

The Editor's Two Cents

Greg Urban

Were you among those worried about the fate of the *Journal of Business Anthropology* in a post-Brian Moeran world, I wouldn't blame you. Brian was an editor nonpareil, no doubt about it. In addition to being the intrepid (dare I call him) entrepreneur who founded the journal, he brought to the task a lifetime of involvement with business matters, as well as enormous, seemingly boundless energy, far beyond the abilities of mere mortals such as myself. Incidentally, that's one reason the journal now has a managing editor — Nancy Ameen — with whom some of you who have submitted papers recently have been in contact. We needed at least two people to replace one. With her background as a former practicing lawyer, Nancy has been an outstanding addition to the team, and I hope you will all welcome her, especially at the upcoming American Anthropological Association annual meeting — where Business Matters will be a key theme.

You may also have concerns about the new editor — Greg Urban, me. Who is he? How can he conceivably step into Brian's shoes? Will the journal continue as it had under Brian's watchful eye? For sure, Urban will never become the totemic emblem of this periodical and, indeed, of the entire sub-discipline, that Brian has been. In truth, I do not bring to the task a lifetime of involvement with business matters. And, okay, no, I do not have the time and energy, or even patience, for the job. For most of my already lengthy scholarly career I have been a linguistic and cultural anthropologist with research interests in Native South America. My abiding concern has been and continues to be with culture theory. Since the turn of the millennium, however, my theoretical and ethnographic

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interests took a turn in the direction of business anthropology, with an ever-increasing involvement that now leads me to think of myself as a business anthropologist. True, my main interests are ultimately conceptual — what are for-profit corporations? What light do they shed on the movement of culture through time and space? In what measure and ways are they central to the creation and spread of future-oriented culture? What kind of future do they portend? What is their relationship to the great issues of our time, their role in producing both negative impacts such as wealth inequality and exploitation of labor, and positive impacts such as providing sustainable sources of energy and cures to diseases?

Amidst the cloud of concerns, some good news: Brian is still around. In fact, in this very issue you will discover an article by him on “Magical Capitalism,” in which he conjures Maussian ideas to expose the enchantment that accompanies, and perhaps is foundational to, the modern capitalist system. He and Timothy Malefyt are putting together a book on this broad subject. Another bit of good news, one issue of the journal has already appeared under my editorship: Spring 2017, Volume 6, No. 1. Hopefully, some of you didn’t even notice the transition. It wasn’t without hiccups, but overall it went smoothly.

I would never have imagined all the problems that come up in running an open access online journal, and I don’t intend to burden you with them here. Under Brian’s editorship, the journal was housed at the Copenhagen Business School (CBS) where Brian taught. My first key decision was whether to move it to Penn where I teach. As it turned out, CBS offered to continue hosting the journal, though they were required to cut out production support. From my perspective, Penn would be the easier option, but I wondered whether each new editor would then need to move the journal to their institution, or whether we should house the journal on a commercial site. All solutions involved monetary and other costs, which for an unendowed open-access journal are daunting. I finally decided to stay with Copenhagen, and will continue to foster the original spirit of international cooperation and collegiality Brian put in place.

One modest innovation to JBA: I am introducing occasional short pieces written by CEOs, ex-CEOs, or other high level executives about business anthropology. We’ll call it “Notes from the Corner Office.” If you know appropriate persons who would be interested in contributing to this column, please put them in touch with Nancy or me. The column will appear desultorily, but we do have our first installment in this issue. The author is Derek Lidow, former CEO of International Rectifier, a company that manufactured integrated circuits and now forms part of the German semiconductor firm, Infineon Technologies. Derek is also an entrepreneur who founded his own company. To top it off, he is presently a Lecturer at Princeton, where he teaches about business startup. As you’ll see from his column, he has recently been working to promote research and

publication on the ethnography of entrepreneurship.

I've already indicated that Brian Moeran is back in this issue, and, while I have no intention of summarizing articles as a matter of course, it is worth doing so here to highlight the vibrancy of research in our field. Fiona Murphy looks at austerity measures in Ireland after the 2008 collapse, using ethnographic data from second-hand markets to explore the issue of whether reduced spending and consumption serves the longer-term interests of sustainability politics. Hanna Garth and Michael Powell look at a corner store re-branding project in South Los Angeles, in which the store's facelift reshapes shopping experience, and in the process redirects consumption patterns in a lower income area towards healthier choices. Tobjörn Friberg explores cultural flows of knowledge between business and academia in a mediator company, and the "cuts" in flow that take place when concerns about proprietary knowledge surface. Those cuts must then be spliced and the flow re-made in laboratories. The issue is crucial today, as business engages ever more tightly with academia, potentially re-shaping the ideals of science and the free flow of knowledge on which universities have been based. Our concluding three pieces all center on the fascinating phenomenon of Pay-What-You-Want Pricing (PWYW). Economist Henrik Egbert sets the stage with his innovative use of Marcel Mauss's work on the gift and reciprocity, exploring its relevance to contemporary pricing schemes in which individuals are asked to pay what they deem appropriate. Egbert isolates four social factors that are preconditions for such pricing schemes to work. Two commentaries reflect on Egbert's findings, one by decision-making specialist Ernest Baskin who supports but qualifies Egbert's claims, and another by anthropologist Kyung-Nan Koh, who illustrates the role of reciprocity in corporate giving. All in all, the reader will come away from this issue with a sense of the vitality of our field.

Business anthropology today has become an exciting area for many anthropologists not only in the business world but also in academia. Working inside corporations, our colleagues help to create more human-centered, less alienated, environments, thereby enabling more people to achieve satisfaction through their work. They also enhance the ability of for-profit corporations to do what they were designed to do: provide the goods and services people want and need. Other of our colleagues work toward similar ends either as part-time or full-time consultants to corporations and other organizations. More and more academics, like me, are drawn to for-profit corporations as sites for ethnographic research on one of the most consequential institutions of the modern world. And, of course, many of our colleagues, especially fulltime academics, contribute by casting a critical eye on for-profit corporations, ethnographically assaying their negative effects. In short, the anthropology of business, from my vantage point, has come of age as a vibrant, multifaceted endeavor.