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## Cherish the Cats

John F. Sherry, Jr.

'Tis a consummation  
Devoutly to be wished.  
(*Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 1)

As a disciplinary interloper, my earliest experiences of transition into consumer research were shaped by the luck of a particular draw. On a number of these formative occasions, I had the exalting and humbling experience of following Morris Holbrook in the rotation of conference-session speakers. Sharing the dais with him was an honor. Being mesmerized by his ideas and his rhetoric was transcendent. Seeking to transport an audience in the aftermath of his magic was futile beyond description. So enraptured were participants by his performance that I could only hope to draft in his tail wind, linking my insight to a lingering trope that I trusted might get my idea encoded with one of his. It was a powerful learning experience that raised my game considerably. In this fusion of substance with style, I could have had no better teacher.

From my novice's vantage point, I came to associate Morris with poetics and a playful pugnacity. His writing frequently invoked the disciplines to which I oriented, which provided great consolation as I explored the unfamiliar territory of marketing and consumer research. Even better, his work was shot through with poetry, borrowed from poets to help illuminate his own current thinking or written by the man himself, better to convey those insights less reducible to journal-style prose. Given my own poetic leanings, the confidence displayed in his penchant for the lyrical was bracing and amplified his insights in a way that few others in our field had attempted. Better yet, he followed Pope's dictum that the sound should seem an echo to the sense. What nobler way to prick the conscience of the gatekeeper than to meet positivist prose with prosody?

This playful pugnacity manifested on page and in person in the form of perpetual challenges. Morris seemed to delight in an affable probing of his interlocutors, engaging them in collegial debate to plumb the consequences of their points

of view. Even fellow travelers were not exempted from critique, as his teammates on the Consumer-Behavior Odyssey came to appreciate. He'd publicly counsel novices (tongue-in-cheek) not to take his own advice, as it could derail careerism.

To be so persuasive, so seductive, and yet be such a contrarian is a dazzling accomplishment. A principal combatant in the paradigm wars of the 1980s, Morris provided us a stunning example of how a scholar might rage against the machine. Immensely learned, able to conduct solid research across contending camps, literary in his disquisitions, Morris uses a sharp, pointy stick to draw his line in the sand. His stance provoked the field to appreciate its potential far more holistically than ever before. And the performance is always so damned smooth.

This contrarian voice begins for me with the call for a rethinking of the boundaries of our field. Morris proposed that "consummation" should become a discipline unto itself, subsuming the efforts of contiguous enterprises in commerce, social science, and the humanities. Along with fellow dissident Russell Belk, Morris called for a field devoted to consumption, broadly construed, that would be no mere handmaiden to business. He wished to liberate consumer research from the thrall of marketing research, to preserve the privilege and integrity of the inquirer to pursue phenomena wherever they might ramify. Morris's "ivory-tower specialism" recognizes the needs both for a narrow conception of marketing to persist and for a branch of scholarship to remain detached from that circumscribed viewpoint.

His indictment of business schools for privileging the managerial perspective and neglecting the consumer perspective has proven to be a powerful corrective, and management education has improved in the distant wake of his early critique. His lament over the standardization of the business curriculum seems also to have been taken to heart by some administrators, as programs are currently reassessing structure, content, and delivery of educational experience. The work of the Task Force on Marketing Thought, of which he was a member and upon which he was a commentator, embodied the scholarly values and mentorly attitude that Morris has traditionally espoused, which I believe will be the principal drivers of our field's viability in the coming decade.

Among his most heretical suggestions is the proposal that the reviewers of manuscripts submitted to scholarly journals be required to sign their reviews. Such a recommendation was offered in an effort to stem the tide of unethical misconduct that Morris felt was overwhelming the academic review process. His view of the "sodomasochistic" enterprise that knowledge production in our field had become, a tough-minded evaluation that resonated across research camps, remains accurate to date, the few reforms undertaken to abate the situation (signing sadly not among them) driven largely by his tireless stumping and his oft-quoted critique.

Beneath the critical commentary of his contrarian condition is a fierce commitment to academic freedom. The challenge and obligation to pursue ideas across boundaries—whether in the lab, the field, or the classroom, without regard to immediate utility beyond discovery—is the scholar's birthright. Morris's insistence that

relevance be understood to refer to more than one reality should be inscribed above our office doors and classroom whiteboards. It should be printed on the masthead of our journals. The freedom to produce, disseminate, and acquire knowledge as one's conscience and training dictate is a value in need of constant refreshment. Morris has refreshed this ideal on more dimensions and in more genres than anyone in our field.

And, in so doing, punning mercilessly across the academic landscape, he has left few cats' tales still unswung. This catachrestical proclivity reached its catastasis in his adoption of the Morris-the-Cat persona, the mask of the finical feline who is his alter ego. Morris the Cat should be every academic's familiar. That's how this catechumen's panegyric ends.