

Ethnography and Co-Creation in a Portuguese Consultancy: Wine Branding Research as an Example

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Abstract

As ethnography branches into the fields of business, marketing research, innovation and design research, anthropologists working outside academic contexts are developing a set of practices that in many ways mirror the work of academic anthropology and in other ways diverge from it. Drawing from the anthropologist Viveiros de Castro's notion of controlled equivocation (Castro, 2004), this paper explores the relation between academic anthropology and applied business anthropology, clients and anthropologist as a particular kind of 'equivocation'. A wine branding research case is given as an example.

Keywords

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Page 1 of 21

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The study of consumption has always been at the forefront of the relation between business and anthropology (Baba, 2006). More than three decades ago, Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood's seminal essay on the anthropology of goods (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979) rendered consumption a social and cultural phenomenon amenable to anthropological thinking. Anthropologists such as Daniel Miller have extended the arguments put forward by Douglas and Isherwood, making consumption a central piece in the study of material culture (e.g. 2008, 2010).

Rethinking consumption anthropologically has also gained a significant expression at the intersection of marketing and anthropology. From John Sherry's (1995) initial writings on marketing and anthropology, to qualitative forms of ethnographic marketing research such as netnography (Kozinets, 2009), by way of the study of the relation between rituals and consumption (e.g. Grant McCracken, 1990; 2005), and even recent developments in the field of consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Sherry & Fischer, 2009), the field is clearly in expansion.

Added to this, there is a current resurgence of business anthropology as a specialized field in which marketing research and consumer research form a substantial area of studies (Baba, 2006; Jordan, 2003; Moeran, 2005; Tian, 2010). Like most forms of anthropological thinking, a divide is still observable between those who think of consumption predominantly in academic contexts and those who practise forms of applied consumer research in consultancy and corporate settings (e.g. Malefyt & Moeran 2003; Morais & Malefyt, 2010; Sunderland & Denny, 2007). Another way of expressing this is to say that the exciting developments of the field are far from breaking the division between scholarly and applied practices. As Patricia Sunderland and Rita Denny (2007: 31) put it, regarding the time of consolidation of their professional identities as anthropologists and practising consumer researchers:

'(...) applied work was deemed as less theoretical, less sophisticated, and ultimately less valuable. (...) The ingoing assumption about applied work was also that it was less "pure" and always a little compromised. Moreover, if "applied" in general was "dirty", consumer research or "marketing" was filthy – wickedly so, in fact. And, discursively, at least in terms of certain industries, it clearly still is'.

Working predominantly through a semiotic frame, as other anthropologists practising in the field of consumption have done (e.g. McCracken, 1990; 2005), Sunderland and Denny present us with a clear articulation between processes of immersion in the field and the

particular sets of theories that organize the data throughout. Their own work makes a fundamental contribution to establishing the similarities between corporate and academic anthropologies. Paul Rabinow once stated that anthropologists' interests are both ethnographic and anthropological, insofar as they are united through the premise that description and interpretation are aspects of one another. This ever-present enmeshment of description and interpretation conveys a double-concern with cultural difference ('the exotic') as much as with broad theoretical questions (Rabinow, 2008:34). Practitioners of applied consumer research are therefore no different from their academic peers in intent and insight,¹

Similarities aside, there are substantial differences characterizing the field of consumer research in corporate settings, most often expressed in issues of language. Anthropologists communicating with clients cannot afford to do so through the density, complexity, and unattended circularity of much anthropological theory, although this issue is not absent in consumer research literature (Denny, 1995; Malefyt, 2003). Anthropologists working in the commercial world know that anthropological knowledge, and especially knowledge of a theoretical kind, must be communicated in a way that non-anthropological audiences can understand. Here, in comparison with academic anthropology, intellectual compromises are brought to the fore. Communication with clients must be clear in the usage of language and presented in a different form from an academic paper or article. Choosing a different way of communicating may give the appearance of a lesser complexity or of an intellectual compromise. Moreover, it remains to be clarified for whom things are a 'compromise' and what constitutes an 'intellectual problem' in a process of anthropologically-guided business research conducted outside an academic setting.

In this paper, I wish to challenge the notion that 'applied' consumer research in the consultancy context is less 'theoretical', 'sophisticated', or even 'complex' than forms of anthropology practised in other contexts. I suggest that a particular form of complexity crosses the entire spectrum of applied consumer research and is often conveyed, disguised or covered by language that seems less complex in

¹ Comparisons can be stretched beyond marketing anthropology and academic anthropology to similarities found between advertisers and anthropologists as professional groups. As pointed out by Malefyt and Moeran (2003: 12-17) advertisers must work – and often do – as 'folk ethnographers', in order to understand the target audiences they want to affect. Both anthropologists and advertisers are fairly insular in how they prefer to communicate with members of their own professional categories. Both are constantly involved in efforts of persuasion so as to get the financial resources that will allow them to carry their practices forward. And the similarities go on. The relation between the two groups, in more ways than one, is one of isomorphic similarity rather than of discontinuity.

form, while shaping the different dialects in which anthropology emerges in relation to clients of different professional affiliations. Continuing the claim of previous writings on the subject (Oliveira 2010, 2011) and drawing on the writings of other anthropological practitioners working in the field of consumer research (e.g. Sunderland and Denny, 2007; Malefyt and Moeran, 2003; Morais and Malefyt, 2010), I argue that anthropological research as practised at a consultancy level involves a rapid, ever-changing comparison of different anthropologies, or, in final analysis, a comparison of comparisons disclosed in different language forms at different stages of a process. In so doing, I take the claim expressed by Viveiros de Castro that 'doing anthropology means comparing anthropologies, nothing more – but nothing less' (Viveiros de Castro, 2004: 4). Indeed, I take several claims made by Viveiros de Castro under the notion of controlled equivocation. In so doing I start the work of translation necessary to provide possible answers to the questions posed by this article. Are anthropologists working in the business world doomed to provide mischievous, oversimplified proxies of concepts like 'culture' or 'society' that are deformed to suit the particular ends of corporations? Is applied anthropology in a business context a broken mirror of the 'real anthropology' practised in academia? How can the notion of controlled equivocation account for some of the problems found in the relation between practice and academia?

Firstly, evoking the notion of controlled equivocation as a theoretical instrument for the practice of business anthropology is suffused with difficulties. Not all of these are resolvable through the notion itself, and to suggest otherwise would imply reducing the notion to a tautological circularity. Secondly, controlled equivocation is a concept forged to account for relations between our (Western) epistemological worldviews and the worldviews of Amerindian cosmologies (Viveiros de Castro, 1998). Controlled equivocation designates the effort of capturing Amerindian categories of meaning-making through the eyes of our own (ethno-psychological) categories of meaning-making. In this sense, controlled equivocation is a notion originating in a radically different cultural context from Western business research practice. It is born in Amerindian perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro, 1998): that is, in the view of a world (animistically) populated with peoples and things that tend to see each other in similar ways. One of its main tokens is that, whereas Westerners see bodies as expressions of different souls (or 'minds', as their modern equivalent), Amerindians believe in the unity of a soul cutting across humans and non-humans, expressed in different bodies. In Amerindian cosmologies the body is, therefore, a difference in point of view, a property of a soul that is not exclusively human and a manifestation of one of its differences. As Viveiros de Castro (2004: 9) himself puts it:

The question for Indians, therefore, is not one of knowing “how monkeys see the world” (...), but what world is expressed through monkeys, of what world they are the point of view. I believe this is a lesson from which our own anthropology can learn.

If we try to radicalize the use of controlled equivocation (which means operating its migration from an analytical construct to an applied construct that is equally analytical), there are several lessons that can be extracted for the practice of business anthropology. Every problem in applied business research contains problems of internal comparison (analogies between domains) and problems of external comparison (our investigations or the mental operations we trace to establish the analogies between domains). These two dimensions do not work separately: rather, they emerge in strict, ontological continuity. Hence, working on a problem of innovation, more often than not, involves working through differences found between manufacturers, designers, sales people, marketing people, branding and communication agencies, and all kinds of other agents belonging in an extensive network. Each agent in a given network is often the embodiment of a particular viewpoint. The anthropologist navigates around this network by mapping analogies between domains of meaning (for example, analogies between marketing language and design language), within and across different groups or different departments inside a company, while researching ‘consumers’ simultaneously (and therefore tracing analogies between consumers and corporations).

Bringing an anthropological insight to this world implies the double task of simultaneously comparing understandings of these different groups while setting them all up against anthropological understanding. One moves from internal comparisons (analogies between domains) to inter-cultural comparisons (comparisons between an anthropological understanding and the understanding produced in this kind of network). Comparison, therefore, is not a product of translation, but a device that exists at the service of translation (Viveiros de Castro, 2004: 3). In applied work as well, comparison is king, operating between the different domains of meaning that form a stakeholders’ network or between this network and an anthropological viewpoint:²

To translate is to presume that an equivocation always exists; it is to communicate by differences, instead of silencing the Other

² Although my use of ‘network’ is partially inspired by the work of Bruno Latour (e.g. 2005), the absence of an exhaustive clarification of the overlap between ANT and Viveiros de Castro’s work is yet to be found in anthropology. To explore that overlap is way beyond the scope of this article, although it is a subject deserving further discussion and thought.

by presuming a univocality—the essential similarity—between what the Other and We are saying.

Viveiros de Castro (2004: 8)

In applied work in business, this may assume the form of knowing that a distinct network of stakeholders may not be talking exactly about the same thing when, for instance, trying to rethink a new strategy, product or service. Different points of equivocation are done and undone along the process. Implementation does not necessarily stem from a full consensus at all times with all the agents involved in a network; rather moving from one point of equivocation to the next often comes after agreeing to disagree, in order to get to the next step. Anthropologists in business may contribute to generating consensus insofar as they know (better than most) that things keep happening when conflict occurs. In short, consensus is suffused with equivocations that implementations more often mirror, than resolve:

An equivocation is indissoluble, or rather, recursive: taking it as an object determines another equivocation ‘higher up’, and so on *ad infinitum*.

Viveiros de Castro (2004: 9)

Here, perhaps, lies the most fundamental difference between how an equivocation is dealt with in applied work and academic work. Aware of the endless recursiveness of an equivocation (for language itself is recursive), equivocations in applied business anthropology must come to a halt to give rise to a line of action or material implementation. This may be a new strategy, a redesign of a product or service, or a redesign of the ‘marketing mix’ of a new product or service (amongst other possible outcomes). Any material outcome, however, has the potential to trigger new meanings in the network of which this outcome is part, therefore extending the equivocation until the next cycle of research. In short: one compares, so as to translate; one stops, only to know that other comparisons will follow; one implements (or contributes to implementation) at the point at which the endless recursiveness of an equivocation must be halted in order to give rise to material implementation.

I will proceed with some examples drawn from anthropological literature, and one example of my own experience as a practitioner anthropologist in the field of business anthropology at Couture (Decode + Disrupt), an anthropologically-oriented consultancy in Lisbon, Portugal, where I currently serve as a research coordinator (<http://decodedisrupt.com>), side by side with my teaching practice in ethnographic marketing research.

Compromising, mediating or working across equivocation?

An example of how equivocations work in the business context is found in the work of Brian Moeran (1996). In an ethnography of the daily life of a Japanese advertising agency, Moeran explores in great ethnographic detail agency negotiations with a client, across different departments and several organizations involved in the creation of an advertising campaign for a brand of contact lenses (*Ikon Breath O₂ lenses*). Broadly speaking, the challenge behind this campaign consisted of creating an overall campaign ranging across television commercial, newspapers, magazines, poster and pamphlet for display at retail outlets. In this frame, both advertising and point of purchase had to contain a single uniting theme. The particular demands made by the client and questions of labour division between the different agencies involved led to a creative team working on two separate projects over a six-month period: either printed matter or television commercial. Yet the greatest source of disagreement (further leading to a greater source of 'compromise') came from the manufacturer's views set against the creative views played alongside.

While members of the Nihon Fibre Corporation (NFC) manufacturing team wanted the stress to be placed on functional characteristics of the product, such as the amount of oxygen that lenses let pass onto users' eyeballs, members of the marketing team wanted to focus on potential users and end benefits – for example, the possibility of continuous wear of the lenses. However, in order to gain credibility based on functional characteristics of the product, the communication of *Ikon Breath O₂ lenses* had to reach doctors as a reliable and medically approved product. This was not as easy as expected, as there are individual differences in users making continuous wearing not recommendable for all cases.

As the target in question consisted of young women aged 18 to 25, the creative team found itself trying to persuade three different audiences: the user, the medical profession, and the client. Two ideas came to the fore as a result of differences in viewpoint. For the manufacturing team, an idea of 'corneal physiology' emerged as a desirable approximation to convey the functional characteristics of the product, although it was one that members of the creative team saw as hardly communicable to the target group. Discussion proceeded around whether a celebrity could (and should) communicate the idea of 'corneal physiology' to a younger audience. At this point, the art director suggested merging together an image of the product as a combination of soft and hard characteristics, hence building a bridge between functional characteristics (the manufacturer's viewpoint) and user experience. If the copywriter preferred the idea of 'corneal physiology', it still had to take into account individual users' differences. Through a series of complex negotiations between the different people involved,

described in great ethnographic detail, 'soft hard' ended up being chosen as a kind of nickname which salesman, retailers, doctors and lens wearers would all use to identify the NFC product. A form of consensus was reached so that implementation could take place. The author concludes, among other aspects, that working in brand definition and strategy equals the kind of functioning described by Lévi-Strauss in *The Savage Mind* (Lévi-Strauss, 1966); both the groups described by Lévi-Strauss and the network in question 'insist on differentiation, and it is the existence *per se* of differences between things, rather than the content of such differences, which is of crucial importance to them both' (Moeran, 1996: 126).

This example, although it does not stem from applied work in industry, illustrates the kind of movement involved in anthropological thinking in the corporate arena. Different networks are mapped according to the meaning produced over one concept, as well as according to that which different groups inside the network are producing around one another. The question is not to find out who is wrong and who is right on the equation, but what is the particular problem of which each of the groups considered in the network stands as a particular viewpoint. Analogies between domains (the different departments involved in the production of the campaign) are identified and set accordingly, while at the same time being set against intercultural comparison (our mental operations, themselves a part of culture) when a comparison with *The Savage Mind* is brought to the fore. The soft-hard approach selected in the network marks the temporary end of a process of recursiveness of the equivocation going on between materiality (the manufacturer's view) and user experience (the marketer's view). Differences in positioning exist when the anthropologist is, from the very onset, an integral part of the network contributing to final implementations, and also involved in bringing consumers' views and voices into the corporation. The kind of mental operations involved (inter-cultural comparison), however, are highly similar in nature and form.

Elsewhere, I have written about how consensus is achieved in the process of business anthropology research (Oliveira, 2011). Here I am stretching that point further by suggesting that generating consensus is not always about dissolving paradoxes in the terms of different agents, but about keeping in mind which paradoxes will be attending future processes of implementation stemming from the anthropological research at hand. Viveiros de Castro's axiom, on the nature of equivocations in anthropology, gains new meaning when transported to the daily practice of anthropology and consumer research:

The question is not discovering who is wrong, and still less who is deceiving whom. An equivocation is not an error, a mistake, or a deception. Instead, it is the very foundation of the relation that it implicates, and that is always a relation with an exteriority. An error or deception can only be determined as such from within a given language game, while an equivocation is what unfolds in the *interval* between different language games.

Viveiros de Castro (2004: 9)

A lens manufacturer wanting to communicate the functional characteristics of a product is just as 'right' as a marketer wanting to convey its user experience. Their 'anthropologies' are departing from a different axiom: the former from a world starting with the assumption that a similar experience will emanate from particular functional characteristics; the latter from a world where user experience will determine the appreciation of what the functional characteristics of the product are in the first place. To each other's eyes, neither is right nor wrong, but equivocated in their premises. A similar paradox could be drawn between academic analysis in anthropology and the practise of anthropology in everyday life. A 'soft-hard' approach may give rise to a different product (as in a consultancy setting in applied business anthropology as a distinct product from academic anthropology). Like a soft-hard approach to lenses, that product is capable of many things; yet resolving the contradictions between the two kinds of agents involved in its making is certainly not one of them.

If an error or deception can only be determined as such from within a given language game, what distinguishes an equivocation from an 'equivoque' or a 'mere' error across languages? Should the true equivocations of anthropology happen solely between realities as far apart as the West and Amazonia? To start sketching an answer to this question, I will take up a narration of translational equivoque described by Viveiros de Castro himself (2004:14-16), but not before introducing a slightly different set of possibilities.

The first possibility is that the difference between an equivoque and an equivocation can be analysed as a question of degree, rather than a qualitative rupture. In this regard, the work of Kasper T. Vangkilde is of particular relevance (2013, *forthcoming*). Studying the creation of concepts amongst a group of Hugo Boss fashion designers, Vangkilde provides an extensive description of how Hugo Boss as a brand is invested with animism by those who work with it. The brand is attributed a 'personality' that goes beyond the individual and collective agencies of the particular fashion designers engaged in forging new creative concepts. The exercise of creating new concepts at Hugo Boss involves a double effort of imagination. One relies on imagining the brand through the eyes of those who work with it; the other relies on

assessing new ideas through the eyes of the 'personality' the brand has been invested with. To recapture Viveiros de Castro's language, the understanding going on between a brand invested with a 'personality' as a form of autonomous agency and those involved in its making is, first and foremost, 'perspectival' (Viveiros de Castro, 1998).

The second possibility is that applied business anthropologists are often working on equivocations across different groups, professional affiliations, and respective language games, rather than participating in one predominant meta-game played between the anthropological analyst, on the one side, and a particular group, or 'culture' (= the 'native'), on the other. The 'culture' of a product or service is here being rewritten in an extensive partnership, rather than the conventional partnership standing between a native and an analyst, of which culture is more often an analytical product (Clifford & Marcus, 1986).

The third possibility is that, more than engaging in a compromise or a mediating role, the applied business anthropologist often ends up holding different and irreconcilable terms of analysis between different groups – terms that must, nevertheless, lead to implementation, even in the absence of full convergence between them. One is working through and around metaphors binding models and clients together (Malefyt, 2003).³

Lastly, there is the possibility that an internal translational process is happening all along inside the applied business anthropologist's mind between the terms of theoretical analysis and the language(s) that must be conveyed to non-anthropological audiences in an appearance of lesser complexity. Here lies a balance across analogies between domains, external comparison, and a need to communicate to audiences that are not trained in anthropology. That balance (needless to say) is different in academia and consultancy settings, and perhaps better captured in a story told by Viveiros de Castro himself.

The narrative stems from one particular request that was asked of Viveiros de Castro. Milton Nascimento, a celebrated Brazilian musician, had made a journey to Amazonia, guided by people of a Non-

³ One excellent description of how metaphors are mapped, analysed and negotiated between advertisers and clients is to be found in Malefyt (2003). Taking a dual role as an anthropologist and advertising planner, the author describes in great detail the processes of staging metaphors through which an advertiser tries to persuade a client of its value proposition. The process through which metaphors are staged in client relations is a fundamental dimension of applied work in business and one amenable to a Goffman-inspired analysis, like that put forward by Malefyt. That my own article focuses on the analytical propositions contained in 'controlled equivocation' should not exclude the dramaturgical and performative dimension of encounters between agencies and clients as a mirroring surface of metaphor mapping.

Governmental Organization. On this trip, Milton spent time with the Cashinahua of the Jordão River. On his return, he decided to use the word '*txai*' to name one of his albums. *Txai* was a word used by the Cashinahua to address Milton and other members of the expedition during their stay. The artist took it as a synonym of friendship and brotherly affiliation. Viveiros de Castro was asked to write a sleeve note to the album, explaining that *txai* for the Cashinahua meant 'brother' in the Portuguese language. Confronted with this request, the anthropologist explained that *txai* is a word that can be used to explain different things – including kinsfolk, cross-cousins, mother's father, daughter's children, any man whose daughter's ego treats as an equivalent to his wife, something akin to brother-in-law, an outsider, or even an enemy. The end result was that the sleeve note ended up being written by somebody else.

Viveiros explains that the problem is not that members of the NGO and the Brazilian artist were wrong about the meaning of the word *txai*; rather, that they were equivocated. It so happens that the Cashinahua use terms where the closest approximation to a Brazilian usage of language is, indeed, 'brother'. It is precisely because of this that a Cashinahua person would rarely address a (consanguinal) 'brother' through the term *txai*, which indicates a connection of affinity, not consanguinity. In sum, 'while the purposes may be similar, the premises are decidedly not so' (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 16). Neither the author nor the marketing team behind Milton Nascimento's album could agree on the way analogies between domains and intercultural comparison work in the relation between the Cashinahua and Milton's understanding of them.

Now imagine you are an anthropologist who is simultaneously working with the Cashinahua, Milton, and a marketing team. If you manage to do this, you will have imagined an anthropologist 'making room for the social and cultural' inside rather than outside a corporation (Dourish & Bell, 2011). In short, you will be facing an anthropologist in industry.

(Un)doing the work: ethnography and strategic planning in a wine branding research

It is the beginning of January 2012 and I have just returned to my native country, Portugal, after a six-month absence in Barcelona, where I was working for another business anthropology consultancy. I came back to Couture, the agency where I first started applying anthropology to marketing, design research, and innovation, two and a half years ago.

At Couture, I was informed of the latest briefing received by the agency. The client is manufacturer of a wine brand which once led the

Portuguese market, but sales of which have now fallen for two years in a row. A particular brand, which for the sake of confidentiality I shall here call 'Old Portugal', is at stake. In a country where consumption rates are falling as a result of the current recession, Old Portugal is still, despite everything, our client's bread and butter. Over time, however, our relation to Old Portugal and how we see it changes. We begin the project as we generally do: talking to each other as if the brand had a 'personality', an agency of its own, a set of cognitive and volitional qualities somehow imagined beyond our own particular agency: 'I believe that Old Portugal' wants this, or 'Old Portugal needs this', will become common ways of addressing the newly personified brand.

At the time of my re-involvement with the consulting agency, I am told that the research project has been sold and its methodologies agreed with the client, as has the budget. I am offered a consultancy on a take-it or leave-it basis, and I decide to accept the challenge. From the outset, both Couture and the client know that we are dealing with a product that marketers would describe as having reached its 'maturation stage'. In marketing terms, this describes a well-known pattern by which a product or brand that has reached its peak in terms of sales and is now on a rapid descendant curve. There are many reasons why Old Portugal might be going this way. Tackling them without evoking feelings of blame inside the company is going to be an incredibly hard task.

Moreover, it is clear from where we stand that, following a peak in sales starting in the early nineties, Old Portugal's company decided to commercialize the product across different sales points aimed at target different groups. Following the surplus of confidence that often comes with a strong period of high sales, Old Portugal became a standard item in a variety of retail outlets, including supermarkets, restaurants and petrol stations. The over-exposure of the brand led to saturation of its image, as well as to a lack of differentiation in its target audience. Old Portugal is now intended for everyone, old and young, and thus for no one in particular. Facing this gloomy prospect, the client decides on an ethnographic, as opposed to a conventional marketing research, approach to its problem.

The degree to which what we call 'ethnographic research' in consultancy of this kind actually corresponds to what academic anthropologists call 'ethnography' is a moot point. A first exercise of comparative translation involves determining the differences and similarities between the two kinds of 'ethnography' prior to going into the field. In each, a particular notion of anthropology is played out. For this project in particular, the team has agreed with the client to conduct in-depth interviews in peoples' homes (which we call 'ethnographic interviews'), applying thinking-aloud protocols to consumers making

choices of wines, using projective techniques, and finally a new methodological product, brought by a Brazilian member of our team, called 'peer dinners'. Peer dinners involve asking a research participant to select people within the same age group and organize a dinner where researchers will be observing and simultaneously partaking in the meal, while introducing cues in the conversation on matters they want to have answered. We agree with the client on as diverse a qualitative sample as possible, in terms of gender, age and generations.

As usual, we do not focus solely on the brand in question, but start our interviews by enquiring about the lives of consumers (hereafter referred to as participants) and their overall habits regarding wine consumption. From the outset, we find ourselves dealing with at least three different 'ideas' of wine: one stemming from the client; another from the research team; and the third from the group of participants researched for this project. Suffice it to say that the client is not to be understood as a single agent, but as a network of different departments inside the company – including marketing, sales, and the shareholders of its distributing company. We also know that variations across the three 'ideas' are often as strong as similarities between them. The question, as in all anthropology, is how to configure members of the three groups as theoretical agents rather than as passive subjects (Viveiros de Castro, 2004: 12). One does not start by assuming that anthropology holds a better theory for accounting for what wine is, as that would be jumping immediately into intercultural comparison, while disregarding the analogies between domains. Rather, one works to sustain the exercise that different 'anthropologies' of wine will emerge from the different groups in question, enabling us to map where these anthropologies cross and where they hardly come together. Lastly, one sustains the challenge of knowing that the thinking across these different anthropologies will ultimately have to be communicated to the 'client' in a language that is, at least in appearance, 'non-theoretical'.

In the process, different research techniques will evoke different theoretical models. For instance, in using thinking-aloud protocols, we ask people to go to supermarkets and pick a brand of wine that they have never tasted before, while asking them to voice aloud their thinking processes in their decision-making. By using this technique, we hope to gather insights that will open new ways for the communication of Old Portugal to audiences already familiar with it. Here the world of Jean Lave (1988) and cognitive anthropology will help us organize the data gathering and analysis. As a result of thinking-aloud protocols, we find that there are visual elements in the bottles chosen by consumers that are not fully aligned with the visual elements of the Old Portugal label. The insights gathered feed the final strategy recommendations dealing with brand image and design.

Through the interviews, we discover that consumers have some reservations about the provenance of the grapes that go into Old Portugal. Questions of nationalism arise from the data, in that people express their distrust towards the provenance of grapes which originate in Spain, their neighbouring country. This makes them perceive Old Portugal as lacking 'purity' – a perception that brings in issues of symbolic anthropology (Douglas, 1966). At this point, the cognition that stems from the application of thinking-aloud protocols gradually shifts towards the symbolism of purity. A tension between cognition and symbolism will carry on throughout the process, emerging at different times with different people and through the use of different methodologies.

With other colleagues trained in advertising, marketing, communication and design working at the agency, theory talk of an anthropological kind seldom comes to the fore. There are three networks of knowledge that must reach convergence for the final recommendations passed to the client. The first consists in a client divided in many departments; the second in the consumers researched; and the third in Couture itself, expressed in our distinct disciplinary affiliations. The initial work of mapping must proceed by tracing the analogies between these different domains.

As the research data gathered with participants comes in, we manage to broaden the questions and venture into a more radical examination of the problem. We are no longer merely asking 'what is this brand?' We are asking 'what is wine?' and what are we learning about wine as a social and cultural product. Conducting the ethnographic interviews, we take a printed set of bottles of wine while asking consumers to order them according to what they think is their value and importance. We ask people permission to open their kitchen cabinets to see what wine they keep at home and how it is kept. We listen to endless stories about wine consumption, to find out that a significant number of participants had their initiation in drinking red wine with this brand, on a family occasion.

Two months of research have gone by and it is time to present our findings to the client. Communication now becomes the major concern. How do we go back to a client and explain that wine has now become a set of social and cultural relations in a language that a client not trained in anthropology can actually understand?

The presentation day arrives. My team is sitting in a room with the client – that is, Old Portugal's CEO, together with his marketing representative and commercial director, plus the CEO of the distribution company and two other employees. Today's agenda involves delivery of the main research 'insights' and a co-creation session where, using

design thinking techniques, we will invite people in the room to brainstorm solutions for Old Portugal. As the presentation unfolds, different viewpoints emerge between Old Portugal's company members and members of our team. One of the slides of our PowerPoint presentation turns out to be particularly problematic: on the left side of the PowerPoint, we have some wines that are clearly winning market share over Old Portugal, in terms of brand image based on sensorial attributes of the product (flavour, smell, etc.) and traditional ways of wine making. On the right side of the slide, we have some wines that are clearly not going for sensorial attributes, but for a communication of 'experience' in and of itself: that is, the social experience of having a wine amongst friends or family, rather than focusing on sensorial attributes and traditional ways of wine making. We place Old Portugal among these wines.

We explain that although Old Portugal has tried to communicate itself to the public in terms of sensorial attributes, tradition and origin, it is actually being perceived as a wine whose brand message is no longer clear and, if anything, closer to experience. Unlike the manufacturing client's perception, Old Portugal in the consumer's view is much closer to a wine-experience than to a wine-attribute. And yet it is not fully situated in that territory, making it a hybrid: neither fish nor fowl. Members of the company do not take this interpretation lightly. We argue that we are not talking of Old Portugal *per se* so much as the *perception* of the product (without either side clarifying what is here meant as 'perception'). At this point, we are mediating between ourselves, Old Portugal, the ethnographic data gathered, and the different people present in the room.

Once the presentation is over we move to the co-creation session. For this we have selected a set of design-thinking techniques stemming from the problems identified through the ethnography. We invite those in the room to resolve them together. The peer dinners we have organized, with different age groups, have given us the insight that perhaps we can move beyond the dichotomy between sensorial attributes and experience, if we introduce a third term. We organize an ideation exercise where everyone must put themselves in the shoes of consumers of different generations. Not only this, but they also have to embody the character of a particular generation trying to influence peers of the same age into drinking Old Portugal.

The exercise creates something new in the room. Up to this point, we have had a conflict stemming from our different 'anthropologies', one in which there was an 'us' on one side, and 'ethnographic data' gathered, on the other. From this point onwards, by enacting distinct positions regarding the brand, we invite members of the room to position themselves differently around the data presented

in the morning. At this point, we are doing an exercise that goes beyond cutting across the different wine domains found in the network. We are asking each person to position him or herself inside, rather than outside, the data gathered. We are making the network converge in a joined positionality: that is, trying to recreate an anthropological form of positionality that is shared by all. As we do this exercise, people in the room start dropping their generational characters to start talking about themselves, the people that they know, their habits of wine drinking and how these relate to some of the aspects they were shown in the ethnographic data presented in the morning.

This process hardly stops there, however, as we must return in two weeks' time and present the client with a strategy stemming both from the ethnographic data and the co-creation session. At this point, thinking of analogies between domains becomes insufficient. The data has provided all kinds of material amenable to anthropology in terms of rituals of wine consumption, wine initiation, kinship ties and gender difference, to name a few. But even if all of these subtleties could give rise to a myriad of interesting observations on well known anthropological categories and authors they cannot bind the network together and therefore making the equivocation move forward. To pull the threads together, we must move from analogies between domains to intercultural comparison.

At this point, I have in mind Lévi-Strauss (1966) and Mary Douglas (1979). I know that in the myriad of people we have involved in building a joint positionality about wine, I am facing a set of categories reminiscent of structuralism. The brand is becoming a structural arrangement reminiscent of Lévi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind*: one whose essence must be defined in relation to other brands which are themselves categories of differentiation (Moeran, 1996). I also know that these categories are being constructed in the network of which I am part and that I must remember to think of myself as an agent of that construction. To put it differently: I have in mind that cognition is rooted in social life (Douglas, 1979; Lave, 1988) and that these categories are being constructed in a social life of which I am part. I must re-examine the nature of the social life in the process of which I have made myself part of.

As in the *Ikon Breath O₂* lens campaign discussed above (Moeran, 1996), there is a major equivocation that must be temporarily undone: to our client, the communication of this product must evolve from sensorial attributes to experience, while from our viewpoint it must communicate itself the other way around. Here, the solution comes from examining the social encounters of the three branches of this network and how categories are being constructed within it. What binds together the ideas about wine emerging from Couture, consisting of a team of

people with different disciplinary affiliations, a client divided into many departments, and a sample of participants asked to talk to Couture about their experience of wine and to hang around with our researchers?

I realize that, exactly like the participants we have researched, our ways of making sense of wine emerge as just as divided when it comes to age difference, as they are through differences related to our positions and disciplinary affiliations. The network must learn with the teachings of the consumers researched: we cannot carry on communicating the same experience of wine along the different generations, while hoping that they will all take similarly to its sensorial attributes. It is the way that categories of meaning around wine have emerged in the social lives of our participants that will end up guiding the rethinking of the brand by the remaining network (Couture + Client). Here, intercultural comparison – our investigations or mental operations, themselves a part of culture – slowly shifts into strategy: that cognition is rooted in social life must become a strategy for Old Portugal, disguised as it must be, in order to be efficiently communicated.

We return two weeks later, having worked out and developed a strategy based on generational marketing, illustrated by ethnographic data gathered during the process and supported by what we had learned during the co-creation session. Basically, we use this to argue that the product should be communicated differently to different generations, and to show how this might be done. At the third presentation session, we finally get it right, coming up with a strategy that involves explicitly dividing product communication to different generations in terms of the wine's sensorial attributes, its origin, and experience. The client is finally happy with our work. So we start the brand guide for the communication agencies that will follow, while winning another account – this time on organic wine – with the same client. At the end of the process, unlike Vangkilde's (2013, *forthcoming*) ethnography of Hugo Boss designers, we no longer talk of the brand as a thing-in-itself, invested with personality or autonomous agency. We talk about what 'people' want for the brand, in a formulation where the word 'people' encompasses both the client and the consumers researched. But unlike the Viveiros de Castro music album story mentioned above (Viveiros de Castro, 2004), we do not refuse to hand in a strategy based on our ethnographic and co-creative work. As an agency specializing in ethnographic research and strategic planning, this is our work. Not the kind of work that engages in intellectual contemplation of equivocations that extend themselves *ad infinitum*, but the kind of work that must identify the point where an equivocation can safely stop in order to give rise to implementation.

Concluding remark: Mapping equivocations and applied business Anthropology

In anthropology, the work of Bruno Latour has clearly shown that science is not immune to social, political and cultural contexts, but a direct reflexion of how different agents co-construct, at a given point in time, particular forms of science rooted in power, contingency, the social and the cultural (e.g. Latour , 1993). Applied work in business anthropology is often about recognizing how networks of meaning are formed between agencies, consumers and corporations while keeping the reflexivity necessary in order to identify the knowledge emerging from such networks – bearing in mind, as we must, that in applied corporate work the anthropologist is an active part of the network, rather than a detached participant-observer engaging with it through limited periods of time.

If anthropology is often built upon misunderstanding (Viveiros de Castro, 2004), applied business anthropology is no different and translation is here, equally required. Business anthropology at a consultancy level entails a dual process of translation: one that works with analogies between domains, and one that simultaneously sets the knowledge of different domains against anthropological knowledge (inter-cultural comparison).

Throughout the process, concepts that are good for anthropological thinking are presented in a form that only in appearance divests them of their theoretical background. PowerPoint presentations to clients are not so much a form of obliterating anthropological theory as of presenting it under a disguise required for effective communication. Anthropological theory is present all along, and more so during the several stages of the ethnographic process, insofar as different techniques will evoke distinct theoretical models in anthropology. For example, cognitive anthropology emerges in thinking-aloud protocols in the same way that symbolic anthropology comes out in the interpretation of meanings of the purity and origins of products.

Against this backdrop, one may claim (and many do) that the work of anthropologists in business is by no means anthropological work, as orthodox academia understands anthropology to be. In this article, I suggest that we could rather look at the question of the relation between academic anthropology and applied business anthropology in a consultancy setting as a matter of equivocation: not equivocation as a synonym of error, deception or mistake; but equivocation in the sense that between academic anthropology and applied business anthropology, there are zones of divergence that can be discussed, but will be difficult to resolve. To put it differently: between academic

anthropology and its application in a business setting, exactly like a product or brand, there are divergences that will carry on being embodied in the daily lives of practitioners. In a sense, such practitioners are equivocated, while carrying a theory of equivocation that can account both for them and the discipline from which they originate.

Further research on the concept of controlled equivocation could benefit the relation between academic anthropology and applied business anthropology – not with a view to resolving it, but rather to identify the points where these two forms can safely stop, in order to give rise to implementation (that is, allowing for the consolidation of the discipline inside anthropology itself) and where divergence must continue *ad infinitum*, inasmuch as an equivocation is endless and recursive.

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