WORDS & MEANINGS

It isn’t all that easy to say what “business anthropology” is. Is it a kind of anthropology whose proponents study “business” organizations and forms of one sort or another in a more or less objective manner? Or are these anthropologists themselves somehow involved in the businesses concerned, as formally identified anthropologists, or consultants, or marketers, or something like that? In which case, is business anthropology something that anthropologists do for (and sometimes with), as well as in, business? If so, can or should it be distinguished from the kind of research conducted on business relations by academic anthropologists?

The answers given to each of these questions necessarily influence the way in which one talks about how best to theorize this emergent field of anthropology. I think it fair to say that it is currently populated by two kinds of anthropologists: those employed full-time in universities, business schools, and other institutions of higher learning; and those who make their living practicing anthropology in all kinds of different business situations. There are cross-overs, of course: business anthropologists head back into academia, while academic anthropologists occasionally take the plunge into the world outside their ivory towers. As a result, there should be a fruitful cross-fertilization of ideas, experiences, methods, and analyses (and this Handbook is just such a welcome endeavor).

This distinction in employment may reflect and reinforce an already existent one in intellectual leanings. There is a perception that those employed in academia (whom I shall call “anthropologists of business”) are somehow different from those making a living out of their anthropological training (“anthropologists in business”). The former are seen to strive for an “objective” understanding of a business organization and to make use of age-old anthropological theories...
based on studies of gift-giving, magic, totemism, social dramas, and so on. The latter work in and for a business organization and may be more concerned with immediately practical results that have a positive effect on their employer’s financial baseline.

Such a perception is, of course, misplaced, in that anthropologists in business also make use of age-old theories in their analyses and they can hardly not be “objective” in their findings. At the same time, it hints at and so sustains earlier prejudices regarding the notions of “applied” and “business” in anthropology. Business anthropology can easily be dismissed by “purists” (including those veering towards the anthropology of business) as yet another, faintly disreputable, example of applied anthropology (Evans-Pritchard 1946), whereas the anthropology of business may, perhaps, be allowed to takes its place among the many more-or-less acceptable subdisciplines (for example, aesthetic, cognitive, design, development, educational, feminist, humanistic, legal, media, medical, political, psychological, sensory, symbolic, and urban anthropologies) that constitute the discipline as a whole.

Why this prejudice against business anthropology (or even the anthropology of business)? First, anthropologists who work in, for, with, and even on various forms of business organizations are tainted by a perceived “commercialism.” The implication here is that either they are paid by the business organization concerned, or that 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 management and financial administration. “Pure” anthropologists, then, are to film directors and editors, for instance, as “applied” anthropologists are to producers and publishers. The subtext here is that money is the root of all evil: a subtext that perhaps inflects current interest in the excellent anthropological work being carried out in the field of finance (e.g., Fisher 2012; Ho 2009; Maurer 2005; Riles 2011; Zaloom 2006).

Second, until comparatively recently, most anthropologists carried out their fieldwork in nonindustrialized societies typically characterized as “tribal” and assumed to have no knowledge of, or much interest in, the modern industrial, highly urbanized societies from which the anthropologists came. Rather like William Morris and others involved in the formation of Britain’s Arts and Crafts Movement in the latter half of the nineteenth 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 nonwestern 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. It is precisely because most business anthropology, as it has taken place hitherto, is conducted in highly (post-) industrialized societies like those found in the United States, Europe, and Japan, that it receives the Evans-Pritchard treatment of faint, but damning, distaste.

There is a third, slightly different, issue arising from the semantic density of the English word “business,” which can mean anything from “occupation” or “trade” to the place or organizational form in which it takes place, by way of earnestness, harsh treatment, and even defecation (according to Webster’s Encyclopedia Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language). This semantic density can cause confusion both historically and across cultures. On the one hand, six or seven centuries ago, our ancestors thought of “business” as “industry” (in the meaning of “diligence”) and only through this interpretation arrived at “occupation.” This terminological confusion extends to the varieties of anthropological subdisciplines currently associated with business: industrial, corporate, organizational, enterprise, and economic anthropologies, as well as the anthropologies of work and management. On the other hand, while European languages may have equivalent words that cover at least some of the same meanings as “business” does in English, Chinese and Japanese, among others, do not. As a result, scholars in these countries are obliged to come up with neologisms of one sort or another for their interpretations of “business anthropology,” which they then supplement with age-old words like “administration,” “commerce,” “management,” “work,” and so on.

So, how best might we say what business anthropology is, in a manner that is comprehensible both to ourselves as native English speakers and to those who live and work in other languages? While it might be argued that 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 irrigated rice paddy fields along the Yangtze River basin; among hedge fund managers in a multinational bank, or drivers of a camel train in the Saudi Arabian desert, I would propose that, in spite of initial appearances to the contrary, there is, indeed, a common thread. Riggers, weavers, dealers, planters, farmers, bankers, and camel drivers are all involved 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; labor 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. It is through trade and through analyses of trade that the different anthropologies (corporate, organizational, economic, industrial, and so on), and other anthropological traditions (like those found in Japan and China) become united into a single “business” anthropology. And 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.

So far, so good. But it seems to me that a major problem in the theoretical and practical development of business anthropology is that most anthropologists who have studied, for example, family businesses in northern Italy (Yanagisako 2002), the Shanghai stock market (Hertz 1998), or a corrugated board manufacturer in Japan (Clark 1979), do not immediately see themselves as “business” anthropologists per se, but as anthropologists pure and simple. They apply anthropological theories to contemporary social and cultural phenomena that happen to be found in business environments. In this sense, perhaps, they are anthropologists of business.

Still, it begs the question: what is it that a business anthropology, or anthropology of business, can contribute to anthropology in general? What can it achieve that anthropology on its own cannot? To answer this question, I am going to resort to personal experience, since it is this that has led to my being classified as a “business anthropologist” in recent years, and to my being asked to write this chapter. Although such personal experience may not be shared by many of my colleagues in the field, it can, in Lévi-Strauss’s famous phrasing, be “good to think” (bonne à penser). And thinking, right now, is what business anthropology needs, if it is to make any mark at all on the intellectual landscape of both businessmen and anthropologists.

A COMMUNITY OF FOLK ART POTTERS

Way back from 1977 to 1979, I conducted fieldwork for my PhD in Sarayama (Onta), a 14-household pottery community in southern Japan. The topic of my research was the Japanese folk art (or mingei) movement and how potters coped, or did not cope, with aesthetic ideals initially promulgated by philosophers and elite artist-craftsmen (including the English potter Bernard Leach) based hundreds of miles away in Tokyo, before being blown up—mainly by the media—into a full-scale consumer “boom” for people living in Tokyo and other urban conglomerations in Japan. And yet, here was I, living on the first floor of a sake shop in a remote mountain community, populated by generation after generation of farmer-potters whose view of their pottery making and the “out-
side” world (which began 200 yards down the road) was somewhat different from that which I had been led to believe by all the learned articles and books on folk art aesthetics that I had been reading some months previously back in London.

In spite of all the finely written words about beauty, nature, harmony, and being “at one with” one’s materials, I quickly learned that money (a topic never mentioned in aesthetic treatises) was extremely important to the potters of Sarayama. After all, they were caught up in the midst of a consumer boom. So, the challenge was how to find out about it. Although this was difficult, it proved possible: thanks to sly persistence, plenty of luck, and an extended period of fieldwork that resulted in potters forgetting why I was there in the first place! After two years in Sarayama I did obtain a lot of financial details for households. I knew—through gossip, access to one household’s detailed records over time, and (slightly deviously explained) measurement of potters’ climbing kiln chambers—more or less exactly the yield of each firing. This I was able to set against expenses for materials (such as they were) and hired labor (such as it was outside the household), and use to show the economic effects of the folk art boom on pottery households. And because I also spent some time in the local city, and elsewhere, tracing the various degrees of mark-up in retail over wholesale prices, I also began to learn a little about Japanese craft retailing practices and to get a more nuanced impression of the nature of “consumer demand.”

As a result, my thesis ended up looking not just at the practice of folk art aesthetic ideals, but at issues of pottery production and the market as they affected both aesthetic ideals and the community of potters in Sarayama. But could this be labeled a form of business anthropology? I realized, of course, that pottery households in Sarayama—like traditional Japanese households throughout the country—were first and foremost economic organizations, and that family and kinship came second. But my disciplinary leaning was towards a melding of “economic” and “aesthetic” anthropology that, to my mind, was absolutely necessary to, but generally lacking in, the “anthropology of art” (although I was reluctant to give the craft that I had studied the status of “art”). If anything, then, I thought of my work as representing an uncomfortable mixture of economic anthropology and the anthropology of art.

And yet, because it dealt with trading relations, the thesis—and the book that followed (Moeran 1997)—was indeed, I now realize and accept, an incursion into the field of business anthropology. There are many, many other such monographs of which the same might be said, from Malinowski’s *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) to Bestor’s *Tsukiji* (2004), by way of Powdermaker’s analysis of the Hollywood film industry (1950), Watson’s study of emigration and the lineage system in the New Territories of Hong Kong (1975), and Lien’s ethnography of a Norwegian food company (1997).
CERAMIC ART & DEPARTMENT STORES

My second period of fieldwork in Japan was as a postdoctoral student and extended my interest in pottery into the ceramic art world. The research question underlying this fieldwork was simple enough: how did a potter manage to elevate himself to such an extent that his work came to be considered “art” rather than mere “craft”? And how, as a result, did he attain the honor of designation by the Japanese Cultural Agency as the holder of an “important intangible cultural property”? The answer was a little more complex. Potters who wished their work to be seen as “ceramic art” used to exhibit it in department stores, which regularly held one-man, group, and competitive exhibitions of one sort or another on a weekly (or, if very important, fortnightly or three-weekly) basis. Potters would start by holding shows in local department stores, and gradually move further afield as success encouraged them and opportunity arose. Their choices were motivated by an informal ranking system of stores, based on both sales generated and their cultural capital (including tradition and regional location).

I therefore found myself visiting numerous shows in department stores around Kyushu, where I lived, as well as further afield in Osaka and Tokyo. These visits, however, together with interviews with store representatives, yielded basic information only, which came to be repeated almost word for word by one informant after another: department stores put on cultural activities like art and ceramics exhibitions to give “culture” back to their loyal customers who had spent their money elsewhere in the store over the years. In other words, exhibitions were a straight swap of economic for cultural capital.

This was fine insofar as it went, but, after listening to the third recounting of exactly the same reasoning, my fieldworker’s hackles were raised and I grew (as it proved, rightly) suspicious. But, until I was able somehow to break down this wall of the “public face” of a department store, I realized that I was going to get nowhere. That I was in fact able to move backstage was pure chance. By hooking up with an active, but slightly disillusioned, gallery owner, I found myself visiting both potters and department stores with a different hat on my head. I was no longer a “scholar,” but an “assistant”: partly invisible behind my informant, the front man in all negotiations that took place before my very eyes (and in my ever-present notebook).

What I learned from this research—which included my holding my own pottery exhibition in a Kyushu department store—was how different people in an art world emphasized different values regarding what made an art object (or, in my case, pot) “good,” “bad,” or merely “indifferent.” Both potters and retailers recognized three sets of value that made up the “price” or overall “worth” of a pot: aesthetic, commodity, and social. While potters tended to stress aesthetics over price (commodity value), they did not ignore the latter; after all, they had
a living to make. But their considerations of what made a pot good or indifferent were not necessarily the same as those of dealers and department store representatives, nor indeed of critics (who virtually ignored the fact that a pot was a commodity other than as a potential objet d’art). What united, and separated, them all were social values: the estimation of quality based on who you knew in the world of art pottery. The idea that Potter A’s work could be considered “good” because he or she had been apprenticed to Potter B might hold good among those who liked the latter’s work. But it came to be a criticism among those who preferred Potters C, D, or E, each of whom had their own coteries of aficionados.

Needless to say, perhaps, steering a course between these different networks of relations was a difficult and tiring task. Although located in a particular business world, what I encountered was not that different from kinship relations or political networks in other fieldwork contexts. So, was this investigation of would-be “artist potters” an example of business anthropology, or just anthropology in general? Was I then just studying markets and forms of exchange (including bribery), like many economic anthropologists (e.g. Plattner 1996), while also adhering to my interest in art and aesthetics?

AN ADVERTISING AGENCY

If anything counts towards my being a business anthropologist, I suppose it is my fieldwork in a medium-sized Tokyo advertising agency, then called Asatsū, conducted throughout 1990, just as Japan’s economic “bubble” burst (Moeran 1996). Although this research provided a wonderful mixture of mental and bodily understanding of what it meant to be employed in advertising (more of which a little later), it was also disturbingly preplanned. Before I arrived in January 1990, the manager of the CEO’s office sent me a timetable for my research: the first two weeks of January would be spent in his office; the following week in magazine buying; the next in newspaper buying; then television and radio, before spending a month in marketing, and the following months in accounts, creative, merchandizing, special promotions, the international division, personnel, finance, and information technology (IT), before returning to the CEO’s office to round things up.

I can still vividly recall my very first day in Sarayama, when I was having lunch in the noodle shop, wondering what on earth I was going to do, now that I had finally arrived in “the field.” How should I start my study? As I looked at a hand-drawn map of the names and locations of the 14 houses in Sarayama on the wall above me, I decided that maybe the best way to start would be to find out who lived in each household. That way, I could at least get to know who was who, how old they were, where they were born, where the wives had come
from, and so on and so forth. So, that afternoon, I started asking people about their families, which turned out to be a stroke of luck because, in spite of their fame throughout the land, Sarayama’s potters had never been asked about their families. It was always pots, pots, pots. In this I unwittingly endeared myself to everyone in the community (and it was probably this that saved me from being thrown out of the community when I started calculating a kiln’s economic yield a few weeks later!).

But now, more than a decade later, I was being told what to study and when. This was both a great relief, and an initial source of worry. What if the agency was trying to steer my research in particular directions, in which I might not necessarily wish to go? After all, I wasn’t dealing with a bunch of “country bumpkins” (as one critic once referred to the potters of Sarayama in my presence). Now I was seriously “studying up.” Power relations were inverted, and who knew where I, as an anthropologist, would end up?

In fact, the carefully concocted schedule was designed to allow anyone in the agency to know where I might formally be found, should the necessity arise. By being officially located in one department or another, a manager or other employee would know how to trace me, even though I might be somewhere else at that particular time. So, in mid-April, for example, the accounts divisional manager’s secretary would be able to tell an enquirer that I was in fact attending the trainees’ induction classes that week, or helping with the Mercedes Benz presentation in the international division the next. In short, the timetable was an exercise in information for others, rather than in control over the fieldworker.

Two other aspects of fieldwork were exceptional and thus worth mentioning. First, every time I moved from one section, department, or division to another, agency personnel would give me more or less formal lectures about their work before letting me experience it for myself in practice. On my first day in the magazine buying department, for example, I was given a two-hour lecture covering the overall field of magazine advertising and the agency’s activities therein. This was followed in the afternoon by two one-hour lectures by two different media buyers about particular aspects of their work. The next morning, the departmental manager suddenly turned to me and said:

Right, professor! Now we’re going off to the biggest publisher in Japan, Kodansha, to negotiate the purchase of ad pages over the next year in all its magazines. You may sit quietly in the meeting and take notes, but you say nothing. OK? We’ll fill you in on what’s gone on when we come back to the office later on in the day.

And so I sat in on two hours of negotiations, of the kind already described to me in some detail secondhand by those who had lectured me the day before, but including a lot of tacit knowledge that I was unable to grasp then and there.
When it was over, I was asked if I had any questions, and Kodansha’s advertising manager answered them quite frankly, before inviting us to lunch, where conversation (aided by a bottle of beer each) voiced some of that tacit knowledge and soon encompassed all kinds of topics I would never have dreamed of asking about! This, surely, was business anthropology!

Second, my informants in Asatsū allowed me to get involved in their projects in such a way that I was not simply asking them questions and observing what was going on, but was actively participating in working out how best to solve a marketing problem or come up with a campaign tagline. This was not the first time that I had engaged in observant participation—my pottery exhibition in a Kyushu department store had been just that—but it provided me with the kind of illumination that, by the end of my fieldwork, made me feel more like an “ad man” than an academic!

The fact that I was able to make a contribution to the agency’s collective thinking about how best to present two of its campaigns to potential clients has over the years reinforced my view that, for fieldwork to be really “successful,” the fieldworker has to do (or have done) what his or her informants are doing: exhibited pots in a department store, worked as a hedge fund manager, been a boxer, ballet dancer, school teacher, or whatever. It is this physical experience that allows the fieldworker to understand things somewhere down in his or her solar plexus, rather than just in the head (Wacquant 1995). And I think that it is something that, ideally, every anthropologist of business should aim for when in the field. It is certainly something that applied business anthropologists often experience in their everyday work over long periods of time.

BODY & MIND

So, where do these fieldwork accounts take us? First, my call for a shift from participant observer to observant participant in fieldwork has theoretical, as well as methodological, implications. By holding my own pottery exhibition in a department store and by working on an ad agency account team for a potential client, I experienced physically what otherwise was an intellectual endeavour. Until I was prevailed upon to exhibit my own pots, I had listened to potters, dealers, department store representatives, and newspaper journalists criticizing one another and the pots on show in the various exhibitions then popular in urban Japan. I had even joined in with my own bits of gossip gleaned during interviews with informants and observations at exhibitions far afield, and learned to be as cynical as those populating the art world of contemporary Japanese ceramics. But once I had to make pots for my own one-man show, things changed drastically. I became extremely self-conscious and unsure of myself and my work, which I saw as amateurish and very far from the kind
of perfection that I sought in my imagination. When somebody actually paid me a compliment, I felt a glow of pleasure that offset the disappointment of watching others displaying no interest at all as they walked quickly past the works on display. When my first pot was sold—a quarter of an hour after the show opened—I nearly embraced the middle-aged woman who had fallen for a plate on which I had drawn a picture of Snoopy in a bath, with the words *Happy Bathday* written round its rim! I quickly learned the meaning of “thank you” as people whom I had never seen before and would never see again decided to pay for a set of dishes or a vase or a *sake* cup, each of which, I felt, cost far more than it should have, and which contained a little bit of “me” that they were taking home.

I also, of course, experienced firsthand the negotiations that took place among different stakeholders in my exhibition, and even made my own contributions to them: for example, by bringing in an organization (the British Council) to which my main sponsors had no access. These experiences impressed upon me the fact that being a potter or “ceramic artist” required more than technical skills in throwing, glazing, and firing pots. Social skills were also crucial to public recognition and acceptance of one’s work. I, too, had to learn to spin a tale around my pots and so provide a hook upon which people could hang their expectations. Such realizations, stemming from my physical engagement with pottery, later were reflected in my intellectual analysis of the ceramic art world, allowing me to be multifaceted and more nuanced in my explanations than I might otherwise have been (Moeran 2014:60–81).

The same can be said of my engagement with advertising, which, as anyone who has read anything written by scholars in the field of cultural studies knows, is an easy target for criticism. The fact that I was myself able to come up with taglines and slogans for clients and participate directly in campaign proposals taught me an awful lot about the kinds of stress that advertising executives go through every day for months, years, decades at a time. It also taught me that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, advertising campaigns came into being through teamwork and that those involved in different business spheres—creative, marketing, media buying, accounts—somehow had to resolve their inevitable differences if they were to make an idea work. Finally, it taught me about how difficult it actually is for people employed in a business like advertising (or, for that matter, fashion magazine or book publishing) to disengage themselves, to reflect upon what they are doing or being asked to do, and to make moral and ethical decisions that could radically change that business. It made me realize just how privileged academics are, and how luxurious is their way of working that allows them to be disengaged, objective, reflexive, and critical.
All of which brings me back, perhaps a little circuitously, to the topic of this entry in this book: how to theorize the anthropological study of business. Clearly, our theories are in our methods, and vice versa. Business anthropologists—that is, anthropologists who work in or for a business organization—are often obliged to carry out research and analysis according to the expectations of a particular client. A manufacturer may frame a problem in terms of the unionized workers it employs; a city education council in terms of its high-school students. But what if fieldwork reveals that the cause of the “problem” is the manufacturer’s middle managers and not its workers, or the teachers and not the students of a high school? Will the client be open-minded enough to accept such a finding, or not?

There are a number of issues like this (including access, client confidentiality, and publication rights) that anthropologists in and of business face, but it strikes me that, first and foremost, business anthropology, by whatever name, needs to develop a programmatic statement of what it should be about. By so doing, it will enable those interested in the subject to focus on issues that become common to them all. Such commonality is essential if this emergent subdiscipline of anthropology is to be anything other than a passing fad, temporarily attracting scholars and practitioners who otherwise feel out of place. One has only to look at another recently emerged “discipline,” fashion studies, to understand what I mean. The last thing we want as anthropologists interested in business is an endless stream of descriptive, only partially critical, navel-gazing studies.

So, what might a program for business anthropology look like?

For a start, it must engage with the discipline as a whole at both practical and theoretical levels. By this I am referring to two things. First, it should fight to revitalize current anthropology programs taught in universities and other institutions of higher learning. In an era when most anthropology students can only get jobs in business organizations of one sort or another, shouldn’t “academic” anthropologists be preparing their students specifically for such job opportunities, rather than giving them endless doses of ethnographic and theoretical discussions that are in large part irrelevant to their future careers? Isn’t it time academic anthropology made concessions to the modern world in which their universities are almost entirely located, and made use of contextualized business case studies, methodologies, and theories that together would provide a practical and pertinent foundation for future anthropological research? As business anthropologists we must engage with colleagues in our discipline far more, perhaps, than we already do.
Second, in anthropology, as in many other disciplines, there is far too much citation for citation’s sake of other people’s work. We need to go beyond making passive use of anthropological or sociological theories by recontextualizing them. How far can we usefully apply theories of animism and contagious magic in “primitive” societies to branding in contemporary marketing, for example, or frame analysis of business settings? Other theoretical topics developed in nonbusiness contexts that immediately come to mind include in no particular order: family businesses; gender; law; entrepreneurship; markets, money, and exchange; material culture; power relations; economic, social, and cultural capital; limited stock companies; networks; bureaucracies; frame analysis; meetings; ritual, symbolism, and religion; CCT (consumer culture theory; see Arnould and Thompson in this volume); and globalization. We have, therefore, a lot of anthropological theories out there that may be put to the test in contemporary business contexts. As business anthropologists, we need to engage with theories (more on this in a minute or so).

This invites a second programmatic statement that is so obvious it shouldn’t need saying. We must be comparative. Those anthropologists working in, on, for, or against businesses must compare their findings with those of their colleagues working both in other branches of business and in other societies. Are analogies to be drawn between north Italian silk manufacturing family firms, on the one hand, and family restaurant owners in Chinatown in London, on the other? If so, what are they? And how do they compare with the ideals and practices of Japanese corporate “familism”? What are the mechanisms sustaining a preference for family forms as a means of making a living from different kinds of business activities over generations and across cultures? An essential aspect of engagement, then, is adoption of a broad perspective.

Third, we should be discussing methodology far more than we do. As anthropologists, we have been brought up to learn about and practice—occasionally even to worship—the defining feature of our discipline: participant observation–style fieldwork. In recent years, some of our colleagues have argued over its former practices and suggested acceptable new ways of going about our craft: multisited fieldwork, for example, or para-ethnography. With the digital revolution, anthropologists have turned to other ways of recording ethnographic material than by traditional means of pencil and notebook. Some use video and audio equipment; others resort to various interactive fora made available by the internet. Business anthropologists are in the forefront of these trends. They often take for granted their everyday practices that would surprise their academic colleagues (like the fact that consultants of one sort or another may have to share their video material with their clients at the end of each day, for example). It strikes me that they could, and should, be leading the way in this particular field of anthropological interest.
As I suggested here, we might think about focusing our theoretical endeavors to “configure” our field of study. The question then becomes: what directions should such theoretical endeavors take?

We all have our different theories about theories, but what I personally would like to see over—say—the next ten years is anthropologists in and of business, engaging with:

1. Social relations and structures of power in, between, and dependent upon business organizations of all kinds, but particularly firms;
2. Explicit comparison between these social forms (companies, industries, conglomerates, and so on) and the various cultures (work, management, professional, regional, national, and so forth) that, in one way or another, impinge upon and form them, and by which they themselves are developed and sustained;
3. The materials, technologies, and things (goods, commodities, equipment, tools) with which business people of all kinds engage, in which they are entangled, and which afford their organizational forms (see Suchman 1987); and
4. Ethnography and fieldwork methods (see also Baba and Patel in this volume).

If we could do all that, and do it well, and in the course of doing it, provide detailed ethnographic studies of business situations of all kinds, perhaps then our colleagues in anthropology might reluctantly agree that the anthropologies in, of, for, and with business are “good to think.” And that, without the customary cynical smirk, Lévi-Strauss can be a brand of jeans as well as a long-lived anthropologist.

REFERENCES


Suggested Further Readings


