

Volume Introduction: Better the Devil You Know: A Thumbnail Hagiography

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This volume celebrates just one aspect of the multifaceted contribution that is the legacy of Russell Belk. Our focus is on enterprises alternative—or formerly alternative—to the research mainstream that managed to restore a humane sense of reverence to the material world. This restoration of the visceral and the spiritual to a discipline preoccupied with the cognitive and the pecuniary is a landmark achievement. The late and unlamented disenchantment or dislodging of the world is revealed in Russ's work to be a disciplinary fiction, an assumption empirically unchallenged for so long before his creative disruption that the richness of consumption had been reduced largely to discussions of utility and mental process. In the early 1980s, at the beginning of our paradigm wars, Russ became, to paraphrase brother Mouzone (from the HBO series *The Wire*), the most dangerous man in the discipline: a trickster with a library card.

I imagine Russ as a devil's advocate for a vision of consumer research informed but unconstrained by disciplinary allegiance. This was a heretical position back in the day, to which some of the articles in this volume will attest. With a wide command of literatures addressing consumption, and following the cue of latter day odysseans who shifted their journey from sea to road, Russ challenged economists and psychologists to understand the lived experience of consumers as it unfolded, on the ground. He has always exhibited enthusiasm in its etymological sense of being possessed by a god, and there has usually been method to his madness. Russ is passionate in his pursuits. The exuberance he displays in launching and managing his portfolio of projects, as well as in his generous guidance of junior colleagues, is as legendary as it is inspirational. This enthusiasm has helped turn the field upside down and inside out, ensouling our subject matter in the bargain.

Three of my colleagues, a distinguished international cast of characters that includes Professors Pauline Maclaran, Marylouise Caldwell, and Jonathan Schroeder, have written eloquent commentaries on the intersection of their interests with those of Russ, and these essays follow my own brief introduction. Each of us has interacted with Russ in numerous capacities over the decades, and each is pleased to have the opportunity to celebrate this relationship in the present volume.

In the following paragraphs, I identify some of the themes that ripple through the articles in this collection. While not exhaustive, the list is indicative of the breadth of Russ's oeuvre, and the distinctiveness of his scholarship. Each theme is a portal onto the substance and practice of consumer research as he has shaped it.

Autobiography. One of the remarkable features of Russ's work is the amount of autobiographical detail it contains. He is often a teller of confessional and impressionist tales, tracing the origins or grounding the discussion of a project in the personal engagement he has with the matter at hand. This is less the subjective personal introspection of a Morris Holbrook than the requisite personal disclosure required by a reader to gauge the resonance of any particular interpretation made by an author. Persuading you of the intrinsic interestingness of a phenomenon (beyond its inherent existence) by virtue of his personal investment in it, Russ leverages this public display of affection into a pact with the reader to accompany him on a deeper dive than might have been anticipated. Revealing to you the personal dimension of intraceptive intuition through the inclusion of a methodological note or journal excerpt mid-story, Russ uses the mechanics of article construction as a teachable moment.

Parsing our way through his oeuvre, we glean intimate details of the author's life that encourage us to speculate about the nature of forces influencing the direction of scholarly inquiry. In installments (some brief, some extended), we are treated to glimpses of the man behind the curtain. Each of us has had the revelatory experience of encountering authors known previously to us only through their work, at a conference or symposium, and being delighted (or dismayed) finally to fit a person to the persona. In a very real sense, few have ever engaged Russ as a true stranger, so accessible to us has he been on the printed page or the DVD. He has dispensed avuncular advice to field workers and videographers, rooted in his own (sometimes hard-won) experience with media technology and consumer context.

Multitasking. Russ tasks the field and its participants not just to tolerate, but also appreciate, the diversity of research orientations and levels of analysis to which consumer behavior is susceptible. He does this less through exhortation than through direct demonstration. Russ has become the change he wants to see in our scholarly world, acquiring and employing disciplinary habits of mind as the situation demands. He embodies the notion of retooling as a fact of life. Our field has become multidisciplinary (if still not, or ever, interdisciplinary) in large part due to his scholarly activism as a researcher and organizer, whether as an internal rabble-rouser or external ambassador.

Russ has been a tireless advocate and practitioner of a multi-method approach to understanding consumer behavior. The Consumer Behavior Odyssey was arguably one

of the earliest experiments in multi-sited ethnography in any discipline. His ardent promotion of multisensory and multimedia data collection and analysis has rendered our scholarly insights more accessible and evocative than traditional approaches have permitted. He has also managed to reach multiple audiences, from mature scholars and doctoral students to the managerial base of the Marketing Science Institute.

Broadening. Like Kotler and Levy did for marketing before him, Russ has managed to broaden considerably the boundaries of the field that we recognize as consumer research. Moving from a circumscribed area of marketing characterized as "buyer behavior" to a vision of "consumer behavior" as a discipline unto itself, the equal of other contiguous social science disciplines, Russ has motivated the field to follow consumption wherever it ramifies. The extra-economic dimensions of consumer behavior have proven to be vast, and their charting has changed the topography of the discipline significantly.

Russ has characteristically mapped out new programmatic research directions in essays exploring the implications for and applications of novel bodies of literature to our traditional topical interests, or identifying consumption phenomena that have been overlooked given our prematurely narrow disciplinary foci. These directions more often than not have been accompanied by specific methodological recommendations for prospective researchers. What's more, Russ has often gone on systematically to complete these suggested studies before the choir has been able to sing.

History. The articles in this volume nicely illustrate the meticulous attention to history Russ brings to bear in his scholarship. I use the notion of history here in two senses. First of all, Russ provides an impeccable history of ideas behind whatever focal issue he has selected to address, which is no mean feat, given the dense domains he prefers. Russ is a master of what Jerry Zaltman has called wide cognitive peripheral vision. Rather than using a blank slate perspective of a phenomenon anchored in the conventional consumer research literature, I have always imagined Russ to use a palimpsest perspective, working tenaciously to uncover whatever contiguous disciplines have had to say about the phenomenon as well. Russ's literature evaluations have traditionally been heroic, an intellectual pay-off above and beyond whatever the results of a particular study might have been. We are challenged to understand a phenomenon comprehensively in this fashion, and to cultivate a sense of humility about our contribution to the wellsprings of knowledge.

Second of all, Russ has proven an able historian of our evolving field of consumer research. His accounts of the Consumer Behavior Odyssey in particular provide invaluable access to the ethos and activity of a watershed moment in the history of the discipline. I have more to say about this moment in later paragraphs, but his dispassionate and detailed chronicling of an episteme that he himself had predominantly forged is exhilarating to behold.

Style. Russ has long been sensitive to the reciprocal relationship of style to understanding. Representation and understanding are intimately intertwined to such an extent that they can be said to be co-constituting. Russ has filtered his interpretations of consumer behavior through genres beyond the conventional journal article.

Even within the confines of print, Russ has shown himself to be a literary stylist and fabulist. His writing often includes literary (and cinematic and musical and pictorial and . . .) allusions, and he has sought inspiration for empirical studies in literary texts. He has a style of writing that is difficult to mistake for anyone else's. Further, Russ has written fables and allegories to convey his fuller understanding of phenomena as the opportunity has arisen.

While his extensive commentary on visual media is represented in this volume, his own many accomplished videos are not. Russ has told numerous effective stories videographically, and has been a prime mover of the ACR Film Festival, which has motivated many scholars to experiment with more cinematic methods of presenting their own research findings to the world. He has conducted videographic workshops and festivals around the world, and published tutorials and bibliographies that have aided the trepidacious. The humanistic impulse in contemporary consumer research is thriving in large measure, thanks to Russ's example and patronage.

Craftsmanship. Russ is an old-school artisan who, having perfected his craft through prodigious iteration, has labored mightily to pass on the secrets of the trade to subsequent generations. Throughout this volume, craft is not only demonstrated but also deconstructed. Advice is delivered in stand-alone exhortations (Read voraciously! Question existing wisdom! Get weird!) that are carefully unpacked, and embedded in postmortems of larger projects (Bring two! Take longer!).

The principles that drive the scholarly and managerial power of visual imagery are derived. The dangers of canonical thinking are detailed. Inventories of techniques, procedures, and approaches are posted. Typologies and evaluations are proposed. The reader will gain an appreciation for Russ as a teacher and a leader in many of the passages included here. He never suggests a new bearing without proffering at least a tentative map.

Odyssey. I've saved the journey for last. Russ has employed the journey figuratively and literally to advance his vision of a discipline coming of age. The Consumer Behavior Odyssey described so assiduously in this volume marked Russ's bid to remake the field in a more honest, rigorous, and holistic image. I've described the Odyssey as part ritual of rebellion and part revitalization movement, part research regime and part marketing strategy. This theme incorporates the others I have catalogued, and displays them in sharp relief. The Odyssey deployed "new" methods, perspectives, orientations, genres, tactics, technologies, and personnel in a daring experiment in experiential research. The articles included in this volume provide a resonant account of the Odyssey from inception through evaluation, in a way that illuminates the growth of a scholar as well as a discipline. Recruitment, funding, logistics, skill acquisition and refinement, organizational dynamics, analysis, genre parsing, and critical assessment are considered in great detail.

Russ moves from the workbench to the realm of grounded theory, unpacking the journey on intellectual and emotional dimensions, to show the doing of naturalistic inquiry as a rigorous social scientific undertaking. His authentic description of the hurdles encountered in his own drive for technical mastery should continue to inspire

doctoral students for years to come. The sociopolitical climate of the discipline, the tactical flirtation with crypto-positivism, the challenge of herding collegial cats, the taming of technology, and the fighting of a dozen other brushfires lends a dramatic tension to the interpretive story Russ is able to tell about the deeper structure of consumption his odysseys were bent upon discovering.

This thematic overview merely hints at the rich content that awaits savoring by the reader of this volume, and hopefully will prime appreciation for the manner in which knowledge can be conveyed. Like Odysseus, Russ has exhibited the classical virtues of *fortitudo* and *sapientia*. Like Brendan the Navigator, he has helped establish many seats of learning inspired by his voyage. In developing and refining an alternative methodological toolkit to the one he acquired as an apprentice, Russ has encouraged us all to explore an enchanted world of consumption. His evocative multimedia presentations immerse us in the animate aspect of our material world. I hope this volume imparts courage to its readers to undertake their own new voyages of discovery, enlightenment, and personal growth.

Legends in Consumer Behavior

RUSSELL W. BELK

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Volume 2

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH RE-ENCHANTING CONSUMPTION

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