into the study of business more generally. Japan is in many ways the *kuroko* black-robed puppeteer in the development of what has now generally come to be referred to as 'business anthropology'. Let us try to explain what we mean.

One theme focused on by pre-war pioneering scholars of Japanese rural society such as Ariga Kizaemon and Yanagita Kunio was kinship and the traditional Japanese 'family' system. There were obvious reasons for this that we need not go into here, but which had to do with Japan's development as the world's first non-Western industrialised society and a felt need to differentiate Japanese society and culture from other industrialised societies and cultures in Europe and the United States. Over time, two competing theories of Japanese kinship emerged: one stressing the patrilineal blood line and 'lineage', the other the economic functions of each family residence and the 'extended household group' (*dōzoku*).

It was the latter theory – that the Japanese household formed a political and economic 'in-group', whose members were related primarily, but not necessarily, by blood (Nakane 1967) – which came to prevail and which was then applied to analyses and explanations of other social forms in Japan (Nakane 1972). In particular, it was argued that certain business formations imitated the Japanese household system (or *ie seido*). One of these was the *zaibatsu* business monopoly, or financial clique, that emerged in the early pre-War stages of Japanese industrial development. The way in which it hived off functional subsidiary companies, each of which was headed by a family member, resembled, it was suggested, the *dōzoku* extended household group (consisting of main and branch houses) that flourished in parts of Japan during the feudal period. The formation of the *keiretsu* business groups after World War II followed this pattern of 'alliance capitalism' (Gerlach 1992).

Japan's traditional household characteristics were also seen to play an important role in the formation of the limited stock company. Both formed closed 'in groups' whose members, it was said, were 'permanent' with 'lifetime employment'. Both looked after their members' needs beyond their daily working conditions, by providing lodging, health care, and even marriage partners when so required. In these and several other ways, including the designation of 'appropriate' gender roles, both household and company were marked out as distinct from families and corporations in Europe and the United States. Japan's business was based not on stock market, but on 'welfare', capitalism (Dore 2000).

These *organizational* arguments underpinning Japanese business forms came, ironically, to be framed in *cultural* terms when, faced with the success of the Japanese economy during the 1980s, American firms began to search for why they had failed so miserably to compete. The answer, it appeared, was 'Japanese culture'. Japanese culture had something that American culture didn't, but needed if it was to compete in the global marketplace. From this emerged the perceived need, following American understandings of Japanese firms, for 'corporate culture'. If Japanese firms had their own cultures, and if they were successful, which they were, then American firms also had to have cultures to be successful (Salaman 1997: 246-8)! This line of thinking gave birth to a whole new academic industry, but one which has virtually ignored – or misunderstood (Bate 1997: 1157) – anthropology's potential contributions to management and organization studies scholars' understandings of culture (Chapman 1997) – a theme pursued by Czarniawska in this issue.

The connections between anthropology and business in the study of Japan, therefore, are of considerable historical depth and cast a shadow on the mid-1980s proclamation of the birth of 'business anthropology'. Let us not forget that both Thomas Rohlen (1974) and Ronald Dore (1973) had published the results of long-term anthropological fieldwork in a Japanese bank and British and Japanese factories in the early 1970s,¹ while another English anthropologist, Rodney Clark (1979) wrote a definitive study of the Japanese company at the end of the same decade. These pioneering works have been followed by many more during the past three decades (e.g. Kondo 1990; Roberts 1994; Moeran 1996; Wong 1999; Matsunaga 2000; Bestor 2004; Sedgwick 2007; and so on).

The trajectory of ethnographic studies on business in Japan points to a basic anthropological insight – that business and trading relations are integrally interlinked with kinship ties, with households, and social networks. They are often best understood when related to social formations, although cultural aspects also play a role, of course – as we

¹ Robert Cole (1971), a sociologist, also wrote about Japanese blue collar workers based on ethnographic case studies conducted in two Japanese companies

can see in the role of religious beliefs, political ideologies, and systems of knowledge on the shaping of business relations and spheres.

On 'the cultural' and 'the social'

One of the major distinctions between American and European contributions to the field of business anthropology has been the relative weight given to 'the cultural', on the one hand, and 'the social', on the other. Whereas, as we have seen, many American scholars picked up on the discovery of 'culture', not least 'corporate culture', as a key aspect of business, European scholars continued in the steps of their early ethnographic predecessors, and pursued the study and analysis of social structures. We do not wish to overstate the differences between American and European contributions to the field; there are certainly overlaps and mutual influences. But the fact remains that the theoretical legacy of mainstream anthropology, with its differing trajectories on the two continents, has contributed to a nuancing of the field of business anthropology. On closer examination, we find a variety of theoretical influences in the works of business anthropologists. All the more reason, then, to make use of these diversities to engage in comprehensive scholarship!

Anthropology's 'cultural turn', as it developed in the US, has given rise to a plethora of insightful ethnographies of the cultural predispositions of business and finance. We may think of Bill Maurer's (2005) work on local currencies and banking, Caitlin Zaloom's (2006) study of how traders are remaking themselves to compete in the contemporary marketplace, and Melissa Fisher's (2012) study of gender and finance on Wall Street. There is also Karen Ho's (2009) examination of the everyday experiences and ideologies of Wall Street investment bankers, and Annelise Riles' (2011) investigation into how legal thinking shapes global markets, while Ellen Hertz (1998) seems to have started it all with her ethnography of the Shanghai Stock Market in the early to mid-1990s. All of these have carved out the ethnographic study of cultures of business, trading and finance as distinctly anthropological (lately under the banner of 'anthropology of finance'), and have yielded insights into the cultural, social and institutional contexts of trading. What they teach us is that if we start with what people in the markets tell us, and what we can observe by way of careful ethnographic observations and business-related problems on the ground, we are able to produce analyses that are relevant to anthropological theory, but also to the problems that all of us more ordinary souls are experiencing in markets here-and-now.

In Europe, the insistence on remaining with 'the social' has led the way to a relatively strong focus on the social underpinnings of exchange relations, much of it going back to Barth's (1963) studies of entrepreneurship and social change. Barth's legacy has had a strong impact on much anthropology in Scandinavia, most notably in Norway,

not least because he combined a keen eye for the local and the particular in trading relations with a view to large-scale social processes and social organization. Hannerz's (1992a; 1992b; 1996) theories about globalization occurring through frameworks of cultural flow also emphasised social networks and forms of connectivity as entry-points into the understanding of how globalization works. And in these processes, market relations were seen to contribute to organizing the transnational flow of people, ideas, and commodities.

There is no denying that in contemporary societies across the world, we tend to grow up corporate, as it were. Our social relations and our social lives are – whether we like it or not – moulded by the corporate frame. Here is another version of the Weberian 'iron cage' to scrutinize. We have over the years seen a growth in interest in how understanding the corporation as a driver of the globalization of markets and capitalism; as a shaper of contemporary ideologies and ways of thinking; and as exerting a strong influence on how employees are fashioned as corporate subjects. Works that come to mind include Gideon Kunda's (1992) research on organizational culture and control in a high tech company; Christina Garsten's studies of transnational organizational culture at another high-tech company, Apple Computer (1994), as well as of the making up of flexible employees (2008); and Marianne Lien's ethnography of marketing practices in a Norwegian food manufacturing company (1997), showing how marketing practice is accomplished and how practical marketing decisions are made. More recent ethnographies include those by Jakob Krause Jensen (2010), who studied the corporate flexible regime at the Danish electronics company Bang & Olufsen, and Emil Røyrvik (2011), who investigated managerial ideology in a Norwegian oil company.

As different in their theoretical orientations as these contributions are, all these works share a common feature: the grounding of the analysis of the organization as a *social* form. And by articulating the organizational framing of business-related activities, they reveal the workings of larger structures of power, as well as the limits and opportunities of individual agency. Studies such as these also challenge the Polanyian (1944/1957) notion that contemporary market exchange is disembedded and cut loose from social ties and constraints. Instead, they reveal how social ties are both constitutive of corporate activities, and how they cut across organizations in ways that challenge their boundedness and unity.

Staying with the social is perhaps also one reason why the anthropology of *business*, as it is practiced in Europe, is more closely connected to *organizational* anthropology. We should thus not be surprised to find that there is a strong affinity in much of European anthropological studies of business corporations with the field of qualitative organizations studies, and more specifically towards critically

oriented studies of management and organization. The article by Barbara Czarniawska in this issue traces her own affinity with anthropology – albeit a somewhat personal one that anthropologists themselves may find surprising.

An interest in social forms should not blind us to the trading that goes on in social networks across and beyond formally recognized organizations. Keith Hart's (1973) path-breaking studies of the informal economy of the 'positively employed' (rather than unemployed) in Ghana paved the way for many others to investigate the social relational components of informal economies, and how these are socially organized. One recent contribution is Lotta Björklund Larsen's study (2010) of the uses of informal market services in Sweden and their fundamental relational component, not just to kin and neighbours, but also to the State. In studies of informal economy, it is precisely not the formal, but the hidden, the underground, the invisible, that is in focus – the maintenance of trading relations in the interstices of the formal economy. As eloquently pointed out by Hart himself :

'When we identify something as informal, it is because it fails to reproduce the pattern of some established form. The consequence for economic analysis is obvious. The 'formal' economy is the epitome of whatever passes for regularity in our contemporary understanding, here the institutions of modern nation states, the more corporate levels of capitalist organization and the intellectual procedures devised by economists to represent and manipulate the world. The 'informal' economy is anything which is not entailed directly in these definitions of reality It follows from this that informality is in the eye of the beholder.'²

Plain talk

We have here briefly outlined some of the paths already taken by those studying and writing about business anthropology, and suggested new ways forward into the future. Our aim in launching the *JBA* is to bring together fragmented anthropologies: in Europe and the United States, on the one hand, but also in other parts of the world; their social and cultural forms of analysis, on another; and their numerous sub-branches – applied, development, economic, corporate, industrial, organizational, and so on – that might usefully be brought back together, on yet another. After all, these days, all of us would be hard put, if asked, to find any aspect of society and culture that is *not* in one way or another commodified and thus economic. As Batteau and Psenka point out in their

² <http://thememorybank.co.uk/papers/informal-economy/> (accessed 12 May, 2012).

article published here, 'numerous experiences and institutions uniquely human – religious meditation, familial intimacy, aesthetic contemplation, kinship, government – can *and already have been* commercialized, turned into a business, had profits extracted from them, and laid the foundations of new institutional régimes'.

We are acutely aware of the fact that there is an awful lot more that we could – or perhaps, should – have discussed in this Introduction to the first issue of the *JBA*. We might have gone into more depth, for example, in our musings on the differences between business and organizational anthropology. We might, too, have taken up issues of ethics and contracts facing practicing anthropologists, as initiated by Batteau and Psenka. We have ignored ethnography and the methods that anthropologists now use to study the domain of business in the digital age. As Barbara Czarniawska points out, traditional ethnography – with its focus on a prolonged period of participant observation – faces problems of participation, time, space, and invisibility, when applied to studies of business organizations. But, as often as not, these require slight adjustments, rather than radical change. We plan to have others engage with such themes in later issues of the journal, so if you get an urge to write on these or any other topics, please feel free to do so.

As we said at the beginning, we don't yet know who you are (although we might entertain an idea or two about some of you). We don't know if you are going to read the *JBA* (although the fact that three case studies and two field reports were downloaded 2,000 times in just over two months suggests that *somebody* is!). More importantly, we don't yet know if you will think the website and this first issue of enough interest to make you yourselves want to submit your own work for publication in the journal. All we can do right now is keep our fingers crossed and send the occasional prayer wafting aloft to our local deity (who sometimes seems like a cross between Buddha and a bottle) that articles, case studies and field reports will magically appear out of cyberspace.

This is *your* journal. However many stratagems we entertain as editors, they may well be spoiled by your indifference. So we trust that you will write *for* us, and write *to* us, so that the *JBA* may flourish and not sink into Titanic oblivion. And, when you write, please remember to write in plain English. One thing that can be said about anthropology in general is that, as a discipline, it has been blessed in the past by good writing, and by anthropologists who have been good writers. This is by no means the case nowadays, when the monograph is being ousted by the journal article, and freedom of expression by all kinds of restrictions. In spite of all appearances to the contrary in most academic journals, it *is* possible to express complex ideas in simple language. Theoretical musings *can* be intelligible, divested of jargon. And articles in the *JBA*, unlike articles in most other journals, really *ought* to say something that is novel, exciting, stimulating and provocative. They ought to strive to reach across to a

variety of audiences. Otherwise, there isn't much point in publishing them in the first place – unless, of course, we are going to play the citation index game, which we're not. So there!

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