

Some Thoughts on the Nature of Business Anthropology

Brian Moeran
Department of Intercultural Communication and Management
Copenhagen Business School

Abstract

This working paper, delivered at the *Creative Encounters* workshop on the Business of Ethnography in June 2012, and in part (the sections on advertising and anthropology) at the American Anthropological Association's annual meeting in San Francisco in November the same year, recounts the author's personal experiences as a fieldworker to consider what it is that defines the newly emergent sub-discipline of business anthropology. The underlying argument is that all kinds of ethnographic research not overtly conducted on 'business organizations' may be counted as an anthropology of business, which itself is not strictly defined by the word 'business' *per se*, but includes such features as kinship and household organization, creative and craft practices, community structures, and so on.

Keywords

Advertising, business anthropology, fashion magazines, pottery, publishing, whaling

Some Thoughts on the Nature of Business Anthropology

Brian Moeran

When it comes to 'business' ethnography and 'business' anthropology, I have to confess that I'm not entirely sure what it's all about. Some anthropologists – including, perhaps, one or two of you here – are ready and willing to call themselves 'business' anthropologists. Others prefer to be labelled 'organizational' anthropologists; yet others 'economic', 'applied', 'corporate', 'industrial' or some other form of anthropologist. I bear the title of 'Professor of Business Anthropology' purely because I work in a 'business' school. If I had been working in a university's anthropology department, I am sure that I would have been little more than 'professor of anthropology'. And yet I never consciously thought of myself as a 'business' anthropologist until quite recently, when others began to describe me as such. So what's it all about?

The only way I can *begin* to come to terms with my lifework as an anthropologist – or, possibly, 'business' anthropologist – and on how these two might differ in their practices, is to reflect upon the different fieldwork situations in which I have found myself over the past 35 years and try to elicit factors of general interest to those of us pursuing the path(s) of business anthropology. These factors include issues that are typical for *all* fieldworkers: in particular, access, connections, trust, gender relations, and chance or, as anthropologists like to call it, serendipity. In addition, they touch on the nature of fieldwork itself: whether it consists of mere interviews, participant observation, or – ideally – observant participation. It is such issues that these reflections bring to light.

This paper, then, discusses my employment as a 'business anthropologist' and the various pieces of fieldwork that I have conducted over the years. In particular, it relates my ventures into the world of advertising – both as a consultant working for a New York ad agency and as an academic ethnographer in a similar organization in Tokyo, Japan. During the course of long-term participant-observation fieldwork in a Japanese advertising agency, the anthropologist as scholar found himself engaged in preparations for several competitive presentations to potential client companies (including Mercedes Benz, Pioneer and Nihon Lever). These were an integral part of my research as an 'observant participant' and afforded insights that would otherwise have remained hidden from the fieldworker's eye. At the same time, however, I found that my ideas were being put to use for the agency's overall profit and I began to wonder: should I, or should I not, be paid for my contributions? Had I not, perhaps, become more of an employee who deserved a salary or some form of financial recompense, than a 'disinterested' academic researcher (whose living and research expenses were being paid for by a research foundation)?

This confusion was resolved when, some years later, as an anthropologist I was paid to carry out a particular piece of 'ethnographic' research on behalf of a world-wide advertising agency based in New York. The task was seemingly simple: to interview six men of different ages and educational backgrounds, all living in Tokyo, about their grooming habits. The methodology proposed was frightening: six pages of detailed instructions about what questions to ask, in what order, as well as requests to examine informants' bedroom cupboards and bathrooms, and to accompany them on a shopping expedition in search of grooming products. Was this really 'anthropology'? How could I arrive at telling analyses of consumer patterns on the basis of six three-hour sessions with paid informants?

In fact, an analysis was made and report written (more or less overnight) by the anthropologist for a client who was delighted with both. As to why this should be, however, had little to do with this

particular piece of 'ethnography' as such, and more with my long-term immersion in *other* ethnographic situations. An anthropology *of* made possible an anthropology *for*. It was a business preposition that, in this case, worked.

A Community of Folk Art Potters

Way back in 1977-79, I conducted fieldwork for my Ph.D. over two years 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 'outside' 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 fine 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. Indeed, as I recount in the first chapter of my book, *The Business of Ethnography*, within the first three weeks of my fieldwork I found myself in a real mess because I had begun to calculate how much a potter earned from a kiln firing (Moeran 2005). It was deemed extremely inappropriate, if not downright rude, for an outsider like myself to make enquiries about local people's incomes when I hardly knew them.

I had made such enquiries because, just before leaving London for 'the field', I had received a letter (there was, thank Buddha, no e-mail in those days) from an eminent professor of Japanese anthropology at Michigan University, Richard Beardsley, in which he advised me to make sure – in the light of the fact that potters were in the midst of a consumer boom – that I obtained financial details for potter households. One of his doctoral students had just returned from Tamba, another pottery village near Kyoto, without such information and was thus having trouble making a coherent argument about aesthetic ideals and economic practices. "Don't forget to find out how much your potters earn," he wrote. "It's extremely important."

In spite of the initial mess in which I found myself after this early incursion into a household's economy, after two years in Sarayama I *did* obtain a lot of financial details for households. I knew, through gossip, admittance 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 labour (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 the community of potters in Sarayama. But could this be labelled a form of business anthropology? Here I had my doubts, on two counts. Firstly, a careful reading of the work of Japanese scholars such as Ariga Kizaemon, Yoneyama, and Nakane Chie, among others, had taught me that pottery households in Sarayama – like traditional Japanese households throughout the country – were first and foremost economic organizations. Family and kinship came second. Secondly, it was this kind of 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 myself as representing an uncomfortable mixture of 'economic' anthropology and the anthropology of art.

Ceramic Art and Department Stores

Six months after finishing my Ph.D., and with my thesis accepted for publication by the University of California Press (Moeran 1997), I found myself awarded an Economic and Social Research Council post-doctoral fellowship to study 'pottery as an art form in Japan'. This came as rather a surprise, since I had, I thought, left England for good and returned with my family to our house situated two to three kilometres down the valley from Sarayama. But there had been a bit of politicking in my absence by one or two people in my former department and the ERSC award was accompanied by a job offer from my *alma mater*, the School of Oriental & African Studies, London. It seemed, therefore, like I had the best of both worlds: further research for a year in Japan, followed by a permanent position in a Department of Anthropology in the UK.

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 as 'art', rather than mere 'craft'? And how, as a result, did he attain the honour of being designated by the Japanese Cultural Agency (*Bunkachō*) 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' (*bijutsu tōgei*) 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-week) basis. Potters would start by holding shows in local department stores, and gradually move further afield as success encouraged 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 in so far as it went, but, after 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 – and described in Chapter 7 in *The Business of Ethnography*. By hooking up with Miyamoto Reisuke, a 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 Miyamoto, 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 at Tamaya Department Store in Fukuoka (Moeran 2012) – was how different people in an art world emphasized different values regarding the 'worth' of an art object (or, in my case, pot). 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 besides being potentially an *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 seen to be 'good' because he or she had been apprenticed to potter B might hold good amongst 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* (Moeran 1987).

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, however, what I encountered was not that different from kinship relations or political networks in other fieldwork contexts. Fieldwork itself had been what I have referred to as 'frame-based' in the case of my research in Sarayama; this time it was 'network-based' (Moeran 2005). But 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 exchange, like many economic anthropologists? I don't really know the answer to that, but I do know that I was knee-deep in bribery and corruption (which has prevented my writing up my data for many years).

Small Type Coastal Whaling

The next piece of fieldwork I found myself involved in was *commissioned* – by the Japan Whaling Association, which asked a dozen anthropologists of Japan to spend a week studying three different small-type coastal whaling communities in Abashiri (Hokkaido), Ayukawa (near Sendai) and Taeji (not too far from Tokyo). What was interesting about this research was, firstly, that it was commissioned; secondly, that we had to conduct research in teams; and thirdly, that we had to write up a report together immediately after completion of fieldwork. In this respect, this fieldwork experience was typical of that conducted by anthropologists and ethnographers working as consultants for business and other organizations.

The commissioning of the research presented no real problems. No doubt, the Japan Whaling Association had selected us carefully for our known predisposition towards 'things Japanese' and positive outlook on the Japanese people (this was a period of 'Japan bashing' by the USA and other Western countries angered by, and jealous of, Japan's economic success). Although the group as a whole included two anthropologists who had not specialised in Japan at all, but were authorities on whaling, the rest of us were quickly convinced during fieldwork that the plight of Japan's small-type coastal whalers was worth highlighting. Our final report, then, met the requirements and expectations of those who had paid for our travel and accommodation; it did not need to be altered in any way to suit our 'client'.

The conduct of fieldwork in teams was also interesting and quickly revealed who were the 'fieldworkers' and who the 'armchair philosophers' among us! I was lucky in that the four others with whom I was teamed all turned out to be excellent fieldworkers. Based in Ayukawa, we moved around for the most part in pairs on the first day, and then individually thereafter, or occasionally in pairs, over the following two days. At breakfast, we would – together with a local town official – discuss whom we would like to meet and talk to initially. The town official would then arrange visits for us, and off we'd go, after agreeing to meet up for lunch at our hotel at midday, when we would tell one another about what we had learned, ask questions and plan the afternoon's activities accordingly. We did the same over dinner each evening. In this way, we were able to gain a lot of information over a very short period of time (three days) and really took advantage of the idea of 'grounded ethnography'.

The writing of the report revealed who could write and who couldn't; who could organize material in what ways, thereby revealing a little more about one's colleagues in the field of Japanese anthropology! Again, as in fieldwork, the work was shared. One of us wrote about gift-giving; another about the social organization of a whaling boat; a third about religious beliefs; and so on. We then had to bring these separate bits of writing together, organize them according to their internal logic, and edit them into a coherent overall style. During this process, representatives of the Japan Whaling Commission were present and ready to help out with technical matters (computers, printing, the

development of photographs, the drawing of tables and figures, and so on), but they did not interfere at all with the content of our work. The end result was printed, published and distributed to members of the International Whaling Commission at its next annual gathering (Akimichi et al 1987). It was also translated into Japanese by one of our team (a Japanese anthropologist of whaling, Jun'ichi Takahashi) and published by a commercial publisher (Freeman et al. 1989). Parts of that and ensuing research on Japanese whaling were developed into academic articles, either by individual members of the team (e.g. Moeran 1993), or by combinations thereof (e.g. Takahashi et al. 1989). Research also led to further joint fieldwork between Arne Kalland and myself, resulting in a co-written book on Japan's coastal whalers (Kalland and Moeran 1992).

Was this, then, 'business' anthropology? Certainly, whaling is (or was) commercial, and Japanese small-type coastal whalers expected to make a living from their endeavours. But, given that there was a world-wide moratorium on large-scale whaling at the time of our research, and that this included those whom we were studying, the 'business' side of their lives had more or less evaporated. Our task, in reality, was more an exercise in political, than business, anthropology.

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 conducted throughout 1990, just as Japan's economic 'bubble' burst. Again, I have described how I managed to gain access to the agency in *The Business of Ethnography* (Chapter 4), and some of my other writings have depicted in detail the parts that I played in preparations for the agency's participation in two competitive presentations (for Mercedes Benz and Pioneer) (e.g. Moeran 2007).

This participation, where I made a contribution to the agency's collective thinking about how best to present its campaigns, 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 theatre director, 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. And I think that it is something that, ideally, every fieldworker should aim for when in the field.

My research in Asatsū, as the Tokyo agency was then called, provided a wonderful mixture of mental and bodily understanding, although it was also disturbingly pre-planned. 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, SP, the international division, personnel, finance, and 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' (Nader 1972). Power relations were inverted, and who knew where, as an anthropologist, I would end up?

In fact, the carefully concocted schedule was designed to allow anyone in the agency to know where I might be found, should the necessity arise. By being officially located in one department or another, a manager would know how to trace me, even though I might be somewhere else at that particular time. So, the Accounts Divisional Manager's secretary would be able to tell an enquirer that I was in fact attending the trainees' induction classes one week, or helping with the Mercedes Benz presentation in the International Division another. In short, the timetable was an exercise in information, rather than in control.

Earlier, I mentioned how research was a wonderful mix of intellectual and physical understanding. By working closely at all hours of the day and night, as well as over weekends, with an account team, contributing to their analysis by coming up with a tagline or slogan, I quickly experienced, at least in the short term, the stress that was a longer-term daily, weekly, monthly and annual experience for my colleagues. I learned to live with the stress induced by deadlines, as well as by a need to be 'creative', to analyse, organize and express oneself clearly in a persuasive manner. I learned what it meant to move one step forward and two steps back; how campaign ideas could be upended because of the latest information brought back by an account planner from a meeting with a client; how passive smoking and windowless meeting rooms really did affect one's eyes, throat, ability to concentrate, and overall health!

What was quite remarkable, so far as I was concerned as a fieldworker, was how 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 two one hour lectures by two different media buyers about their work. The next morning, the departmental manager suddenly stood up from his desk 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 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 second-hand by those who had lectured me the day before. 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) soon encompassed all kinds of topics I would never have dreamed of asking about! This, surely, was *business anthropology*!

Advertising Anthropology

Some years later, I was contacted by a global advertising agency in New York and asked to conduct 'fieldwork' in Japan (where I was, at the time, located). The task, it seemed, was simple: to interview six men, of different ages and social backgrounds, living in Tokyo, about their grooming habits. The agency concerned intended to conduct simultaneous testing of 'respondents' in Tokyo, Berlin and New York, making use of three different anthropologists, one in each country. Each was supplied with a list of questions to be asked; each was also to be accompanied by a videographer. Interviews were to last three hours, and include a visit to a local store where the informant would talk about the products he saw on the shelves, explaining his likes and dislikes, buying habits, and so on. For his time and cooperation, each respondent was paid approximately US\$100 to buy grooming products that he

fancied. The selection of respondents was left to a marketing firm that specializes in this sort of thing, so that all the anthropologist had to do was turn up in the right place at the right time and conduct his (or her) 'ethnographic research'.

Still, the preparations for this ethnographic research were formidable. The anthropologist was sent a six page list of questions, covering a broad range of topics, many of them not overtly connected with grooming, and told to cover them in order. At the same time, each respondent was asked beforehand to have to hand some magazine photographs of men's fashions that he could then discuss with the ethnographer. He was also to show him his wardrobe and describe very precisely how he went about his 'ablutions' (washing, shaving, etc.) every morning before leaving the house for work. Every inflection of voice, every gesture, every seemingly innocuous cough or laugh by both respondent and anthropologist would be captured on videotape. This would enable the advertising agency's clients to study the interviewing process closely, at their leisure, and repeatedly, and thus to draw their own conclusions if they wished, in addition to the analysis written by each anthropologist immediately after fieldwork had come to an end.

I have to say that, although the prospect of conducting practical research with specific aims and methods was something to look forward to, the idea that I could find out anything of significance solely by conducting three hour interviews (which included a visit to the bed and bath rooms if each respondent's home, plus a spot of shopping) was daunting. After all, hadn't I spent months, years even, studying groups of people before even beginning to analyse and write about them? How on earth could a grand total of eighteen hours-worth of interviews reveal anything significant about Japanese, or any other, men's grooming habits?

The answer ended up being: quite a lot. As I talked informally to each of my informants – not adhering to the script provided by the ad agency too closely, but covering most of the ground by the end of each interview – I began to recognize them as belonging to one or other 'social types' characteristic of contemporary Japanese society. This enabled me to start ordering their seemingly random comments and to create a continuum of practices ranging from 'old fashioned' and 'traditional' to 'cool' and 'contemporary' men. I was also to make more general cultural observations and analyses which, seemingly, pleased both the New York ad agency and its client.

How did this come about? Only because I had lived in Japan for sixteen years on and off over a 35 year period and was able to use the cultural knowledge gained in those years to inflect my observations of what was said and done during these six interviews. That my consumer analyses were telling and instructive was entirely due to my long-term immersion in *other* ethnographic situations. If I had been a raw recruit with much less experience of Japan and the Japanese people, I would have been unable to contribute anything to this particular piece of research. In other words, previous experiences in the anthropology *of* business enabled an anthropology *for* business.

Women's Fashion Magazines

What, then, of my study of women's fashion magazines in Japan, Hong Kong, France, Britain and the USA? This research focused on the content of magazines like *Elle*, *Marie Claire* and *Vogue* which were (and still are, of course) published in a wide range of countries and their markets; on the people involved in different aspects of their production; and, to a far lesser extent, on readers of these (and other fashion) magazines (Moeran 2006a and b).

The first thing that needs to be said about this research is that I have serious doubts as to whether it constituted 'fieldwork' – at least, in the classical sense. Most of my time was spent on travelling to different parts of the world (Paris, New York, Hong Kong, Tokyo and London, often in conjunction with conferences held there or nearby) in order to interview an advertising manager here, an art director there; an editor somewhere else, and a fashion model in yet another place. I was lucky enough to be able to spend two days in the headquarters of *Marie Claire* in Paris, and two more days at

studio shoots for hair products in Tokyo. These gave me a bit of the ‘feel’ of magazine production, but I was never allowed to observe, say, the putting together of a single issue of any magazine over a month. I therefore had to judge the extent to which what my informants told me was ‘the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth’, or an amalgam of truths, sincerity, and occasional obfuscations.

In this research, then, I experienced the typical business anthropologist’s problem of access. This was particularly acute because magazine publishers are extremely busy, working to tight deadlines, and also seemingly extremely closed and slightly hostile towards academic researchers. I soon realised that their hostility, or at the least unfriendliness and suspicion, owed much to feminist critiques of fashion magazines and their seemingly ‘frivolous’ contents (fashion and accessories; beauty, make-up and hair; the world of celebrities; and so on), so I played on the fact that I was a *man* who was interested in the daily lives of editors and their colleagues as they went about producing a magazine issue every month, rather than in its actual contents. This approach resonated quite well and reassured my respondents, so that – busy though they were – once they had agreed to talk to me, they often wouldn’t stop! As the Assistant Editor of *Elle Japon* said at the end of a long interview one evening:

“That was *really* interesting. You see, we never have time to stop and reflect on what we’re doing and how we do it. So it’s been a real lesson to me this evening describing our work. I realise how mad and disordered a lot of it must seem,” She laughed happily, while her Advertising Manager, who had been sitting through the interview wincing with pain at what he learned, shifted uncomfortably in his chair. “But please write about it, and when you’ve finished, please send me your book. I don’t care if it’s in English. I’ll read it!”

Just how I managed to get to interview this particular editor was a saga in itself, but it reveals the method I – like many anthropologists – was obliged to use in order to get access to publishing houses that would not open their doors to me. Sometimes, as in this case, I made use of my connections with Asatsū, the ad agency where I had done fieldwork ten years earlier, to gain access to a magazine (which explains why the assistant editor of *Elle Japon* was accompanied by her Advertising Manager). At other times, I asked a former student at the University of Hong Kong who had gone into the magazine business to introduce me to colleagues in Hong Kong. Once I managed an *entrée* circuitously via a long-distance telephone call to New York. And once, by pure luck, I sent off my research proposal to the Director of International Editions at *Marie Claire* and was invited, as a result, to spend two days under her wing at the magazine’s headquarters in Paris. As she said over lunch the first day: “You know, you were lucky, Brian. I am probably the only person in the industry who has a Ph.D. – in history from the University of Geneva – so I actually read, and was intrigued by, what the report you sent me!”

One more point arose from research that had me talking to informants about their magazines in places as varied as their open-plan offices or the privacy of their homes, in a luxury hotel foyer or on a Greek island beach. I was almost invariably talking to *women*. This, believe it or not, was a new fieldwork experience. In the community of Sarayama, people looked askance at me when I started asking housewives about how they went about the preparation of clay (mainly a woman’s job in each household). Department store representatives were, without exception, men – as were critics and potters (with one exception). There were women enough employed in Asatsū, but at the time they were not treated seriously and were given fairly menial jobs, even though many of them were clearly much smarter than their male colleagues. At the time of my fieldwork, in a company employing almost 1,000 people, only one woman had advanced to any managerial position (and she had risen, remarkably, to being in overall charge of Marketing and a member of the Board of Directors).¹

¹ This was my main criticism when, asked to do so by Asatsū’s CEO at the end of my fieldwork in the agency, I wrote a report summarizing my research findings. In it, I commented on the agency’s seemingly total disregard of the talents of its female employees. The morning after I handed the report in, I saw a copy of it on the desk of the Personnel Manager, whom I was visiting to discuss other matters. I beat a fairly hasty retreat before he could

As a result, almost the entirety of my fieldwork experiences had been spent talking to, and associating with, men. And what I had learned about men, or at least Japanese men, was that they tended not to be that open or frank (except when inebriated) until they felt that they could trust me (and such trust might take up to a year of daily contact). Either because of insecurity or because of a sense of self-importance, they seemed reluctant to divulge information. As a fieldworker, therefore, I always had to charm, to probe, to take circuitous paths to find out 'the truth'. It was damned hard work!

But when I started studying fashion magazines, I found that my respondents were unbelievably *open* and frank. Now, it could well be that, as women, they took advantage of their charms to lead me, a man, up various garden paths (one certainly tried to, until I put away my notebook, upon which she performed a faster switch in persona than Jekyll did in becoming Hyde). And, indeed, it may well be the fact that, *because* I was a man, they were happy to tell me about the problems besetting them in their work, and that they might not have been so frank if I had been a woman. But, whatever the explanation, the fact that my respondents *were* so open and willing to talk in many ways offset the disadvantage that this particular piece of 'business anthropology' relied on interviews and not on fieldwork as such.

The Publishing Industry

Finally, let me turn to my recent research on the publishing industry in England and Japan. Two, not entirely unrelated, factors encouraged me to embark upon this: first, through a concatenation of circumstances, I found myself investing in an academic publishing company that was later sold, to yield a profit that I reinvested in another academic publisher which, in the course of time, was also sold (on the day before the financial crash of 2008!); second, as an academic, I have over the years generally been frustrated by publishers of my books who have in their time lost my manuscript, ignored specifics regarding a cover photo, misspelt my name, and generally failed to market a title.

My initial investment came about through a friendship that developed with the owner of the publishing house concerned, so that, when he asked for financial help (I was, at the time, earning more than probably any other academic anthropologist in the world), I was happy to oblige. I did so because of the *trust* that I had in his understanding of the business and his refreshingly open criticisms of (often pompous) academics. When we sold the company five years later, each of us wanted to remain in touch. This wasn't easy, given that we were both exiles: he was living in Germany and I in Denmark. So, when I was given the opportunity to invest in a second publishing house, I quickly brought in my publisher friend and we eventually agreed to go into the business together. I trusted his business acumen (and was justified in doing so), but my continued observant participation venture resulted from friendship.

Being Director of a publishing company gave me perfect fieldwork opportunities, since I could talk to its dozen or so employees as and when I was in the office, and attend managerial board meetings in which we planned the strategic development of the company. It also enabled me to tag along to the Frankfurt and London Book Fairs (Moeran 2010), where I sat in on endless meetings with suppliers, sales agents, distributors, translators, and so on, over the course of intensive three day periods, during which I was also introduced to others in the trade.

I was also allowed to attend the annual trade conference of the IPG (Independent Publishers Guild) and was so taken by the people I met there that I decided to donate some of the profits made from my investments to this organization. By becoming an IPG patron, I found myself given access to all sort of events and activities, including an IPG board meeting in which the next conference was

ask me about its contents! These days, things have changed, and women are being treated far more seriously in the agency.

planned. Rather remarkably, I have always been treated as an equal, and not as an outsider, by the publishing world which has turned out to be extremely friendly, outspoken and egalitarian in its activities.

Contacts made at the Frankfurt and Tokyo Book Fairs also enabled me to gain initial access to publishers in Japan. My main scholarly interest in the publishing industry initially was that which I had followed in the ceramics art world, advertising agency, and fashion magazine publishing: creative processes in the production of cultural objects. However, what I quickly realised was that, in the case of publishing (as with – say – art), manuscripts arrived at publishing houses already written. While, in Japan especially, editors then had considerable say in how a particular manuscript was edited and rewritten as necessary to fit a particular targeted readership (see Childress 2013), I could not find out exactly how an author first conceived and then nursed a book into existence.

Although many of my interviews were with editors and other staff in publishing houses, I soon felt dissatisfied with my research. I needed to find an author or two and follow the writing of a book. However, research took an unexpected turn because of one particular connection with a distributor of foreign language books in Japan. Precisely because he was a distributor, he introduced me to two major Japanese wholesale distributors, one of which arranged for me to visit its gigantic warehouse, situated in the northern outskirts of Tokyo. This field trip, with its observation of, literally, millions of books shelved, selected, packed, and shipped, but also several million more being returned, every day, left me in total depression about the futility of hoping to have one's own books read, as well as about the environmental destruction caused by felling trees to make paper for books – 43 per cent of which are pulped in Japan.

This research, then, has been short-lived, even though I have had the best possible access to people and organizations since my days at Asatsū. The twist to this is that, when encouraged to start up the *Journal of Business Anthropology*, I decided to go for Open Access, if only to prevent a few trees from being felled somewhere round the world. This is not the first time I have been faced with ethical considerations, of course, but this time they have influenced my scholarly career. When studying advertising, for example, I was not happy about the content of particular advertisements and their unstated assumptions and intentions, or about their role in the promotion of consumerism, but I convinced myself that it was worth doing because we had no idea about how these ads were *produced* in the first place. Similarly with fashion magazines, whose contents did indeed seem pretty vacuous, until I started listening to intelligent women talking about producing and reading them.

With publishing, ethics took a different form. My experience with the second academic publisher had taught me how important journals are in providing up-front cash (through subscriptions) with which to finance the publication of books and thus to increase overall turnover. It taught me, too, about how publishers were ready to raise journal prices time and time again because they knew that libraries, their main customers, had no choice but to keep buying them (because they are pressurized to do so by academics in universities and others institutions of higher learning). But, in a climate of dwindling financial resources, this meant that libraries spent less money on purchasing books – thereby allowing government measurement and control of 'academic quality' by means of journal citation indices. By editing and publishing an Open Access journal, I reasoned that Christina Garsten and I would be able to take an 'ethical' stand as we put an anthropological analysis of particular business practices to test.

Does business anthropology, then, allow us to change the academic world? Probably not, but it's worth a try!