

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 cap-

ture 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 Klammer, 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).

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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 steered 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-

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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 irregu-

lar 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-

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 Kassarian (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

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

(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

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

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

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

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 merg-

ing 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

keting. Marketers have provided the sub-discipline 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 semilogically the actual advertisements comparatively across product categories, brands, target

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

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