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POSTMODERN ALTERNATIVES: THE INTERPRETIVE TURN IN CONSUMER RESEARCH

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This chapter explores the postmodern perspective in consumer research. The viewpoint is evaluated in terms of its connotations and denotations. It is examined also in terms of its sociopolitical context in conventional consumer research. Nonconventional or "alternative" perspectives, such as the sociocultural, the semiotic, the humanistic, the critical theoretical, and the like, are examined in a literature review. Prospects for these eclectic perspectives are assessed, and programmatic research recommendations are made.

APOLOGIA

As a participant observer in the culture of consumer research, I am aware of an "experimental moment" (Marcus and Fischer 1986) occurring in the sociology of the profession. Whether this moment portends a paradigm shift in the discipline, or merely reflects a healthy recognition of the "tyranny of paradigms" and their rhetorical bases (Arndt 1985a, 1985b), it has fostered a politicization of the very issue of pluralism itself (Sherry 1987a). A close reading of essays published in the *Journal of Consumer Research,* which explores some of the boundaries of the discipline (Calder and Tybout 1987; Cooper 1987; Holbrook 1987a; Kernan 1987), of rejoinders to controversial treatments of consumer behavior (e.g., Anderson 1988a; Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy 1988) or of the *Journal of Consumer Research* style sheet (Lutz 1988a), reveals something of the tension animating the conduct of inquiry in recent years. It is important to treat both the substantive and political dimensions of this moment, since each potentiates and retards the other. In this chapter, I con-

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sider the pursuit of "alternative" perspectives (Hudson and Ozanne 1988) in consumer research not only as a clinical or evolutionary development of the discipline (a life cycle issue), but also as a social drama (Sherry 1986; Turner 1974) that might as well be construed as a revitalization movement (Wallace 1956).

Alternative Ways of Knowing

While the biases of this chapter should be evident, I will alert the reader to the perspective guiding this review. Rorty (1980) divides philosophy into "systematic and edifying" categories. Systematic philosophy—our central academic focus, grounded in epistemology—has advocated "knowing" as the master paradigm by which all human agency is limned. Knowing is characterized by beliefs so intrinsically persuasive that their justification is deemed unnecessary. Edifying philosophy revolves around skepticism of the unexamined claims of epistemology, and advocates a perpetual search for other "vocabularies" through which phenomena may be construed. It is just such an edifying philosophy that will permit consumer research to radiate adaptively into new niches (Belk 1987a; Holbrook 1987b; Tucker 1967; Sherry 1987a).

The term "alternative" is applied in this chapter to perspectives and methods in the service of skeptical search. Whether such alternatives merely supplement or eventually supplant conventional approaches, they are presented in this chapter as a complement to orthodoxy. As Peirce (1935–1936) observed, philosophy should

> . . . trust rather to the multitude and variety of its arguments than to the conclusiveness of any one. Its reasoning should not form a chain which is no stronger than its weakest link, but a cable whose fibers may be ever so slender, provided they are sufficiently numerous and intimately connected. (Vol. 5, p. 264)

This statement is echoed by Bateson (Bateson and Bateson 1987, p. 200) in his advocacy of "double description," a process intended to capture the "richest" knowledge about phenomena; myth *and* botany tell us more about trees than either perspective does alone. Gardner's (1978) use of Norse mythology to proselytize for "interpretive completeness," cited approvingly by Rodman (1987), is instructive:

> It was said in the old days that every year Thor made a circle around Middle-earth, beating back the enemies of order. Thor got older every year, and the circle occupied by gods and men grew smaller. The wisdom god, Woden, went out to the King of the trolls, got him in an armlock, and demanded to know of him how order might triumph over chaos. "Give me your left eye," said the King of the trolls, "and I'll tell you."
>
> Without hesitation, Woden gave up his left eye. "Now tell me."
>
> The troll said, "The secret is *"Watch with both eyes!"*

Seen in cross-cultural perspective, and denied its honorific—some (Berman 1984) would say hegemonic—status, "science" means merely "disciplined inquiry" (McCloskey 1985, p. 54). That is, any rigorously systematic conceptual framework—including those arising in the field generally glossed as "humanities"—that provides a "profounder or more adequate *knowledge of* what we already 'know' in a factual sense," is scientific (Howe 1960, pp. ix; xiv). McCloskey believes the hallmark of good and bad in learned discourse to be the "earnest and intelligent attempt to contribute to a conversation" (1985, p. 27). His rhetorical analysis of learned discourse has spread from economics (see especially Klamer, McCloskey, and Solow 1988) from whence our first consumer behavior constructs were borrowed, to others of the human sciences, where equally useful constructs are emerging (Nelson, Megill, and McCloskey 1988). If self-correction (or empirical vulnerability) is seen to be the key to responsible inquiry (Lett 1987), then the adoption of an alternative ethos should enhance our understanding of consumer behavior, and catalyze this disciplinary advance envisioned by some of its founders (Tucker 1967).

Our scholarly conversation, whether construed as a dialogue (Levy 1978) or a polylogue (Sherry 1988a), will be the livelier for its incorporation of other voices. The fear of "anarchy and paroxysms of self-expression" as potential consequences of alternative approaches to consumer behavior expressed by some researchers (Calder and Tybout 1987, p. 139)—intimations of Yeats's (1921) "Things fall apart; the center will not hold/Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world," are detectable here—is a predictable sociopsychological response of a maturing discipline. Thus, even as incontravertibly scientific an approach to ethnography as the one proposed by Werner and Schoepfle (1987a,b) can be rejected by gatekeepers whose own ethnocentrism and impoverished conceptual frameworks (Keown 1988) serve as stopgap measures to delay the sanctioning of pluralism. I envision a similar response to Bernard's (1988) efforts. (Interestingly enough, the Werner and Schoepfle [1987a,b] approach to ethnoscience has been criticized within anthropology as being uncritically or unreflectively positivistic [Briggs 1988]). The equally exaggerated concern—"Thou shalt not sit/With statisticians nor commit/A social science" (Auden 1946)—voiced by some alternative researchers (Belk's [1987b] lampoon being an implicit illustration) is likewise a predictable response to perceived complacency. Perhaps, as Nietzsche (1913, p. 3) suggested, our century is distinguished not by the triumph of science, but by the triumph of the scientific method over science. If this is the case, then it is time to promote the kind of "guerilla science" advocated by Cooper and Levine (1985). Social science can thus be understood as seeking discursive strategies that help us to resist power and keep conversations alive: "creating interpretive frames and enacting inquiries that provide more coherence with existing values, that help to enable collective action, and that offer mechanisms for transaction across disciplinary and institutional boundaries" (Shapiro 1988, p. 378). In this chapter, I hope to steer between the Scylla of positivist materialism and the Charybdis of romantic idealism (Brown 1987) to arrive at a simple affirmation of paradigmatic pluralism.

Postmodernism and Consumer Research

The need exists to cast alternative approaches in the semantic scheme of postneologisms. While the tempocentric "post" prefix is generally glossed as "contemporary," it is connotatively much richer in our culture of consumer research. Semantically, "post" conjures up images both military and mercantile; it hints at the siege mentality attending our theories and practices of trade. It suggests something of the coursing involved in our careers, and of the epistolary campaigns waged by outraged authors and disciplinary watchdogs against journal editors and conference chairs. Affixing "post" to an appropriate root is a worthy challenge.

Gellner (1985, p. 4) has observed that every "philosophical baby that is born alive" is either a "little positivist" or a "little Hegelian," and that the image that each of these sides has of the other is "simple and damning." Drawing from the works of Popper and Adorno, Gellner casts this opposition in emic terms as "an army of verbiage-intoxicated, pseudorebellious windbags, meeting a horde of inwardly vacuous, conformist, impotent Babbits" (1985, p. 6). The tone of this encounter suits much of the current exchange on alternative perspectives in consumer research, whether conducted through journal pages or at cocktail parties. While persuasive criticisms have been leveled against the positivist philosophy of science (Caldwell 1982; Haan et al. 1983; McCloskey 1985; McMullin 1988; Miller 1987; Ryan 1986; Woolgar 1988; see also Peter in this volume), sometimes in the service of methodological pluralism, it seems clear that the rumors of the death of logical positivism have been greatly exaggerated. Consequently, I am reluctant to affix the label "postpositivist" to the alternative perspectives and methods described in this chapter. Some of the approaches are based in or are refinements of positivism, some antedate positivism by millennia, and some are either actively antagonistic or entirely indifferent toward positivism. Rather, I prefer to label such alternatives as "postmodern," to link consumer research

with parallel developments in contiguous disciplines.

Postmodernism is a cross-disciplinary trend encouraging sensitivity to differences and tolerance of the incommensurable (Lyotard 1984, 1979). This trend challenges the hold of "specific totalizing visions" and the "general paradigmatic style of organizing research" over "fragmented scholarly communities" (Marcus and Fischer 1986, p. 8). Contextuality, texture, native perspectives, and outliers are significant postmodern considerations. Assumptions undergirding the validity of entrenched paradigms are called into question, prompting a reexamination of our notions of appropriate inquiry (Berman 1984; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Sherry 1987a; Shweder and Fiske 1986), and a search for models capable of incorporating the ambiguity and uncertainty of social life (Barrett 1984; Levine 1985; Sherry 1987a). Rhetoric of inquiry replaces logic of inquiry, in postmodern epistemology, by "pluralizing, incorporating, and contextualizing modern grounds of research—not by eliminating them" (Nelson 1988). Geertz's (1973) discussion of the refiguration of social thought captures the postmodern ethos now touching consumer research, while Anderson's and Venkatesan's (1987) cautionary essay on interdisciplinary borrowing alerts us to some of the perils of such refiguration.

Postmodern inquiry has often taken an "interpretive turn" (Rabinow and Sullivan 1987); hermeneutic social science, which has had a venerable past, has acquired a "new lease on life" (Haan et al. 1983). Whether this resurgence is a market correction that will restore texture and everyday phenomenology to a prominent position within consumer research, or a countercultural movement that will eventually coalesce into a subdiscipline of consumer research, the "interpretive" social science, which is providing models for the understanding of consumer behavior (for example, see O'Shaughnessy 1987), is also providing a lexicon that is potentially divisive. The adjective "interpretive" is alternately honorific (Hudson and Ozanne 1988) and pejorative (Calder and Tybout 1987). It is ultimately misleading, since "interpretation" is a fundamental activity of positivist inquiry (as is recognized by anyone who has conducted conjoint or discriminant analysis, administered projective tests, or otherwise massaged data). Indeed, Berger and Berry (1988, p. 165) have shown that "objectivity is not generally possible in statistics." The "nerve of interpretation" (Levy 1985, p. 81) being steeled by qualitative researchers has long been calmed by their quantitative counterparts. The theory-ladenness of scientific observation ensures that all of consumer research is an interpretive quest, and makes Frankel's (1987, p. 170) resignation eminently sensible: "It seems to me that if we can't get away from it, we might as well get on with it and do the work of interpretation as rigorously and honestly as we can." The forging of a postmodern science has begun in a number of disciplines (Griffin 1988), and its effects are being felt in our own. In keeping with the opportunities afforded by postmodern inquiry, and with the back to the future motif that characterizes much interdisciplinary borrowing, I employ the adjective "alternative" to characterize the perspectives and methods diffusing into consumer research from disciplines previously underrepresented in our inquiry (Belk, Zaltman et al. 1987; Hudson and Ozanne 1988). It is instructive to view these contributions as embedded in the sociopolitical context of contemporary consumer research.

POLITICIZATION OF PLURALISM

According to Turner (1974), a social drama is a unit of aharmonic or disharmonic process that arises in a conflict situation, for example, in market protectionism (Sherry 1986). Such drama is a contest between influential paradigm-bearers. The paradigms, and the rules for social action which they embody, are conventionally represented through metaphor. "Foundation" or "root" metaphors (Turner 1974, p. 28), that is, conceptual archetypes that structure our understanding of paradigms, are the vehicles through which protagonist and antagonist contend. Over the last five years, a fas-

cinating social drama has been unfolding in the theatre of consumer research. The protagonist has been variously construed as "positivism," "sophisticated falsificationism," "traditional" or "conventional" research; the antagonist has been billed as "interpretivism," "humanism," "naturalistic inquiry," or "alternative" research (Calder and Tybout 1987; Hirschman 1986; Hudson and Ozanne 1986; Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988). Whether staged as objective versus subjective, dispassionate versus passionate, or scientific versus artistic (Belk 1986), the drama has been well attended and promoted, its plot and characters being as often commented upon as its disciplinary significance. That this dissensus had not been formally examined in Association for Consumer Research Presidential addresses (Spiggle and Goodwin 1988), until Lutz (1989) broached the issue in 1988, is itself symbolic of the highly charged political milieu in which the social drama unfolds.

Social Drama and Revitalization

Recognizing that ancestral shoulders provide the perch for contemporary visionaries (Wallendorf and Belk 1988), I locate the watershed for consumer research in 1986. The work of scholars antedating this watershed, which I review in subsequent paragraphs, constitutes a collective "prologue" to our social drama. Following Turner (1974), the social drama in consumer research unfolds in four acts. In Act I, a publicly signalled *breach* in social relations occurs between influential paradigm-bearers. The influx of new disciplinary perspectives into consumer research, mirroring the succession of psychology in a discipline formerly dominated by economics, culminated in a set of keynote addresses that challenged the professional membership of the Association for Consumer Research to alter the course of inquiry in radical ways. Belk's (1987a) Presidential Address urged researchers to investigate "macro consumer behavior" along a number of explicit dimensions. Rogers's (1987) Fellows' Address also exhorted researchers to cast a broader epistemological net by incorporating tenets of the critical school of social science into their regimes. Each of these addresses was delivered in the wake of the Consumer Behavior Odyssey, a well-funded and well-publicized transcontinental, interdisciplinary naturalistic inquiry into consumption broadly construed (Wallendorf and Belk 1988). The Odyssey was designed, executed, and marketed as an alternative both to experiment- and survey-driven research, and to research oriented to managerial practice. It became a controversial political vehicle, part vision quest, part paradigm shift, the published record of which has just begun to emerge (Belk 1987c; Holbrook 1987c; Kassarjian 1987; Sherry 1987a).

In Act II, a *crisis* supervenes and threatens to escalate. The breach is widened to become coextensive with a dominant cleavage in social relations between actors. Again, I locate the crisis in the events of 1986. Three events in particular marked this crisis. The publication of an article by Holbrook and Grayson (1986), a semiotic analysis of cinematic consumption that may well have been "the single most reviewed paper in the annals of *JCR*" (Kassarjian, personal communication), proved to be as controversial among readers as it was among reviewers, and it intensified the debate about the nature of consumer research. Second, the program of the Annual Conference of the Association for Consumer Research contained an unprecedented number of "nontraditional" research presentations, prompting guarded optimism in one camp of researchers and outspoken skepticism in the other. Finally, the deliberations attending the appointment of a new editor to the *Journal of Consumer Research* unfolded in an environment of heated gossip and considerable trepidation, as the appointee was widely believed to be able to influence profoundly the direction of the discipline for years to come. Such belief is well founded (Cummings and Frost 1987). As symbols become most potent under conditions of uncertainty, the political agendas of the candidates were emically characterized along a continuum from "dog food managerialism" to "weird science," with each research camp fearing the worst if its paradigm-bearer were to lose the nod. Together with the

solicitation of papers for a tract on "Alternative Ways of Knowing" of the upcoming AMA Winter Educators' Conference (Belk et al. 1987), the success of the first International Conference on Marketing and Semiotics (Umiker-Sebeok 1987; Mick 1988), and the recommendation by (and the subsequent rejection of) a publications committee to the ACR Board of Directors of a proposal to launch two new journals that would broaden the scope of consumer research, these events of 1986 constituted a crisis that widened the rift between positivist and nonpositivist camps in the discipline.

Redressive action takes place in Act III of the social drama. Such action serves to dampen the escalating crisis. Turner (1974) maintains that pragmatism and symbolism reach their fullest expression during this phase. Significantly, social change is most profoundly affected in Act III. Once again, multiple events constitute the adjustive mechanism at work in consumer research. The reconstitution of the editorial review board and the redrafting of the review philosophy and style sheet of the *Journal of Consumer Research* created an environment more tolerant of postmodern research. The designation of McCracken's (1986) theoretical article on culture and consumption as the winner of the inaugural "best contribution" to the *Journal of Consumer Research* award delivered an impactful message to the field at large. Further, submission of Hirschman's (1989) edited volume on "interpretive" consumer research as the first in a series of monographs to be considered by the publications committee of the Association for Consumer Research served as an important sanctioning of postmodern approaches. The completion of the Odyssey monograph (Belk 1990) should consolidate this gain. Finally, the inclusion of the present chapter in this handbook is a recognition of the promises such postmodern approaches hold for the evolution of the discipline of consumer research.

The social drama concludes in Act IV with *reintegration or irreparable schism.* The former outcome is presaged by a journal whose "facelift is not entirely cosmetic" (Lutz 1988b, p. i), by annual conferences whose purviews grow increasingly wide, and by a longitudinal if irregular kind of presidential oscillation across the camps in the Association for Consumer Research. The latter outcome will be characterized by the rise of alternative journals and proliferation of monographs, by the creation and joint sponsorship of "separate but equal" or "specialty" conferences, and by the eventual founding of a new professional society. Either of these outcomes will be catalyzed by the escalating interest in consumer behavior in disciplines such as anthropology (Appadurai 1986a; McCracken 1988a; Spencer-Wood 1987), sociology (Campbell 1987; Mukerji 1983), history (Agnew 1988; Fox and Lears 1983; Macfarlane 1987; McCracken 1987; Schama 1988), semiotics (Umiker-Sebeok 1987), and popular culture (Hine 1986), among others. The rise of "K-Mart realism" in contemporary American literature will soon bring literary critics more directly into the orbit of consumer research, Stern's (1988a,b,c) literary evaluations of advertising having provided them the requisite sanction. Work emerging at the intersection of these disciplines, such as Brown's (1987) treatment of agoraphobia and related consumption disorders, Culver's (1988) discussion of the paradox of enlightened consumption in American child lore, Stewart's (1984) essays on longing, Bolwby's (1981) exploration of window shopping, and Belk's (1987d) hagiography of Santa Claus, suggests something of the synergistic potential of consumer research. Whether the discipline will be able to radiate adaptively to new niches by incorporating "new" methods and perspectives into its orientation, or whether it will elect a more circumscribed, parochial course and thereby help balkanize the study of consumer behavior, depends largely upon the productivity of postmodern researchers, and the integrity of the peer review process so insightfully articulated by Morgan (1987).

Some observers may view the postmodern movement in consumer research as a collective form of reactance, wherein particular individuals negotiate their own life crises by individuating in response to the perceived excessiveness of disciplinary compliance attempts. Others may cast the movement as a "ritual of rebellion" (Gluckman 1956) in which a group of re-

searchers protests against conventional disciplinary order and questions the established principles of the discipline. These rituals ultimately result in the reaffirmation of the status quo. My preference is to view postmodern alternatives collectively as a revitalization movement (Wallace 1986), mounted deliberately and consciously by researchers to create a more satisfying "culture." Revitalization movements arise under conditions of high stress for individuals and general disillusionment with a distorted cultural gestalt (Sherry 1986). Spread initially by charisma and commitment, the principles of such movements are eventually routinized if the new paradigm provides adequate stress reduction. With the increasing availability and variety of published postmodern research, the charismatic dimension of the movement will fade, no longer to be seen as an epiphenomenon of a Levy, a Holbrook, or a Belk. Just as important as published exemplars of alternative research to the reshaping of the discipline is the programmatic drafting of frontier research issues. The conversion of "getting there from here" from prospect to practice will be greatly facilitated by such guidance. Thus, the alternative research reviewed in this chapter should be judged in good measure by its ability to inspire additional inquiry.

AN OVERVIEW OF LITERATURES

The following pages present a very circumscribed view of postmodern developments in consumer research. The discussion is focussed principally on material available in sources conventionally consulted by consumer researchers, which results in bias toward the field which has regarded consumer behavior as a subdiscipline: marketing. In fact, scholars such as Belk (1987b) and Ryan (1986) have suggested that a discipline of consumer research does not yet exist. Nonetheless, in addition to those borrowed constructs imported by cosmopolitan consumer researchers, I have included work in parallel disciplines whose universes of discourse suggest no awareness of the very existence of consumer research sui generis. Further, many of the authors identified subsequently have incorporated their own histories-of-ideas and programmatic regimes into their texts, as befits the kind of frontier research that unfolds under discontinuous disciplinary precedents. Thus the reader is urged to consult the references cited in the articles I identify: given the recency of postmodern developments in consumer research, the historical value of these citations is eclipsed by their potential impact upon the direction of future research. Estimating such impact is fraught with difficulty, but one of these postmodern alternatives—Levy's (1981) article on consumer mythology—has already been designated a marketing "megawork" (Robinson and Adler 1987).

My overview of postmodern alternatives is sketched in broad strokes. First, I review the critical thought that has fueled the search for alternatives in consumer research. Second, I explore some culturological dimensions of postmodern developments, focussing specifically on anthropological, sociological, and historical modes of inquiry typically slighted in conventional consumer research. Third, I examine the fascination of postmodern consumer researchers with the communication of meaning, dwelling in particular upon macro, structural, and semiotic treatments of consumption. Finally, I describe some of the contending correctives in consumer research as shaped by two emerging vehicles: naturalistic inquiry stemming from the Consumer Behavior Odyssey (Belk 1990) and humanistic inquiry associated with interpretive consumer research (Hirschman 1989). The review is based primarily upon published sources, but numerous working papers are cited as well. Readers will recognize immediately that I have slighted such fields as philosophy, aesthetics, literary criticism, and popular culture studies, among others. Lowenstein's (1985) study of the impact of the marketplace on the evolution of the bibliographic ego, existing as it does at the intersection of many of these disciplines, is an example of the kind of relevant work that I will not undertake to review in this chapter. Neither do I treat geography, although its relevance to consumer research (see for example Sack 1988) continues

to grow. As the perspective of these fields are drawn increasingly into the orbit of consumer research, I trust a companion piece to my present effort will straightaway be constructed. I have limited my overview to those fields which I believe have impacted consumer research most directly, and with which I have some immediate familiarity.

Critical Perspectives

Although there is probably no researcher who has not lamented the failure of the discipline to adopt his or her own orientation and approaches as its own, there have been relatively few thoroughgoing and programmatic critical overviews of consumer research. The evaluative framework proposed by Sheth (1982) is an exceptional examination of the shortages and surpluses in consumer research along the dimensions of focus, process, and purpose. Sheth finds our knowledge of group behavior and non-problem-solving behavior limited, our theorizing guided by constructs that are descriptive and borrowed rather than normative and native, and our purpose turned to managerial rather than disciplinary ends. Critics such as Zielinski and Robertson (1982) fault the field for its failure to be interdisciplinary and integrative, while Kassarjian (1982) bemoans the "fragmented" nature of the discipline. Belk's (1984) call for attention to consuming rather than buying, and his reminder of the importance of context, is just now being heeded. Jacoby's (1978) satirical review of the consumer research literature remains timely today. The irony of this timeliness is striking. These initial, insightful calls for reform have generated little empirical enthusiasm, but seem to have inspired a new wave of critical reflection, which may in turn prompt the kind of empirical inquiry that will further advance the discipline.

As a stepping stone toward the eventual creation of an outlet that might be called the *Journal of Radical Marketing Thought,* Firat, Dholakia, and Bagozzi (1987) have compiled a volume of essays to catalyze innovative research into marketing and consumer behavior. The perceived need for such a journal is as remarkable as the substantive issues addressed in the volume. This book is itself a lineal descendent of the Dholakia and Arndt (1985) collection—notable in the present case for its critique of the ideology of consumer choice (Dholakia and Dholakia 1985) and its recognition of alternative approaches to consumer research (Benton 1985)—purporting to challenge the course of conventional marketing. The editors' lament that the implicit assumptions that regard a certain worldview, historic juncture, and social system as perpetual (1987, p. xii) have gone largely uncriticized in the two disciplines, is an accurate one. Further, the prescription for radicalizing the disciplines, synthesized from the volume's contributors is provocatively stated: Scholars must infuse humanistic values into their work, foster enlightened, reasoned practices, adopt macrosystemic perspectives, use comprehensive causal models, develop holistic and integrative frameworks, and deepen the historical basis of investigation (1987, p. 374).

While each of the essays in this volume has implications for consumer behavior, the editors have bracketed several chapters in particular as consumption-centered. Holbrook (1987d) has insightfully considered the neglect of introspection as a research strategy, experience as a research focus, and narrative as an expository vehicle in the discipline of consumer research. Sherry (1987b) has adopted a cultural criticism perspective to explore the ideology of consumption and attendant dysfunctions, arguing the need for a canon of propriety to guide such directed intervention programs as contemporary marketing. The meanings of consumption as shaped by marketing practice are explored by Moorman (1987). That consumer behavior is critical to self-actualization, but that a radical reordering of the individual's relation to consumption processes is necessary to avert the harmful psychic consequences of unreflective false consciousness is detailed by Kilbourne (1987). Benton's (1987) account of the succession of the culture of production by the culture of consumption has made apparent the wisdom of reorienting marketing according to traditional social criticism and aligning the discipline with other contemporary social change

movements, in the service of the search for an improved quality of life. Firat's (1987) concern with macro consumption phenomena has prompted his discussion of the "Structure of Available Alternatives for Consumption," a socially constructed framework he believes determines consumer choice, and whose infrastructural and superstructural determinants themselves are poorly understood. Belk's (1987b) modest proposal "for creating a discipline that actually investigated consumer behavior," cited at the beginning of my essay, serves as a capstone summary and criticism of the field that the Firat, Dholakia, and Bagozzi (1987) volume seeks to radicalize.

Of the many correctives proposed by researchers concerned with broadening the discipline, two in particular, one ontological, the other methodological, have helped catalyze postmodern developments in consumer research. The first of these is the advocacy of research into hedonic and experiential dimensions of consumer behavior (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). This advocacy has fostered inquiry into phenomenological dimensions of consumption previously slighted by consumer researchers, and challenged the hegemony of the information-processing perspective. By focussing on the multisensory, fantasy, and emotive aspects of consumer behavior, by offering a range of propositions on issues such as mental constructs, product classes, product usages, and individual differences, and by complementing existing models of consumption through an emphasis on experience, these authors have extended the depth inquiry begun by their motivation research forebears. They have broadened their central constructs and suggested techniques for probing dimensions of consumer experience (Hirschman and Holbrook 1986). Their perseverance has helped legitimize the search for balance in understanding consumer behavior.

The second proposed corrective is the advocacy of a critical relativist perspective of methodology (Anderson 1986, 1988b). This critique of the ways in which knowledge is generated and evaluated in consumer research has challenged positivist orthodoxy and suggested that conventional workbench issues more rigorously pursued would advance the discipline appreciably. Anderson's revisionism has prompted considerable debate across research camps (Cooper 1987; Calder and Tybout 1987; Siegel 1988). He has also set the tone for debate within the emerging circle of nonpositivist researchers, as Hirschman's (1986) version of humanistic inquiry was dissected shortly after publication in a set of widely circulated working papers (Belk and Wallendorf 1987; Brinberg and Kumar 1987; Sherry 1987c; see also Wallendorf and Belk 1988). That dissensus has emerged simultaneously with alternative perspectives is itself a persuasive argument against the reifying of diverse approaches into an "interpretive" paradigm. The naturalistic inquiry espoused by Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf (1988), itself informed by the critical perspective, awaits its own critical reception. The broad-based assault on traditional consumer research methods has drawn from fields as far flung as hermeneutics (Ryan and Bristor 1987; Ozanne and Hinson 1987), Austrian economics (Boettke 1987), mythology (Speck 1987), and theology (Kavanaugh 1981; Mascarenhas 1987; Tamari 1987). This exploration of "new" methods and "alternative" ontologies is one of the hallmarks of postmodern inquiry in consumer research. It has culminated in the examination of ways by which consumption is employed as a vehicle to achieve transcendent experience (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989).

Culturological Perspectives

In contrast to the distinct cast that cognitive social psychology has imparted to contemporary consumer research, a macro-orientation has arisen over the past half decade that seeks a more comprehensive and embedded understanding of consumer behavior. This orientation is shaped chiefly by anthropological, sociological, and historical viewpoints, which are diffusing into consumer research, carried by newcomers to the discipline and imported by

natives seeking wider interpretive frames. Work representative of each of these viewpoints and channels is sampled in the following pages.

Anthropology. Initially touted by Winick (1961) and championed by Levy (1978), the anthropological perspective began its sustained diffusion into consumer research with Sherry's (1983) modeling of the process of gift exchange and call for ethnographic inquiry. In subsequent cognate articles treating the two disciplines, Sherry (1987d, 1988b) has examined the history and sources of mutual neglect, identified areas of conceptual and empirical compatibility, described the major anthropological research orientations and ethnographic methodology, and laid out programmatic research directives based upon a comprehensive anthropological framework. He has also explored the utility of the culture concept in consumer behavior (Sherry 1986b). Applications of an economic anthropological perspective to issues such as the globalization and development (Sherry 1988c) of a folkloric perspective to word-of-mouth and complaint behavior (Sherry 1984), of a linguistic perspective to market pitching (1988d), and of a symbolic anthropological perspective to brand loyalty (Sherry 1986c) have helped demonstrate the breadth of relevance each discipline has for the other. Ethnographic analyses of flea markets (Sherry 1988a), farmers' markets (Heisley, McGrath, and Sherry 1988), and gift shops (Sherry and McGrath 1988; McGrath 1989) have consolidated this demonstration.

Contributing to the establishment of this anthropological beachhead is the historically and symbolically focussed work of McCracken (1988a). His timely volume is the culmination of numerous inquiries into the nature of material culture, the most highly regarded of which (McCracken 1986) has explored some of the mechanisms that effect the transfer of meaning from the categories of the culturally constituted world to consumer goods themselves, and from thence to consumers. In cognate literature reviews (1987, 1988b), McCracken has described modern consumption as a historical artifact, evaluating the consumer revolution in terms of the cultural, sociological, psychological, political, intellectual, marketing, and consumer contexts in which it unfolded. His discussion of the evocative power of objects (1988c) as a bridge to displaced meaning, of the consistent complementarity of goods that both enables and constrains choice (1988d), and of the role of goods in cultural continuity and change (1988e) has deepened our understanding of material culture and suggested novel avenues of research. Whether dealing with the social symbolics of patina (1988f), of clothing (1988g), or of collections (1988h), McCracken has emphasized the capacity of goods to mobilize behavior.

A third stream of anthropological inquiry into consumer behavior is the cross-cultural investigations of Arnould and Wilk. In a jointly authored paper (1984), they have explored the diffusion of Western consumer goods into the ritual orbit of nonwestern societies, noting the difference in social dynamics between commercial and gift economies. This issue was subsequently examined individually, in Arnould's (1989) revision and refinement of diffusion theory, and Wilk's (1988) examination of the micro- and macro-level implications of the diffusion of American baseball. Family decision making in cross-cultural perspective has also been examined (Wilk 1987). In an early paper, Arnould (1983) had called for the explication of intersubjective, phenomenological experience, rather than the scaling and operationalizing of variables characteristic of consumer research. His collaborative investigation of object attachment and social linkage (Wallendorf and Arnould 1988), in effect, has answered that call through its use of a mixed research design to capture the richness of context attending consumers' involvement with objects.

Anthropological inquiry paralleling and potentiating the work in progress within consumer research has begun to accelerate. A call for an anthropology of consumption was formally issued by Douglas (1976), whose communications theory of goods was elaborated later (Douglas and Isherwood 1979) into a fully articulated semiotic framework, which equated

consumption with the creation of intelligibility, with power relations, and with the manipulation of periodicity. Sahlins has also (1976) adopted a semiotic perspective in his explication and critique of contemporary Western consumption; his discussion of object codes and the totemic dimension of consumer behavior has proven especially intriguing to anthropologists working within the discipline of consumer research. Mintz's (1982, 1985) seminal treatments of the social dynamics and cross-cultural impact attending the diffusion of sugar, including the politics of overconsumption, as well as his provocative speculation that profoundly compulsive behavior frequently masquerades as freedom of choice (1987a), have grounded the semiotic perspective in biology and history. The inquiry into the social life of things launched by Appadurai (1986a) and his colleagues has just begun diffusing into consumer research. In particular, Appadurai's (1986b) treatment of the shaping of consumption by the politics of valuation, Kopytoff's (1986) call for a cultural biography of things that would capture the range and depth of consumer-object relations, and Gell's (1986) description of the transformation of consumption in developing economies have immediate relevance to current work in consumer research.

The concern anthropologists once had for the histories of things (Mintz 1987b) has been renewed, with Wolf's (1982) volume on world system dynamics being a particularly successful instance. Object-specific explorations by anthropologists—cloth, for instance, has fascinated researchers (Bayley 1986, Schneider 1987)—which are an inevitable outgrowth of the study of material culture (Babcock 1986, Clark 1987, Schlereth 1982, Shanks and Tilley 1987, Spenser-Wood 1987b), promise to contribute to the nascent work on consumer-object relations in consumer research (Belk 1988a; Belk et al. 1988; Kelly 1987; McCracken 1988i; Shimp and Madden 1988). So also does the historico-philosophical treatment of the role of the object in the revision of the theory of consumption developed by Miller (1987). The significance of consumption in archaeological perspective (Brumfiel 1987; Hodder 1989) grows increasingly apparent.

Perrin's (1988) sensitive and detailed accounts of the levels of social setting in which consumption is embedded, coupled with Newman's (1988) examination of lifestyle degradation in the contemporary United States, have provided a compelling new agenda for researchers interested in the situational dimensions of consumer behavior. Collaborative work between anthropologists and consumer researchers (e.g., Heskel and Semenik 1983; Heisley and Holmes 1987) has also begun to fulfill important bridging functions. Finally, volumes produced by the Society for Economic Anthropology (Plattner 1985; Rutz and Orlove 1988) have begun to address consumer behavior issues, albeit within traditional field venues. Such volumes will undoubtedly accelerate the shift in anthropological focus to contemporary industrial consumption settings.

Sociology. Acknowledging the scattered and uneven precedents for a sociology of consumption, Nicosia and Mayer (1976) have proposed a conceptual framework that recognizes the social embeddedness of consumer behavior, and have illustrated the practicality of an approach unmoored from individual decision making. However, programmatic sociological research into consumption of the kind advocated by Robertson and Zielinski (1982)—a "key perspectives" approach of eminent utility—has not progressed appreciably. The investigation, prompted by Rogers's (1976) examination of new product adoption and diffusion, by Gatignon and Robertson (1985), is one notable exception; Coleman's (1983) work on social class is another.

The principal proponents and practitioners of sociologically informed consumer research have been Zaltman and his colleagues. An early paper (Zaltman and Wallendorf 1977), which sampled such neglected topics as social roles, societal level analysis, collective decision making, demography, lifestyle, social class, and illegal exchange, coupled with both a textbook (Zaltman and Wallendorf 1983) and a reader

(Wallendorf and Zaltman 1984), which devoted considerable attention to social dimensions of consumption, have imparted impetus to sociological research emerging within the discipline. Advocacy of "heretical" perspectives (Zaltman and Bonoma 1979) that facilitate discovery of "hidden events" (Zaltman 1983) underlying consumption patterns has reached fruition in the postmodern climate of consumer research. Studies of assimilation and acculturation (O'Guinn, Lee, and Faber 1985; Reilly and Wallendorf 1984, 1987; Wallendorf and Reilly 1982, 1983), of ethnic affiliation (Deshpande, Hoyer, and Donthu 1986) and innovativeness (Hirschman 1981), of social class (Fisher 1987), and of metatheoretical bias (Deshpande 1983, 1984; Haas 1986; Hirschman 1985; Redmond and Wallendorf 1984; Tetreault 1987; Zaltman and Price 1984) have stemmed directly from this advocacy. Zaltman's sociological perspective has been complemented indirectly by that of Howie Becker (1979, 1982, for example), whose championing of photography as a research technique has begun to have an impact on the field through the work of Heisley (Heisley and Levy 1985; Heisley, McGrath, and Sherry 1988a) and Wallendorf (Wallendorf and Arnould 1988; Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988; Wallendorf and Westbrook 1985).

Several sociological approaches in particular have been proposed as "alternative" methods for exploring consumer behavior. Ethnomethodology has been espoused by Spiggle and Sanders (1983), while Sanders (1985, 1987, 1988) has demonstrated the usefulness of ethnographic methods in complementing conventional survey research. Symbolic interactionism has been applied to such issues as discipline building (Prus 1987; Prus and Frisby 1987), subcultural coding (Durgee 1986a), and consumer-object relations (Solomon 1983). Phenomenology—an area I view as a philosophical clinical zone between psychology and sociology (Churchill and Wertz 1984)—has been used to enhance researchers' interviewing and interpretation skills (Durgee 1987a, 1987b) to explore consumer-object relations (Myers 1985), to probe the psychology of buying (Wertz and Greenhut 1985), to evaluate emergent trends (Mruck 1985), and to explicate marketing practice (Fennell 1985). Durgee (1986b, 1988; Durgee and Stuart 1987) has used his sociological perspective to nurture a variant of motivation research among marketing practitioners. Content analytic approaches to consumption phenomena, such as those employed by Spiggle (1986) and Belk (1987c) to study comic strips and comic books, by Belk and Pollay (1985) to study advertising, and by Spiggle (1987) to study shopping lists, have been sociologically informed. Prus's investigations (1984, 1985, 1986a, 1986b) of relationship management, pricing, sales, and trust, each of which has employed participant observation and interviewing as principal methods, have influenced postmodern consumer researchers. His volumes on the interpersonal dimensions of sales interactions (Prus 1989a) and ethnographic approaches to marketing (Prus 1989b) have a similar impact. His newsletter *Marketplace Exchange* has proven to be a valuable nexus of information exchange among sociologically inclined consumer researchers.

Sociological investigation ongoing outside the boundaries of consumer research promises to shape the reorientation of our field. Gary Becker's (1976, 1981) economic perspective of social dynamics has heartened some researchers and alienated others, but it has influenced significantly the way we construe consumer interactions. Sociologists have figured prominently in reevaluations of the nature of advertising (Barthel 1988; Goffman 1976; MacCannell 1987; Schudson 1984). Rogers's work on Silicon Valley (Rogers and Lawron 1984) is among the few grounded studies upon which a meaningful investigation of corporate culture will eventually be based. Mukerji (1983) has demonstrated convincingly that mass consumption antedates the development of capitalism, which in turn will help liberate the study of consumption from marketing-bound conceptions. In fact, the very nature of consumer behavior itself has been provocatively and persuasively redefined by Campbell (1987), whose discussion of "modern autonomous imaginative hedonism" as the engine of consumption has received an

enthusiastic hearing from postmodern consumer researchers. Ewen's (1988) intriguing and wide-ranging examination of the semiotics of design with particular attention to the concept of "style" contributes to this redefinition. The culture-critical perspective of consumer behavior advanced by Williams (1981), coupled with the normative implications of Etzioni's (1988) deontological critique of neopositivist economics, provide the kind of integration needed for an effective reorientation of this kind to occur. Bourdieu's (1984) survey of middle-class consumer behavior in France, a species of social psychoanalysis that explores the linkages of lifestyle patterns with class-conditioned cultural competence, has demonstrated the value of subjecting reputedly generalizable constructs to local scrutiny. The emerging subdiscipline of consumer-object relations is being catalyzed by sociologists such as Rochberg-Holton (1986). The rise of visual sociology (see, for example, recent issues of the *Journal of Visual Sociology* and *Visual Anthropology)* is abetting this emergence. Work on the phenomenology of sales interactions (Pinch and Clark 1986; Clark and Pinch 1987), of financial markets (Adler and Adler 1984), and of auctions (Smith 1986) has gradually diffused into consumer research (Sherry 1988a). Finally, gift giving has reemerged as a focus of sociological attention (Cheal 1988). With their capstone essay on cultural sociology, Wuthnow and Witten (1988) provide consumer researchers a point of entry into a number of research agendas of importance in the postmodern climate.

History. Fullerton's (1987a) eloquent discussion of the poverty of ahistorical analysis in contemporary marketing thought is readily generalizable to the field of consumer research. Our lack of attention to "complex flux" and "uniqueness" of consumption phenomena in time, and our unexamined belief in "uniformitarianism" (Fullerton 1987a, p. 98, p. 103) have been critical disciplinary shortcomings. His debunking of the "catastrophic" and "continuity" models of evolution upon which conventional marketing history has rested, and his introduction of a "complex flux" model that conforms more precisely to known facts (Fullerton 1988), suggests that our understanding of consumption may be severely time-bound as well. Mager and Helgeson (1987) have helped direct our attention to the changing cultural forces that have shaped some of our conceptions of consumption. Kumcu's (1987a) succinct comparison of historical method with conventional positivism and his assessment of the benefits of historical analysis have provided consumer researchers with a useful introduction to the field. Savitt's (1980) overview is similarly instructive. With the institutionalization of Michigan State University's annual "Workshop on Historical Research in Marketing" (see volumes by Hollander and Standley 1983, and Hollander and Nevett 1985, for examples), and with the growing significance of the annual Macromarketing Conference, we can expect the historical investigation of consumer behavior to accelerate.

Several recent tutorial articles have contributed to this acceleration. Firat (1987) has examined several historiographical traditions—the *Annales* school, the hermeneutic perspective, and Marxian analysis—for the light to be shed on consumption phenomena that do not lend themselves to probing by experiment or survey. His historically based critique of positivist inquiry (Firat 1988a) and his call for the founding of a historically grounded discipline to study needs (Firat 1988b) have amplified researchers' dissatisfaction with synchronic perspective. Fullerton (1987b) has continued his critique of positivist inquiry in a useful sketch of German historicism, which details both the philosophical assumptions and disciplinary goals of the school, as well as their implications for consumer research. Kumcu's (1987b) application of historical perspective to consumer behavior, with particular regard to retailing systems, is a further challenge to conventional positivist inquiry. The historical perspective of advertising issues presented by Pollay (1986, 1987a, 1987b) and critiqued by Holbrook (1987c) has helped shape the introspective disciplinary climate developing in consumer research. Pollay's (1987c) ethnohistorical meditative case study of his becoming an advertising archivist has contributed

to a psychohistorical introspective tradition emerging within the discipline (Holbrook 1988d). Finally, in an essay combining workbench suggestions with programmatic research directives, Rassuli and Hollander (1987) have provided some historical grounding for what may become one of the discipline's most productive new avenues of inquiry: comparative studies.

If we accept the premise that the past is a foreign country (Lowenthal 1985), the merger of historical and cross-cultural studies into a comparative perspective of consumer behavior is readily understandable. A volume of research edited by Tan and Sheth (1985) has demonstrated the multistrandedness of this merger. The advocacy of a philosophy of contextualization (Engel 1985) has called our attention to ethnocentric and tempocentric biases that have characterized consumer research. The impending bifurcation of consumer research into pure and applied disciplines (Sheth 1985) as a result of historical forces impacting marketing is a further testimony to the tumultuous nature of the postmodern environment. The "consumer revolution" discussed by McCracken (1985) may well have a twentieth-century analog in the work of postmodern consumer researchers. The potential discontinuity and aimlessness of consumer research projected by Helgeson, Mager, and Kluge (1985) in the face of the current research environment can be averted by viewing postmodern developments in historical perspective, and by linking these developments both to antecedent research and to each other as the postmodern tradition emerges. Thus, whether research is focussed on cultural area or country, on ethnicity or nationality, or on substantive or methodological issues, as are the sixty-odd papers in the Tan and Sheth (1985) volume, an historically informed comparative perspective of consumer behavior can become a unifying principle within the discipline. Kaufman's (1987) study of marketing in Han dynasty China is a step in this direction.

Three volumes in particular are evidence of increasing interest in such comparative perspectives. Although each is focussed upon marketing—one on "broadening" the discipline (Shapiro and Walle 1988), the others on applying the discipline to economic development (Kumcu and Firat 1988; Littlefield and Csath 1988)—a number of the contributors deal explicitly with consumer behavior. Historical and macro-level dimensions, and to a lesser extent cross-cultural dimensions, of consumer behavior are treated in the Shapiro and Walle (1988) volume. Consumption patterns in transitional societies and their managerial implications are discussed in some depth in the Kumcu and Firat (1988) volume. The essays in the Littlefield and Csath (1988) volume, although terse and primarily driven by their applications, illustrate something of the cross-cultural diversity both of consumer behaviors and analytic interpretation. Each of these three contributions presages a return to the kind of comparative contextuality that will permit our understanding of consumption to grow more comprehensive.

As with the anthropological and sociological traditions I have already considered, historical inquiry into consumer behavior being conducted beyond the disciplinary boundaries of consumer research is continuing apace. McCracken's (1987, 1988b) cognate reviews are the best single introduction to this historical work, and obviate the need for extended discussion in this chapter. However, a number of particular treatments deserve recognition for the impact they are having on contemporary consumer research. An edited volume of essays on the "culture of consumption" by Fox and Lears (1983) has helped fuel much critical reflection among consumer researchers (Dholakia and Sherry 1987; Sherry 1987b). Macfarlane's provocative volumes on individualism (1978) and the culture of capitalism (1987), each of which is a stimulating exercise in anthropologically informed social history, have contributed to this critical reflection. Agnew's (1986) examination of the "inescapably dialectical" relationship between commerciality and theatricality has greatly facilitated exploration of the experiential dimension of consumer behavior. Our understanding of the evolution of contemporary consumer behavior has been shaped by the historical accounts of Braudel

(1979a, 1979b, 1979c), McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb (1982), and Williams (1982), while scholars such as de Certeau (1984), Foucault (1970), and White (1978) have influenced our notions of the critical purposes toward which historical inquiry itself may be fashioned. Numerous historical case studies have begun to have a cumulative impact upon the field. Geary's (1986) examination of the medieval consumption of sacred relics, Cassanelli's (1986) investigation of quasilegal drug consumption in Africa, and Reddy's (1986) exploration of the adoption of capitalist modes of evaluating commodities in postrevolutionary France have each demonstrated the value of ethnohistorical approaches to understanding consumer behavior. Schama's (1987) meticulous examination of the multileveled role played by consumption in Dutch ethnogenesis—in particular, the anxieties of superabundance and the ordeal of prosperity—has methodological and culture critical implications for consumer researchers beyond its sheer thickness of description of a historical epoch. So also does Apple's (1987) investigation of the "commercialization and medicalization" of infant care.

Communicative Perspectives

Much of the postmodern research into consumer behavior has focussed on symbolic communication. This focus has revealed something of the mutually constituting nature of consumption and communication. Generally speaking, postmodern consumer researchers have adopted three approaches in interpreting the significance of communication. A macro-level perspective has been used to explore the ways in which symbolism is shaped and reflected by the culture in which it is embedded. The "packing" process by which symbols are infused with meaning is of interest here. A structural perspective has been used to interpret the significance of that embeddedness. From this viewpoint, the "deep structure" or symbolic infrastructure of a culture is at issue. A semiotic perspective has been used as an omnibus framework to explore all manners of symbolic behavior. This perspective has served as a conceptual cachement basin for issues ranging from cognitive process to cultural movement as each impacts upon meaning. While these perspectives inevitably and inexorably intergrade, I have selected a number of works that represent each of these approaches to illustrate something of the range and diversity of the postmodern exploration of consumption and communication.

Macro Perspectives. The macro-level or "cultural studies" approach adopted by a number of contemporary consumer researchers has its roots in a counter-Enlightment shift away from notions of rationality as objective to a critique of ideology that explores the antecedents to and consequences of thought control in consumer culture (Alvesson 1987; Christians 1986; Grossberg 1983; Rabinow and Sullivan 1987). A triangulated reading of Geertz's (1964) essay on ideology as a cultural system, Real's (1986) indispensable review of critical and institutional theories of communication, and Carey's (1988a,b) volumes on the multistranded relationship of culture and communication reveals the dense interpenetration of scholarly traditions (whose disentanglement is beyond the scope of my essay) that has culminated in the recent desire of some consumer researchers to move beyond "the narrow concern for empirically measuring media effects" (Real 1986, p. 477), which I construe as the micro-orientation, to the study of the cultural significance of communication. This work has been largely confined to studies of advertising, although there are indications that the inquiry is being extended to other dimensions of persuasive communication. For example, even such ostensibly innocuous vehicles as "Sesame Street" have been evaluated for their efficacy in perpetuating the hegemonic character of consumer culture (Mattelart, Delcourt, and Mattelart 1984, pp. 97–98).

Leiss (1976) and his colleagues have been the principal contributors to the emerging macro-level perspective in consumer research to date. By defining the "real" importance of contemporary advertising as "the privileged discourse for the circulation of messages and social cues about the interplay between persons and ob-

jects" (Leiss, Kline, and Jhally 1986, p. 47), these scholars have reoriented the plane of inquiry to a sociocultural level. Their discussion of the commodification of consumers, of the evolution of advertising as both a unique cultural form and a model for the entire field of communications, of consumption as an articulated communication system, of basic advertising formats, and, most important, of the cultural frames by which the significance of goods is ultimately construed, has empowered consumer researchers to broaden the scope of legitimate inquiry. Their provocative assertion that advertising is written to achieve test results rather than sales results (1986, p. 138) is itself enough to fuel a powerful new research regime. Jhally's (1987) subsequent investigation of the meaning of commodities in mass-mediated society—in particular his treatment of compulsion and alienation and his resurrection of advertising-as-religion construals—has further incentivized researchers to grapple with meaning and significance.

Several consumer researchers have extended this probing into the social significance of advertising. Sherry (1987e) has employed a cultural systems perspective to interpret advertising as a way of knowing, a way of discerning, and a way of creating meaning that structures experience semiotically and semiologically into distinct patterns. The shortcomings of information processing-based models of advertising have been evaluated by McCracken (1987b), who has advocated a cultural perspective capable of viewing advertising as one conduit in the transfer of meaning from the cultural world to consumer goods (McCracken 1986). Belk and Pollay (1985b) have presented a historical analysis of the ways in which advertising reflects and influences values in the United States, while Sherry and Camargo (1987) have explored the way in which linguistic borrowing creates a promotional patois by which Japanese consumers are able to negotiate cultural continuity and change. Moving beyond advertising to study other forms of mass-mediated communication, Belk (1987e) has investigated themes of materialism in U.S. comic books, and Spiggle (1986) has contrasted the conventional comic with the countercultural "comix" to reveal a uniform embracing of materialism across ideological camps. Each of these latter studies has raised issues regarding core cultural values and noncommercial materialism that are in urgent need of further exploration. Emerging work on acculturation into consumer society (O'Guinn, Lee, and Faber 1986; O'Guinn and Faber 1985) has an especially urgent appeal given the recent fragmentation of our domestic marketplace. Finally Levy (1984) has used consumers' perceptions of products themselves to make inferences about the stability of cultural categories and values over time.

Structuralist Perspectives. Structural approaches to consumer behavior have derived chiefly, although not exclusively, from the work of Levi-Strauss (1963, 1969), and they have sought to discover the basic meaning beneath consumption phenomena construed as myths. The principle proponents of structuralist approaches have been Leymore, Levy, and Hirschman. Predictably enough, the earliest structuralist forays into consumer behavior have concentrated upon advertising. Leymore (1975, 1987, 1988) has usefully interpreted advertising as the mythology of consumer culture, and has detailed the rules by which the codes of advertising can be transformed to reveal their culturally significant meanings. Levy (1981) has employed personal narrative as a projective vehicle from which to elicit insight into fundamental categories such as values, status, gender, and age from informants' accounts of foodways. This study was the precursor to contemporary deep structural examinations of consumer behavior. In a series of articles, Hirschman (1987a, 1987b, 1988) has sifted cinema and television productions for their respective consumption codes, by which cultural categories, ramifying through metaphysics, cosmology, sociology, and psychology, are reproduced and reinforced for American consumers.

Semiotic Perspectives. In a pair of didactic essays, Mick (1986, 1988a) has catalyzed the formal diffusion of semiotics into consumer research and has assessed the extent of that diffusion to date. These essays bracket a period that

has witnessed the meeting of the First International Conference on Marketing and Semiotics (Umiker-Sebeok 1987) and the publication of a special edition of the *International Journal of Research in Marketing* on semiotics (Pinson 1988). Mick's essays have demonstrated the degree to which consumer research has been influenced by the habit of mind, if not the formal vocabulary and techniques, of semiotic analyses. These essays have also suggested something of the breadth of the semiotic purview in consumer research. Of those works that do not explicitly employ the scholarly apparatus of semiotics, research into issues such as symbolism and secular ritual falls most directly into this purview. Because Mick's review essay (1988c) has obviated the need for much further accounting, I have confined my comments to a subset of the literature of particular interest.

Investigation of the ritual substratum of consumer research is in its infancy. Explored originally by Levy (1978b), interest in ritual consumer behavior has been revived by Rook (1984), whose studies of grooming (Rook 1985; Rook and Levy 1983) and threshold protection (1987b) have also revitalized the use of projective methods in consumer research. Pandya (1985) has treated gift giving within a semiotic framework. Fashion codes have been consumer research mainstays (Holman 1980, 1981), and recent studies have examined them in terms of power and gender displays (Solomon and Anand 1985). Sherry (1984) has probed the deep structural significance of consumer oral traditions such as rumor-mongering. Pollay (1987c) has employed the extended case study format to interpret the significance of specific U.S. Christmas practices. Interest in secular rituals that accompany holidays is building among consumer researchers (e.g., Arnould and Wallendorf 1988). Holbrook has created a virtual cottage industry of the study of aesthetic production and consumption, his essay on the semiology of consumer aesthetics (1987b) being an especially comprehensive overview. Dietary practices (Verba and Camden 1987) and mealtime behaviors (Heisley and Levy 1985) have received attention. Inquiries into the numinous dimension of consumer behavior (Hirschman 1985b; Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1988) have sifted the secular rituals of contemporary culture for their semiotic import. Noth's (1988) proposal for the creation of a semiotics of consumer behavior arrives on the swell of critical interest in the ritual substratum of consumption.

Research into symbolic consumer behavior has quite often fallen into the purview of semiotics. While the long and venerable history of this topic renders it resistant to the compaction required in my essay, several contributions (themselves encapsulating much antecedent treatment of symbolism) are especially worthy of note. Principal among these is *Symbolic Consumer Behavior,* a volume edited by Hirschman and Holbrook (1981) whose eclectic essays on symbolics, aesthetics, and mass communication imparted much impetus to the renewed interest in extrafunctional dimensions of consumer behavior. The study of product constellations (Solomon and Assael 1987)—the symbolic complementarity and diagnosticity of sets of products—and the syntax of product use (Kehret-Ward 1987, 1988) have shed considerable light upon the nature of consumption systems. Investigations of consumption symbolism (e.g., Belk, Bahn, and Mayer 1982; Hirschman 1986b; Kleine and Kernan 1987) have added to this understanding. Application of this knowledge has been attempted in the field of design (Flock 1988; O. Solomon 1988). The production of symbolic vehicles by competing cultural production systems, and the brokering of these vehicles by cultural gatekeepers, have begun to come under more careful scrutiny in consumer research (M. Solomon 1988). Linguistic treatments of advertising, such as Mick's (1987) study of story grammars, Denny's (1988) observations on pragmatics, North's (1987) discussion of framing, and Durand's (1987) examination of rhetoric, have demonstrated the utility of semiotics to consumer research.

Integrating the Perspectives

Each of the integrating perspectives I have identified—the critical, the culturological, and the communicative—produces an orientation

to research that is programmatic in its own right. These orientations can be briefly sketched. Critical researchers are interested in the articulation of moral and political economies. Further, their interest extends beyond the merely economic to embrace to ludic dimensions of consumer behavior. Culturological researchers are concerned with transforming our notion of externality by demonstrating the fundamental character of economic embeddedness. Their interest in the macro-level dimensions of consumption is grounded in contextuality, whether of a social or temporal nature. Finally, communicative researchers are absorbed with the venerable issues of encoding and decoding. Their principal interest is in the nature of meaning, its transmutation into consumption codes, and its translatability between communicants.

Thus, loosely disentangled, these orientations suggest collectively some general directions that postmodern inquiry might pursue:

- Investigation of the macrofoundations of consumption phenomena such as needs and choice (Dholakia, McIntyre, and Joy 1988; Firat and Dholakia 1982), and expansion of the microfoci of consumer research to embrace extra-economic features (Hudson and Murray 1986).
- Recognition of the cultural biases that inform (and deform) theory construction (Joy 1988; Rexeisen 1982; Roth and Moorman 1988).
- Comparison of research findings across social and temporal boundaries (Belk 1984b; Belk and Zhou 1987; Jolibert and Fernandez-Moreno 1983; O'Connor, Sullivan, and Pogorzelski 1985; Tse, Belk, and Zhou 1989).
- Shift to discourse-centered investigations of consumer behavior and to hermeneutic approaches in understanding meaning (Levy 1986; O'Shaughnessy 1985; Parker 1988; Traube 1986).
- Development of enlightened directed intervention programs that take into account culturally patterned consumer behaviors (Firat 1988c) and the cultural contradictions engendered by the diffusion of market capitalism (Belk 1988c; Dholakia and Firat 1988; see also Peter in this volume).

Clearly, these research directions are quite general and by no means exhaustive. They do indicate, however, the habit of mind resulting from the merger of perspectives I have explored. In an era of increasing contact, if not outright collision, of disciplines with one another, of cultures with one another, and of each of these singular creations with the other, the embeddedness of the researcher becomes as much a liability as an asset to productive inquiry. As this embeddedness is more rigorously scrutinized, consumer researchers will challenge both the fundamental constructs of their discipline and the unilinear evolution of the culture their efforts have helped to direct. Ontology, epistemology, axiology, and praxis are all affected by postmodern inquiry. We are discovering, just as Horatio grew to learn, that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. Before lodging specific research recommendations, I find it helpful to consider some of the recent work whose explicit agenda includes the promotion of just such a habit of mind.

SOME CONTENDING CORRECTIVES

At the time of this writing, I am aware of two vehicles that attempt to capture and package the kinds of postmodern alternatives described in this chapter for an audience explicitly composed of consumer researchers. Each vehicle is a monograph, whose collective papers provide readers with a sense of the variety of postmodern alternatives and of the complementary and conflictual orientations held by researchers in this emerging tradition. One volume in progress stems directly from a single multidisciplinary research project, the other from a number of independent projects related in spirit as interpretive. Given their early stages of production, I have treated some of these efforts in an unconscionably cursory fashion. However, the emergent nature of the postmodern tradition and the summary mission of this chapter dictates such as expedient approach.

The Consumer Behavior Odyssey

Because the history of the Consumer Behavior Odyssey—a transcontinental interdisciplinary naturalistic inquiry into consumer behavior

broadly construed—has been detailed by a number of chroniclers (Kassarjian 1987; Wallendorf, Belk, and Heisley 1988), and because the disciplinary impact of the project has been tentatively (and by no means uniformly) assessed by several of its principals (Cote and Foxman 1987; Holbrook 1987c, 1988c; Sherry 1987a; Wallendorf 1987), I have not recounted these issues here. Rather, a substantive accounting of the project's output is more germane to my purpose. The Odyssey data archive, housed at the Marketing Science Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts, consists of approximately 800 pages of field notes and journals, 137 videotapes, about a dozen audiotapes, 4000 photographs, and a heterogeneous artifact file. Odyssey researchers have published numerous papers and one videotape, and have made dozens of professional presentations from the data collected during the project (Wallendorf 1988). Among the issues addressed in this work have been naturalistic methodology (Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988; Belk 1988c), consumer-object relations (Belk, Wallendorf, Sherry, Holbrook, and Roberts 1987; Holbrook 1988c), periodic market system dynamics (Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988; Sherry 1987d), and experiential dimensions of consumption (O'Guinn 1987a, 1987b, 1987c).

An edited volume entitled *Highways and Buyways: Naturalistic Research From the Consumer Behavior Odyssey* (Wallendorf and Belk 1990) is currently in production. (The book will be published by the Association for Consumer Research as part of its monograph series.) The book examines the philosophy and methods of naturalistic inquiry, the conceptual leitmotifs that shape and reflect the project itself, and the numerous consumption phenomena (in extended case study format) investigated by the researchers. Extensive use is made of photographic illustrations. Wallendorf and Belk (1988) have provided a detailed account of the origin, development, and launching of the project. Jaworski and MacInnis (1988) have reflected upon their roles as informants to the project, and upon their reactions to the methodological techniques to which they were subjected. Holbrook (1988d) has used the psychoanalytic analysis of his own consumer-object relations to meditate upon the nature of motivation research. The ways in which consumer behavior shapes and reflects the contemporary processes of secularization and sacralization are explored in a reprinted chapter by Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry (1989). A synchronic analysis of a farmers' market, excerpted from a long-term ethnographic investigation that made extensive use of photographic research methods, has been prepared by Heisley, McGrath, and Sherry (1988). A chapter on collectors and collecting, based upon an initial work by Belk, Wallendorf, Sherry, Holbrook, and Roberts (1987), is underway. Additional chapters on researcher-informant relations, research-program evaluation, consumer-object relations, transcendent experience, performative consumption, and living beings as possessions are currently being drafted.

Humanistic Consumer Research

In the wake of the interest and controversy created by Hirschman's (1986) essay on humanistic inquiry, a number of consumer researchers have pooled their efforts to create a volume of "alternative" papers to serve as a primary reference source for postmodern investigators. Entitled *Interpretive Consumer Research* (Hirschman 1989), the volume includes, as well, a set of ostensibly evaluative chapters written by conventionally positivist consumer researchers (Hunt 1989; Calder and Tybout 1989). This inclusion mirrors the tension in the discipline I have described, but it fails to provide readers with a semblance of balance missing from traditional, single-orientation treatments of consumer behavior. However unfortunate this shortcoming, the reader is able to glean insight into the politics of disciplinary evolution, into logocentrism and the rhetorical bases of positivist inquiry, and into the intimate relationship of comprehensive close readings of primary texts to scholarly integrity. One imagines that the reader's fervent wish will be for a shift from circled wagons to hermeneutic circles.

The volume explores philosophical and

methodological issues in interpretive research, and includes a variety of studies shaped by approaches contained within the rubric of "humanism": ethnography, literary criticism, history, semiotics, and popular culture. Anderson (1989) has continued his development of the critical relativist orientation by exploring the relationship of this paradigm to interpretivism, by probing the notion of "understanding" in contrast to "explanation," and by countering conventional criticisms of interpretivism. Peter and Olson (1989) have also taken exception to the Calder and Tybout (1987) construal of scientific inquiry, and have affirmed the need for a constructionist perspective of science. Ozanne and Hudson (1989) have cast positivism and interpretivism in a dialectical relationship that reveals, through the bridging of their contradictory orientations, a number of alternative approaches to consumption phenomena. By focussing on the contrasting axiology, ontology, and epistemology of these orientations as applied to a phenomenon of special interest to consumer researchers—emotion—and by proposing that critical theory be viewed as a resolution of the positivist-interpretivist conflict, the authors have made a cogent appeal for paradigmatic pluralism. In their examination of naturalistic research techniques, Wallendorf and Belk (1989) have proposed criteria for evaluating the "trustworthiness"—as clearly distinguished from "quality"—of inquirers' data collection, interpretation, and presentation techniques. Building upon the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), the authors have introduced the notion of "integrity" as an evaluative criterion, and have explored the dynamics of misinformation in researcher-informant relations to useful effect.

Applications of interpretivist perspectives are distributed across a range of concerns, and often combine quantitative with qualitative techniques. Lavin and Archdeacon (1989) have examined the relevance of historiography to the study of the relationship of marketing and ethnicity. In broadening the notion of humanism beyond the current social scientific applications in consumer research, Holbrook, Bell, and Grayson (1989) have shown the utility of merging the idiographic perspective of the artist and critic with the nomothetic perspective of the experimentalist through their use of projective technique to explore consumption symbolism, and through their close reading of the consumption code of a particular Broadway production. The partially ironic intent of this piece is itself consistent with the role of irony in postmodern literary texts. Mick and Politi (1989) have used their protocol-based study of connotative meaning in advertising imagery to demonstrate the effectiveness of interpretive methods as a logic of justification, rather than merely as a logic of discovery. The semiotic perspective employed by McQuarrie (1989) has revealed a previously uninvestigated rhetorical trope—resonance—that serves as a cue to enhance the meaning and communicative efficacy of advertisements. The methodological excursus into literary explication employed by Stern (1989) to analyze advertising has demonstrated the virtually unrecognized limits our conventionally framed construals of persuasive communication have placed upon our insight. McCracken's (1989) ethnographic investigation of "homeyness," a condition created by urban Canadians who manipulate consumption in the service of domestic ambience, has extended the study of product constellations into the domain of culture.

Apropos of the volume's projected distribution date, a number of contributors have focussed their attention on holiday consumption practices. In this regard, Belk (1989) has explored, through the analysis of popular cultural sources in historical perspective, the interpretation of values which characterizes the commercial and Christian celebration of Christmas in the United States. So also have Hirschman and LaBarbera (1989) probed the meaning of Christmas in the United States, and have described the dialectical tensions between sacred and secular, and the positive and the negative dimensions of the holiday as experienced by their respondents. Finally, in an ethnographic comparison of activities unfolding during Christmas and Hanukkah in two midwestern American gift stores, Sherry and McGrath (1989) have examined the semiotic significance of and deep structural motivation for the gift

search, the impact of retail ambience on relationship management, and the gendered nature of secular ritual.

Toward Interpretive Closure

Despite the summary treatment I have accorded them, it is apparent that the papers in each of these volumes (Belk 1990; Hirschman 1989) represent a diversity of perspectives and methods too complex to permit grouping into anything other than a historically grounded common category. Such is the "seemingly irreducible variety" (Jameson 1987, p. 352) of the postmodern. The combination of quantitative with qualitative methods, the shift from text to field, the contrast between introspection and extroversion as research strategies, and the tension between synchronic and diachronic perspectives are just a few of the oppositions embodied in these works that render the label "interpretivist" ironic. Collectively, these papers embody a skeptical impulse inherent in all authentic inquiry. They indicate the many directions that inquiry can legitimately take in a postmodern environment. Clearly, each of these studies carries within it the seeds of future studies and the prospect of cross-pollination with other studies. It remains for me to delineate some broad dimensions along which postmodern inquiry might productively radiate.

SOME DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In contrast to Holbrook's (1989) repeated admonition to young scholars to eschew alternative research approaches—a politically wise but disciplinarily perverse bit of advice despite the subtle irony in which it is usually couched—I recommend an enthusiastic, rigorous, and playful exploration of postmodern alternatives by novices and veterans alike. A multidimensional provoking of curiosity is the surest way to promote the paradigmatic pluralism I espoused in the opening pages of this chapter. Such provocation, whether induced through collaboration with colleagues outside the discipline or through systematic cross-training during the individual's workcourse, can be institutionalized, to the great gain of consumer research. Despite its need for updating in an era of gender neutrality and computer literacy, Mills's essay "On Intellectual Craftsmanship" (1975/1959, pp. 211–212) remains a provocative and inspiring admonition to researchers. As valuable as his workbench suggestions for stimulating the sociological imagination is his meditation on the role of the academic as technician, which speaks directly to our postmodern era of consumer researchers:

> Perhaps [we are] too well trained, too precisely trained. Since one can be *trained* only in what is already known, training sometimes incapacitates one from learning new ways; it makes one rebel against what at first is bound to be loose and even sloppy. But you must cling to such vague images and notions, if they are yours, and you must work them out. For it is in such forms that original ideas, if any, almost always first appear.

Indeed, Levy's advice can be appended as a code to my review of postmodern alternatives:

> Having survived my ideas being called banal, excessive, destructive, irrelevant, obscure, and immature, I discover today that that is the way to become a distinguished educator. The message I learn from this history is to take heart, to be daring in having your ideas, to be persistent in putting them forth, to be courageous in struggling with adverse reviewers, and to hope for the best. (1988)

Recognizing once again the numerous research regimes suggested by the authors whose works I have noted, and the richness of the citation bases upon which these works are founded, and emphasizing the need for individual initiative in examining the implications of these rich sources, I recommend five avenues of inquiry to be pursued.

1. Approach-Avoidance: Marketing

In its struggle to become an independent discipline, consumer research has been both nurtured and stifled by its association with mar-

keting. Marketers have provided the subdiscipline with roots, but not with wings. The postmodern climate can empower researchers to explore consumption in two alternative directions. The first direction is the path of least resistance. Researchers need to probe much more deeply into marketing-based consumer behaviors with alternative perspectives and methods. The topics treated in each of the chapters of this handbook are amenable to reinterpretation, reevaluation, and perhaps reorientation, within the alternative frameworks I have explored. Brand loyalty (Sherry 1986c), diffusion (Arnould 1988), and motivation (Campbell 1987), for example, have been subjected to such probing. This is equally true with respect to marketing practice, where applications of ethnography, semiotics, and other so-called interpretive approaches have gained currency (Sherry 1986d). The second direction is more problematic, yet potentially more rewarding. Researchers need to examine consumption as if it were not merely an epiphenomenon of marketing. Consumption is a biobasic behavior whose significance antedates that of marketing. Further, there are aspects of consumer behavior that are either beyond the current purview of marketing or which have not yet been fully marketized. Examinations of the sacred and profane dimensions of consumption (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1988) or of love as an arbiter of consumer-object relations (Shimp and Madden 1988) are examples of such expanded inquiry.

2. Triangulation

More than a decade ago Reichardt and Cook (1979) outlined the advantages of moving beyond the quantitative *versus* qualitative debate in social scientific research in their advocacy of paradigmatic pluralism. That their appeal was not persuasive among consumer researchers is attributable in part to the dearth of exemplars of "interpretive" inquiry at the time they wrote their essay. Since that time, a body of alternative literature has accumulated, making triangulation a practical possibility, perhaps to an unprecedented degree. Thus, the remaining barriers to investigation of common phenomena from radically multimethodological perspectives are functions of disciplinary politics, of expediency, or of entropy. Triangulation would appear to be one of the most pressing needs facing consumer researchers. Triangulation *across* research traditions is one appropriate avenue. For example, imagine the design challenge and wealth of data that would be involved in a triangulated, comparative study of the relationship of ethnicity to consumer behavior. Begin with ethnographic investigations in an ethnically diverse urban area, construct and administer surveys through active negotiation and collaboration with the natives, design and execute experiments or conduct focus groups with subjects drawn from a population with which the inquirer is intimately familiar, create and analyze projective instruments with emic sensitivity to cultural nuance, and integrate the entire investigation with an ongoing discussion of the findings with informants as well as professional colleagues. Our notions of ethnicity as well as consumption would profit from such study. Mick's recent attempts to enlarge our conceptions of marketing communication by revising our notions of basic constructs such as "schema" (1988b) and "comprehension" (1988c) through the merging of semiotic and cultural perspectives with those of cognitive science are representative of this kind of triangulation. Similarly, triangulation *within* the emerging postmodern tradition is clearly warranted. Both Wallendorf and Belk (1988) and Mick (1988) have drawn attention to the many points of difference and disagreement among so-called interpretive consumer researchers. For example, the utility (or futility) of an auditing procedure has proven to be a point of contention (Parker 1988, p. 223). So also has the utility of member checking been disputed (Emerson and Pollner 1988). Imagine again the richness of a multidimensional study that would examine historically and ethnographically the production of advertising by a particular agency and its consumption by clients and prospects. Such a study would analyze semiotically and semiologically the actual advertisements comparatively across product categories, brands, target

segments, and time, and it would interpret critically the impact of the agency upon the industry and the culture. Such study would fuse the best of Jhally (1987) and Marchand (1985), of Dyer (1982) and Williamson (1978), and of Schudson (1984) and Vestergaard and Schroder (1985), and it would impart some of the "passion" inspired by Henry (1963).

3. Outreach and Collaboration

The forging of alliances with other disciplines should be given a prominent place on the agenda of consumer research. I have demonstrated something of the breadth of interest in consumption that exists outside of our discipline, as well as the maddeningly parallel nature of this interest. The interdisciplinary fervor of conference track chairs will be institutionalized among the editorial review boards of journals principally through such alliances that move the field beyond its current "comfort zones" (Zaltman 1983). Some of this institution building has been begun by the "newcomers" to consumer research, some by those cross-trained beyond the field, and some by "borrowers" in search of greater interpretive adequacy. The encouragement of cross-attendance at conferences, the reading of journals outside of one's field, the joint sponsorship of conferences and journals, and the expansion of invisible colleges will help consumer research move in this direction.

4. Empirical and Critical Schools

The efforts of Rogers (1987) and Poster and Venkatesh (1987) to accelerate the diffusion of critical school social science into consumer research urgently require support and expansion. The normative dimensions of consumer behavior, with the possible exception of some of the public policy literature, is sorely underdeveloped. The ideology of consumption, the power dynamics underwriting that ideology and its cross-cultural diffusion, and the moral economy affected by that diffusion are most worthy of investigation. These topics are more accessible to postmodern perspectives and methods than to our traditional empiricist ones. We also need to explore the range of consumer "misbehavior" (Holbrook 1985; Zaltman and Wallendorf 1977), those dysfunctional consequences of the ideology of consumption that plague contemporary society. Rook's (1987) examination of the buying "impulse" is a step in this direction. So also is the recent work on compulsive consumption (Faber, O'Guinn, and Krych 1987). Haug's (1987) critique of commodity aesthetics is ripe for diffusion into consumer research. A critical school perspective of consumer behavior enables (and perhaps demands) a different kind of activism than the traditional applications orientation of consumer researchers; assessing the socioenvironmental impact of consumer behaviors is no mere demarketing or macromarketing task. Duesenberry's (1960) famous quip that "economics is all about why people make choices, while sociology is all about why they don't have any choices to make," is an implicit challenge to consumer research to develop a critique of the ideology of choice and to question the hegemony of decision making in the scheme of things.

5. New Presentation Modes

Among the most exciting and controversial developments of the emerging postmodern research tradition is the experimentation with nonconventional modes of conveying the researcher's understanding of a phenomenon (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Sapir 1988; Tyler 1987). These modes range from works that purport to be faithful cultural representations which restore meaning, to those wherein the researcher's interpretation exceeds and disputes the "conscious knowledge" of subjects (Traube 1986). Standardized research articles and monographs, themselves rhetorical vehicles or artifacts of a particular paradigm (Bazerman 1988; Thornton 1988), may well be insufficient vessels for containing our varied experiences of consumer behavior. Something of this insufficiency is conveyed by the increasing use of video recording and photography among consumer researchers (see Belk, Sherry, and Wal-

lendorf 1987 for precedents and applications), and by the publication of a videocassette on "deep meaning in possessions" (Wallendorf and Belk 1987) by the Marketing Science Institute. Parallel video research is emerging on the other side of the Atlantic as well (Pinch and Clark 1988). Our resistance to book-length treatments of consumption objects and systems (e.g., Fields 1983; Kira 1966; Rossi 1976) may also be on the wane. Essays, such as Wills's (1989) meditation on a deodorant bottle, constitute another potential vehicle. Other alternative modes or genres readily suggest themselves. Friedman's (1985, 1987) fascinating accounts of the impact of consumer behavior on popular culture prompt direct speculation: Are there consumer researchers among us who are able to write novels based upon that research? Delia Ephron's novel *Funny Sauce* (1986) is as carefully drawn a portrait of consumption and contemporary family life cycle issues as is available in our academic "literature," as well as being more impactful and widely targeted. In a similar fashion, Ishmael Reed's *The Terrible Twos* (1988) complements the many Christmas-focussed accounts of consumer behavior I have noted in this chapter. The central conceit of John Rolfe Gardiner's *In the Heart of the Whole World* (1988)—that the shopping mall mediates the relationship between sacred and profane dimensions of contemporary culture—is latent in much of our critical academic literature. Tom Miller's *The Panama Hat Trail,* a delightful depiction of aspects of a particular consumption system, is another such illustration. Might not such novels be as readily aspired to as exemplars as are the natural science treatises that are our current models? The Farmers' brave effort to novelize as arcane a field as international finance (Farmer and Farmer 1985) is an implicit challenge to consumer researchers. So also is Coles's (1987) literary approach to business ethics. Who is it among us, writer of the occasional poem or short story, who might be turned toward the illumination of consumer behavior? As researchers we have studied film (Holbrook and Grayson 1986; Holbrook 1988b) and television (Hirschman 1988b), sometimes triangulating between the two media (Belk 1988b). We have not yet created *with* these media, rather than *from* them, despite the existence of cinematographers in our midst. Films such as the one by Aibel et al. (1984) on estate sales might serve as appropriate exemplars. So also do we harbor painters and musicians, but the relationship of their work to consumer behavior has not been publicly (or perhaps even privately) scrutinized. Here again, Holbrook has suggested some of the ways in which such artistically driven scholarship might develop, through his use of stories (1988d, 1987d), drawings (1983; Holbrook and Zirlin 1985), and music (1987f, 1986) to probe experiential dimensions of consumer behavior. From the chrysalis of such scholarship will autonomous consumer art emerge.

CONCLUSION

Having ranged across the disparate quarters of postmodern geography, the reader has earned an interpretive summary. While numerous manuals (see, for example, the inaugural volume edited by R. F. Ellen 1984) and an enterprising miniseries (directed by John Van Maanen for Sage Publications) now clamor for our methodological attention, much of the essence of nonpositivist research has been neatly summed up by Christians and Carey (1981) in just four criteria. *Naturalistic observation* permits the analyst access to a native world view. *Contextualization* forces the researcher to recognize the embeddedness and multiplicity of meaning and to acknowledge the linkages between and the interpretations of meanings. *Maximized comparisons* that range across cultural, psychological, situational, or temporal boundaries encourage the construction of a "cumulative perspective" that renders interpretation "more penetrating and coherent." Finally, researchers seek to create *sensitized concepts,* whether models or metaphors, which are faithful to native categories but which also are sufficiently powerful to interpret larger domains of experience (Christians and Carey 1981).

The precision and accuracy of this cogent summation are commendable, but the authors

do not attempt to account for one of the most problematic features of postmodern inquiry as evaluated by conventional consumer researchers—the idiosyncrasy of the inquirer. To paraphrase Murray's (1943, p. 6) assessment of thematic apperception testing, the future of postmodern inquiry in consumer research depends upon the possibility of perfecting the interpreter (consumer research's "forgotten instrument") more than it does on perfecting techniques. Consumer research has not encouraged the honing of the kind of intraceptive intuition (Murray 1943) requisite to plumbing consumer worldview and ethos. We have not learned to use "the subjectivity inherent in all observations as the royal road to an authentic, rather than fictitious, objectivity" (Devereux 1967, p. xvii). Postmodernism will flourish or languish in the discipline to the extent that the acuity of the researcher-as-instrument is valued and sharpened. Lacking such a tradition of valuation, consumer researchers must seek out the mavens of postmodernism (Feick and Price 1987), yet be hypercritical of the surrogate consumers (Solomon 1986) mediating the diffusion of this movement into the discipline, until such time as instruction in alternative paradigms is incorporated into the initiation of our neophyte scholars.

In this chapter I have sketched the principal sociopolitical and disciplinary implications of postmodern inquiry in consumer research. In glossing most of the works that have contributed to the emergence of postmodern inquiry, I have identified the range of alternatives consumer researchers appear ready to tolerate, if not celebrate, as well as a handful of issues that future researchers might constructively address. Because of the highly volatile nature of this experimental moment, it is difficult to predict the shape postmodern alternatives will assume in our history of ideas. Such alternative approaches have the potential to balance and integrate the discipline of consumer research, as well to balkanize it even further. Adherents of these approaches may as easily be assimilated into contiguous disciplines as accepted into the mainstream of consumer research. If the discipline is earnest in its attempt to eradicate metatheoretical bias and foster paradigmatic pluralism—"to enlarge the sense of how life can go" in an intellectual era in which it is "increasingly difficult to get out of each other's way" in Geertz's (1988, p. 139, p. 147) phrase—we can expect the emerging postmodern tradition to be nurtured, in doctoral seminars as well as journal pages. I hope this chapter will foster just such nurturing and challenge novices to forsake a comfortable apprenticeship in favor of a broader perspective.

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