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## Finding Ourselves in Images: A Cultural Reading of Trans-Tasman Identities

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores salient categories, metaphors, and meanings embedded in representations of New Zealand, Australian, and trans-Tasman cultural identities. The discussion is based on an ethnographic and semiotic exploration grounded in the examination of New Zealand and Australian beer, car, and convenience food advertisements. The study was carried out jointly by U.S. consumer research anthropologists and Australian and New Zealand advertising professionals. Similarities and differences in identity icons, cultural conceptions of nature, implicitly gendered understandings, and metaphors of relationship are reviewed. We suggest that advertisements are revealing cultural texts that when analyzed expose socially constructed 'truths' that can in turn be leveraged, contested, and altered by consumers as well as advertisers.

### ARTICLE

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*Figure 1: Respondent photo diary images of Australia (Hill's Hoist, "Aussie Boy"), New Zealand ("Boy with Tiki"), and the trans-Tasman region (rugby, surfing, BBQ). Icons of identity?*

What does it mean when an Australian announces, with a note of obvious pride in the voice, " *New Zealand has always been a country that punches more than its weight*"? What does it say about what is culturally salient or assumed? Beyond the personality or personal preferences of the speaker, what cultural truths, categories or connotations does it reveal? Or, if beaches, barbecues and backyards are salient symbolic images for the trans-Tasman

region (see Figure 1), what are the pre-packaged connotations and corollary meanings? And what if one delves deeply into contemporary advertisements, the symbolically saturated combinations of images and words that so permeate our contemporary world? What, for instance, does a Toohey's beer spot in which New Zealand and Australian teams spar in a bottle cap competition say about the relationship between Australia and New Zealand and about culturally shared values as well as territories in which meanings and values diverge? What are New Zealand and Australian advertisements communicating about the region – and each other – perhaps without the explicit realization of even the makers?

These were the kinds of questions we posed and explored together during a week-long session in Auckland at the beginning of 2004. It was an immersion in ethnographic and semiotic practices for FCB, an advertising agency, and in the meanings of Australian, New Zealand, and trans-Tasman cultural identities for anthropologists from the Practica Group, a U.S. based consumer research firm. Prior to the session, staff of the Sydney and Auckland FCB offices selected automobile, convenience food, and beer as the three most important categories of products on which to heuristically focus the endeavor. In each country, contemporary examples of billboard, print, and television advertisements for these categories were gathered for analysis (with an eye on inclusion and exhausting the universe, not pre-selecting a sample). Prior to the session, Australian and New Zealand FCB team members also created diaries of images which were then collectively discussed and analyzed. Australian participants were asked to create a photo diary of images “that uniquely capture what Australia is all about” and to include images of:

- traditional Australian-ness,
- modern or contemporary Australia,
- counter ideas to either traditional or modern Australia,
- trans-Tasman images – the things that speak to a shared identity.

New Zealand participants were asked to do the same, except focused on New Zealand. In addition to the decoding and discussion sessions among the team (comprised of two Australians and four New Zealanders), five ethnographic interviews were carried out in Auckland area households with recruited consumer respondents. Members of these households were asked to complete the same photo diary assignment; the images they selected were then discussed as part of the ethnographic encounter.

This paper draws on the conversations surrounding the decoding of images primarily from the television advertisements for beer and automobiles, of which there were 88 and from 18 photo diaries (six diaries were created by Australians all of whom were advertising professionals, and 12 diaries were created by New Zealanders, of which five were created by consumers and seven by advertising professionals or student interns at the agency). Crucially, because the Practica anthropologists are American, team members from Australia and New Zealand often needed to explain the cultural background – in detail. In this, the team members became ethnographic informants, not dissimilar from the recruited respondents. Clearly, given that this session took place in Auckland and all recruited ethnography respondents were New Zealand residents, the session analysis favored New Zealand. These facts as well as the scope of the data make the analysis illustrative rather than definitive. Nonetheless, the analysis offers a unique vantage point on the question of what is trans-Tasman.

### **A Bit of Background**

The analysis of advertising is not a new endeavor. Among advertisers it is a common, in fact necessary practice to conduct brand and benefit audits of existing advertising and to keep tabs on the terrain. Among scholars there is a long tradition of analyzing advertising as social commentary and lens onto consumption practices (Abel 2004; Barthes 1972; Bell 2004; Goffman 1979 ; Goldman 1992; Mick 1986, 1997; Palmer 2002; Pettigrew 1999). Advertisements are cultural texts that incorporate (or co-opt) cultural conventions, metaphors, values, ideologies into the space of the ad to give a brand meaning (Bignell 1997, Caillat and Mueller 1996, Cook 1992, Jutel 2004, Matthewman 2004; McCracken 1990; Streeter 2005; Vestergaard and Schrøder 1985) . Williamson's (1978) classic text speaks to the ways in which advertisements align cultural meanings with products to imbue the latter with emotional, functional and symbolic salience.

It is precisely because of this process of semiosis, this juxtaposition of signs, that ads become a rich source for understanding not only the advertised and other brands but, we suggest, become a lens for understanding ourselves and our world in a way that is quite independent of the consumption context set up by the ad. Advertisements, viewed in a semiotic frame, are performative events (cf. Bauman and Briggs 1990; Turner 2004) and, as such, offer an inherently ethnographic text for analysis. Advertising matters not simply to persuade target audiences to purchase a brand or product but because advertising defines a symbolic space in which products and categories 'live.' This symbolic space is not

only the fodder with which brand and category meanings are created, but constitutes cultural spaces (cultural assumptions, symbols, values, metaphors) quite independent of the product being advertised. These cultural spaces can be illuminated through analysis. By way of example, consider the two U.S. Nike ads (Figures 2 and 3).

*Figures 2 and 3: U.S. Nike print ads, circa 2002.*

These ads, targeted to girls, contest definitions of femininity in the United States . A (female) hockey player and the phrase, "I like sports. I like pink" or "I wear muscles, I wear dresses" in context of a (female) boxer exhibiting a face of sheer grit is telling us that girls can be tough, powerful, determined – traits traditionally ascribed to masculinity in the United States. The power of the ads, their effect, is only possible because of the cultural 'fact' of huge differences in cultural notions of what it means to be male or female – *notions that are carefully continued through the symbolic invocation of pink and dresses*. The cultural values, symbols or metaphors on which a brand relies to create meaning are those that we use to frame the way we see the world. To illuminate the implications of this perspective, our task in this paper is to delve into ads (and diary images) for what is culturally presupposed about trans-Tasman identity and to demonstrate the benefit of this kind of analysis and understanding. Notably, if ads are relying on meanings we invoke to make sense of our worlds more generally, they have the potential to reframe these understandings as well.

But first, what we found. The U.S. Nike examples are apt in that they also bring us to the first and pervasive aspect of this exploration of trans-Tasman cultural identity: the icons were (almost) all male.

## **Trans-Tasman Cultural Identity**

### ***Icons of Identity are Male***

The overwhelming majority of images and pictures chosen by team members as representative of Australian, New Zealand , and trans-Tasman-ness carried an assumption of maleness (consistent with Bell 2004; Kapferer 1996; McGrath 1997; White 1981) . Men and women were approximately equally represented among participants and respondents; the masculine gendered, male-centric images

were the kinds of images chosen by both men and women. The array of images which opens this article was among them. Few would contest the selection of the All Blacks as iconic New Zealand or an Australian-New Zealand match as a good representation of trans-Tasman-ness; that image is only the most obvious, not the most telling image. If team wins and losses can affect stock prices, surely such an image can – and should – be included as a marker in the cultural stakes. More striking was the cumulative effect of the subtler images, for instance of the male surfers (acting like 'mates', itself a cultural concept that takes male-male relations as the standard and starting point) or, for Australia, the image of turned around baseball-capped man as "Aussie Boy" and "Boy with Tiki" (as he was labeled in the digital image) to represent contemporary New Zealand. The barbeque, an icon that surfaced, again and again, in both New Zealand and Australian diaries, was explained as the site of men's cooking. Implicated in family rituals and thus obviously important in multi-gendered events, the barbeque as icon nonetheless foregrounds men in the cultural story. The Hill's hoist is clearly female though? No. The image was explained as the invention that gets women's work out of the way, so (male) sports could be played in the backyard.

Where were the girls? Where are women in the symbolic construction of identity? In an Australian Toohey's television advertisement, she is the hero, she triumphs in a bar battlecap contest among rival Australian and New Zealand teams by shooting the winning cap from her navel. In one sense she wins by cleverness – both the rival team and her own are astonished at her behavior. At the same time, she 'wins' by being a guy and playing the mates game, beating them in a male sport. In essence, she has become the honorary male. In New Zealand, an Export television spot is a riff on the mainstream, ubiquitous wheel barrow. A female is the expert commentator on the ingenuity of young guys as they dissect, reassemble, and re-constitute the 'barrow' as a technological invention, yet the creativity is all male – the female only the bystander. While the prism of reflection is clearly constrained by the (male) category of beer ads, the underlying motifs on which these beer advertisements play go beyond the brands and the category. Just as in the American Nike ad, Export and Tooheys are calling on cultural symbols that involve tacitly understood categories of gender relations to create meaning for their respective brands, otherwise the ads would make no sense.

One could argue that the selection of beer and automotive advertisements as the categories selected for analysis predisposed the focus on male imagery (at least in Australia, beer is gendered male, cf. Hamilton 1990; Pettigrew 1999, 2001). True. But once

aware of the lurking underlying assumption of maleness and the involvement of masculine imagery at the heart of trans- Tasman , New Zealand , and Australian cultural identity, team members also queried themselves. Had that cultural predilection itself influenced the choice of categories on which to focus? The gendered assumptions of cultural identity appeared in the convenience food ads as well. For instance, Australia 's Maggi advertisement (Figure 4), "Emma: Darren's new girlfriend and new SNACK STOP fan" drew not only on contemporary stock comedic characters but, at its heart, on the highly culturally salient concept of mates. In this case it was not the obvious way in which the woman was made a fool in this advertisement that spoke to the gendering of cultural identity, but the way in which a male defined concept of mate-hood was tacitly accepted and assumed.

*Figure 4: Maggi television advertisement from Australia .*

Photo diaries, advertisements, ethnographic conversations all invoked the concept of mates. Whether the topic centered on adventure, sport, the pub, the flat, the girlfriend, the wife, advice or, it seemed whatever, the mate concept emerged as an element. An Australian Toohey's New advertisement, "Nice Things to Say" simultaneously addresses many of these as it shows four mates in a pub, jointly creating a list of nice things they could say to female partners as strategies that ultimately allow their joint and male-only attendance at a rugby match. One younger man's suggestion of "will you marry me?" momentarily stops and silences not only his mates, but the entire pub. He is willing to go far for his mates. They click glasses and the seemingly oldest mate writes it on the list.

Mates' age differences and the acknowledgement of a mentorship function are perhaps what made the mate concept so striking from an American perspective. (The U.S. has no equivalent cultural category; 'friends' comes closest but mentoring, even if it occurs, is not culturally understood or an expected part of that relationship.) So, from New Zealand, a Speights beer ad in which a younger man uses the two free tickets provided by an attractive young woman to go with his older mate to a ball was, at first, almost inscrutable for the Americans. Was the older man the father of the younger? What happened here? The difficulty in cultural reading was not shared by participants from either side of the Tasman. Saturated with the flavor of southern New Zealand and its regional values, the narrative was transparent nonetheless. The two men were mates and the older had (somewhat shamelessly and shamefully) manipulated the situation to his mateship advantage. Participants

understood the ways in which this advertisement drew on notions of being true to your mate, of putting your mate first. For Australia this notion is interlaced with ideas of survival – of the need to look after mates because of the need to depend on them in the face of isolated and harsh conditions. Hence one hears of sayings such as 'rely on your mate, your horse, and your dog.' Laudable values of loyalty are brought to the fore in this cultural emphasis on (male) mates, yet where does this framework leave, and put, relationships with women? Women, just as in these beer ads, have not been picked up as part of the main cultural narrative but rather viewed apart (Ernst 1990; Kapferer 1996). History plays a role. Mates, as a social and cultural category, can be traced historically to male labor crews in the history of both Australia and New Zealand (Belich 1996). But aspects and 'facts' of history never assure the whole cultural story. Male crews were part of U.S. history as well, and yet did not survive as a culturally salient category. In the U.S. male crews were reduced symbolically to the lone individual – the cowboy who does it alone, e.g., the Marlboro Man, as he, through the semiosis of ads, is also now known.

Notably, if the U.S. cultural value of (male) individualism tends to erase emphasis on relationships and dependencies on others, both male and female, notions of mates on both sides of the Tasman provide men the space to openly express emotional facets and bonds of male-male relationships. As one ethnographic respondent said of the periodic departures of mates and colleagues during his multi-year employment in the Antarctic (his own version of an overseas experience, yet another culturally salient concept), "*it was quite special really, and emotional to say 'goodbye.'*" In the U.S. , women's friendships are the culturally ascendant model implicitly and explicitly used as a comparative standard (Oliker 1989; Rosenzweig 1999). This model of women's friendships assumes talking and 'sharing,' which implies foremost the confessional sharing of secrets, not the sharing in activities such as work or sport. Oprah, a long running cultural phenomenon, is a clear cultural fit.

The use of the female friendship model as a comparative norm (further aided and abetted by a psychotherapeutic world view) has meant that for decades men in the U.S. have been criticized for not talking often or explicitly enough about feelings, moods, deep-seated dreams. At present, there reigns a sense that men are 'coming around,' that is, men are talking more and as such are demonstrating a capacity for competent, i.e., culturally ideal, interpersonal relationships. Undoubtedly, this lurking comparative model helped to produce the American researchers' feelings of surprise when both male and female ethnographic respondents who

lived in flatmate situations declared men, not women, as undisputedly the easier-to-live-with flatmates. It was not only that men were pronounced more even-tempered and accepting, while women were said to bitch and complain, inevitably, if not cyclically. It was that respondents attested that men-only flats tended to 'always' work interpersonally. Female-only flats were 'disasters,' an observation later nuanced with the distinction that actually that was not the only case; rather the case was that the outcome tended to be one of two extremes – either disaster or total sisterhood. Again, the point is not what the realities were or not, but that the male situation was deemed normative, the one with which other situations compared – in this case as extremes relative to the norm. If, at present, many flat mate configurations are actually multi-gendered, and an ideal image consists of a flat with both men and women (abiding by the rule of 'don't screw the crew', though in reality many do), there lingers the notion that it would be better in those situations if the women were more like the men, not the inverse.

Of course, in everyday life all of these perspectives are refracted through sexual preference, e.g., male and female perspectives that are nuanced through interest in sexual partners that are either female, male, or both. Notably, our purpose here is not to create or reinforce stereotypes or to overly simplify a messy reality. Life as it is lived, in New Zealand, in Australia, in the United States, includes both men and women, and innumerable kinds of relationships among men and women. The point is the play of cultural narratives and symbols within that reality, and how we as cultural actors, analyzers, advertisers, consumers, and citizens make our way, carve out niches, and create new gardens amidst the cultural geographies. On and illustrating that note, it would also not be fair to continue without some mention of the place of sports in the construction of trans-Tasman cultural identities.

### ***Sports Are a Currency***

In both New Zealand and Australia sports is a currency – an understood, shared form of communication and measurement. Explicitly, achievement in sports is a symbol of success and standing beyond one's borders in both countries; sports has been a historical and cultural marker of national identity and a means to demonstrate difference from Britain and each other (see Mewett 1999; Perry 2004). There are stories and stories of outcomes of wins and losses in rugby and, for New Zealand, the days of mourning created by loss of the America 's Cup. Loss of the America 's Cup is further discussed as an index of national predilections, not only shame. The basic thread of the narrative is 'we produce the



best sailors in the world, but we won't pay them their worth, so they go elsewhere and win for other countries.' New Zealand : Always producing among the best in the world. New Zealand : Always shooting itself in the foot.

The cultural emphasis on sport and the use of sports as valuable currency is discernable in advertising in which play is often articulated as a sport. In both of the aforementioned television beer advertisements, the Export wheelbarrow re-invention ( New Zealand ) and Toohey's bottlecap competition ( Australia ), games devised to entertain and pass time took on the motif of sports ('teams', winning/losing, competition). In New Zealand car advertising, a vehicle easily becomes the technical equipment in an extreme sport. For instance, the Audi Quattro pulls an extremely competent wake boarder through the water, it does more than take a man and his gear to the beach. Ford cars and trucks not only do work and drive through water, they also drive easily across frozen terrain with skiing snowboarders in tow. Mitsubishi 4x4s, not to be fenced in, go through water, pull snowboard skiers, and climb rocky barriers in the middle of city streets. While it is important to note the mainstreaming of extreme sport and its co-opting in mainstream branding endeavors (cf. Palmer 2002), for us, what is crucial is their presence at all: these metaphors and iconography would not be symbolically resonant in U.S. culture – they are culturally specified tropes of New Zealand, Australian, and the trans-Tasman region.

Team sports, in addition to national symbols, are salient symbols of community, like the mate concept, a way of celebrating the group over an individual. Photo diaries included many images of group games of cricket and rugby, formal as well the informal kind played on beaches and backyards with friends, family, countrymen. Currently, though, a tension exists as team sports seem to be losing some salience as a currency. In Australia, this was expressed by the increasing adoption of 'take away' sports; in New Zealand by the replacement of sports with music and, additionally, by the icons of individual sports, e.g., thus the icons of extreme and individual sports in advertising, the snow and wake boarding as well as luge, cycling, rock climbing and running. Ethnographic respondents talked of their workouts in the gym, pursuits distinctly focused on the betterment of their individual bodies. Even if carried out in the context of a group class, this is not a team sport, but a matter of individual betterment. National pride can still attach, however. Les Mills, for instance, was described as a first-rate program of fitness training that New Zealanders have provided the world. Check out the website we were instructed; Les Mills classes can be taken in New York .

Given the discussion of male icons above, perhaps it goes without saying that not only in the traditional team sports, but also in the individual and extreme sports currently celebrated, men's activities are foregrounded. Even when women are featured, traits of physical and mental strength typically associated and understood as masculine (strength, courage, daring) are the ones highlighted. Just as the concept of male boxer frames and informs Nike's U.S. ad of a young female boxer, so the statement, "*New Zealand has always been a country that punches more than its weight*", is informed by a male inspired metaphor. (See also Henley's (2004) discussion of women's netball in New Zealand and Palmer's (2002) discussion of the gendered morality of risk-taking, e.g., male climbing feats stand unencumbered by family relations, while women's feats do not.)

### **The Same, But Different**

#### ***Older, Younger Brothers***

The rhetorical question that started this essay regarding New Zealand's "punching more than its weight" queried not only the phrase, but what it could mean when announced by an Australian, with a note of obvious pride in the voice. The phrase carries the notion of a boxer, but its delivery implied more. A relationship and a kind of prideful caring were implied.

Clearly there *is* a relationship between New Zealand and Australia that spans time, trade and alliances in wars (see Belich 1996, 2001). Just as clearly, this historical relationship has been continually reconstituted and re-created through migration, tourism, sports and business enterprises in more recent times (Goff 2001), even if the extent of the relationship has been downplayed by modern historians of each country (Smith and Hempenstall 2003). 'Trans-Tasman' is a resonant category, as reflected in photo diary images (Figure 5).

*Figure 5: Diary images of trans-Tasman-ness included references to mates during war time, trans-Tasman travel and geographic proximity.*

Interesting are the terms by which the relationship is framed. Not surprising given history, the relationship is construed as familial but, more specifically, it is articulated implicitly as *brothers* in which New Zealand is "*the younger brother.*" Not twins, not siblings, not sisters, not mates, but younger and older brother. The metaphor of *brother* captures the intense national rivalry in sports as well as the

ongoing sparring that occurred through words, jokes, smiles, and intercultural insults among the assembled New Zealanders and Australians in this seminar. 'Younger brother' also captures not only New Zealand's smaller size as a country and population, but also the intense mutual interest in how New Zealand fares relative to Australia (economically, in sports, accomplishments on a world stage, interethnic domestic relations, standards of beauty, the role of sheep, wine, virtually everything).

Importantly, though, 'brothers' is itself a cultural category that carries with it a set of implicit meanings. Given the common ground of history, and Britain as the espoused symbolic parental nation for both countries (despite more complicated realities and intricacies of settlement), the category of 'brothers' is nuanced by the British tradition of primogenitor which valorizes the elder brother. The first son inherited family wealth, carried the family title, held greater status and was seen as more established vis-à-vis society at large. The younger brother, by contrast, was the one who made his own way in the world, perhaps without wealth and certainly without title. Given both the similarities between these two countries in time and patterns of immigration and the huge difference in circumstances of immigration as well as historic relations with resident populations, it could be considered remarkable that 'older brother' and 'younger brother' is the current metaphor for expression of relationship between Australia and New Zealand. At the least, one might ask, why not cousins or, indeed, mates? (Or, through the lens of American eyes, why not just 'neighbors', as Canada is culturally-speaking to the U.S. ?)

The 'brother' metaphor is further nuanced through an ontogenetic or developmental metaphor articulated by residents of each country, e.g., as in New Zealand is still 'growing up' or 'adolescent' or that Australia is 'more mature.' This is not an imagining of New Zealand as the fully grown, adult younger brother, but as a still growing younger brother who has not yet achieved the full adult growth that older brother has. Notions of progress, development and evolution were prevailing metaphors for social analysis in Anglo-American theoretical traditions from the mid-1800s to early 1900s. In the foundational writings of theorists such as Herbert Spencer, varied societies were compared and ordered in a time framework in which some were deemed to exist in the simpler forms of an earlier time of the more complicated contemporary societies. Similarly, in biology the theory that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny (see Gould 1981) spoke to the notion that evolutionary development of a species could be observed in the stages of biological development of the organism. While both these theories are now defunct in academic theorizing, each seems to live

on implicitly in folk theories informing New Zealanders' and Australians' articulations of cultural identity. And so New Zealanders said in reference to Australia :

- *"We're not there yet."*
- *"You're more advanced than us."*
- *"We're not as mature."*

These articulations are consistent with the point of view of a younger, not yet grown brother and with an evolutionary folk theory of societal development. Without doubt, the intense rivalry in the brother metaphor also speaks to great commitment. Brain vs. brawn is a well worn dispute on both sides of the Tasman. Winning and losing are typical terms of engagement. We would just emphasize once again that these terms and the larger metaphor of brothers are cultural constructions, not in any sense the way it must be, merely the way it happens to be.

### ***Ingenuity versus Resourcefulness***

Ingenuity born of scarce resources on the part of New Zealand is contrasted to an Australian sense of resourcefulness. A narrative of ingenuity runs through New Zealand advertising, as it did in the photo diaries and ethnographic interviews. Ingenuity in design is articulated by images of fashion and architecture and stories of bikes and boats, for instance, the many-times told tales of New Zealanders' invention of cars that morph into boats and engines that by virtue of operability in very shallow water allow boats to almost work on land. The sheep and dairy industries were seen as testaments to ingenuity. The developing wine industry is yet another example. Perhaps not unrelated to traditional social roles of the British younger brother, was the overall mantra and recurrent refrain: 'making the best out of what you have.' As one respondent said, *"in New Zealand the question is how can we do more; do better with what we've got here."* It is also the uniqueness of contribution that is a crucial bit of New Zealand cultural identity. New Zealand does not want to play on the world stage as others (or brothers) have defined it as much as it wants its achievements to make unique contributions to that stage. Narratives of achievement come in the form of 'nothing less than first class,' carried out with a distinctive New Zealand ingenuity as well as connection to the country, recently exemplified by Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings trilogy.

In New Zealand 's Toyota advertising, even the cars are clever. For instance, in a spot for the "smaller, bigger, smarter" Echo, the Echo

is, to the tune of 'The Pied Piper,' *the* pied piper that other brands follow, emptying the town to the consternation and confusion of their owners. At the edge of sea cliff, the Echo swiftly turns and observes as the long line of following cars careen over the cliff. There were no drivers, the cars drove themselves. In an advertisement for a new Corolla model, scored to the tune of "Please Release Me," owners' cars stop and trap them and block their vision when they try to look at and admire a passing Corolla. A door slams shut catching a coat; another door locks an owner inside; sun visors and convertible tops clamp down; seats, mirrors and emergency brakes work on their own accord; an air bag explodes. The car is not only a technological device to be mastered; it is a clever sentient, inspired, ingenious being.

Local history is invoked by New Zealanders as a reason for current ingenuity. The narrative is traced through New Zealand 's history, and imagined that it has always been such. As one South Islander now living in Auckland reflected, " *we are inherently innovative, perhaps we got that from the Maori.*" Belich (1996) provides several examples of Maori inventiveness, including the pattern of Maori engagement in the first 100 years of contact that dictated the value of what traders had to offer (from trinkets to guns), as well as the specific ingenious uses of trade goods (from Te Puhi's iron patu in 1815 in which an iron bar became a weapon "*beaten with infinite patience*" to earrings from bits of glass to nails made into chisels and fish hooks). Perhaps the historical reconstruction is and was truly distinctive at the time; perhaps Belich as a New Zealander in valuing ingenuity, interpreted it thus.

One might assume that given the vast amount of desert that makes much of Australia barely habitable, ingenuity would also be a prominent narrative. But not so. Rather Australian narratives emphasize self-sufficiency and resourcefulness in which survival skills, technical knowledge, physical strength and stamina are foregrounded. In Australia , the Toyota Landcruiser 100, "*with earth-moving v-8 power. . . the most powerful Landcruiser ever*" is a vehicle that pulls the strings and reverses global rotation when it reverses gears.

### ***Cultured Nature and Culture in Nature***

On the surface, both New Zealand and Australia are grounded by a shared symbol of nature. Photo diaries from both countries were replete with images of gardens, plants, camping, the sea, the beach, the ubiquitous barbeque and love of outdoor cafes. There the similarities end. Nature as a symbolic category is nuanced differently in each country. In Australia nature is something to be mastered; in New Zealand, something to be partnered (Clark 2004;

see also Gibson 1993 for a discussion of the undomesticated view of Australian nature and the consequences of this notion for imagery in film and Jutel 2004 for a discussion of ramifications of the construction of New Zealand nature, including its Lord of the Rings image as Middle Earth).

In Australia , nature is harsh, potentially deadly; it can kill you by virtue of its sheer vastness, the deadliness of flora and fauna and extreme climactic conditions as seen in photo diary images of snakes or brushfires (Figure 6). And thus nature is something to be mastered. In Australia it is important to be proficient in one's survival skills and resourceful. In a similar vein, nature is something to tame or domesticate. Climactic differences notwithstanding, swimming pools as icons of the outdoors loom large in Australian diaries. Nature is engaged but not as a partner; it must be controlled for one's own welfare, for one's own benefit.

*Figure 6: Images of 'traditional' Australia from respondent photo diaries – nature is deadly.*

In New Zealand it is important to engage and challenge nature – to push boundaries of one's own limits. This was seen in photo diaries (Figure 7) and is highly salient in automobile advertising, for example in the Audi Quattro wake boarder ad mentioned above.

*Figure 7: Photo diary images of 'modern' New Zealand (bungee-jumping, skiing field) and traditional New Zealand (secluded cove, BBQ); all speak of personalizing experiences in nature.*

There is also a Subaru ad that shows the car going through water as well as a high flying, flipping snowboarder and features Glen Sisarich, two-time New Zealand downhill champion, cycling over natural hills; Steve Gurney, coast to coast winner running nature's more rocky spots; and it seems for good measure Angela Paul, Olympic luge champion, on a luge barreling down a city street. In all, what looms large is an intense, personal engagement and interaction with nature. Fear and mastery is not the issue, except perhaps of oneself. Nature is a partner, a partner in endeavors, a partner in culture. And technology can be partnered with nature. The combination of nature and technology is not an immediate disconnect (as it tends to be for Americans).

In ethnographic discussions with New Zealanders, the therapeutic function of nature was articulated. Through the engagement with nature – whether through camping, rowing on the bay in early morning hours, sailing, walking the beach with the dog – one's very being is reconstituted. We observed in Auckland homes the extent to which the outside was brought inside through porches, plants, open and unscreened windows, the barbeque always somewhere, even if squeezed onto a very small balcony (see Figure 8). In New Zealanders' partnership with nature, they have, in the language of semiotics, an indexical relationship with nature in which the acts of participation with the outdoors is at the heart of it. In the U.S. , by contrast, the 'doing' doesn't matter; nature is more like a museum – something to witness or 'see'. For New Zealanders it is the doing that matters; to separate New Zealanders from the land is akin to severing an artery. The derogatory "JAFA" ("just another f-ing Auckland") is in part based on the perception that Aucklanders have in fact severed the tie to nature in their pursuit of commercial success. Aucklanders' wariness of recent immigrants may be in part because these immigrants are not *doing or engaging* nature in the way New Zealanders implicitly would, and thus are violating deeply held, implicit, cultural convictions about the way the world is, in this case, a 'doing' relationship with nature.

*Figure 8: Observations of nature in Aucklanders' lives: blurring boundaries between indoor and outdoors (flowers, plants, windows, muddy boots at the front door); photo diary image situating oneself quite literally in the outdoors (feet in water), as though one's legs were a plant stem and feet, roots.*

### ***Multicultural versus Cosmopolitan***

New Zealanders pride themselves on their multicultural history and multicultural attitude. Maori images, symbols, art are pointed to proudly. In part, this multiculturalism is a way to articulate a clear separation from Australia where the national history with Aboriginal populations provides for New Zealanders clear evidence of Australia's monocultural leanings. In fact, the history of Maori and European engagement and the extant presence of Maori cultural forms are used not just to separate New Zealanders from Australians but New Zealand from other countries which share similar settlement history or patterns, e.g., the U.S. and Canada . Thus New Zealand , because of its Maori history of engagement, is unique.

The Australian images collected in photo diaries or in advertising made no implicit or explicit claim to multiculturalism. Rather the

Australian value was articulated as contemporary cosmopolitanism with the goal of playing (and being recognized) on the world stage. Diary images selected to express modern or contemporary Australia included images of restaurants and chefs, ethnic foods, the gay and lesbian Mardi Gras parade. These images, as well as advertising that assumed acceptance of cosmopolitanism and male metrosexuality (e.g., imagery of parties, restaurants, music that could easily be located in many of the world's elite cities; a Birds Eye advertisement in which a young man knows better than his date how to cook a stir-fry and use chopsticks) as seen in Figure 9, become evidence of 'taking the best from other cultures', that is of a selective integration of symbols from elsewhere inserted into contemporary Australia.

*Figure 9: Photo diary images of 'contemporary Australia'.*

In both Australia and New Zealand current immigration practices are in tension with the articulated values of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism, respectively (Abel 2004; Hudson 1997). Australia's current policy of turning immigrant boats away from its shores makes visible the heavy handedness with which 'cosmopolitan' is constructed; the Tampa is not forgotten. Aucklanders' angry reactions to recently immigrated Chinese populations fly in the face of professed acceptance of ethnic diversity. Some rail against Chinese cyber-cafes and shopping centers and areas that (presumably) show only Chinese signs (Figure 10). Others vent disgust at the fact that some young teenagers who come to New Zealand to go to school 'stay inside and study all the time,' thereby changing the norm for the New Zealand students (see Abel 2004). Again, for Aucklanders it seems not that ethnic difference per se is what is so offensive, but that recent immigrants are not *doing* in the way New Zealanders can understand/accept – by not participating/engaging with nature, by separating inside and outside so thoroughly, and perhaps by not embracing ingenuity New Zealand style and melding shopping centers or language use more ingeniously in an Anglo-Maori world. Again, we offer the United States as a comparative frame. In New York or Chicago, a taxi driver can be forgiven for not speaking the language, for cell phone conversations in Hindi, for not knowing the landscape of streets and directions, *if* there are concomitant signs of shared value – in this case, that the immigrant is there because of a shared belief in freedom, opportunity or democracy. These signs might include an American flag on the dashboard, a conversation about higher education or children in school, and even a posted sign of what wearing a turban means to a Sikh. In the U.S., what counts is the



demonstration of a sharing of ideas and values, a state of psychological, intersubjective sharing; in New Zealand, the crucial signs are those attesting to engagement with nature and doing.

*Figure 10: Auckland shopping center. Respondent photo diary image of 'counter' New Zealand-ness.*

## **Conclusion**

The foregoing analysis is necessarily incomplete, limited by very real constraints of time and space. In this essay, we have not mentioned the New Zealand emphasis on step-wise goal setting, health as the road to success, or the iconic Kiwi holidays. Nor have we touched on the trans-Tasman nuances vis-à-vis tall poppies, global youth culture, or new images of crime. Yet we would hope that this essay nonetheless offers a glimpse into the potential powers of an analysis of cultural symbols and of the value of deconstructing the cultural details and messages that are implicated in the advertising images that both reflect and constitute our cultural worlds.

There is little question that advertisements co-opt symbols and values and by semiotic juxtaposition give brands meaning. There is also little question that advertising can redefine category landscapes. Apple Macintosh, for example, reframed the discourse of 'what is a computer' with a series of print advertisements which introduced cultural categories of art and design (see Figure 11) in a category that once consisted of small print functional specification.

*Figure 11: Apple introduced aesthetic design into the discourse of personal computing through 2002 advertisements such as the one above, shifting the category discourse altogether.*

Our concerns are a bit different. We are less interested in the fact that symbols or metaphors give a brand meaning, than in what those symbols or values tell us about larger cultural categories such as gender, friendship, childhood, personhood and national identity. In this endeavor, advertising becomes an additional discourse, along with movies, music, cartoons, editorial content or political rhetoric, for observing and understanding the cultural assumptions we live by.

A cultural analysis of advertising can be an insightful source of understanding or self-realization (depending on one's relationship to the advertisements under scrutiny) not necessarily garnered elsewhere. We do not think that New Zealanders' relationship with nature as a source of explanation for criticism or antipathy toward recent Asian immigrants would have been readily revealed through simple discussion. New Zealand and Australian car advertising got us there – by provoking the question of 'what is nature' and an analysis of one's relationship to it. That diary images were replete with pictures of nature on both sides of the Tasman told us we were onto something which, in turn, provoked a detailed ethnographic questioning. The link to attitudes toward recent immigrants came much later.

Moreover, understanding the nature of one's immediate and 'automatic' reactions offers the potential for altering the reactions. Research team participants from New Zealand were visibly embarrassed, horrified even, by some of the images and statements regarding Chinese immigrants. Criticisms of Aboriginal policy produced bruised looks on the faces of Australian team members. No one was particularly proud of the realization that almost everyone had selected distinctly male-centered imagery as representative of their individual countries as well as the trans-Tasman region. As anthropologists and social analysts we suggest, however, that one can see the careful deconstructive analysis of cultural imagery as a first step in the strategic rethinking and recasting of those images. That is, with self-awareness comes the potential to shift the discourse.

A cultural analysis requires a recognition that the 'truths' on which advertisements depend, (e.g., what it means to be a girl or boy or mate or Australian or New Zealander) are social constructions. Neither false nor true in an epistemological sense, they simply are. These truths are grounded (though in no way determined) by social, historical, economic and political forces and, as such, are subject to change – if we notice, if we comment, if we contest, if we question – as scholars, market researchers, as consumers.

*Figure 12: Diary images from New Zealand : Males and sports are an immediate fit. Women's breastfeeding offered as a unique, alternative iconic image of New Zealand . Yet what gendered assumptions do these images still telegraph?*

So for example, one of the New Zealand participants had collected noticeably more images of women as part of her representations of

New Zealand , for instance, the breast-feeding image in Figure 12. She cited this image as reflective of a long-standing New Zealand tradition of valuing breast over formula feeding (again an issue with links to ideas about active partnering with nature?). Part of her project was clearly inclusion of women in the representations of New Zealand in order to counteract the underlying gender bias that prioritized men. Similarly, the man as the caregiver of a baby while overlooking young boys' sports could also be put forward as an image indicative of change in gender roles. But in putting forward alternative images, one must still look further into the cultural assumptions implicit in the images. Are there recurrent images that feature women's caregiving in a nourishing, comforting, passive (sitting down) stance versus men's that indicate active challenging? Is the gender of women's children depicted as mixed or ambiguous while for men the tendency is unambiguous depiction of boys? Are women depicted as caregivers, operating within an adult group situation, while men are going it alone with the kids? A cultural reading of advertisements requires us to question, and re-question, and then to question again.

As nations, both New Zealand and Australia seem intensely and self-consciously interested in working out their own identities as well as their relationships with each other and the world (see Bell and Matthewman 2004; Goff 2001; Horrocks and Perry 2004; Kapferer 1996; Mewett 1999; White 1981). For scholars, the now classic works of Benedict Anderson (1983) and Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) made clear the ways that the nation and national identity are not natural or static identities but constructions that are achieved, reinforced, and altered through time. What is so striking to American scholarly sensibilities is the degree to which analysts on both the New Zealand and Australian sides of the Tasman incorporate an acknowledgment of the role of advertising in that creation of the nation and national identity. For example, as White (1981:viii) wrote in the introductory paragraph in his now also classic, *Inventing Australia* , "This book traces some of these efforts to explain what it means to be Australian, from William Dampier's description of 'the poor winking people of New Holland,' to the corporate advertisements of the 1980s." The acknowledgement of the importance of advertising in the reflection as well as framing and constitution of the cultural milieu is evidenced in the matter-of-factness with which varied scholars draw on and from advertising messages to make their case regarding New Zealand or Australian cultural issues (see Abel 2004; Goode 2004; Matthewman 2004; Pettigrew 1999).

It is thus undoubtedly no coincidence that advertising professionals from New Zealand and Australia would be interested in analyzing

existing advertising as a window onto their own cultures as well as looking to cultural realities (and tensions) as a medium from which to draw for the creation of future adverts. Resonating with implicitly held cultural 'truths' makes for better advertising whether the objective is to sell cars, increase tourism or decrease alcohol consumption (or other public service messaging). Strategic alignment with such truths can be extremely compelling, as seen in the New Zealand 's Toyota ads in which the cultural value of ingenuity is applied to the cars. Perhaps more importantly, strategically playing with such truths offers the possibility of re-framing identity narratives.

At the end of the week-long seminar we suggested that advertisers needed to look more closely into questions of how women may be redefining the mate concept or the currency of sports and suggested that one could play with and off the ubiquitous use of male symbols and the big brother-little brother relationship. In the process of doing so, one might also alter the terms of understanding – of both the relationships and values of the trans-Tasman region. It is not the fact of a brother relationship or even 'little' brother relationship across the Tasman that is most important but in recognizing that either is a socially constructed truth that, if brought into focus, can be altered, contested or laughed at. This goes for advertisers and for consumers. Identity stories are narratives – stories we tell ourselves about ourselves. Given the predilection for including advertising into the discourse of understanding national identity (unlike the U.S. ) it has the potential to play a significant role, even while selling us something. Consumers are integral in this process. The consumption of messages is always an active, not passive process; and only through the imaginations and activities of many can the idea of a nation and national culture be achieved.

### **Footnote**

At a later date, FCB continued the research process, interviewing ethnographic respondents in varied locations in Australia as well as New Zealand .

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