

## **Culture, Consumption, and Marketing: Retrospect and Prospect**

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### **Backstory**

Not quite fifteen years ago, as I policed my kitchen, cleaning up after dinner, refereeing a loud squabble between two of my sons and calming an incessantly barking dog that couldn't decide whether the scuffle interrupting her own foraging was an invitation to play or flee, the domestic din was joined by the jangling of the telephone. For some foolish reason, perhaps the welcome relief promised by what surely must be the placid monotone of a telemarketer's script, or the expectation that the bell would send all combatants to a neutral corner, I picked up the phone and put into motion the events that have led to this chapter.

On the other end of the line was Hal Kassarjian, who had tracked me to my home to outline his vision of a comprehensive handbook of consumer behaviour, which would serve as a training guide for doctoral students in the area. Three seconds into the conversation, I knew Hal wanted something from me, since his salutation had not included the words 'Jesus Christ, what the hell is all that racket going on over there?', but rather had begun with gentle ritual inquires into my current state of being, before blending seamlessly into the protracted sales pitch. By the time he had reached me, Hal had convinced many of the luminaries of our field to contribute a chapter to his project, but he lacked what he called a 'final' chapter, one that would capture the 'other stuff' that had been going on in the discipline over the last few years. As Russ Belk was apparently unavailable for the project, I had become the go-to 'other guy' for this 'other stuff'.

Already an experienced 'other', I negotiated a loose set of ground rules with Hal. I would provide an idiosyncratic account of the area, told from the point of view of a participant-observer who was also an informant, essentially confounding emic and etic distinctions. The chapter would be part sociology of the discipline, part literature review and part projection of the area's trajectory. Hal was convinced of the potential of this 'other stuff', and was eager to get its canon into the hands of doctoral students. Ever the practical anarchist, or *agent*

*provocateur*<sup>1</sup>, he acceded to my wishes, and promised to edit with a light hand. I remember the words he spoke after sealing the deal, just prior to ringing off: 'Jesus Christ, what the hell is all that racket going on over there?'

Thus, in the cacophony of my kitchen, were the first few notes of Joshua's horn replayed. This 'other stuff' was being offered a seat at the institutional table, and I was being given the honour of representing the work of so many guerrillas engaged in the paradigm wars; of getting the Trojan Horse inside the walls. How best to proceed? As a native Chicagoan, I heard the words of Mayor Richard J. Daley echoing in my mind's ear. He had occasion to remark, accurately as it turned out, that, 'The police aren't here to create disorder. The police are here to preserve disorder.' A sound analogy, I thought. If I could preserve the disorder being mobilized by researchers marginalized by the minions of modernism, and amplify the polyvocal chatter as characteristic of my academic department as my kitchen, then a good time might be had by all.

As a marketer, I knew I couldn't hang the tale on Hal's category label 'other stuff'. By then, the heyday of 'otherness' (and kindred concepts such as 'marginalization', 'hegemony' and 'subalternity') in contiguous social science disciplines had started to wane, even as it was making its way to consumer research, and both its stridently critical (albeit warranted) ethos and implicitly dismissable connotation were the wrong positioning statements for a marketing audience. The label 'alternative' was appropriately countercultural, but also struck me as somewhat stigmatizing, implying, as I thought, a suboptimal choice. 'Interpretive' was a label increasingly being ascribed to this 'other' research, less often in the sense of the 'interpretive turn' said to have been taken by disciplines growing more interested in richly nuanced readings of behaviours treated as hermeneutic texts, than in the sense of projective fantasy exercised in the absence of rigorous data analysis. Again, a pejorative ascription, but, with a certain flip-pant caché: every inquirer interprets, but some do it more reflexively, with greater integrity. I needed a label that would capture the inchoate, amorphous, rebellious, ludic irruption promising to rock our disciplinary world.

The *mot juste* I selected was a contentious one, flanked by weasel words but unpacked, I thought, scrupulously. A patchwork quilt of inquiry, a confederacy of autonomous regimes reading consumption against the disciplinary grain, a heterotopia of heterodoxies, Hal's 'other stuff' became 'postmodern' consumer research, a label of convenience purporting to embody the weirdness of the moment in which the foundational became fungible, the essential evanescent. This 'new consumer behaviour research', as Russ Belk (1995) came to construe it, seemed to arise as our disciplinary membrane mutated from selectively permeable to porous. As boundaries were blurred and transgressed (eventually to be redrawn and reinforced, inevitably and lamentably, by neo-orthodoxy), the promise of apotheosis stirred in the literature. Our thought leaders were chal-

lenged with the prospect of being otherwised. Difference seemed about to have its day.

The postmodern alternatives I described in that early effort (Sherry 1991) were unfolding in an era of rapidly accelerating and highly politicized pluralism. Ontology, epistemology, axiology and praxis were each touched by the successive waves of researchers eager to understand consumption in more holistic, comprehensive fashion. Refugees from and freeholders in other disciplines explored consumption from vastly different perspectives than the economic and psychological ones that had dominated our field. Danny Miller (1995) would eventually advocate that consumption should replace kinship as the lodestar of the anthropological enterprise. Russ Belk would continue to argue that consumer research as a field had actually yet to emerge. Shelby Hunt (1999) would eventually indict nonpositivist research for the decline and fall of Western Civilization. I also made a few projections about the fate of our field in the wake of the pluralist perturbations the postmodern moment provoked. In the balance of this chapter, I revisit and revise the projections and offer a few more in their place. In so doing, I hope not only to preserve, or at least prolong, the disorder of our area, but also to misdirect at least as many subsequent inquiries as I did with the original effort.

## Reprise

In my chronicle of the emergence of this 'other stuff', I described the changes underway in consumer research in terms of Victor Turner's (1974) model of the social drama, wherein positivist and postmodern paradigm-bearers contested in a four-act exhibition of disciplinary theatre. At the time of the writing, both Acts One (public breach) and Two (escalating crisis) had been completed, and the curtain had just risen on Act Three (redressive action). Having identified the fault line, the field had begun searching for ways to contain the rift. The past fifteen years has been a period of rapidly escalating social change in the discipline, directed, I think, primarily toward bringing down the curtain on Act Three.

Several signal events have occurred during this protracted Act. Of primary importance has been the complete reconfiguring of the editorial structure of the field's flagship journal, the *Journal of Consumer Research*. In the service of decentralized decision-making and paradigm-appropriate review, *JCR* has evolved to provide its editor guidance first from advisory editors, and thence from associate editors, and from an increasingly diverse Editorial Review Board. Over time, more segments of the journal's franchise have gained greater share of voice, resulting in a more diversified publication. Recent structural changes to the journal have permitted intramural and extramural thought leaders to challenge the field with provocative essays, and encouraged researchers at large to re-



inquire into fundamental tenets of the discipline, thus harnessing some of the energy of scholarly ferment to catalyse social scientific advance. Further, awards for Best Article published during a three-year period in *JCR* have been made across the research 'camps', which have both validated emerging regimes and provided exemplars for emulation, thus contributing to the efflorescence of the 'other stuff'. (In fact, by my informal count, at least 50 per cent of the awards have gone to 'other stuff'.) Finally, the launching of a monograph series under the aegis of the *Journal of Consumer Research* portends significant increase in the 'reach' of postmodern inquiry, whose practitioners often chafe at the page restrictions imposed upon them by the conventional journal article.

Act Three has also been driven by events occurring at the level of the professional society. The Association of Consumer Research (the most active contributor of *JCR*'s twelve member association sponsors) has held conferences of irregularly accelerating diversity and balance, striving mightily to meet the needs of its increasingly heterogeneous membership. Its presidential leadership continues to oscillate nominally across the research camps, further helping to assure breadth of coverage and diversity of intellectual initiative in the society's undertakings. ACR has partnered with Sage Publications over the years to nurture book-length treatments of consumption issues, recognizing the value of monographic accounts in a field dominated by journal readers.

While it is difficult to pinpoint the dawn of a new intellectual era – are we truly in the Seventh Moment of the history of qualitative research (Lincoln and Denzin 2000) and not still the Sixth? Or yet the Eighth? – the theatrical trope demands the staging of a fourth and final act. Act Four (reintegration or irreparable schism) is where, I believe, our field currently finds itself. Imagine consumer research, paused, like a deer in the footlights, poised to begin the next leg of its journey, with several paths looming ahead. Fifteen years ago, I saw Turner's dénouement as an either-or proposition, too close to call. Among the forces of reintegration at work have been a transmogrified *JCR*, a more variegated ACR, and the gradual articulation of a philosophy of inclusiveness by our institutional leaders. No new professional society has yet arisen to co-opt the energies of post-modern consumer researchers, (with the possible exception of the Society of Consumer Psychology), and little institutional outreach to other disciplines has occurred. Ironically, and tragically, one legacy of the 9/11 terrorist attack against the United States may prove to be a heightened realization of the role of consumption as a central agent of cultural stability and change at work in the world today. Hopefully this realization will lead directly to more enlightened ways of understanding and tempering the forces of consumption, a normative challenge the entire discipline may renounce to our collective peril.

The centripetal forces I saw moving our field toward schism have continued unabated. 'Alternative' journals have arisen to accommodate parochial interests.

Here is just a partial list: the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *CMC: Culture, Markets and Consumption*, the *Journal of Marketing Theory*, the *Journal of Consumer Culture*, *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Qualitative Marketing Research*, *Consumer Dimensions*.

We have seen a rise in the number and frequency of specialist conferences within the field and around the globe. In an era of reduced academic travel budgets, this embarrassment of riches will lead to fragmentation, as specialists are forced to make more efficient choices. As these conferences thrive, the flagship interdisciplinary conference may experience attrition, especially among older, more seasoned researchers who find less of relevance in their former haunts.

Outside our discipline (whose motherland has steadfastly remained the departments of marketing), contiguous fields have embraced consumption with ever greater fervour. Psychology, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, political science, communications, architecture, literature, film, psychoanalysis, history, geography and, gods help us, even economics have begun to think through consumer behaviour. Interest groups within these disciplines increasingly command conference tracks and stand-alone meetings, publish proceedings and newsletters, and post accounts of their members' activities from book writing to reviewing on web sites available for universal consultation. Ironically, many (if not most) of the consumer researchers outside our field who work in the area of 'other stuff' seem unaware of the existence of the *Journal of Consumer Research*, or *Advances in Consumer Research*. Perversely, some who are aware (including august presences such as Danny Miller or Colin Campbell) seem disinclined to import our findings into their own research, or export theirs to ours. For all intents and purposes, the scholarship of consumer research seems safely stored in a disciplinary silo, securely segregated from the basic disciplines, destined to be reinvented rather than discovered and used synergistically.

At the present writing, I tend to read Turner's dénouement with the post-modern grain, rejecting his either-or outcome in favour of an and-both scenario. That is, I believe consumer research will undergo reintegration and schism simultaneously for the foreseeable future. While key figures and their students will maintain a publishing and professing presence on their interdisciplinary flagship home turf, the new freedoms afforded them by both emerging specialist venues and basic discipline niche development will lure them beyond the marketing department pale. Further (as I explore later), the defection of post-modern researchers from the journal article to the book as the preferred mode of publication will increase the visibility of their ideas to new audiences at the same time as it alters the criteria of personnel committees. Concurrently, sponsoring associations of interdisciplinary journals will begin to reassess and realign their allegiances, creating vehicles more in tune with their memberships' needs and

interests. More specialized journals will tempt consumer research 'insiders' to publish beyond the walls of the business school. Finally, organizations like *JCR* and *ACR* will be compelled to mount more vigorous and sustained outreach efforts with consumer research 'outsiders' if the hope to stay at the cutting edge of inquiry is to be sustained. Over the long haul, I envision both the rise of a vastly reconfigured multidisciplinary 'spanning' association of scholars interested in consumption broadly construed, as well as the proliferation of specialty associations devoted to the micro-granularities of consumption rooted in local perspectives.

In retrospect, it is clear that the postmodern moment in consumer research is not simply a manifestation of reactance. Our revered elders are still acting out as outrageously as ever. Juniors are emulating their elders in increasing numbers. Hopefully, a simple reinquiry of the Consumer Behavior Odyssey will be considered too trivial an undertaking compared to the launching of an even more provocative enterprise. (Perhaps a virtual Cyberodyssey? A multi-site exploration of lived experience in Temporary Autonomous Zones? An archaeology and psychoanalytic interpretation of Russ Belk's file cabinets?) Nor is the postmodern moment simply a ritual of rebellion, as the ever widening and deepening literature assures that the hegemony of economics and psychology has been a temporal 'blip' on the screen. It seems apparent that the postmodern moment has been the occasion of a revitalization moment. Charisma has been routinized, a new generation of researchers is pushing the field in interesting new directions, and the pioneers continue to innovate even as their earlier contributions are being critiqued by their students.

### Perspective Integration Revisited

At the core of my original chapter was a typologized literature review of material emanating chiefly from consumer research – space limitations permitted only a ritual bow in the direction of work outside the discipline (which included perennial usual suspects Campbell, Miller and Wilk) – that I felt fit the 'other stuff' category. Perhaps the most frequent comment I received about the chapter had to do with the sheer volume of work going on outside the mainstream of the discipline. Consumer researchers hadn't realized just how much depth and breadth this emerging field had already attained. I grouped this research into three basic categories: critical, culturological and communicative. With some internal refinement and elaboration, these categories are still structurally sound fifteen years later. However, the literature has since burgeoned. The *Journal of Consumer Research* now relies for 12 per cent of its content (but, recall, 50 per cent of its prizewinners) upon postmodern inquiry. *Advances in Consumer Research* is perhaps even more dependent.<sup>3</sup>

While I will not update the categorization in this chapter, I do think it is useful to revisit and revise some of the suggestions I made at the time for inquiry into issues that an integration of the categories revealed as promising. I thought we'd see more investigation of foundational principles of consumption by now, but the field's major tenets still await systematic rethinking. We have, however, seen exceptional growth in the exploration of extra-economic dimensions of consumer behaviour. We have made some progress in cross-cultural and historical investigations of consumption, but still have a long way to go before escaping the ethnocentric and tempocentric perspectives of American departments of marketing. Discourse-centred and hermeneutic analyses of consumption have flourished over time. Finally, I think our programmes of directed intervention have benefited tremendously from the input provided by these 'other' perspectives, whether at the level of consumer packaged goods or of public policy. Managerial marketing research itself seems to be undergoing something of a qualitative renaissance at the moment, which I believe contributes to consumers being exploited a little less inhumanely, and sometimes satisfied in a more prosocial manner.

Going forward, I am hoping to see a few particular issues emerge from my older categories that will be of special interest to consumer researchers. From a critical perspective, I think renewed attention must be devoted to global-local marketplace dynamics, and to the practices of resistance, accommodation and co-creation consumers adopt in marketplaces around the world. From a culturological perspective, we need comprehensive, nuanced cross-cultural comparative explorations of consumer behaviour, and more precise understanding of virtual marketplaces as experienced by consumers. From a communicative perspective, we still need to field a cultural poetics of desire and convey our research in a manner that addresses the challenges posed by the crisis of representation. At least, I see these imperatives as part of a programmatic package that shapes much of the work I hope to undertake in my own research.

### Bringing 'Other Stuff' to Prominence

I was only able to cite two vehicles portending the kinds of change our discipline might expect to weather back when I drafted the chapter Hal had requested in the late 1980s. One was Russ Belk's (1991) *Highways and Buyways*, and the other Beth Hirschman's (1989) *Interpretive Consumer Research*. The former, a multi-site team ethnography emerging from a nominally integrated project, the latter a kitbag of virtuoso exercises demonstrating the range of humanistic inquiry, these volumes proved to be harbingers of the 'other' era. Since their publication, a number of other correctives to conventional consumer research has emerged. These correctives have been multifaceted in nature, and bear some consideration of their own.



Conferences are convenient vehicles for launching and nurturing research regimes, for cultivating invisible colleges, and for developing the kind of *esprit* that gives an emerging subdiscipline the kind of immediacy and presence it requires to flourish. Several conferences have stimulated divergent thinking in our field over the past decade and more. The HCR Conference – Heretical Consumer Research – has consistently pushed the envelope on topical and (re-)presentational diversity, adopting the mandate of radical challenge to disciplinary convention. The ACR Gender Conference has continued to explore consumption as it is shaped and reflected by the biocultural forces of masculinity, femininity and its hybrids. Both the ACR International Conferences (Europe and Asia-Pacific) and the Marketing and Development Conference have pushed the discipline to adopt a cross-cultural perspective of consumer behaviour, and have encouraged the critique of dominant views (typically US-centric) of consumption dynamics. Somewhat more idiosyncratic conferences have bracketed this era of postmodern expansion. A pair of early conferences on marketing and semiotics held in Bloomington and Evanston helped set the agenda for the exploration of meaning movement in consumption, while Stephen Brown's Belfast trilogy of marketing 'retreats' has accelerated inquiry into the sacred and utopian dimensions of consumption. While there seems to be no current substitute for place-based conferencing as a mode of stimulating scholarly communal solidarity, I expect we can look forward to Internet-based convocations as technology rapidly improves.

A congeries of programmes and centres has arisen to foster alternative discourse in recent years. Odense University's Doctoral Program in Cultural Dimensions in Marketing, Consumer and Organization Research has trained flights of younger inquirers in the methods and perspectives of nonpositivist research. Bilkent University's Center for Research in Transitional Societies, and Göteborg's Center for Consumer Science promise to build on such a tradition. The University of Utah's Center for Consumer Culture is creating the nucleus of such alternative inquiry in the United States. Russ Belk and Rob Kozinets have just offered the first consumer research videography training under the Center's auspices, in preparation for the first ACR film festival, held in October of 2002. From such programmes and centres may spring the next wave of 'weird scientists' or 'post-Odysseans' to foment change and challenge complacency among the neo-orthodox old guard postmodern researchers.

Institutional changes in professional societies and journals have accelerated the rate of diversification in our discipline as well. To choose just one group, the Association for Consumer Research has offered several important innovations, grounded in democratization, empowerment and inclusion. The ACR Doctoral Consortium has helped initiate young scholars into a heterogeneous research community of peers. The ACR Round Tables have expanded the opportunities for

collegial exploration of emerging issues of interest to the discipline. The creation of an ACR Fellows' Bookshelf column of recommendations in the Society's newsletter is expanding the membership's grasp of the complexity and dimensionality of the field exponentially. Finally, the making universally available electronically (at no charge) of the entire body of research published by ACR, will do more to stimulate the growth and diversification of alternative inquiry than any of us can yet imagine. On the journal side, the *Journal of Consumer Research* has evolved to include reflective essays by seminal thinkers inside and outside the discipline, which are designed to stimulate ever greater individuation of the field. Further, *JCR* has established a practice of re-inquiry into 'established' knowledge that promises to challenge some of the foundations of the field, reinvigorating our roots in the bargain.

While space limitations preclude more than a passing nod at the explosion of publications devoted to the 'otherwise-ing' of our discipline, I will single out a few examples suggestive of the trend. Publishers such as Routledge, Sage and Berg have created book series centred on consumption issues. University presses, notably Duke, Minnesota, California and Cambridge, are developing lists that feature consumer behaviour prominently in their numbers. Perhaps no single volume has had such impact on the spread of alternative perspectives in our field than Mike Solomon's (2001) *Consumer Behavior* text, the first to incorporate a systematic sense of the postmodern moment. The recent entry by Arnould, Price and Zinkhan (2001), titled, simply, *Consumers*, builds upon and extends this legacy. Many of the *eminences grises* of postmodern consumer research have begun to release books. The freedom of protracted exploration afforded by books is ever more attractive to scholars whose subject matter grows increasingly granular as it proves ever more pervasive. On a final, complementary note, the circulation of such critical popular periodicals as *Adbusters*, *StayFree!* and *The Baffler* marks the rise of public intellectuals posing a normative, grassroots challenge to the culture of consumption, and the dawn of an era of increased interaction between ivory tower and activist inquirers.

My concluding observations on corrective measures currently at work have to do with the social organization of the discipline. First of all, the longevity of our postmodern pioneers has been remarkable. ACR Fellows such as Wells, Levy, Zaltman, Belk, Holbrook and Hirschman have maintained prolific publishing presences during the postmodern moment. A tier of nearly as prolific, if not as exalted, fellow-travellers – Wallendorf, Sherry, Mick, O'Guinn, Arnould, Stern, Firat and Venkatesh among others – has exhibited similar staying power. Among the heirs apparent to this old guard are scholars such as Thompson, Holt, Peñaloza, Fournier and Schouten, whose output threatens to eclipse that of their elders, as well it might. A fledgling cadre, including scholars such as Kozinets, Ritson and Grayson is currently flexing its wings. The momentum the post-

modern moment has generated has been enormous. While many if not most of these researchers have partnered with colleagues in other schools and departments, there has gradually arisen a small set of enclaves around the world where scholars have been able to talk shop and collaborate on projects within their own walls. This handful of schools – Northwestern, Utah, Arizona, Rutgers, Illinois, Harvard, Wisconsin, Penn State, Irvine, London Business School, Ulster, Odense – has become a collective incubator for the postmodern moment. Colleagues and doctoral students at these institutions have formed cottage industries of sorts, and benefited greatly from the ability to dwell together within the research process as it unfolds and meanders. While these enclaves are rare, they are synergistic hotbeds of intellectual activity.

If I were to envision a new era of ‘othering’, it would be characterized by a few key features. At the populist level, it would begin with the founding of an annual doctoral field school, which in essence would be a travelling workshop or rotating summit. It would meet in different places around the globe, and facilitate both the training of students and the collaboration of faculty on projects of cross-cultural, interdisciplinary scope. At the institutional level, the era would begin with systematic outreach by ACR to other disciplines already actively researching consumer behaviour. Alliances and partnerships across these disciplines could result, at a minimum, in consortia newsletters and websites, and ultimately in joint conferences. At the level of scholarly publication, two initiatives might be undertaken. First, postmodern researchers could become regular contributors to the *Monographs of the Journal of Consumer Research*, while at the same time lobbying vigorously for the recognition of books in the promotion and tenure decisions of their schools; lamentably, while the market for book-length treatments of consumption has expanded rapidly in other disciplines, it is sorely underdeveloped in our own. Secondly, postmodern researchers might be persuaded to adopt, if not found, a flagship journal as their publication outlet of first choice. This journal might resemble a hybrid of *CMC* or *Advances in Consumer Research*, and be modelled along the lines of *Journal of Consumer Psychology* or *Psychology and Marketing*. Perhaps George Ritzer’s and Don Slater’s *Journal of Consumer Culture* will fulfil this mandate. Ironically, this journal has been launched by an outside initiative, an extramural effort abetted by editorial assistance from a number of ACR members. Should these key features be realized in the new era, I envision a fissioning of ACR and a defecation of its postmodern membership to a new society, formed along with the growing confederation of refugee special interest groups from current host disciplines.

## Tea Leaf Redux

Recognizing the volatile character of the postmodern moment – indeed it may have already elapsed (marked, perhaps, by the recent special issue of the *Diamond Harvard Business Review* devoted to the subject that was published in Japan) – I made some projections in that early chapter about the avenues emerging research might be expected to follow. These were sociopolitical and disciplinary projections, rather than programmatic prescriptions for particular regime preferences.<sup>4</sup> In reviewing these projections, I realize the research I envisioned has broadened, balanced and balkanized our discipline simultaneously. Our field has finally begun producing the kind of methodological pluralists (Sherry 2000) I hoped would lead to the kind of problem-appropriate inquiry that in turn would lead eventually to a holistic understanding of consumer behaviour. Ironically, that work is not diffusing effectively across disciplinary boundaries. Increasingly, I find the sources that inspire me and the audiences I would like to reach in an orbit frustratingly beyond the one my adopted discipline travels.

Perhaps *E Pluribus Plures* will be the slogan that captures the day, and the dream of a unified field will be so acknowledged. This may be the inevitable legacy of parochial professional societies, if not a business school demesne. Silos and sectarianism seem to characterize that disciplinary moment suspended between fusion and fission, evolution and devolution, efflorescence and decline. In revisiting my earlier projections, I explore the ways our discipline has morphed, and assess some ways a common focus might be retained in the wake of consumption’s rise to grace across so many fields of scholarly inquiry.

## Approach-avoidance: Marketing

The reverberations of the postmodern moment have produced the most significant change in the discipline of marketing since the experimental psychologists upset the hegemony of the economists. And not only has the academic face of the field changed profoundly. The era has witnessed a global growth in managerial research that is decidedly nonpositivist (Sherry and Kozinets 2000). Cultural critic Thomas Frank (2000), in a contorted exercise in sour grapes and wrist slapping, has lamented the incursion of anthropologists, among others, into the practice of account planning, while Jerry Zaltman (1997) has patented the ZMET® projective tasking procedure he has built into a very successful consulting business. Local practitioner organizations of social scientists engaged in commercial consumer research hold regular regional meetings to network and talk shop, seeking to maintain their intellectual vibrancy as they practise their craft in formerly nontraditional fields. The adaptive radiation of these ‘other’ or ‘alternative’ approaches to the commercial sector was inevitable, given both the (insid-



ious if not immoral) overproduction of academic doctorates and the insatiable craving of managers for ever new sources of practical insight. The colonization of the academic discipline has been more of a struggle, but has resulted in some interesting developments.

The study of marketized aspects of consumer behaviour has rapidly accelerated over the past fifteen years. Nothing in the marketing mix has escaped the postmodern purview. Consider just this abbreviated list of topics: branding, advertising and packaging; pricing, merchandising and atmospherics; decision-making, satisfaction and involvement; lifestyle, social class and self; intergenerational transfer, adoption of innovations and category essence; information processing, public policy and service encounters; culture, gender and identity; materialism, socialization and ethnic consumption; technology, mass mediation and ambivalence; fashion, tourism, and gift-giving. Postmodern researchers have continued to pioneer new areas of inquiry, beyond original sacred and profane considerations. Global-local dynamics, cybermarketplace behaviour, consumption subcultures and communities, and methodological innovation comprise a few of these frontier areas.

So also has the study of consumption as a primary, biobasic activity (not as merely an epiphenomenon of marketing) accelerated with a vengeance. This research stream is even more heterogeneous than its parallel cousin. Again, a list is telling: embodiment (adornment, surgery, body image, abortion, gestation, death, etc.) heirlooms and inheritances; desire and authenticity; slavery, propaganda, drug-abuse and illiteracy; feminism, authenticity and ambivalence; ritual, fanaticism and camp; wilderness, homelessness and cosmopolitanism; art, altruism and time; privacy, place and neighbourhood; disability, weddings and STDs. The recent resurgence of interest in community beyond the marketplace – whether positioned as utopia, heterotopia or Temporary Autonomous Zone – among postmodern consumer researchers suggests that this distinctive avenue of inquiry still has great growth potential.

Projecting the approach-avoidance trajectory out into the future, I can imagine the avenues converging in mutual illumination on a nested version of D'Andrade's (1984) meaning systems and material flows. The exploration of material culture under different ideological regimes, as those regimes inexorably interact in the contemporary world, would be a worthy joint venture.

### *Triangulation*

Predictably enough, multimodal studies have proliferated more rapidly within research traditions than across them over the past decade and a half. Postmodern inquiry has combined a number of qualitative methods to produce insight into consumer behaviour. Depth interviews combined with focus groups seems most common. The use of life histories with other personal narrative has also been

popular. Archival and historiographic work have been paired effectively. Observation has been combined with interview. Participant observation and interview is an increasingly frequent combination. Ethnography has enjoyed perhaps the greatest elaboration. While participant observation and (individual and group) interviewing provide the baseline, ethnographic interpretations of consumption have also included artefact analysis, photography, videography and projective tasking. Projectives and interviewing comprise a common pairing. Autodriving – the use of photographic stimuli as prompts for depth interviews – has also proven most useful. There has been a fairly gradual trend toward using either photography or videography as a primary representational mode, with ethnography providing important complementary contexting. Both introspection and autoethnography have been incorporated into more conventional ethnographic accounts to interesting effect. Finally, among the most promising new methodological wrinkles on the triangulation frontier is a technique Kozinets (2002) has called netnography, which translates to cyberspace many of the practices ethnographers pursue in physical space.

While fewer in number, multimodal studies across research traditions have exhibited particular promise. Researchers have effectively combined experiment and individual interview, as well as focus group and experiment. Interview and survey is an increasingly common pairing. Focus groups, survey and phenomenological interview have been employed as complements. Statistical context and critical incident analyses have been jointly performed. Focus groups have been combined both with surveys and structural equation modelling. More ambitious studies have combined survey, interview and dyadic analysis. Among the more intriguing of recent efforts at triangulation are those grounded in and sustained by ethnography, but which incorporate statistical analysis into the process. For example, ethnography has been teamed with causal reasoning tasks, network analysis and cognitive mapping to provide comprehensive, nuanced statistically rigorous insight into phenomena. More ambitious still are the longitudinal studies integrating multiple interview and survey vehicles with participant observation. Perhaps the greatest difficulty encountered in such multimodal research is not the reconciliation of different philosophies of science so much as the heroic effort required to recruit experts and coordinate the interdisciplinary teamwork that the enterprise demands.<sup>5</sup>

It may well be that the next wave of triangulated research can best be stimulated through a combination of methodological refinement and serial joint venture. Parsing a project across methods experts in realistic, actionable components, supporting those experts with pluralists who are boundary spanners, and managing the enterprise over its legitimate life cycle could result in a demonstration piece that would serve as an exemplar of multimodality. Such a project might originate most realistically in a proprietary setting, with the sponsoring

company gaining real-time access to findings in exchange for the academics' right to publish those findings for the entire research community. A properly ambitious relationship might result in the establishment of long term, ethnographer-friendly consumer panels maintained and mined by doctoral students whose research would be of proprietary interest, but of theoretical significance beyond that demanded by managerial relevance. Of course, these large-scale projects might also be accomplished entirely academically, via consortia of centres, special-issue journal initiatives, or dedicated conference tracks, provided a deadline were enforced.

### *Outreach and Collaboration*

There is no denying the rapid diffusion of inquiry into 'other stuff' over the past decade and a half. In the early 1980s, the fate of some of my own manuscripts in the review process was diagnostic of the era. In the absence of paradigm-appropriate review, I was prepared (somewhat) for *ad hominem* attacks on methodology, but was surprised to learn that reviewers often felt that what I was doing was not consumer research. (This occasionally included Hal Kassarian, co-editor of *JCR* and eventual commissioner of the chapter on 'other stuff'.) As I now speak, the postmodern moment has touched all of the top tier journals in marketing, as well as those in most of the other tiers as well. The content of that touching has ranged from the outrageously provocative to the yeomanly pedestrian, but the touching is no longer regarded as remarkable. The effort has been given its due, grudgingly or graciously, and the subdiscipline now pursues both normal and frontier weird science in the flagship journals of the field. And, as I noted earlier, a host of new journals has arisen over time to absorb the output of the moment.

Outside our discipline of consumer research<sup>6</sup>, the rapid rise of interest in consumption has been just as remarkable. Consumer behaviour has been explored in the flagship journals of anthropology, sociology, geography, psychology and communications, as well in the lower tier journals of those fields. Eric Arnould has even mounted a fifth-column invasion of the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, seeking to diffuse marketing scholarship into contiguous disciplines under a false-flag strategy of sorts. (My own preferred Trojan Horse gambit has involved packaging consumer research into books and exporting them to our bibliocentric cousins. Hopefully both approaches will bear fruit.) Older established journals in the humanities such as *Critical Inquiry* and *Representations* have incorporated consumption into their purview, while newer journals such as *Angelaki* have recognized a consumption mandate from the very start.

While books comprise the principal vehicle of research dissemination outside the field of marketing,<sup>7</sup> there has been an increase in other extradisciplinary

channels as well. Danny Miller's Morgan Lectures are an especially visible instance of this growing awareness. Conference tracks at annual meetings in sociology and anthropology are devoted to consumer behaviour. Satellite associations such as the Society for Economic Anthropology have devoted entire conferences to the examination of consumption. Special interest groups within the major fields are served by outlets such as Don Slater's website or Dan Cook's *Consumer, Commodities & Consumption* newsletter. As these channels intersect and as scholars cross pollinate, interpenetrating membership and interlocking directorates are likely to emerge.

I believe the most grossly underutilized but potentially greatest catalyst for multi- and interdisciplinary research into consumer behaviour – a truly ecumenical source of differentiation and individuation – is the Policy Board of the *Journal of Consumer Research*. I also believe the most effective mobilization and exploitation of that Board in the service of scholarly expansion will be directed by the publisher rather than by a visionary Board President, *horribile dictu*. The possibility of ramping up subscription frequency and spinning off carefully cultivated specialist journals is immanent in the Board's design. If each representative of the twelve sponsoring professional associations were charged with cultivating his or her home discipline as a farm club, and empowered not just to prospect for but to develop and recruit talent that would not only reflect the journal's sponsoring base but also lay the groundwork for the apotheosis of consumption in each home discipline, we would experience a golden era, not merely a moment, of the 'otherwise'. Convocation, not just publication, would be stimulated in the bargain.

In lieu of such editorial reconfiguration, outreach and collaboration might best be facilitated by a biennial congress, a kind of 'alternative' exposition of consumer behaviour, to which all disciplines would send delegates, presenters and conventioners. Again, the venue of this congress might rotate, in an effort to involve as global a constituency as possible.

### *Critical Views of Consumption*

While the postmodern moment has stimulated a tide of empirical investigation, its hallmark may well be the normative positioning it has given consumption. The concepts of moral economy or moral geography have a force that the founding fathers of consumer behaviour may have lauded but never anticipated when they launched their venture in the mid 1970s. Consumer researchers have cast an ever more critical eye on the antecedents and consequences of consumption. Drawing on sources as varied as Marxism, ecology, critical theory, feminism, situationism, media studies, liberation theology, queer studies, anarchism, ecofeminism, legal studies and others, scholars have pursued a critique of consumption that has not only indicted marketing as the engine of planetary immiseration and degrada-



tion, but also called (paradoxically? perversely? playfully?) for a marketing solution to problems marketing has ostensibly created. Out of these studies has emerged a renewed interest in consumer agency, as issues of false consciousness, co-creativity, production of consumption, consumer misbehaviour and resistance are unpacked with ever more precise empirical probing. So also is the interest in social engineering seeming to revive, as investigation of Utopian pragmatics accelerates.

I imagine two interesting streams at least will emerge from this critical inquiry. First, the critique of marketing practice must be accompanied by a revision of marketing practice. A simple (if rigorous or comprehensive) audit and exposure of the shortfalls of marketing management (as ideology and practice) is a necessary but insufficient application of the critical perspective. We need to field a variant of Gramsci's engaged intellectual (who, if not willing to work harder, will at least work smarter), committed to translating scholarship into activism. Whether this activism results in the sublation of the global economy (perhaps a variant of the humane capitalism the Swedes have striven to perfect), or the selective disengagement of groups from the system all together (*à la* the bioregionalists, voluntary simplicitarians, gated communitarians or some as yet undeclared monastic or hermetic enclaves), it is a vital component of our professing mission, and one that has been left too long to atrophy. Perhaps Alan Andreasen's Institute for Social Marketing, or Joel Cohen's increasingly aggressive *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, are steps in this direction.

The second emergent stream is the relentless, holistic, comprehensive and nuanced empirical investigation of the material conditions of critical counterculturalism itself. We require a thorough understanding of the dynamics of resistance, appropriation or whatever other name by which the strategy of consumer revitalization movement comes to be characterized. The dynamics of populist presumption or grassroots conduction need to be examined as they unfold, on the ground, in households around the world. Whether ephemeral or long lasting, these instances of wresting autonomy from the system must be understood, harnessed and directed in the service of enhanced quality of life.

### New Presentation Modes

As this chapter goes to press, the crisis of representation has finally breached the walls of consumer research. While the tyranny of the journal article has not been deposed, it has been convincingly challenged. As the humanists and artists of our era become bricoleurs of consumer culture (from current permutations of K-Mart realism such as William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*, Alex Shakar's *The Savage Girl* and Victor Pelevin's *Homo Zapiens*, to the endemic product placement of contemporary cinema and television), and as consumers themselves use the stuff of their consumer behaviour to produce hybrid art forms (I think imme-

diately of the sampling 'mash-ups' that computer technology assists audiophiles in creating), scholars have finally started to represent their understanding in vehicles more emotionally and evocatively attuned to authenticity. Once produced off-the-clock in odd hours and rarely published (perhaps out of fear of the Cornell West rap CD brouhaha potential of their musings), then nurtured in presidential sessions of ACR conferences, and now published in flagship journals, poetry has emerged as a viable vessel of consumer research. Introspective, autoethnographic accounts of consumption experience are finding their way from book chapters to journals as well. Some consumer researchers may find they have more in common with Sundance film-makers than with their information-processing colleagues, as Russ Belk and Rob Kozinets speed the diffusion of videography through our research community.

As more popular cultural biographies of commodities, brands and corporations are produced in trade press book format by writers, journalists and independent scholars, and as academic researchers outside marketing departments generate more scholarly books on consumer behaviour, we are seeing more consumer researchers adopt the book as a vehicle of knowledge dissemination. These books are being produced primarily by senior scholars beyond the reach of promotion and tenure committees, rather than by more junior scholars, who, arguably, might be even more prolific if this option were available to them. I think for this format to flourish, senior scholars must lobby collectively for the adoption of the book as at least the equivalent of the journal article in the evaluation of untenured scholars' productivity. This is especially important for younger researchers whose methods do not include experiment or quantitative data analysis.

One of the most intriguing implications of the crisis of representation is that consumer researchers may be able to reach audiences outside their own narrow domains of specialization. Conveying our understandings in a way that may produce enlightened consumption – that we may have a powerful, provocative, prosocial impact on the lived experience of consumers as they consume – is a heady prospect, and one that is quite edifying. I think of it as a way to take our professing to the streets.

### Conclusion

If the legacy of the postmodern moment in our discipline was the exaltation of doubt, the enfranchisement of speculation, and the flourishing of 'alternative' perspectives, it is probably reasonable to state that the passing of that moment has been marked by the routinization of this alterity. Because I assigned dates to certain watershed moments in my original chapter, recognizing at the time the somewhat arbitrary nature of dating in such a fluid intellectual environment, I

feel a certain urgency to repeat the effort here, especially in keeping with what I believe to be the ritual auspiciousness that this volume embodies. The 'elusive' consumption we celebrate in this book is both 'illusive' and 'allusive', and we are not so much 'tracking' new perspectives as we are 'releasing' them, if the hunting metaphor be preserved. In deference to the editors, who have extended their ancient tradition of *Allemanstratt* (Gannon 1994) into our discipline, I imagine the summit of 2002 that spawned this book as the threshold of our new era, the suffusion of orthodoxy with otherness, the transformation (not merely the subversion) of our inquiry into complementary holism, the righteous proper became the next ordinary. For now. Let's hope we've witnessed the birth of a discipline we can all recognize simply as 'consumer research'. And that it will henceforth be infused with the egalitarian passion the Swedes call *jamlikhet* (Gannon 1994).

## Notes

1. So many of the pioneers of our field - Bill Wells, Joel Cohen, Sid Levy, Jerry Zaltman, Jerry Olsen, Jerry Kernan and others - are interdisciplinary rabble-rousers of the first order, who set into motion changes whose magnitude I'm sure they never imagined. Subsequent instigators whose activities I nominally chronicle in this essay hail primarily from US business schools, a parochial provenance whose circumscription I readily acknowledge. I hope my colleagues will read through the apparently ethnocentric tenor to the situated critique I offer.
2. Which didn't include the rampant rise of alliteration as a persuasive trope, as championed by postmodern marketing's belletrist nonpareil, Stephen Brown (1995).
3. As a proxy measure of this proliferation, the coursepacket for my doctoral seminar, which is drawn principally from intramural sources and winnowed for relevance, now weighs in at 24 pounds, or 12 pounds when duplexed to save trees.
4. For example, my own predilection for such topics as gift-giving, placeways, embodiment and festival were not advanced as vanguard enterprises, despite my passion for them and belief that their importance, especially as unpacked by me, is vastly underrepresented in our journals.
5. For years, my behavioural colleagues at Kellogg and I have nickel-and-dimed a revisionist study of advertising effectiveness, the sole topic we can each agree upon as the requisite whipping boy. We have begun with semiotic analysis of advertisements, initial experimental and survey work, but have never quite made it to the ethnographic study intended to inform future rounds of interview, experiment and survey that would lead to new measures of effectiveness we all could sanction. Alas, more discrete projects have intervened to distract us, and the track has grown cold. Perhaps a project manager would be a wise investment!
6. Each time I use a personal pronoun, I hear a mafioso echo, a clanny, insular, hegemonic reverberation, as if 'our allegiance to marketing's *cosa nostra* required me to defer to Eric Arnould (a consumer ethnographer in a business school) as a friend of ours and Rick Wilk (a consumer ethnographer in a college of liberal arts and sciences) as a friend of mine. This distinction is a sociopolitical not a personal one. I look forward to an era when we have tunnelled so extensively between silos that erosion produces a common garner.
7. Again, space constraints preclude a cataloguing of this prodigious output, but interested researchers can turn to the *JCR* 'Reflections' and *ACR News* 'Fellows' Bookshelf' for a running start at the literature. It is a safe bet that the *Annual Reviews* series will include surveys of consumption as regular features among their numbers.

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# Elusive Consumption

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