

***Discipline and Practice:
The Anthropology of Marketing and Marketing Anthropology***

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Anthropology and marketing (together with consumer research) were described a few years ago as ‘linchpin disciplines in parallel intellectual domains’ (Sherry 1985a: 10). To judge from the prevalent literature, however, this view is not shared by many anthropologists, who tend to look at markets (for example, Carrier 1997) rather than at marketing *per se* (Lien 1997 is the obvious exception here). For their part, marketers, always open to new ideas, have over the decades made – albeit eclectic (de Groot 1980:131) – use of the work of anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966, 1969) and Mary Douglas (1973), even though the latter’s aims when they put forward their theories of binary opposition, totemism, and grid and group were far removed from the endeavour of marketing both as a discipline and as practice.

Can anthropology really be of use to marketing? Can the discipline market itself as an effective potential contributor to solving the problems faced by marketing people in their practices? There is no reason why it should not. After all, anthropologists have long been interested in notions of reciprocity and exchange that underpin markets (cf., among many others, Parry and Bloch 1989) and it is anthropologists who point out that there is more than one kind of market and that these markets, like the Free Market beloved by economists, are all socio-cultural constructions. In this respect, what they have to say about the social costs of markets, as well as about the non-market social institutions upon which markets depend and the social contexts that shape them (cf. Carruthers and Babb 2000:219-222), should be of great relevance to marketers anxious to come up with definitive answers as to why certain people buy certain products and how to persuade the rest of the world to do so.

The fact that marketing people in general do *not* pay all that much attention to current developments in anthropology, however, suggests that anthropology may *not* be able to be of direct use to marketing practices. In particular, anthropology would seem to suffer from the fact that its conclusions are based on long-term immersion in a socio-cultural ‘field’ and that its methodology is frequently unscientific, subjective and imprecise. Yet marketers, as part of their persuasive strategy, present their discipline and practices as objective, scientific, speedy and producing the necessary results. These, after all, are the things that count in the world of business. How they actually go about obtaining such results, however, and whether they really are as objective and scientific as they claim to their clients, are – as we shall see – moot points.

This paper focuses, by means of a case study, on how marketing is actually practised in a large advertising agency in Japan and has five main aims. Firstly, it shows how the organisation of marketing practice in the Agency has important social functions: in particular, the encouragement of competitiveness and cooperation among employees, and the development of a shared knowledge of

marketing issues taken up by the Agency. Secondly, it addresses the problem of how apparently 'objective' marketing analyses and strategies can be upset by 'subjective' interpersonal relationships upon which so much business organisation depends. Thirdly, it focuses on the related issue of how all marketing campaigns are obliged to shift from 'scientific' to 'artistic' criteria as statistical data, information and analysis are converted into linguistic and visual images for public consumption. Fourthly, based on the cultural relativity of a specific set of marketing practices in a Japanese advertising agency, it will take a few tentative steps towards developing a comparative theory of advertising as a marketing system (cf. Arnould 1995:110). And finally, it will comment further on the relations between anthropology and marketing both as disciplines and practices.

The Discipline, Organisation and Practice of Marketing

The Marketing Division is the engine room of the Japanese advertising agency in which I conducted my research in 1990. At the time, this agency handled more than 600 accounts a year, their value varying from several million to a few thousand dollars. The Marketing Division was almost invariably involved in some way in the ad campaigns, cultural and sporting events, merchandising opportunities, special promotions, POP constructions, and various other activities that the agency carried out on behalf of its clients. Exceptions were those accounts involving media placement or certain kinds of work expressly requested by a client – like, for example, the organisation of a national sales force meeting for a car manufacturer. Even here, however, there was often information that could be usefully relayed back to the Marketing Division (the number and regional distribution of the manufacturer's sales representatives, as well as possible advance information on new products and/or services to be offered in the coming year).

Marketing might be defined most simply, perhaps, as 'the art or science of most efficiently relating production to consumption through distribution' (de Groot 1980:4). But, as Marianne Lien (1997:11) points out, marketing is both a discipline and a practice. The main aims of the Marketing Division as both discipline and practice were (and, of course, still are): firstly, to acquire as much information as possible from *consumers* about their clients' products and services; secondly, to acquire as much information as possible, too, from *clients* about their own products and services; and, thirdly, to use *strategically* both kinds of information acquired to develop new accounts. In a number of important respects, marketing provided those working in the Marketing Division with the *dispassionate* data that account executives needed in their *personal* networking with (potential) clients whom they cajoled, persuaded, impressed and pleaded with to part with (more) money.

In order to achieve the three overall objectives outlined above, the Agency established a certain set of organisational features to enable marketing practice to take place. Firstly, the Marketing Division, which consisted of almost 90 members, was structured into three separate, but interlocking, sub-divisions. These consisted of Computer Systems; Market Development and Merchandising; and Marketing.

The last was itself sub-divided into three departments, each of which was broken down into three or four sections.¹ Each section consisted of from six to a dozen members, led by a Section Leader, under whom they worked in teams of two to three on an account. These teams were not fixed. Thus one member, A, might work with another, B, under the Section Leader (SL) on a contact lens advertising campaign, but find herself assigned to worked with C under SL on an

¹ Note that, unlike the Marketing department in Viking foods discussed by Lien (1997:64), this description of the Agency's Marketing Department is structured in terms of *units* rather than individuals (managers) (cf. also Dore 1978).

airline company's business class service account, and with D under SL on a computer manufacturer's consumer survey. In this respect, the daily life of members of the Marketing Department was similar to that of product managers described by Lien (1997:69), being characterised by 'frequent shifts from one activity to another, a wide network of communications, and a considerable amount of time spent in meetings or talking on the telephone'.

Secondly, tasks (or accounts) were allocated *formally* through the hierarchical divisional structure – by departments first, then by sections – according to their existing responsibilities and perceived suitability for the job in hand. Each SL then distributed these tasks to individual members on the basis of their current overall workloads. At the same time, however, there was an *informal* allocation of accounts involving individuals. Each SL or DL could take on a job directly from account executives handling particular accounts on behalf of their clients. Here, prior experiences and personal contacts were important influences on AEs' decisions as to whether to go through formal or informal channels of recruitment. The account executive in charge of the NFC contact lens campaign described below (see also Moeran 1996), for example, went directly to a particular SL in the Marketing Department because of some smart work that the latter had done for the AE on a different account some months previously. Mutual respect had been established and the contact lens campaign provided both parties with an opportunity to assess and, in the event, positively validate their working relationship.

There were certain organisational advantages to the ways in which accounts were distributed in the manner described here. Firstly, by freely permitting interpersonal relations between account executives and marketers, the Agency ensured that there was competitiveness at each structural level of department and section. Such competition was felt to be healthy for the Agency as a whole, and to encourage its continued growth. Secondly, by assigning individual members of each section in the Marketing Department to working in different combinations of people on different tasks, the Agency ensured that each member of the Marketing Department received training in a wide variety of marketing problems and was obliged to interact fully with fellow section members, thereby promoting a sense of cooperation, cohesion and mutual understanding. This in itself meant that each section developed the broadest possible shared knowledge of marketing issues, because of the knowledge gained by individual members and the interaction among them.

And now let us turn to marketing practice. Accounts were won by the Agency primarily through the liaison work conducted with a (potential) client by an account executive (who might be a very senior manager or junior 'salesman' recruited only a few years earlier). Once an agreement was made between Agency and client – and such an agreement might be limited to the Agency's participation in a competitive presentation, the outcome of which might lead to an account being established – the AE concerned would put together an account team. This usually consisted of the AE in charge (possibly with assistants); the Marketing Team (generally of 2 persons under a Marketing Director [MD], but sometimes much larger, depending on the size of the account and the work to be done); the Creative Team (consisting of Creative Director [CD], Copywriter, and Art Director [AD] as a minimum, but usually including two ADs – one for print-, the other for TV-related work); and Media Planner/Buyer(s).

The job of the account team was to carry out successfully the task set by the client, and to this end would meet initially for an orientation meeting in which the issues and problems relayed by the client to the AE were explained to and discussed by all members.² Prior to this, however, the AE would provide the marketing team with all the information and data that he had been able to extract

² The Media Planners do not usually participate in these early meetings since their main task is to provide information about suitable media, and slots therein, in which the finished campaign may be placed.

from the client (a lot of it highly confidential to the company concerned). The marketing team, therefore, tended to come prepared and to have certain quite specific questions regarding the nature of the statistics provided, the target market, retail outlets, and so on. If it had done its homework properly – which was not always the case, given the number of different accounts on which the team's members were working and the pressure of work that they were under – the marketing team often had several pertinent suggestions for further research.

It was on the basis of these discussions that the AE then used to ask the MD to carry out such research as he thought necessary for the matter in hand. In the meantime, the creative team was asked to mull over the issues generally and to think of possible ways of coping 'creatively' (that is, linguistically and visually) with the client's marketing problems.

Back in the Marketing Department, the MD would tell his subordinates to carry out specific tasks, such as a consumer survey to find out who precisely makes use of a particular product and why. This kind of task was fairly mechanical in its general form, since the Agency did this sort of work for dozens of clients every year, but had to be tailored to the present client's particular situation, needs and expectations. The MD would therefore discuss his subordinates' proposal, make some suggestions to ensure that all points were covered (and that might well include some additional questions to elicit further information from the target audience that had taken on importance during their discussion), and then give them permission to have the work carried out.

All surveys of this kind were subcontracted by the Agency to marketing firms and research organisations of one sort or another. This meant that the marketing team's members were rarely involved in direct face-to-face contact or interaction with the consumers of the products that they wished to advertise,³ *except* when small 'focus group' interviews took place (usually in one of the Agency's buildings).⁴ The informal nature of such groups, the different kinds of insights that they could yield, and the need to spot and pursue particular comments meant that members of the marketing team had to be present to listen to and, as warranted, direct the discussion so that the Agency's particular objectives were achieved. In general, however, the only evidence of consumers in the Agency was indirect, through reports, statistics, figures, data analyses and other information that, paradoxically, were always seen to be insufficient or 'incomplete' (cf. Lien 1997:112).

Once the results of the survey were returned, the marketers used to enter them into their computers (since all such information was stored and could be used to generate comparative data for other accounts as and when required). They could make use of particular programmes to sort and analyse such data, but ultimately they needed to be able to present their results in readily comprehensible form to other members of the account team. Here again, the MD tended to ensure that the information presented at the next meeting was to the point and properly hierarchised in terms of importance. This led to the marketing team's putting forward things like: a positioning statement, slogan, purchasing decision model (high/low involvement; think/feel product relationship), product message concept, and creative frame.

One of the main objectives of this initial – and, if properly done, only – round of research was to discover the balance between what were termed product, user and end benefits, since it was these factors that determined the way in which an ad campaign was to be presented and, therefore,

³ A similar point is made by Lien (1997:111) in her study of Viking Foods.

⁴ Focus Groups usually consist of about half a dozen people who represent by age, gender, socio-economic grouping and so on the type of target audience being addressed, and who have agreed to talk about (their attitudes towards) a particular product or product range – usually in exchange for some gift or money. Interviews are carried out in a small meeting room (that may have a one-way mirror to enable outside observation) and tend to last between one and two hours.

how the creative team should visualise the marketing problems analysed and ensuing suggestions from the marketing team.

It is here that we come to the crux of marketing as practised in an advertising agency (whether in Japan or elsewhere). Creative people tended to be suspicious of marketing people and vice-versa. This is primarily because marketers believed that they worked rationally and that the creative frames that they produced were founded on objective data and analyses. Creative people, for their part, believed that their work should be 'inspired', and that such inspiration could take the place of the data and analyses provided for their consideration.

As a result, when it came to producing creative work for an ad campaign, copywriters and creative directors tended not to pay strict attention to what the marketing team had told them. For example, attracted by the idea of a particular celebrity or filming location, they would on occasion come up with ideas that in no way met the pragmatic demands of a particular ad campaign requiring emphasis on product benefits which were irrelevant to the chosen location or celebrity suggested for endorsement. This did not always happen, of course. A good and professional creative team – and such teams were not infrequent – would follow the marketing team's instructions. In such cases, their success was based on a creative interpretation of the data and analyses provided.

If there was some indecision and argument among different elements of the account team – and it was the presiding account executive's job to ensure that marketers and creatives did not come to blows over their disagreements – they almost invariably banded together when meeting and presenting their plans to the client. Such meetings used to take place several, even more than a dozen, times during the course of an account team's preparations for an ad campaign. At most of them the MD would be present, until such time as it was clear that the client had accepted the Agency's campaign strategy and the creative team had to fine-tune the objectives outlined therein. Very often, therefore, the marketing team would not stay on a particular account long enough to learn of its finished result, although a good AE would keep his MD abreast of creative developments and show him the (near) finalised campaign prior to the client's final approval. But marketers did not get involved in the production side of a campaign (studio photography, television commercial filming, and so on) – unless one of those concerned knew what was going on when, happened to be nearby at the time, and dropped in to see how things were going. In other words, the marketing team's job was to see a project through until accepted by the client. It would then dissolve and its members would be assigned to new accounts.

Advertising Campaigns: A Case Study

To illustrate in more detail particular examples of marketing practice in the Agency, let me cite as a case study the preparation of contact lens campaign in Japan. This example is illuminating because it reveals a number of typical problems faced by an advertising agency in the formulation and execution of campaigns on behalf of its clients. These include the interface between marketing and creative people within an agency and the interpretation of marketing analysis and data; the transposition of marketing analysis into 'creative' (i.e. linguistic, visual and design) ideas; the interface between agency and client in the 'selling' of a campaign proposal; and the problems of having to appeal to more than one 'consumer' target.

When the Nihon Fibre Corporation asked the Agency to prepare an advertising campaign for its new *Ikon Breath O₂* oxygen-passing GCL hard contact lenses in early 1990, it provided a considerable amount of product information with which to help and guide those concerned. This information included the following facts: firstly, with a differential coefficient (DK factor) of 150, *Ikon Breath O₂* had the highest rate of oxygen permeation of all lenses currently manufactured and

marketed in Japan. As a result, secondly, *Ikon Breath O₂* was the first lens authorized for continuous wear by Japan's Ministry of Health. Thirdly, the lens was particularly flexible, dirt and water resistant, durable, and of extremely high quality.

The client asked the Agency to confirm that the targeted market consisted of young people and to create a campaign that would help NFC capture initially a minimum three per cent share of the market, rising to ten per cent over three years. The Agency immediately formed an account team, consisting of eight members all told.⁵ Their first step was to arrange for the marketing team to carry out its own consumer research before proceeding further. A detailed survey – of 500 men and women – was worked out in consultation with the account executive and the client, and was executed by a market research company subcontracted by the Agency. Results confirmed that the targeted audience for the *Ikon Breath O₂* advertising campaign should be young people, but particularly young women, between the ages of 18 and 27 years, since it was they who were most likely to wear contact lenses.

At the same time, however, the survey also revealed that there was little brand loyalty among contact lens wearers so that, with effective advertising, it should be possible to persuade users to shift from their current brand to *Ikon Breath O₂* lenses. It also showed that young women were not overly concerned with price provided that lenses were safe and comfortable to wear, which meant that *Ikon Breath O₂*'s comparatively high price in itself should not prove a major obstacle to brand switching or sales.

On a less positive note, however, the account team also discovered that users were primarily concerned with comfort and were not interested in the technology that went into the manufacture of contact lenses (thereby obviating the apparent advantage of *Ikon Breath O₂*'s high DK factor of which NFC was so proud); and that, because almost all contact lens users consulted medical specialists prior to purchase, the advertising campaign would have to address a second audience consisting mainly of middle-aged men.

All in all, therefore, *Ikon Breath O₂* lenses had an advantage in being of superb quality, approved by medical experts and recognized, together with other GCL lenses, as being the safest for one's eyes. Its disadvantages were that NFC had no 'name' in the contact lens market and that users knew very little about GCL lenses or contact lenses in general. This meant that the advertising campaign had to be backed up by point of purchase sales promotion (in the form of a brochure) to ensure that the product survived. Moreover, it was clear that *Ikon Breath O₂*'s technical advantage (the DK 150 factor) would not last long because rival companies would soon be able to make lenses with a differential coefficient that surpassed that developed by NFC.

As a result of intense discussions following this survey, the account team moved slowly towards what it thought should be as the campaign's overall 'tone and manner'. Ideally, advertisements should be information-oriented: the campaign needed to put across a number of points about the special product benefits that differentiated it from similar lenses on the market (in particular, its flexibility and high rate of oxygen-permeation). Practically, however – as the marketing team had to emphasize time and time again – the campaign needed to stress the functional and emotional benefits that users would obtain from wearing *Ikon Breath O₂* lenses (for example, continuous wear, safety, release from anxiety and so on). This meant that the advertising itself should be emotional (and information left to the promotional brochure) and stress the end benefits to consumers, rather than the lenses' product benefits.

⁵ On this occasion, because the advertising budget was comparatively small, the media buyer was not brought in until later stages in the campaign's preparations. The AE in charge of the NFC account interacted individually with the media buyer and presented the latter's suggestions to the account team as a whole.

Because the marketing team had concluded that the product's end benefits should be stressed, copywriter and art director opted for user imagery rather than product characteristics when thinking of ideas for copy and visuals. However, they were thwarted in their endeavours by a number of problems.

Firstly, advertising industry self-policing regulations prohibited the use of certain words and images (for example, the notion of 'safety', plus a visual of someone asleep while wearing contact lenses), and insisted on the inclusion in all advertising of a warning that the *Ikon Breath O₂* lens was a medical product that should be purchased through a medical specialist. This constriction meant that the creative team's could not use the idea of 'continuous wear' because, even though so certified by Japan's Ministry of Health, opticians and doctors were generally of the opinion that *Ikon Breath O₂* lenses were bound to affect individual wearers in different ways. NFC was terrified of antagonizing the medical world which would often be recommending its product, so the product manager concerned refused to permit the use of any word or visual connected with 'continuous wear'. Thus, to the account team's collective dismay, the product's end benefit to consumers could not be effectively advertised.

Secondly, precisely because *Ikon Breath O₂* lenses had to be recommended by medical specialists, NFC's advertising campaign needed to address the latter as well as young women users. In other words, the campaign's tone and manner had to appeal to two totally different segments of the market, while at the same time satisfying those employed in the client company. This caused the creative team immense difficulties, especially because – thirdly – the product manager of NFC's contact lens manufacturing division was convinced that the high differential coefficient set *Ikon Breath O₂* lenses apart from all other contact lenses on the market and would appeal to members of the medical profession. So he insisted on emphasizing what he saw as the unique technological qualities of the product. In other words, not only did he relegate young women who were expected to buy the product to secondary importance; he ignored the marketing team's recommendation that user benefit be stressed. Instead, for a long time he insisted on the creative team's focussing on product benefit, even though the DK factor was only a marginal and temporary advantage to NFC.

As a result of these two sets of disagreements, the copywriter came up with two different key ideas. The first was based on the product's characteristics, and thus supported the manufacturer's (but went against his own marketing team's) product benefit point of view, with the phrase 'corneal physiology' (*kakumaku seiri*). The second also stressed a feature of the product, but managed to emphasize the user benefits that young women could gain from wearing lenses that were both 'hard' and 'soft' (*yawarakai*).

The former headline was the only way to break brand parity and make *Ikon Breath O₂* temporarily distinct from all other lenses on the market (the product manager liked the distinction; the marketing team disliked the temporary nature of that distinction). At this stage in the negotiations, the account executive in charge felt obliged to tow an obsequious line, but needed to appease his marketing team and ensure that the creative team came up with something else if at all possible, since corneal physiology gave *Ikon Breath O₂* lenses only a temporary advantage. As a result, the copywriter introduced the word 'serious' (*majime*) into discussions – on the grounds that NFC was a 'serious' (*majime*) manufacturer (it was, after all, a well-known and respected Japanese corporation) which had developed a product that, by a process of assimilation, could also be regarded as 'serious'; moreover, by a further rubbing-off process, as the marketing team agreed, such 'seriousness' could be attributed to users who decided to buy and wear *Ikon Breath O₂* lenses. In this way, both the distinction between product benefit *and* user benefit might be overcome.

The copywriter's last idea was the one that broke the deadlock (and it was at certain moments an extremely tense deadlock) between the account team as a whole and members of NFC's contact lens manufacturing division. After a series of meetings in which copywriter and designer desperately tried

to convince the client that the idea of softness and hardness was not a product characteristic, but an *image* designed to support the benefits to consumers wearing *Ikon Breath O₂* lenses, the product manager accepted the account team's proposals in principle, provided that 'serious' was used as a back-up selling point. 'Soft hard' (*yawaraka hard*) was adopted as the key headline phrase for the campaign as a whole.

It can be seen that the marketing team's analysis of how NFC should successfully enter the contact lens market met two stumbling blocks during the early stages of preparation for the advertising campaign. The first was within the account team itself, where the copywriter in particular tended to opt for the manufacturer's approach by emphasising the product benefit of *Ikon Breath O₂*. The second was when the Agency's account team had to persuade the client to accept its analysis and campaign proposal.

But the next major problem facing the account team was how to convert this linguistic rendering of market analysis into visual terms. What sort of visual image would adequately fulfil the marketing aims of the campaign *and* make the campaign as a whole – including television commercial and promotional materials – readily recognizable to the targeted audience? It was almost immediately accepted by the account team that the safest way to achieve this important aim was to use a celebrity or personality (*talent* in Japanese) to endorse the product. Here there was little argument, because it is generally recognized in the advertising industry that celebrity endorsement is an excellent and readily appreciated linkage device in multi-media campaigns of the kind requested by NFC. Moreover, since television commercials in Japan are more often than not only fifteen seconds long and therefore cannot include any detailed product information, personalities have proved to be attention grabbers in an image-dominated medium and to have a useful, short-term effect on sales because of their popularity in other parts of the entertainment industry. At the same time, not all personalities come across equally well in the rather differing media of television and magazines or newspapers, so that the account team felt obliged to look for someone who was more than a mere pop idol and who could act.

It was here that those concerned encountered the most difficulty. The presence of a famous personality was crucial since s/he would be able to attract public attention to a new product and hopefully draw people into retail outlets to buy *Ikon Breath O₂* lenses. It was agreed right from the start that the personality should be a young woman, in the same age group as the targeted audience, and Japanese. (After all, a 'blue eyed foreigner' endorsing *Ikon Breath O₂* contact lenses would hardly be appropriate for brown-eyed Japanese.) Just who this woman should be, however, proved problematic. Tennis players (who could indulge in both 'hard' activities and 'soft' romance) were discarded early on because the professional season was already in full swing at the time the campaign was being prepared. Classical musicians, while romantic and thus 'soft', were not seen to be 'hard' enough, while the idea of using a Japanese 'talent', Miyazawa Rie (*everyone* on the account team's favourite at the time), was reluctantly rejected because, even though photographs of her in the nude were at the time causing a minor sensation among Japanese men interested in *soft*-porn, she was rather inappropriate for a medical product like a contact lens which was aimed at young women.

Any personality chosen had to show certain distinct qualities. One of these was a 'presence' (*sonzaikan*) that would attract people's attention on the page or screen. Another was 'topicality' (*wadaisei*) that stemmed from her professional activities. A third was 'future potential' (*nobisei*), meaning that the celebrity had not yet peaked in her career, but would attract further widespread media

attention and so, it was hoped, indirectly promote *Ikon Breath O₂* lenses and NFC. Most importantly, however, she had to suit the product.⁶

In the early stages of the campaign's preparations, the creative team found itself in a slight quandary. They wanted to choose a celebrity whose personality fitted the 'soft-hard' and 'serious' ideas and who would then anchor a particular image to *Ikon Breath O₂* lenses, although it proved difficult to find someone who would fit the product and appeal to *all* those concerned. Eventually, the woman chosen was an actress, Sekine Miho, who epitomized the kind of modern woman that the creative team was seeking, but who was also about to star in a national television (NHK) drama series that autumn – a series in which she played a starring role as a 'soft', romantic character. Although popularity in itself can act as a straightjacket when it comes to celebrity endorsement of a product, in this case it was judged – correctly, it transpired – that Sekine had enough 'depth' (*fukasa*) to bring a special image to *Ikon Breath O₂* lenses.

Once the celebrity had been decided on, the creative team was able to fix the tone and manner, expression and style of the advertising campaign as a whole. Sekine was a 'high class' (or 'one rank up' in Japanese-English parlance) celebrity who matched NFC's image of itself as a 'high class' (*ichiryū*) company and who was made to reflect that sense of eliteness in deportment and clothing. At the same time, NFC was a 'serious' manufacturer and wanted a serious, rather than frivolous, personality who could then be photographed in soft-focus, serious poses to suit the serious medical product being advertised. This seriousness was expressed further by means of very slightly tinted black and white photographs which, to the art director's – but, not initially, the product manager's – eye made Sekine look even 'softer' in appearance and so match the campaign's headline of *yawaraka* hard. This softness was further reinforced by the heart-shaped lens cut at the bottom of every print ad, and on the front of the brochure, which the art director made green rather than blue – partly to differentiate the *Ikon Breath O₂* campaign from all other contact lens campaigns run at that time, and partly to appeal to the fad for 'ecological' colours then-current among young women in particular.

This case study shows that there is an extremely complex relationship linking marketing and creative aspects of any advertising campaign. In this case, market research showed that *Ikon Breath O₂* lenses were special because of the safety that derived from their technical quality, but that consumers themselves were not interested in technical matters since their major concern was with comfort. Hence the need to focus the advertising campaign on user benefit. Yet the client insisted on stressing product benefit – a stance made more difficult for the creative team because it could not legally use the only real consumer benefit available to it (continuous wear), and so had to find something that would appeal to both manufacturer and direct and indirect 'consumers' of the lens in question. In the end, the ideas of 'soft hard' and 'serious' were adopted as compromise positions for both client and agency, as well as for creative and marketing teams.

Concluding Comments

Let us in conclusion try to follow two separate lines of thought. One of these is, as promised, the relationship between marketing and anthropology; the other that between advertising and marketing.

Although convergence between anthropology, marketing and consumer research may be growing, the evidence suggested by the case study in this paper is that huge differences still exist. Marketing people in the advertising agency in which I studied may be interested in anthropology; they may even have dipped into the work of anthropologists here and there. But their view of the discipline

⁶ For further discussion of celebrity endorsement in advertising, see Kaitaki (1987), McCracken (1989), and Moeran (forthcoming).

tends to be rather old-fashioned, and they certainly do not have time to go in for the kind of intensive, detail ethnographic enquiry of consumers that anthropologists might encourage. If anthropologists are to make a useful contribution to marketing, therefore, they need to present their material and analyses succinctly and in readily digestible form, since marketing people hate things that are *over*complicated. It is, perhaps, for this rather than any other reason that someone like Mary Douglas (Douglas and Isherwood 1979) has been so favourably received.

In the end, marketing people aim to be positivist, science-like (rather than scientific, as such), and rationalist in their ad campaigns. They aspire to measure and predict on the basis of observer categories, if only because this is the simplest way to sell a campaign to a client. In this respect, they are closer to the kind of sociology and anthropology advocated in the 1940s and 50s (which would explain their adoption of Talcott Parsons's theory of action, for example), than to the present-day 'interpretive' trends in the discipline, and thus favour in their practices an outmoded – and among most anthropologists themselves, discredited – form of discourse. In this respect, and for better or worse, anthropology – in particular, its 'postmodern' turn – does not offer much to people working in marketing.

Secondly, as part of this positivist, science-like approach, marketers in the Japanese advertising agency tended to make clear-cut categories that would be easily understood by both their colleagues in other divisions in the Agency and by their clients. These categories tended to present the consumer world as a series of binary oppositions (between individual and group, modern and traditional, idealist and materialist, and so on [cf. Lien 1997: 202-8]) that they then presented as matrix or quadripartite structures (the Agency's Purchase Decision Model, for example, was structured in terms of think/feel and high/low involvement axes). In this respect, their work could be said to exhibit a basic form of structuralism. One of these oppositions was that made between product benefit and user benefit (with its variant end benefit). As this case study has shown, this is a distinction that lies at the heart of all advertising and needs to be teased out if we are successfully to decode particular advertisements in a manner that goes *beyond* the work of Barthes (1977), Williamson (1978), Goffman (1979) and others.

Thirdly, one of the factors anchoring marketing to the kind of structured thinking characteristic of modernist disciplines, perhaps, is that the creation of meaning in commodities is inextricably bound up with the establishment of a sense of difference between one object and all others of its class. After all, the three tasks of advertising are: to *stand out* from the surrounding competition to attract people's attention; to *communicate* (both rationally and emotionally) what it is intended to communicate; and to *predispose people to buy* or keep on buying what is advertised. The sole preoccupation of those engaged in the *Ikon Breath O₂* campaign was to create what they referred to as the 'parity break': to set NFC's contact lenses apart from all other contact lenses on sale in Japan, and from all other products on the market. At the same time, the idea of parity break extended to the style in which the campaign was to be presented (tinted monochrome photo, green logo, and so on). In this respect, the structure of meaning in advertising is akin to that found in the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes of structural linguistics where particular choices of words and phrases are influenced by the overall structure and availability of meanings in the language in which a speaker is communicating. That the work of Lévi-Strauss should be known to most marketers, therefore, is hardly surprising. Marketing practice *is* in many respects an application of the principles of structural anthropology to the selling of products.

Fourthly, although those working in marketing and consumer research take it as given that there is one-way flow of activity stemming from the manufacturer and targeted at the end consumer, in fact, as this case study shows, advertising – as well as the marketing that an advertising agency conducts on behalf of a client – always addresses at least two audiences. One of these is, of course, the group of targeted consumers (even though they are somewhat removed from the direct experience of

marketers in their work). In this particular case, to complicate the issue further, there were two groups of consumers, since the campaign had to address both young women and middle-aged male opticians. Another audience is the client. As we have seen, the assumed or proven dis/likes of both consumers and advertising client affect the final meaning of the products advertised, and the client in particular had to be satisfied with the Agency's campaign approach before consumer 'needs' could be addressed. At the same time, we should recognise that a third audience exists among different members of the account team within the Agency itself, since each of the three separate parties involved in account servicing, marketing and creative work needed to be satisfied by the arguments of the other two.

In this respect, perhaps, we should note that marketing people have spent a lot of time over the decades making use of insights developed in learning behaviour, personality theory and psychoanalysis which they then apply to individual consumers. In the process, however, they have tended to overlook the forms of social organisation of which these individuals are a part (cf. de Groot 1980:44). Yet it is precisely the ways in which individual consumers interact that is crucial to an understanding of consumption and thus of how marketing should address its targeted audience: how networks function, for example, reveals a lot about the vital role of word-of-mouth in marketing successes and failures; how status groups operate and on what grounds can tell marketers a lot about the motivations and practices of their targeted audience. Anthropologists should be able to help by providing sociological analyses of these and other mechanisms pertinent to the marketing endeavour. In particular, their extensive work on ritual and symbolism should be of use in foreign, 'third world' markets.

Fifthly, there is the matter of 'culture'. If there is one word that has come to dominate business discourse since the mid-1980s, it is culture. Much of the discussion of culture has taken place in management studies and has been concerned with the advantages of developing organizational or corporate cultures. Much of it, too, stems from Japan – in the sense that American managers and academics seized on 'culture' as the explanation for Japan's economic success (and, at the time, American economic failure) and tried to apply what they saw as positive in Japanese business culture to their own organisations (cf. Salamon 1997). Within the academic discipline of marketing, too, *all* international, as well as many introductory, marketing texts devote at least one chapter to the importance of understanding the cultural dimensions of marketing (Costa and Barmossy 1995:viii). Given the issue of globalisation, this is hardly surprising. What is surprising, however, is that – even though, as anthropologists, we might expect suddenly to be crowned kings of the cultural castle – in fact marketing academics pay scant attention to such disturbing ideas that capitalism might be no more than a cultural system (Sahlins 1976), preferring instead to stick with the less taxing structural functionalism of such worthies in our discipline as Geert Hofstede (1980).⁷ As Malcolm Chapman and Peter Buckley (1997:234) wryly observe in a slightly different context, we need perhaps to spend some time entirely outside anthropology to realise that our carefully constructed cultural castles are for the most part unknown to those who use culture for practical business, marketing and organisational ends.

Finally, most products are made to be sold. As a result, different manufacturers have in mind different kinds of sales strategies, target audiences, and marketing methods that have somehow to be translated into persuasive linguistic and visual images – not only in advertising, but also in packaging and product design. For the most part, *producers* of the commodities in question find themselves obliged to call on the specialized services of copywriters and art designers who are seen to be more in tune with the *consumers* than are they themselves. This is how advertising agencies market themselves. But within any agency, the creation of advertising involves an ever-present tension between sales and marketing people, on the one hand, and creative staff, on the other; between the not necessarily

⁷ Or, as one anthropologist colleague recently asked, "Geertz who?"

compatible demands for the dissemination of product and other market information, on the one hand, and for linguistic and visual images that will attract consumers' attention and push them into retail outlets to make purchases, on the other. This is not always taken into account by those currently writing about advertising. More interestingly, perhaps, the opposition that is perceived to exist between data and statistical analysis, on the one hand, and the creation of images, on the other, parallels that seen to pertain between a social science like economics or marketing and a more humanities-like discipline such as anthropology. Perhaps the role for an anthropology of marketing is to bridge this great divide.

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