

Changes and Continuities: A revised strategy for the *JBA*

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Editing a new journal is a lonely business. An editor must have vision, of course, and inspire colleagues to want to contribute to his or her endeavour. He or she must also be ready to adapt to circumstance, and to take new ideas on board, in an ongoing attempt to make that journal readable and interesting – not something one can readily say of (m)any academic journals in these soul-destroying days of citation indices, rankings, impact factors, and other forms of “bureautrash” designed to keep scholars firmly under control, and to stop them from engaging in what, ideally, they do best: thinking.

I’m sure that those of you who are not employed in academia have your own crosses to bear (not least, client obtuseness). Imagine, though, how we might upset the universe if we had but time to think (and, of course, act). Bankers would be obliged to do regular bouts of community service and become contemporary Robin Hoods by distributing their bonuses among the poor. Glass ceilings in corporate hierarchies would be shattered to allow *everyone* – regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, education, and so on – equal opportunities (and less unequal pay). Mobile phones would be banned on all forms of public transport throughout the world (and not just in Japan). “Breaking news” would be limited to twice a day. Photo-shopped images – particularly of women – would be made illegal in the public domain. And there’d be no more middle-aged men

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wearing socks with shorts and sandals. Oh, to be Lord of the Universe!¹

Apart from such jolly dreams, a journal editor must decide what to publish, and what to reject, as well as how best to nurture a potential author's work through what may turn out to be several revisions in order to get it ready for publication. S/he may also (like this particular editor) devote a lot of his time to copy editing – something normally delegated to a freelance copy editor. But the *JBA* is run on absolutely no financial resources at all – other than part of the Editor's half-time salary from the Copenhagen Business School, and the good will and patience of one of its librarians, Claus Rosenkrantz Hansen, who devotes days of his valuable time to ensuring that each issue of the *JBA* appears on the Open Access website in a professional manner, and who then alerts those who have signed up for such "alerts" that a new issue is published. So, here is a big "thank you" to a virtually invisible, but absolutely indispensable, Danish librarian who, this year at least, has lived in fast-fading hope that his soccer team, Liverpool, was finally going to win the Premier League Championship. *Skol*, Claus!

An Editor, then, does not – cannot – work alone. Apart from technical assistance, s/he needs colleagues to advise, for s/he can never be sure if s/he has the most appropriate vision, or how best to inspire others. I was very happy, therefore, when Christina Garsten agreed to join me in launching the *JBA* two years ago. Alas! A new job in a new kind of institution in a new country, necessitating putting on new courses and finding a new home, has made it impossible for Christina to continue as full-time co-editor. As a result, the editorial structure of the *JBA* has been changed. There is now an Executive Editorial Committee, whose members – Elizabeth Briody, Jakob Krause-Jensen, Timothy Malefyt, and Dixon Wong, with James Carrier providing psychological and technical editorial support in the background – have joined Christina in agreeing to co-edit one issue of the *JBA* over the next couple of years. Elizabeth Briody stepped into the breach opened up by Christina's withdrawal and has helped immensely in bringing this issue to fruition. Given that she did this without any arm twisting on my part, I am even more indebted to her for her common sense, reasoned advice, and sheer hard work in putting together this issue (and you can read her thoughts in her own Editorial which follows this). In addition, Greg Urban very kindly offered to edit the Opinion Pieces and worked very hard to bring together an extremely high-powered group of scholars to write about how business history might engage more with business anthropology, and vice versa. Thank you, Greg. In the meantime, Dixon Wong and I are already working on the autumn issue, and James Carrier and Christina Garsten are considering how best to proceed with next year's issues.

Together, we have been pondering the future of the *JBA* and the

¹ Or, as James Carrier put it to me in private correspondence, Minister of Culture with License to Kill!

direction it might take in terms of contents and format. This has been necessitated, primarily, by the limited number of article submissions to the journal. It has become clear, I think, that the community of business anthropologists is not that large, or – if it is – that there are rather few at present who have the time, energy, and inclination to write your standard “academic” articles. This has prompted us to rethink the kinds of contributions that we wish to see published in the *JBA*. A LinkedIn discussion that I initiated in March suggests that those working as anthropologists in, for, on, with, and so on, businesses might be more willing to submit shorter, less “academic” papers to the *JBA*.² So, one change now in force is the following:

- **In addition to formal “academic” articles and case studies, the *JBA* publishes essays, and other forms of critical analysis, on anthropologists’ and other scholars’ engagements with business forms and practices all over the world.**

As I mentioned above, you will read in this issue of the *JBA* a number of Opinion Pieces by business historians, who here engage with business anthropology in various different ways. We have in the past solicited the opinions of scholars in related fields such as (economic) sociology about “business” anthropology, and we intend to continue publishing cross-disciplinary Opinion Pieces in the coming issues of the *JBA*. Our aim in so doing stems from our belief that:

- **Business anthropologists should engage with other disciplines in order to create a multi-disciplinary field for the long-term study of business.**

In this respect, we believe that the *JBA* should **not** be confined to writings by anthropologists, but that it should extend an invitation to:

- **Scholars of *all* disciplines interested in the study of business to present their views and research on business forms and practices.**

Also, given that most of our research engages with *people* working in business organizations of one kind or another, another aim of the *JBA* is:

- **To engage with business people all over the world, by soliciting commentaries on their challenges, concerns, experiences, problems, puzzles, and so on.**

This does *not*, however, mean that the *JBA* is going to become a *Harvard Business Review*-style journal. The *JBA* is, after all, the premier outlet for the promulgation, critique, and development of business *anthropology*. In

² My thanks here to Marietta Baba, Elizabeth Briody, Melissa Cefkin, Rita Denny, Walter Faaij, Vidar Hepsø, Pawel Krzyworzeka, Timothy Malefyt, John McCreery, Bob Morais, Pedro Oliveira, Claus Paklepaa, and Mark Pratt for writing in with their stimulating comments and ideas.

order to maintain coherence in the substance of the journal, therefore, these contributions by business people and scholars in other disciplines will always be accompanied by anthropological commentaries, as anthropologists are asked to present alternative understandings and, as necessary, constructive critiques of submissions. In this way,

- **The aim of the *JBA* is to encourage cross-disciplinary and methodological engagements and debates about the forms and practices of businesses around the world, by means of formal academic articles, essays, opinion pieces, and commentaries.**

In this respect, we will encourage continued engagement with the basic tenets of socio-cultural anthropology:

- **Cross-cultural comparison** – with a particular emphasis on comparison between European/US and Asian business forms and practices, because of the importance of economies in that region, but also with those found in African and South American countries;
- **Cultural relativism and reflexivity**: the attempt to understand and reflect upon business forms and practices both within and across societies in terms of their – rather than the anthropologist’s or “our” – own cultural symbols and values;
- **Participant-observation**, and long-term immersion in fieldwork;
- **Contextualization**: whereby the apparently trivial (jokes, drinking, clothing, meetings) may take on central significance in analyses of socio-cultural relations in certain contexts;
- A continued tradition of **social and cultural critique**, where scholars problematize the taken-for-granted, and are not afraid to criticise, on the basis of their extended research, business forms and practices that they deem to be unethical or morally reprehensible.

As part of this endeavour:

- **The *JBA* seeks to engage with *all* anthropologists who conduct research on, and have an interest in, what may broadly be construed as “applied” and/or “economic” anthropology, as well as with their formal organizations (such as EPIC, NAPA, SfAA, and SEA, but also EASA and other non-American associations).**

In this respect, the *JBA* aims to drag mainstream anthropologists, no doubt many of them kicking and screaming, out of their warped time and space machine into the modern world. Hi guys! Maybe things ain’t what they used to be, but they ain’t so bad, either. So, join in and be relevant. Fight for thought.