

*Valediction*

## Prose and Qualms: On Editing the *Journal of Business Anthropology*

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The time has come for me to step down as founding Editor of the *Journal of Business Anthropology*. As is customary on such occasions, I should start by thanking all those who have supported me during the past five years: Claus Rosenkrantz Hansen, librarian at the Copenhagen Business School who has selflessly dedicated himself over the past five years to ensuring that each issue of the *JBA* is properly uploaded on the journal website; Melissa Cefkin who first pointed me in the direction of Open Access publishing; Elizabeth Briody who stepped in out of nowhere to help when I thought the journal was about to go into oblivion; various members of the *JBA*'s supporting cast of gaffers, grips, and best boys (better known as the *JBA*'s Advisory Board), who came through with essays, articles, and submission reviews when called upon for help; and last—but certainly never, never least—my five co-editors: Elizabeth Briody, Jakob Krause Jensen, Dixon Wong, Timothy de Waal Malefyt, and Ghislaine Gallenga. I owe a special word of thanks, too, to Greg Urban, who, thankfully, has agreed to take over the *JBA*'s editorial reins from the beginning of next year.

At the best of times, editing is a hard task. Taking on the editorship of an academic journal—especially when that journal is totally new—is daunting. Due to an unexpected concatenation of circumstances which, at the time, included a collective unease at Robert Tian's newly

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launched *International Journal of Business Anthropology*, coupled with a shared desire to broaden the net and come up with something that really does reflect the kind of work anthropologists do in business environments around the world, I ended up doing precisely this. Now, more than five years later, I am stepping aside. The *JBA* needs someone at the helm who is younger, more in tune with what is going on in both academic and business worlds, and who can breathe fresh life into the project. Not that I am disappearing entirely from view. Jakob and I—with the able assistance of James Carrier—are launching a *JBA* Book Series, to be published by Berghahn Books, so please send us your book proposals and manuscripts.

Needless to say, perhaps, my retirement from the journal's field of editorial battle has led to a certain introspection. What have we done right? What might we have done better? What should a journal devoted to business anthropology be trying to do, and for whom in particular? In other words, who is our audience? Businessmen? Unlikely, unless we alter the style of discussions published in the *JBA*. Anthropologists working in, for, with business? Possibly, at least with some of the stuff we have published. Academics? Almost certainly. So how might the journal become more inclusive? What needs to be jettisoned from what has been done so far? What new forms of writing (or other media) should we experiment with in order to get a broader audience?<sup>1</sup>

This introspection leads me to think not just about editing the *JBA*, but about editing in general. I will, therefore, in this valediction indulge myself a little. Please bear with me.

### Editorial moments

To edit is to make a choice, or series of choices. Such “editorial moments” (Becker 1982: 198) involve editing of both the self and others.<sup>2</sup> As anthropologists, we are aware that self-editing starts when selecting the kind of research we want to do, where we want to do it, and how to go about doing it. Fieldwork is one long series of editorial moments, as we make choices about what is, and is not, relevant to our observations, participation, and communication. Who do we speak to, and whom do we ignore? What's the best way to broach a tricky issue like money? What questions are better left unasked? What do we, and what do we not, record? Do we write more than one record: a “subjective” diary, for example, as well as “objective” field notes? How much do we consign to memory; and how much to the tape recorder or video camera?

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<sup>1</sup> The fact that early articles of the *JBA* have been downloaded more than 10,000 times suggests that there is in fact a broad audience—if only of automatic download software programmes!

<sup>2</sup> Much of what follows is taken from a chapter written for Helena Wulff (ed.), *The Anthropologist as Writer*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016.

And when we start to analyse all we've learned, we make more editorial decisions. How are we going to organize our material and structure our results? What sort of theoretical frame should we use? How much detail should we include? What sort of style should we adopt? Who, if anyone, is going to be our audience? What is the sound of one hand clapping?

An answer to one of these questions inevitably has an effect on the answers to others, which in turn may enforce a change in the first. Editorial moments are messy, not least for anthropologists. They do not constitute a neat or logical process, if only because of their variety. In the words of Clifford Geertz (1995: 20):

One works *ad hoc* and *ad interim*, piecing together thousand-year histories with three-week massacres, international conflicts with municipal ecologies. The economics of rice or olives, the politics of ethnicity or religion, the workings of language or war, must, to some extent, be soldered into the final construction. So must geography, trade, art, and technology. The result, inevitably, is unsatisfactory, lumbering, shaky, and badly formed: a grand contraption. The anthropologist, or at least one who wishes to complicate his contraptions, not close them in upon themselves, is a manic tinkerer adrift with his wits.

### **Writing, editing, and rewriting**

Editing is not writing. The two should be kept separate as activities. When I write, I go with the flow, allowing the words to form their own spaces, to take over from my thinking self, and to express ideas I never knew I had. In writing, words should have a mind of their own. This is the point at which creativity begins. When I edit, I put down anchors that interrupt what the cognitive psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996: 118-23), refers to as the merging of action and awareness. It is at this point that my logical mind takes over. I have to be careful, of course, to balance the two activities, the two states of being. The perfectionist is someone who edits all the time and doesn't allow himself to write. This leads to writer's block. Or is it editor's block? Whichever, at that stage it's time to learn a few tricks of the writing trade: using fewer words, and active, rather than passive, tenses; paying attention to syntax; avoiding repetition, metaphors and abstractions; basic common sense stuff like that. This is something almost all future contributors to the *JBA* should keep in mind.

When writing, we compose, we build, we weave our prose (Benjamin 1985: 61). So, at the beginning at least, writing should exclude editing. This is particularly important for anthropologists, who often have to wrestle with mountains of data that they believe should be theoretically framed. How on earth are we to get started?

When I was in the middle of the second year of fieldwork studying folk art potters in Japan, my supervisor, Rodney Clark—himself an early anthropologist of business—unexpectedly wrote to me, saying that he was coming to Tokyo and that I should send him the first draft of my doctoral dissertation, “with a beginning, a middle, and conclusion, and no loose ends,” no later than 15<sup>th</sup> November that same year. I had exactly three months and two days from the time I received his letter (this was before the era of e-mail) to write my thesis.

Because I was, in spite of appearances maybe, conscientious, I settled down to do as he asked. But because I was in the field, I had no scholarly books to read and rely on for help, and the nearest university library (which, in fact, had few of the works I needed) was more than two hours away from my fieldwork site. This was a blessing in disguise. I had no choice but to write the whole of my thesis on the basis of my copious field notes and nothing else.

I had two sets of notebooks. One contained unexpurgated, raw material, consisting of hurriedly jotted field notes made during interviews, making pottery, and *sake* drinking sessions. The other consisted of larger notebooks, in which I had neatly transcribed these jottings in greater detail, and edited them too, according to specific themes such as household organization and community structure, pottery production and distribution, and aesthetics and the Japanese folk art movement.

Beginning is the hardest part.

I remember gazing rather hopelessly at these two sets of notebooks piled on a table temporarily set up on the earthen floor of a storeroom in our Kyushu farmhouse. I remember, too, the harsh symphony of cicadas in the pear orchard outside, and the keyboard of my portable typewriter with a fresh white sheet of A4 paper inserted, straightened and with margins adjusted. Gradually it dawned on me that all I could do was tell a story—a story about the community of potters I’d been studying and how they’d been caught up in an artistic movement that they didn’t really understand or appreciate. I would tell the story they had been telling me the past eighteen months.

And so I began to write that story—a long story maybe, but a story nevertheless. I edited it, of course, to fulfil Rodney’s criterion that it have a beginning, middle and conclusion—themselves prerequisites for what constitutes a story. But because the emphasis was on *writing*, and writing a *story*, rather than on trying to fit the details of that story into some kind of theoretical framework, I managed to finish the whole of my thesis two days ahead of the stipulated time. (I wish colleagues would write their books and articles in the same way.)

“Very interesting,” Rodney remarked when I went up to Tokyo to hear his judgement on what I’d written. “Now go away and find a theory.”

It was then that I started editing.<sup>3</sup>

Editing, then, is not writing but re-writing. Already I've made three changes in the sentence you've just read, before moving on to this one. Before I'm through, I may well have made several more, or less, significant changes, or even deleted what I've written altogether. In which case, you will not read any of this paragraph. How do you read a cut without the paste?

Re-writing isn't easy. You have to learn to be tough with yourself. You have to stand back and read what you've written with the eye of another. You have to make sure the theory makes sense, avoid clichés, eliminate *inconsequentia*, check those ingrained habits that lead to the same old spelling or grammatical mistakes, and cut down on all those fascinating snippets of research detail so that they do no more than illustrate a particular point you wish to make. Editing operates at two levels in particular: one at that of grammar and style; the other, of organization. The first demands an experienced love of language; the second clear-headedness. What you have written must be clear and simple, and it must be organized in such a way that your reader can easily follow your argument. Organization's the key.

So, how do you know when your written work will be judged sufficiently well written to be understood by people potentially interested in what you have to say?

Rodney Clark helped me with this, too. After reading one particularly tortuous theoretical section in the third draft of my thesis (there were six in all before it was ready to be examined), he said: "why don't you read this aloud to your elder son when you go home tonight? See what he makes of it." Poor Alyosha was only thirteen years old at the time. He was bewildered by my account of the intricacies of the Japanese household system and what made it different from a family. Dutifully, though, he managed to ask a question about one of his school friends when it came to my description of how to make pots ("Is Takuchan going to be a potter like his dad?"). But he soon fell asleep night after night as I read aloud extracts from what I'd written.

From this I learned two things: first, how to put a restless child to sleep; second, to write more simply, in such a way that Alyosha—or someone like an intelligent baker in a Greek island village (Moeran 2005)—could understand what I was communicating, if he put his mind to it.

It's an effective test, or trick of the trade (Becker 1998), but not many of my colleagues seem to have tried it. You can see how people nod off in department seminars as the speaker drones on in what, to a layman,

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<sup>3</sup> None of my doctoral students, alas, has ever followed my suggestion that they write their theses in the same way.

is pure gobbledygook. It was during the course of reading my second departmental seminar paper that I realised that what I'd written sounded pompous (a common feature of theory), and didn't make sense, even to myself. I stopped in mid-flow and extemporized, speaking to what I'd written. People woke up and smiled encouragingly.

If only we could all learn from our mistakes! I was once invited to attend a workshop on "Advertising and the new middle class in India." Other participants included a dozen or so, mainly American, academics and a handful of representatives from the Bombay (or should I now say Mumbai?) advertising industry. Five minutes after one, rather famous, anthropologist had begun reading a prepared paper—littered with obscure phrases about an epistemological this, a postmodern that, and a subaltern other—one of the advertising executives interrupted the speaker: "Excuse me, sir," he said, "But I don't understand a bloody word you're saying. Could you please be speaking in plain English? That's what we have to do in advertising. Get to the point." Alas! The rather famous anthropologist was rooted to his text and was totally unable to engage his audience. We dutifully nodded off.

Don't forget, then. Your audience is an intelligent layperson, not just a colleague. I think this is what we should be aiming for in the *JBA*.

### **Journal editing**

And what has all this to do with my five years as Editor of the *JBA*?

Editorial moments occurred throughout the process of first envisaging, then launching, the journal. Should we link up with a respected publisher (in which case an editor who was either American, or who was located in a university in the USA, was crucial to success)? If so, which publisher? Or should we stray from the hitherto customary path and try out Open Access? The latter offered several advantages, in that the *JBA* didn't *have* to be published at precise intervals every year—the inevitable slippage of manuscript completions could be overlooked (although, as one seasoned contributor moaned early on, I was a hard task master). Open Access also lessened the importance of finding an American colleague to co-edit the journal. Moreover, the *JBA* didn't *have* to follow the standard format of editorial, articles, and book reviews, but could branch out into parallel streams, which published fieldwork accounts and case studies as they came in (book reviews have never materialized). It could also make use of other media—like video or blogs (although we have only published one video to date—something to be developed in the future?). Ultimately, Open Access became more than a series of ideas when Claus said, yes, of course, CBS managed Open Access journals, and had the necessary platform for us to launch the *JBA*. Suddenly, my fear of digital technology melted into total acceptance (filled with confusion).

But, if we were to have a website, we needed to distinguish it from other journal websites. This meant talking to a designer and making more editorial decisions on formats, colours, designs, lettering, and so on. We needed both Advisory and Editorial Boards, so names were selected and their owners approached. Remarkably, not one of those we wrote to declined.

And then we needed submissions.

We still need them.

Submissions needed to be reviewed and authors contacted with reports and requests to revise their articles (more editorial moments). Belatedly, I realized that we needed some sort of journal “style.” What size of what font should authors use? Should capital letters be used in bold throughout a heading? How much should each paragraph be indented? Should there be spacing between paragraphs? Should all authors follow a single referencing style? Or should each be allowed to use whatever s/he preferred—provided that s/he was consistent in that usage? The answers to these, and many other, questions have been worked out over time as I have copy edited submissions for inclusion in each issue of the *JBA*, but some still confuse (for instance, should one write PhD or Ph.D.?).

Regretfully, because we have had no back-up support for the journal (other than Claus’ voluntary work in uploading each issue), I have been obliged to devote a lot of my time to copy editing (about 20-30 hours per issue). Here more editorial moments have come into play, as I wrestled with the texts of those writing in a second language, as well as (occasionally horrific) articles and essays by native English speakers. I sometimes felt that I worked like a dress designer—cutting, fitting, twisting, and matching the material to hand. Whether this editorial exercise was successful or not, I leave to you to judge.

A journal editor must also have a vision. He or she must know how to communicate (especially when dealing with difficult situations affecting authors), and needs to be aware of flow in deciding what should go where in an issue (necessary in a journal to take readers seamlessly from start to finish). A journal editor cannot hope to be abreast of all the latest developments in all the fields of knowledge covered by his journal, so s/he subcontracts work to referees, who assess manuscripts and make editorial judgements for him (or her) about their worth (or lack thereof).

Even so, a journal’s editor has to make decisions. Which accepted manuscripts should be placed together with which, and in what order? Should a referee’s recommendations be followed to the letter, or should the author be allowed some leeway in revising her manuscript? And what if two referees give totally opposing assessments and recommendations? The editor of one journal to which I submitted my first article on advertising sent the manuscript out to three reviewers. One liked it very

much and recommended it for publication as it stood; another thought it lacking in scholarship and rejected it; a third regarded it as a bit like the Curate's egg: good in parts.

I was asked to revise in the light of reviewers' comments. I did so and sent the manuscript back. Unable to make up her mind, the journal editor sent it out to three more reviewers, one of whom liked it, another disliked it, while the third wavered between hot and cold. Since the journal editor still couldn't make up her mind, I sent the manuscript to another journal, together with the six reviewers' assessments. It was published without further ado! Fortunately, we have never faced this kind of situation when having submissions refereed for the *JBA*.

Flexibility, adaptability, and an openness to new ways of doing things are crucial aspects in a journal editor's work. Here we have a classic case of structure versus agency. A journal's name and reputation enforce a particular kind of article to be found therein. This limits editorial choices. But an editor should be able to spot a gap and broaden the field of her journal's enquiry, thereby encouraging the publication of slightly different kinds of articles that contribute to creating—and then sustain—the reputation of the journal's "brand." She should also realise that journal articles generally make very little contribution to scholarship, if she insists on their following a format that includes problem orientation, research question, literature review and methodology sections before presentation of the actual data. This is why we have been open to articles that abandon this traditional format and try something new.

So, there you have it—the prose and qualms of an elderly anthropologist heading for senility. I hope, though, that you, dear readers, have enjoyed reading what has been published in the *JBA*. I'm sure you don't read *every* essay or article in *every* issue, but hopefully you find more of interest in the *JBA* than in your average academic journal. But do please remember, the *Journal of Business Anthropology* is *your* journal. *You* are the ones who contribute to it, who read it, who recommend it to students and colleagues. Its quality and its future depend on you as much as on its editor.

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