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**PSYCHOLOGY VS. ANTHROPOLOGY:  
WHERE IS CULTURE IN MARKETPLACE ETHNOGRAPHY?**

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Ethnography, which involves observation techniques, in-depth interviewing, and using tape or video to record people in their natural settings, is gaining ground in market research, supplying detailed information on customers that other qualitative research techniques don't provide, experts say. *Marketing Research* (Fellman 1999)

These days, with the media world grown as fragmented as the American demographic map, the sales fantasy *du jour* is anthropology. *Harper's Magazine* (Frank 1999)

As anthropologists who make their living conducting consumer research for corporate clients, we have benefited from ethnography's 'gaining ground' and anthropology's status as 'sales fantasy *du jour*'. We work for advertising agencies or manufacturers ('clients') conducting research that leads them to relevant and resonant ways to market their products or services, or to develop new ones. In the past few years we have conducted research on cars and refrigerators, internet sites and internet appliances, luxury and more mundane package goods including beer and frozen dinners, healthcare and

financial services. Across this range of assignments we have seen attention shift from the focus group room to the living room. We have gotten requests to carry out research in people's homes, to interview them and to watch them cook, to go with them in their minivans, to observe them in stores, to shop with them for shoes. Clients do call us and say, 'we need ethnography' and 'we want an anthropologist'. The specific request and the general call for ethnography and anthropologists would lead one to expect that the request is for a cultural understanding of brands, products or services in everyday life. (At least it does us. Isn't that what we do as anthropologists?) Sometimes we are charged with providing a distinctly cultural understanding. Too frequently, however, the questions the client or advertiser would like to address are not anthropological – which is to say, cultural. Rather they are distinctly psychological.

This paper is concerned with, if not preoccupied by, the increasing popularity of ethnography in the marketplace in combination with the absence of what we might call anthropological thinking. Clients situate ethnographic inquiry as on-site or in-situ investigative technique. Often, however, the goals or objectives of the research do not include understanding or analyzing the lived culture of people and brands, the meanings consumers invest in brands or products or even, the shared values imputed to brands or product categories. Rather, for advertisers and marketers ethnographic inquiry is too often embraced as a means to obtain a deeper psychological understanding of a target audience. In a study of pick-up trucks (2000), for example, we were charged with interviewing both brand and competitive brand owners. The study seemed ethnographic at its core: It involved multiple cities and demanded in-home interviews, driving demonstrations and week-plus-long video diaries of owners' and their vehicles' lives.

The difficulty for us lay in the questions the client wanted answered: How are Chevrolet, Dodge and Ford pick-up drivers different as people? How do pick-up owners differ from other drivers? Are they socially conservative? We attempted to reframe the questions as: What does it 'say' in our world to drive one of these brands? We argued, for instance, that a particular brand can message 'youthful risk-taker' whether the owner necessarily has this psychological profile or not. An owner might want to forge a connection with his kids, for example, or want a youthful, risk-taking vehicle for one occasion or event, i.e. context, and not for another. We suggested that understanding the cultural meanings – not the psychological meanings – of the vehicles was both the key temporal question facing the brand in question and a more appropriate use of ethnography. The client, however, remained tied to the importance of understanding how owners of different brands of pick-ups were different as people. We argued that sometimes Chevy drivers had recently been Dodge drivers and are, therefore, not different people. At some point mutual annoyance reigned and we simply talked past each other.

The preoccupation with psychological traits is not limited to projects on brand owners but extends to whole product categories. In mid-2000, prior to the technology bubble bust, we were assigned to study people who were 'into' the latest in technology – those who seemed to be on the route we would all eventually take. The ultimate client was a telecommunications firm. We were hired by the affiliated advertising agency and agreed to work in close conjunction with planners there as well as with a consultant (a psychologist) who had worked with them and the client for several years.

To be selected as participants for this study, respondents had to first undergo a screening process which assured not only their ownership/use of a certain array of

technological devices but also their designation as ‘vanguard’ as determined by their responses to a 29-item psychographic, Yankelovich survey instrument. (For instance, they had to agree or disagree with questions such as ‘I like to imagine myself doing something I know I wouldn’t dare do’ and ‘I think my IQ is higher than average’.) They were then required to submit self-produced video presentations of themselves and the role of technology in their lives. Fewer than half of the people who submitted videotapes were selected. The use of the psychographic screener was neither our idea nor one we had any input on though we did, in principle, have a say in who was selected based on these videotapes. We, along with Agency planners and their consultant, viewed the tapes and argued our cases for who should be selected. We then spent a half day or more with each selected respondent, conducting interviews, observing the spaces of their everyday lives and garnering an understanding of the in-situ incorporation of technology from our respondents’ points of view.

Our chagrin in this study was not centered on the respondent selection process, however tortuous it might have seemed. Rather our chagrin centered on the analysis. More so than in any project we have conducted, the respondents in this study did indeed share a psychological profile – one that was easily discernable and undeniable. It was also highly suspect. First, all respondents had to respond similarly to the initial (psychographic) screening questions. Second, they had been hand-picked based on their videotapes. Assumptions about what kind of person these technology leaders should be had clearly been at work in the selection process. (Witness, for example, the fact that women were truly underrepresented and ‘hard to find’.) For us, though, overriding the suspect genesis of respondents’ psychological profile was the fact that this similarity

seemed much less interesting and important (in general and for advertising) than some of the cultural phenomena, in particular the cultural shifts that seemed so readily apparent when we explored their technology-laden worlds.

A striking aspect of the homes and offices of these technology leaders was the (visual) elimination of books – traditionally potent symbols in our society of intellect, reason and knowledge. Desks proudly displayed Internet-ready computer screens, telephones, PDAs and synchronizing cradles, back-up disks and drives. Nearby shelves showed reference CDs, software, and software manuals. Books were relegated to entertainment locations or marginalized altogether. We found books behind the closed doors of entertainment armoires, on family room shelves alongside televisions, in forgotten entranceways and outside propping up an air conditioner. Analytically, we reasoned, computers and related peripherals had replaced books as the icons and symbols of knowledge as well as organization. What mattered culturally in the technology-oriented world was the demonstration of access to and management of up-to-date, changing information and here the computer occupied the central position.<sup>1</sup>

What also emerged from this research was the way in which technological devices did not eliminate, but rather reinforced, pre-existing cultural boundaries. We found that many of the tech-savvy people were using their technological devices and services to mark and separate business realms from personal realms, to keep work and play separate, to bound and define ‘free-time’. We noted the existence of separate business and personal e-mail accounts and telephones, and the transition to free time that occurred by turning off a cell phone or by closing a laptop. For example, while sailing, the ‘fun’ only starts when the laptop is closed. Our finding contradicted journalistic commentary on the

‘merging’ of work and play in a 24/7, technologically equipped world.<sup>2</sup> Instead, technology was being harnessed to ensure the functional and symbolic separation of cultural spheres of private and public, work and play, human and machine, even if that could now be done practically and cognitively via ‘windows’.<sup>3</sup>

These cultural issues comprised only a very small portion of the report to the ultimate client. A much larger portion of the report was centered on respondents’ psychological similarities and other issues that had to do with ‘the self’. Pre-presentation conversations with the advertising agency planners and consultant assured us that this needed to be the case.

In both of these examples, ethnography, despite its heuristic link to anthropology as a discipline, was translated by agency and client as a method for more in-depth psychological analysis. Ethnography, even when conducted by anthropologists, was interpreted as a means for a more fine-tuned psychographic profile of a target audience. This psychographic perspective assumes, at heart, that a set of personality traits guides consumer motivation, decisions and behavior and ignores the patterns of behavior that might result from cultural values and trends. In the case of the high-tech vanguards, how the vanguard was using technology to manage salient cultural domains such as work and play or devaluing books went unnoticed. For pick-up owners, the shared values and meanings of pick-ups in today’s world were secondary. In a time-sensitive, quickly moving society, which is more productive for advertising?

### **The Reign of Psychological Perspectives**

How is it that anthropology – or cultural analysis – remains invisible while ethnography draws the limelight? In the United States psychological perspectives and analyses are part and parcel of a shared cultural worldview. To use a psychological framework, or to see things through a psychological lens, constitutes common sense (or ‘default’ way of looking at things – to use a more technology inspired metaphor). As such it can be difficult *not* to think in these terms.

In the aftermath of 11 September 2001, the questions framing our national discussion were: How threatened do we feel? How much security do we need? Are we in greater need of home? Family? More likely to cocoon? Is our optimism misplaced? The questions that framed news analyses, that were heard on NPR or discussed among work colleagues are born of a psychological way of comprehending our world. A more anthropological or cultural question would be: How have these events reconfigured what it means to be American?

Native theories on childrearing – whether in lore or press – show a similar predilection for the psychological. There is worry over children’s self-esteem and cognitive development, and a stress on children’s need for developmentally appropriate cognitive tasks and one-to-one emotionally appropriate attention from adults. Without the former, we fear that an ideal network of synaptic connections may not develop in the brain and without the latter, we fear that psychological problems are likely.

We describe each other most easily and intuitively in psychological terms: introverts, extraverts, narcissists, achievers and so on. We look to psychology for underlying causes in professional success or failure – was a particular attitude self-defeating or winning? Concepts of welfare-dependency push poverty into a psychological



discourse. While culture as an idea remains invisible, ‘the mind’ is an entity firmly ensconced in our cultural epistemology. In the United States, intelligence is a quantifiable entity; people can talk about ‘high’ and ‘low’ IQs and might even know the number they scored when tested. Unconscious processes, including their power, are popularly accepted. It is no small wonder that consumption is also thought about in these same terms. To see our cars as mollifying a mid-life crisis or fulfilling a life of quiet desperation is an easy fit.

In 1969, the president of the American Psychological Association, George Miller, encouraged psychologists to ‘give psychology away’. Miller believed that what psychology had most to offer humanity was not the provision of services but rather a changed conception of humans. His appeal fell on fertile ground, as psychoanalytic perspectives had had an influence on Americans’ ways of looking at the world and themselves long before 1969. Psychologically oriented techniques had already become a part of the procedures of schools, workplaces, churches, the military and more.<sup>4</sup> In both analytic and popular circles, each new decade just seems to usher in the latest spin of psychology’s sway. We have seen things move from psychoanalysis to Maslowian pyramids to the postmodern self – to name a select few trends that have prevailed in both popular and analytic circles. Recently we noted a speed dial option to ‘psychologist’ in the rooms of an upscale San Diego hotel.<sup>5</sup> Just in case of sudden need, one supposes.

### **Ethnography is More than a Method**

What is troubling is that now that ethnography has been integrated into the toolkit of methodological approaches for use in the marketing world, the cultural analytic

framework that traditionally accompanied it in anthropology has tended to be left by the wayside, leaving the focus on the psyche. Ethnography in marketing worlds is a method, not a form of analysis. Slotted into the realm of ‘qualitative’ methodology that lives in opposition to ‘quantitative’ methodology, ethnography is depicted as an ‘improvement’ over the focus group, its qualitative predecessor. In this view ethnography is simply a way to collect or gather data. Implicit in this understanding is the notion of ‘raw’ data: pieces or patches or parcels of information which can be retrieved and later subjected to analysis. Theory is acknowledged as central to the process only during the analytic, ‘cooking’ stage. This notion of raw data is integral to traditions of scientific, quantitative research, in which psychology has been a major player.

By contrast, the anthropological stance vis-à-vis data is that data are *always* cooked. This cooking process takes place at every stage of the research process. Researcher stance, theoretical perspectives, technologies and techniques of recording all affect what is found. We find the answers to the questions that we ask, explicitly and implicitly. Data are produced, not gathered. In the field of anthropology there is a long history of discussion on these issues. These ideas are evident in the early 1900s methodological statements of Malinowski,<sup>6</sup> an acknowledged founder of the in-situ ideals of ethnographic fieldwork. They can also be found in the more recent discussions of reflexivity, the writing of ethnography, and the problematics of Malinowski’s in-situ ideal in a contemporary world of both considerable human movement and non-local, remote communication and interaction.<sup>7</sup>

Coupled with notions of the rawness of data is the sense of the transparency of meaning. As researchers we experience these beliefs when clients join us in the field and

then are surprised at what we ‘took away.’ We encourage clients to accompany us during fieldwork or to look at videotaped recordings of these encounters. We want clients to engage in the lived worlds of their customers and products. But we do not believe that we are necessarily all thinking about, or attending to, the same things in that environment. Based on our anthropological training and approach, we are generally listening and looking for the ‘invisible’ cultural meanings and categories that organize people’s perceptions and actions. While we watch someone clean a floor we might be thinking: What is a floor? What is clean? What is a cleaner? We are trying to discern the assumptions the person must have in order to clean the floor in this particular manner. We might ask that person or ourselves: What does clean mean? What is different about a clean floor versus a clean chair? So what is the difference between a floor and a chair? We use the term invisible for these cultural meanings because they can be so familiar or so tacit that neither the performers nor the observers can immediately discern their existence. We are trying to make the very familiar, the very tacit, and the very new (for instance new ideas of what constitutes a clean floor) obvious to ourselves and our clients.

Ethnographic methodology was developed by anthropologists for situations where the researcher was unfamiliar with the social or cultural worlds of the participants, and an important goal of that research was to explicate and translate these worlds for outsiders. One needed to ask things such as, ‘What are chairs and their social uses?’ because chairs and what was accomplished with them were often not what the researcher – or anyone in the researcher’s society – would have expected. We continue in this tradition in our research and continue to believe that the analysis of cultural issues remains a strong suit of this methodology. Other methodologies have been honed for psychological analyses,

for instance projective techniques; the intense, emotion-focused depth interview; or hypnosis. Quantitative fixed response survey techniques remain well suited for uncovering distributions across populations, censuses, voting, and the like. Focus groups have their place in brand and category inquiries, concept testing, and even – we would argue – as a forum for uncovering cultural, not only psychological, meanings. But in advertising circles, qualitative research of which focus groups and now ethnography are a part has been permeated with a psychological framework for understanding consumer behavior. This is a framework that assumes individual motivation and make-up are the key to consumption practices. We would suggest that the use of a psychological framework is itself a cultural issue, conditioned by American cultural predilections to think in those terms. Though, this decoupling of cultural theory from the ethnographic method is not only true of US practices. In a 2001 ESOMAR conference – Europe’s largest professional market research organization – ethnographic studies were highlighted even as they grounded their analyses in psychological theory. In a study of Russian cooking, for example, researchers discussed women’s cooking activities in relation to a Maslowian hierarchy (a ‘culinary pyramid’) and self-actualization.<sup>8</sup>

As anthropologists, we find social and cultural life worth studying in its own right. As consumer researchers we also find it crucial. In recent years, more than one American toothpaste brand has repositioned itself as a ‘whole mouth’ solution, in response to a contemporary sociocultural shift away from a focus on cavities. Due to fluoridation as well as advances in dentistry, cavity prevention is less of a concern than gum disease. Consumers tell us, as dentists told them, that if they want to keep their teeth they need to take care of their gums. That is why they brush – and are concerned with –

much more than just their teeth. Good smelling breath, another socially emphasized reason to brush, also necessitates brushing the tongue and the roof of the mouth, or so many consumers believe and do these days. Would a campaign launched on the basis of psychological profiles of users really be a better one?

### **It's Not Simple and Easy**

We do not mean to imply that the distinction between psychological and cultural frameworks is a simple or easy one. Nor is it one that should mutually exclude. The separation of what is cultural and what is psychological is not clear-cut but, we would strongly argue, how we as a society articulate the make-up of our minds, our selves and our emotions is culturally influenced. Research conducted over the last two decades on the cultural construction of emotion, the self and personhood has clearly illustrated this to be the case.<sup>9</sup> In the American cultural context, for example, what it means to be an individual is socially and culturally constructed in such a way that we think of ourselves as independent of others and strive to be more so when we find this not to be the case. The notion of a self that is completely independent of others would not apply to a definition of ideal personhood in India, Japan or Ethiopia, for example.

As anthropologists, we also know that American anthropology itself follows a decidedly psychological tradition in comparison to analytic schools emanating from other countries. One need think only of American (cultural) anthropology's 'culture and personality' schools versus British (social) anthropology's structural functionalism. With some transparency, American anthropology's interest in psychological matters is itself part and parcel of our national, cultural leanings.

Of late, with sound analytic rationale, American anthropologists have also seen the need to focus more on individual actors than on the extra-individual cultural realm. These attempts to focus on individual cultural actors have been means to incorporate theories of human agency and power in sociocultural life, as well as to acknowledge that cultures are not static entities, situated and sequestered in one place or time. To show the dynamism of cultural processes across place and time and to show the ways in which differently positioned human action and reaction have an effect, there has been a renewed focus on exactly who does and says what, when, where, and how.<sup>10</sup>

The analytic focus on the individual by anthropology still assumes a structure of shared meanings that give coherence to our everyday lives. Culture, as a set of meanings, metaphors, ideas and practices is made visible through individual action; but the meanings are inherently social and extra-individual.<sup>11</sup> As anthropologists in the US, we are left with the need to acknowledge the cultural importance and place of native (and analytic) theories of action grounded in psychology, and to go beyond them. As anthropologists in the commercial world, we are further left with the task of making culture visible.

### **Drugs and The Self**

One of the most successful studies we have undertaken succeeded because we were able to unwind and make visible the strands of both psychology and culture. This study, on drugs in the lives of mainstream 'Tweens' (kids aged 9-13), had issues of the self at its core.<sup>12</sup> The purpose of the research was to develop a drug prevention campaign strategy targeting this age group. We conducted the study with Michael Donovan, a fellow

anthropologist and colleague. A central tenet of our findings was that drugs are thoroughly implicated in American Tweens' development of autonomous, bounded, private selves.

This tenet is both psychological and cultural. On the one hand, we found that drugs are deeply implicated in the process of self-construction: forbidden, secret and dangerous, yet an expected part of the growing up experience. We observed that Tweens are a work in progress and that their boundaries between self and other are still somewhat open and permeable; Tweens have 'thin skins'. Drugs are a major player in their development of autonomy and privacy vis-à-vis adults. Drug behavior is a means for Tweens to define the boundaries of the private, secret worlds – akin to fashion or music tastes, and like snowboarding or other extreme (non-adult) forms of behavior.

On the other hand, we noted that concepts of the person and the self are socially constructed. The cultivation of an 'interior life' is a pervasive *cultural* expectation in the United States, often first expressed in terms of tastes and 'extreme' kinds of activities. In our society the twin anchors and signposts of the self are autonomy and privacy and the nascent self is both a psychological phenomenon and a cultural construction. Given this meshing of drug behavior with the psychological and cultural process of gaining maturity, for adults to say 'just say no' is to say 'don't grow up.'

Beyond the role of drugs in the development of the self is the culture of drugs in which the Tweens participated. This arena provided advertisers with a clear venue for messaging. Marijuana, alcohol, and cigarettes were the normative drugs for Tweens. Speaking anthropologically, we called this the unmarked cultural category. These drugs were accepted and acknowledged as quotidian examples of ubiquitous drugs. Tweens

expected to try these drugs; adults assumed Tweens would try these drugs. Other drugs were seen as different – special cases for special kinds of people. They conceptually resided in non-normative categories, the marked categories: Scary (hallucinogens), Death (heroin), Addiction (cocaine), and Stupidity (inhalants). These ‘exceptional’ drugs (or marked categories) were nuanced in ways we have glossed with their titles. Inhalants, for examples, were for idiots, unusual rock bands or one’s self when being really stupid. While the normative category (marijuana, alcohol and tobacco) might elicit a shrug of the shoulders and a ‘just is’ comportment from Tweens (even as they talked about these as drugs they did not want to have around in their lives), the non-normative categories were marked as special, behaviorally and linguistically. Talk of heroin, we noted, was generally accompanied by a visible shudder.

Beyond the psychological self and into the cultural frame of everyday living, we found the language of drugs an important component of kids’ lives. The language of drugs was part of the social currency and showed what you did and did not know. The language itself, the talk, marked Tweens and their friends vis-à-vis other groups, other individual Tweens, parents, and adults in general. Mastering the language *is* part of the experience. Tweens garnered drug language via an outside, official track such as school programs, science teachers and anti-drug advertising, and elaborated and mastered that language via an inside track of movies, music and friends. Stories, stories and more stories about drugs were part of the milieu. Kids told stories to each other about who was doing what and when. Adults told apocryphal stories about drug users and use. Specific vocabularies marked the social categories of speakers. For example, ads and adults might call marijuana ‘pot,’ whereas Tweens used the indexical ‘stuff’. Language mastery



suggested membership in the ‘drug using group’. Thus, for a Tween to discuss drugs with parents entailed a risk. As a seventh grader told us, ‘If I asked a question they’d freak. They’d assume I’d be doing it.’ Another Tween reasoned that if he started talking to his mother about drugs, she would then start searching his backpack. What Tweens would often like is to know about drugs though not to do them. For instance, they might want to be included in the group but not to engage in the behavior, whether with alcohol, cigarettes, or marijuana.

Finally, we made the case that a drug metaphor permeates the fabric of American lives. Existing in an unmarked, normative guise – and thus hard to see – the metaphor of drugs is an organizing metaphor of our cultural lives. This unmarked cultural metaphor became apparent to us while trying to make sense of Tweens’ stories of snorting sugar, Pixie Stix and Altoids, as well as tales of inhaling WiteOut, Magic Markers, rug cleaner or just about anything with ‘a strong smell’. In all of these practices, be it with sugar or solvents, the expectation was that one could, possibly, get high.

From the time these Tweens were very young they had heard messages about being ‘hyped up’ on sugar. (So, as one Tween pointed out, since ‘they’ say you get high from sugar, maybe the girl she sees snorting Pixie Stix in the school yard is getting high.) Tweens knew of Ritalin as the drug of their classmates, of Prozac as the drug of their parents (or friends’ parents) and the uses of Viagra. They told us their own experiences with antibiotics and pain relievers and could contribute to a reasonable discussion of the relative efficacy and tastes of Advil versus Tylenol. Substances such as alcohol and tobacco, while illegal for them to use, were nonetheless openly part of their everyday worlds: available in neighborhood stores, often consumed within the home, part of adult

life. As noted above, stories, stories, and more stories about drugs were part of their lives. Drugs were relentlessly discussed, officially and unofficially, by young and by old.

These Tweens conceptualized many ideas, things and activities in terms of drugs. Foods such as caffeine, chocolate, sugar, and soft drinks were routinely thought of as drug-like. Other foods were also discussed in this light. For example, they spoke of being ‘addicted’ to chips, to food and the action of eating in general, not only when pathologized in terms of ‘eating addictions’. Favored activities, whether video games, shopping, sex or love, were described as addictions. Behavior, thought, and affect, even when not literally drug induced, were frequently spoken of in terms such as hyped, spaced, and tripping. The Tweens drew on this cultural context when they redefined virtually everything as a drug. Given this metaphor, it made sense to smoke incense, to believe that ‘anything with a strong smell’ could be sniffed and make you high, to maintain that a certain girl could be a drug for one of your friends, or to chop up and snort an Altoid.

In the recommendations we provided the agency, we suggested that it not exempt cigarettes and alcohol from messaging around marijuana. These all live in the same cultural category for Tweens. We also suggested that there was a need to address the ubiquitous status of drugs in our cultural world and that, since Tweens individuate by creating distance from a perceived status quo, an advertising campaign might challenge the pervasive status of drugs in the US. We advised the agency to provoke Tweens to challenge the model of drug experience that the culture at large supports, in order to get to a more ‘real self’. With these last recommendations, we also came full circle; we brought the insight into the means by which the self is constructed in American society

together with our insights into the permeation of the unmarked, cultural metaphor of drugs.

### **Language and Culture**

As is perhaps obvious for anthropology insiders, our analytic approach is rooted in linguistic anthropology. We accept that language and experience are intimately intertwined, that language is a social resource and that language is itself a culturally defined and specified practice. Our perspectives have been particularly informed by the traditions of the Prague School structuralists, ethnomethodology, and the socialization of language.<sup>13</sup>

We use insights grounded in this intellectual arena in our work for clients. We pay great attention to meaning context, looking for situations where a given meaning prevails and where it does not. As we illustrated in the above Tweens and drugs example, we obtain hints about what is culturally salient and what is culturally unusual by noticing what is marked and unmarked. Paying attention to what is marked and unmarked also gives us – as in the technology study – the means to both witness and map dynamic changes in what is normative about private and public, work and play and other cultural categories that so invisibly organize our daily lives and experience.

Our notion of culture is, in good anthropological tradition, adequately fuzzy. For most of our everyday purposes, we use a notion of culture derived from theorists such as Geertz and Bourdieu, as articulated by Schieffelin, and tempered by the ideas of anthropologists such as Appadurai, Abu-Lughod and Ortner.<sup>14</sup> In Schieffelin's 1990 ethnographic study of language socialization among Kaluli children, she provided a

succinct outline of her sense of what culture means that has heuristically held up well.

The five principles she puts forward there are worth quoting in their entirety:

1. Language and culture comprise bodies of knowledge, structures of understanding, conceptions of the world, and collective representations that are extrinsic to any individual.
2. These contain more information than any individual could know or learn.
3. There is variation among individual members in terms of their knowledge. This variation is crucial to the social dynamic between individuals, but it is also socially structured, and as such is extrinsic to individuals.
4. It is important to distinguish between the symbolically constructed contexts in which individuals live and the knowledge, attitudes, interpretations, and understandings they must have to operate appropriately in their place within the culture. These are not the same thing. Thus,
5. One does not “acquire culture”; one acquires a set of practices that enable one to live in a culture.<sup>15</sup>

We applaud the criticisms of culture theorists who have maintained that notions of culture are flawed when they make it seem that an abstract concept like culture has the ability to act, when a vision of static places and homogeneous actors is produced, or when people and real, mutable, places are forgotten altogether.<sup>16</sup> But we are not ready to

eschew all notions of culture. In good anthropological fashion, we use the concept pragmatically. It serves us well. As Ortner (1999) writes:

Without denying the profound and far-reaching importance of this critique, I would suggest that the issue is not so much one of ... banishing the concept of culture .... Rather the issue is, once again, one of reconfiguring this enormously productive concept for a changing world....What I am trying to say is that the fate of “culture” will depend on its uses. (1999:8,11)

### **In The End**

Mazzarella (this volume) notes the quandary of the anthropologist in the commercial world – aiding and abetting, on the one hand, aloof and analytic, on the other. He queries how the intellectual tradition of anthropology can come to grips in a productive, illuminating and theoretical way with advertising as a cultural practice. And, given the enormity of advertising’s impact on life beyond merely the business it is designed to affect, how can anthropology and advertising be mutually engaged in a dialogue and critique?

We would pose a different (and presupposing) question: How does an anthropological and distinctly cultural worldview find a presence and a meaning in advertising practices? We have suggested that a psychological framework – one that is understood in our society to be independent from the culture that gives it resonance – permeates ethnographic research in the commercial workplace for reasons both historical and cultural. The idea of culture as a framework for comprehending the world is

backgrounded, much as it is in the everyday life we observe, in the analytic models of our clients or in our conversations with respondents about their construction of things, themselves, events and consumption. We find it telling that Malefyt and Moeran's original suggestion for this book's title, *Advertising Anthropology*, was replaced by *Advertising Ethnography*.

We have suggested in this chapter that anthropology has a practical place for advertisers. A cultural analysis illuminates the shifting, ongoing, engagement of meanings between consumers and producers, mediated by advertising – whether in reference to pick-up trucks, new technologies or drugs in Tween lives. In Terrio's (2000) ethnography of French luxury chocolate, she notes that individual chocolatiers as well as state level authorities leveraged the cultural meanings of chocolate in their marketing efforts. Store windows and sponsored ceremonies invoked the French cultural authenticity of fine chocolate with roots in local history and craft tradition; purveyors knew to emphasize the culturally valued tradition of gifting of chocolate for important ritual occasions as well as the highly valued 'familial' nature of their businesses. Moreover, there were active efforts on the part of craft leaders and 'cultural tastemakers' to influence consumption by altering cultural-level meanings, for instance by encouraging the value of fine, French chocolate consumption not only for ceremonial occasions, but also as part of the daily, healthful French diet. As Terrio (2000:41) explains, 'They sought to increase consumption by altering the culturally constituted uses and symbolic meanings of chocolate in France. Consumers were urged to eat more refined French chocolates not just on the ritualized ceremonial occasions traditionally associated with them but regularly, even daily.'

Cultural meanings are, perhaps, more accessible to members of French society. In France there is a considerable tradition of intellectual and emotional attention to cultural matters. Taste, etiquette, entertainment, fashion, consumption, and what it means to be French have a history of being appreciated in both high and anthropological culture terms. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction*, is a case in point.<sup>17</sup> For anthropology to be successful in US arenas, an awareness of culture as a theoretical and native theory must be brought to the fore. It is only in becoming part of a collective consciousness that anthropology can hope to become part of an ongoing conversation about who we are in our work and in our lives. In our own work this means making culture visible in advertising's ethnographic practice and in so doing, making it available to a scrutinizing lens for our society at large.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Sunderland, P.L and R. Denny (in prep).

<sup>2</sup> Compare Wellner (2000).

<sup>3</sup> In Sunderland, P.L. and R. Denny (in prep) we argue that Windows has become our metaphor for windows of action.

<sup>4</sup> Sunderland's 1985 thesis covers some of these issues.

<sup>5</sup> Observed in late 2001.

<sup>6</sup> See Malinowski's introduction to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*.

<sup>7</sup> See Myerhoff and Ruby (1982), Marcus and Cushman (1982), Marcus and Fischer (1986), Clifford and Marcus (1986), Geertz (1988), Gupta and Ferguson (1997a,b). Note

also Miller's (this volume) remarks that in anthropology methodology 'is part of the research findings'.

<sup>8</sup> See Vladimirova and Petrin (2001). Malefyt (this volume) provides an example of yet another use of the Maslowian model. These psychological analytic models are the ones drawn upon, even when the real concern is not so much centered on understanding the consumer, but rather on strengthening relationships and appearances of expertise.

<sup>9</sup> For a range of examples, from both psychologists and anthropologists, see Shweder and LeVine (1984), Lutz (1988), Kondo (1990), Turkle (1984, 1997), and Fader (2000).

<sup>10</sup> See Abu-Lughod (1991) and Kondo (1990), see also Appadurai (1996).

<sup>11</sup> Wenger's (1998) *Communities of Practice* provides a very useful introduction to the inherently social nature of meaning and individual activity. Note also Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) work on brand communities.

<sup>12</sup> This work was conducted for The Geppetto Group and Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide. The findings were presented in person to the then head of the O.N.D.C.P, General McCaffrey.

<sup>13</sup> The thinking and work of Michael Silverstein, Bambi Schieffelin, and Erving Goffman have been of primary influence.

<sup>14</sup> Bourdieu (1977, 1984), Schieffelin (1990), Appadurai (1996), Abu-Lughod (1991), Ortner (1999) and Geertz (1973, 1983).

<sup>15</sup> Quoted from Schieffelin (1990:15).

<sup>16</sup> Gupta and Ferguson (1997c), Appadurai (1996), Abu-Lughod (1991). See also Eagleton (2000).



<sup>17</sup> Müller (2002) discusses the public reception of Bourdieu in light of his death and his politics.

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