

MARKETING CLASSICS¹

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Art or Science? Fifty Years of Marketing Debate

Fifty years after Converse's (1945) classic statement on the "art or science of marketing", the debate has come full circle. The holy grail of Science has not been attained and its pursuit has not only served to alienate practitioners from academics, but it has also done enormous damage to our discipline. This paper traces the development of the great debate, discusses the damaging postmodern critique of western Science and concludes that, as an Art, marketing should be judged by appropriately aesthetic criteria.

Technique is the servant not the master,
A beginning not an end,
A challenge that needs creative imagination for fulfilment,
A form with the potential for an art.
Fashioning dreams before they are dreamt,
Needs before they are articulated, and creating effective
demand from confusion.
Art is the master not the servant.
(Stevens 1995).

Introduction

Fifty years ago, a momentous event occurred in the history of marketing research. Like many momentous events, the momentousness of the publication *The Development of the Science of Marketing* was not immediately apparent. On the surface, indeed, Paul D. Converse's (1945) much-cited paper comprised little more than the results of a routine

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² The "marketing scientists" among the *JMM* readership will doubtless derive great pleasure from the fact that the author patently cannot count! I fully appreciate that this year [1996] is not the 50th anniversary of the great "art or science" debate — but, believe me, it was when the paper was written. Correspondence to: School of Management, University of Ulster, Jordanstown, Co. Antrim, BT37 0QB, Tel: 028 9036 6130, Fax: 028 9036 6868, E-Mail: sfx.brown@ulst.ac.uk

questionnaire survey of 64 marketing researchers and, despite the imprimatur of the foremost academic journal, could quite easily have been dismissed as one among many worthy but dull contributions. However, by pressing the then fashionable term “science” into titular service and incorporating a couple of throw-away remarks concerning “the art or science of marketing”, Converse struck the spark that ignited one of the most prolonged, profound, provocative, polemical and downright pyromaniacal debates in the entire post-war period. Half a century on from Converse’s classic contribution, it may be worthwhile endeavouring to stare into the embers of the once-mighty “art versus science” conflagration. Such an exercise in intellectual divination is not simply an empty anniversarial gesture, important though anniversaries undoubtedly are in today’s sepia-hued, nostalgia prone, some would say rose-tinted, world of postmodernity (Johnston 1991; Brown 1995a). On the contrary, it is arguable that such augural endeavours are more necessary than ever, since the ostensibly dormant art versus science debate seems to be on the point of entering a new and potentially decisive phase. Recent years have witnessed a dramatic change in societal and scholarly attitudes toward Science, and it follows that this transformation is likely to have serious implications for the nature, characteristics and aspirations of the marketing discipline. Few people, after all, would deny that the pursuit of “scientific status” and the academic legitimacy it confers, has been the leitmotif of post-war marketing scholarship. It goes to the very heart of modern marketing understanding, our sense of ourselves, and any alteration in the prevailing conception of science has significant ramifications that simply cannot be ignored.

In its attempt, therefore, to mark the anniversary of Converse’s seminal statement, whilst highlighting some of the issues that are now at stake, the present paper commences by setting out an admittedly oversimplified three-stage model of the “art or science” controversy; continues with an undeniably subjective assessment of the outcome, implications and legacy of the great debate; and, concludes by offering a somewhat partisan summary of the extant epistemological options that are available to academic marketers. This paper, it must be emphasised, does not claim to be the last word on “art or science”, nor, indeed, an even-handed account of the controversy. Nor, for that matter, does it strive to set out or dictate the future direction of the marketing discipline. Any such prescriptions would be indicative of intolerable authorial conceit, inimical to the overall development of the subject area and, not least, utterly unimplementable. Nevertheless, by its intentionally provocative assertions, the paper does try to raise a number of not insignificant topics which warrant careful consideration, especially in these times of pre-millennial tension, when reflections on the past and hopes for the future tend to loom large in the human psyche (Bull 1995).

Stage One: The Pro-science Era (c.1945–1983)

Although the commencement of the “art versus science” debate is usually attributed to Converse’s (1945) landmark publication, it is noteworthy that the

term “science” had been employed in a marketing context some years earlier (see Kerin 1996). Indeed, it is also true to say that the great “debate” did not really get into its stride until the early 1950s. As a close reading of his paper clearly reveals, Converse did not consider the artistic and scientific approaches to be meaningful alternatives. On the contrary, he maintained that marketing was indubitably a nascent science and that the results of his survey had gone some way towards providing an “accurate evaluation of contributions to the development of science” (Converse 1945, p.23). These sentiments, what is more, were shared by several other early commentators, most notably Brown (1948) and Alderson and Cox (1948). The former argued that in order for it to develop into a fully-fledged profession, marketing had to abandon the descriptive ethos that had long prevailed and endeavour to become more analytical, research-orientated and methodologically sophisticated, all of which were pre-requisites for the formulation of a precise, scientific body of knowledge. The latter authors, likewise, concluded that marketing scholarship had hitherto been characterised by too much indiscriminate fact gathering and a distinct lack of systematicity. It was only by setting up testable hypotheses, developing a coherent body of abstract principles and culling the conceptual insights available in cognate subject areas, that marketing could move beyond its then pre-scientific status to one of genuine scientific attainment.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the scientific aspirations of Brown, and Alderson and Cox were promptly challenged by Vaile (1949), who asserted that marketing was an art where innovation, creativity and extravaganza prevailed, and where the sheer complexity of marketplace behaviours rendered impossible the development of a general theory or theories. Hence, it might be better to abandon endogenous theory building and endeavour instead to exploit the principles formulated by purer, better equipped social sciences like economics, psychology and sociology. In a similar vein, Bartels (1951) emphasised that marketing was not and could not be considered a science, since work that warranted the appellation “science” was simply not being conducted by marketing researchers, and, while it may well be possible to study marketing phenomena scientifically, the very idea of establishing a science called marketing was questionable. Not only was there widespread uncertainty over the scientific status of the group of academic disciplines known as the social sciences, but marketing was also much too narrow a field to be considered a legitimate science. That said, Bartels found *some* evidence of the use of the scientific method in marketing research and concluded that, with further theoretical speculation and systematic scholarship, marketing may well become a science in the fullness of time.

Bartels’ conclusion, coupled with the growing preparedness to speak openly of “marketing science” (e.g. Cox and Alderson 1950), prompted Hutchinson (1952) into penning a devastating rejoinder.

“In appraising the progress which has been made in developing a science of marketing, one is tempted to make allowances for the relatively short period of time in which the issues have been under discussion. But whatever

allowances are called for, one is likely to be somewhat disappointed over the lack of progress to date... There seems to be little evidence to support the claim that all that is needed is time and patience until there will emerge the new and shining science of marketing... There is a real reason, however, why the field of marketing has been slow to develop a unique body of theory. It is a simple one: marketing is not a science. It is rather an art or a practice, and as such more closely resembles engineering, medicine and architecture than it does physics, chemistry or biology. It is the drollest travesty to relate the scientist's search for knowledge to the market research man's seeking after customers. In actual practice...many and probably most of the decisions in the field resemble the scientific method hardly any more closely than what is involved in reading a road map or a time table." (Hutchinson 1952, pp.287-291).

Notwithstanding Hutchinson's heroic attempt to emasculate marketing's early post-war "physics envy", and the serious concerns expressed by Vaile and Bartels, it is fair to say that by the beginning of the 1960s, the battle had been decisively won by the scientific wannabes. In an era informed by the Ford and Carnegie Reports, which excoriated Business Studies for its lack of academic rigour (see Holbrook 1995), and the celebrated Two Cultures controversy, where Snow (1993, original 1959) effectively demolished the perceived intellectual hegemony of the humanities, the establishment of the Marketing Science Institute, coupled with the AMA's stated aim of advancing the science of marketing, ensured that no one seriously questioned the appropriateness of marketing's aspiration to scientific status. As Buzzell (1963, p.32) emphasised in the opening sentences of his celebrated and much-cited paean to the scientific worldview, "If you ask the average business executive what the most important agent of progress is in contemporary society, the odds are good that he will answer 'Science'. There is a general respect, even awe for the accomplishments of science. The satellites in orbit, polio vaccine and television are tangible pieces of evidence that science conquers all. To be against science is as heretical as to be against motherhood".

While many early enthusiasts shared Buzzell's absolute conviction that the pursuit of scientific status was an appropriate ambition for marketing scholarship, there was considerable dissensus about the extent to which the discipline had or had not attained this ultimate objective. For some prominent commentators, such as Mills (1961), Lee (1965), Robin (1970), Kotler (1972) and Ramond (1974), marketing was already a science or proto-science. For others, it had either a considerable way to go or was courting a pleasant, if somewhat utopian, day-dream (Borden 1965; Halbert 1965; Kernan 1973; Levy 1976). In fact, none other than Buzzell himself was somewhat sceptical about marketing's scientific pretensions. In order to qualify as a science, he argued, marketing had to meet certain stringent conditions: principally, a classified and systematised body of knowledge, which was organised around one or more central theories, ideally expressed in quantitative terms and used for the prediction and control of future events (Buzzell 1963).

Regardless, however, of commentators failure to agree on marketing's precise placement on the art–science continuum, there was no disagreement over the propitiousness of the aspiration. As Schwartz (1965, p.1) stressed at the time, “the various expressions of opinion have not revealed anyone who is opposed to the development of a science of marketing”.

Interesting though the initial exchanges in the “art or science” debate undoubtedly are, there is no question that the single most decisive first phase contribution was Shelby Hunt's (1976) prize-winning paper, “The Nature and Scope of Marketing”. For Hunt, the lack of consensus on marketing's scientific status was partly a consequence of the impossibly high qualification criteria laid down by Buzzell. It seemed unnecessarily harsh, Hunt contended, to withhold the “scientific” designation until such times as marketing had successfully accumulated a body of central theories. The appellation, rather, was warranted when marketing exhibited the three characteristic features of science: distinct subject matter, underlying uniformities and intersubjectively certifiable research procedures. While there was some evidence to suggest that marketing had demonstrated, or was capable of demonstrating, the latter two, marketers' apparent inability to reach agreement on the discipline's domain - as manifested in the then extant and seemingly interminable “broadening” debate - had served to constrain marketing's scientific aspirations. In an attempt to circumvent this constriction on the royal road to Marketing Science, Hunt posited a broadened conception of marketing's nature and scope which combined the traditional company-centred, profit-orientated and normative dimensions, with the emerging societal, non-profit-oriented and positive perspectives. The last of these, in particular, enabled Hunt (1976, p.27) to conclude triumphantly that “the study of the *positive* dimensions of marketing can be appropriately referred to as *marketing science*” (emphasis in original).

In retrospect, therefore, it is evident that the first great stage of the “art versus science” controversy can be summarised in terms of the 4Ps of *positivism*, *penitence*, *pubescence* and *positioning*. *Positivism* does not simply refer to the fact that the model of science being pursued by marketers was characterised by universal laws and objective knowledge, but also to the overwhelmingly positive, progressive, optimistic, forward-looking attitudes of the individuals concerned. The attainment of “scientific” status was generally considered to be a good thing, a worthwhile pursuit, a noble endeavour and, indeed, one that could be attained if it were not for the bad old intuitive, seat-of-the-pants, unscientific attitudes that still too often prevailed and about which prospective marketing scientists were suitably *penitent* and self-critical. In fact, Newman (1965, p.20) went so far as to threaten recalcitrant revolutionaries with “the pains of hastened obsolescence”. Set against this, it was generally acknowledged that marketing's continuing pre-occupation with piecemeal data gathering, rather than theory construction, was attributable to *pubescence*, the comparative youth of the subject area, the fact that it was only 50 years old and, unlike analogous applied sciences like engineering and medicine, had not progressed beyond the artistic or craftsman stage of

disciplinary development. Yet despite its academic immaturity and predilection for improper procedures, many maintained that marketing was moving in the right direction, had achieved a great deal in a short period of time and, for some enthusiasts at least, already warranted the “scientific” appellation. Such assertions, and diverse counter-claims, ensured that much time and effort was devoted to *positioning*, to defining the nature, scope and characteristics of both “marketing” and “science”, and placing the perceived state of marketing thought against these putative measures of “scientific” attainment.

Stage Two: The Pro-sciences Era (c.1983–1999)

If the first great stage of the art–science debate began with a whimper, it ended - and the second era commenced - with an almighty bang. In 1983, Paul Anderson challenged the fundamental philosophical premises of marketing “science”. The received view, variously described as “positivist”, “positivistic” or “logical empiricist”, rested on the assumption that a single, external world existed, that this social reality could be empirically measured by independent observers using objective methods, and that it could be explained and predicted through the identification of universal laws or law-like generalizations. Aided and abetted by like-minded revolutionaries, Anderson sought to highlight the shortcomings of this scientific worldview, mainly its reliance upon the flawed “verification theory of meaning”, the inadequacies of its falsificationist procedure, the difficulties presented by the inherent theory-ladenness of observation and, not least, the fact that innumerable attempts to demarcate “science” from “non-science” had signally failed to do so (see Deshpande 1983; Peter and Olson 1983; Hirschman 1986).

In these circumstances, Anderson (1983, 1986, 1989) concluded that marketing was ill-served by the traditional positivistic perspective - what he termed *science*¹ - and that a relativist approach - dubbed *science*² - had much more to offer. This maintained that, although an external world may well exist “out there”, it was impossible to access this world independently of human sensations, perceptions and interpretations. Hence, reality was not objective and external to the observer but socially constructed and given meaning by human actors. What counted as scientific knowledge about this world was *relative* to different times, contexts and research communities. Relativism held that there were no universal standards for judging knowledge claims, that different research communities constructed different world views and that science was a social process where consensus prevailed about the status of knowledge claims, scientific standards and the like, though these were not immutable. Science was so social, in fact, that Peter and Olson (1983), in their ringing endorsement of the relativist position, concluded that science was actually a special case of marketing, that successful scientific theories were those which performed well in the marketplace of ideas thanks to the marketing skills of their proponents.

Although these sentiments ran completely counter to many academic

marketers' understanding of the nature of Science, which, thanks to Hunt, Buzzell and their first place forebears, was widely considered to be objective, impersonal, progressive, rational, rigorous, cumulative, universal and, above all, truthful, they were predicated on an extensive body of scholarly research. In his seminal text, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, for example, Thomas Kuhn (1970) had demonstrated that far from being open-minded, co-operative and dispassionate, scientists were dogmatic, secretive and strongly committed to their theoretical constructs. Instead of trying to test their theories rigorously by endeavouring to disprove or falsify them, as Popper prescribed, scientists tended to defend their concepts from attack and seemed prepared to make all sorts of *ad hoc* modifications rather than give them up. Paul Feyerabend (1987, 1988), furthermore, contended that there were no methodological standards that could be universally applied, no procedures that guaranteed success or pertained to all sciences at all times, no rules that had not been bent, broken or ignored on occasion and no single, agreed, uniform scientific method as such. Taken together, the theses of Kuhn and Feyerabend effectively destroyed the notion that Western science was a unique form of objectively proven knowledge and, while there has been substantial subsequent debate on the validity of such contentions in general (Rorty 1980; Barnes 1982; Wolpert 1992) and their applicability to marketing in particular (Dholakia and Arndt 1985; Venkatesh 1985; Foxall 1990), the fact of the matter is that they have been borne out by numerous empirical studies of scientific endeavour. These have shown science to be irredeemably social, inherently messy, deeply affected by political, professional and personal interests, and rife with subjective decisions concerning experimental procedures, instrumentation, the interpretation of results and so on (Woolgar 1988; Pickering 1992; Collins and Pinch 1993). Contrary to the received wisdom concerning scientific method, it would appear that there is no dispassionate search for the truth. Scientific "truths" and "falsehoods" are social constructs, agreements to agree, which are culture-bound, context-dependent and relative rather than absolute.

Albeit based upon an extensive body of empirical research, it almost goes without saying that Anderson's (1983, 1988) relativism - his endeavour to eschew the positivistic idea of marketing science and replace it with the notion of science as societal consensus - provoked a ferocious reaction. The foremost defender of the faith, Shelby D. Hunt (1984, 1989, 1990, 1992) was particularly scathing about relativism, arguing that its pursuit would not only lead inexorably to nihilism, irrationalism, incoherence and irrelevance, but it also threatened to subvert the past 400 years of scientific and technological progress (Western Civilization in Peril - Shock!). Battle was thus joined and, over the next decade or thereabouts, the heavyweights of marketing scholarship slugged it out on terrain as diverse as demarcation criteria, "truth", "reification", "incommensurability" and quantitative versus qualitative research methodology. The precise assumptions of logical positivists, logical empiricists and falsificationists were clarified; the oft-repeated assertion that marketing is dominated by positivism was challenged; "scientific realism",

which holds that the world external to human cognition is a real world comprising hard, tangible, measurable and ultimately knowable structures, was advanced as a candidate for marketing's philosophical redemption and its differences from positivism and relativism explained. The manifold versions of relativism and realism were also explicated, professional philosophers were called in as putative referees, and, when the combatants eventually battered themselves to a standstill, an uneasy truce descended on the battlefield (see Kavanagh 1994). The smoke, however, has since dispersed, the dead and wounded attended to and the ultimate outcome of the conflict is now apparent. Despite Shelby Hunt's brazen, some would say shameless, attempts to claim victory, the fact of the matter is that the revolutionaries of relativism have triumphed, in so far as marketing scholarship is much less epistemologically and methodologically monolithic than before. Granted, the vast majority of marketing academics may continue to work within the broad realist/empiricist/instrumentalist/ positivistic tradition. Nevertheless, as a glance through the recent issues of mainstream marketing journals amply demonstrates, papers emanating from the broad relativist/interpretivist/constructionist/humanistic end of the academic spectrum - the view of science that Hunt attempted to strangle at birth - have become commonplace. It is arguable, indeed, that Hunt's intemperate invective probably did more to propagate the relativists' standpoint than the relativists themselves, though perhaps the ultimate irony is that the great defender of the marketing faith, the witch-hunter general, has recently acknowledged that scientists are marketers, the very position he condemned out of hand when it was articulated a decade ago by Peter and Olson (Hunt and Edison 1995)!

It seems, then, that just as the first great era of the art or science is summarisable in a 4Ps framework, so too the second can be encapsulated in terms of the 4Ps of *philosophy*, *polemic*, *partition* and *perplexity*. Regardless of one's assessment of the outcome of the Hunt-Anderson contest, there is no question that it was conducted at a high level of *philosophical* sophistication, and the very fact that the leading intellectual lights of the discipline were involved, forced mainstream marketing academics to reflect on issues that go to the very heart of scientific understanding (Brown 1995b). The caricature of science that characterised much of the first stage of the great debate was well and truly buried. No less comprehensively interred, as marketing scholarship descended into extremely acrimonious and highly personalised *polemic*, was the hitherto prevailing sense of collegiality, of community, of collective endeavour. True, the participants in first era exchanges were quite prepared to disagree over the precise placement of marketing on the art-science continuum, but there was a general consensus about the desirability of the ultimate aim of attaining scientific status. The demise of this sense of overall purpose in the second era resulted in the effective *partition* of the marketing discipline into embittered and mutually antagonistic factions, variously, often pejoratively, labelled as positivist/post-positivist, quantitative/qualitative, realist/relativist and more besides (cf.

O'Shaughnessy and Holbrook 1988; Calder and Tybout 1989; Hunt 1994). Hence, the ultimate legacy of this period of internecine warfare appears to be a widespread sense of *perplexity* and bemusement. By almost any measure, marketing is more "successful" now than it has ever been (Brown 1995a), but mounting challenges to its hitherto unimpeachable "scientific" mission have created a palpable air of uncertainty, ennui and doubt, a disconcerting feeling that the post-war marketing "revolution" is slowly grinding to a halt and increasingly desperate calls to stand together at this time of growing intellectual crisis (Thomas 1994; Hunt 1994; Baker 1995a).

Stage Three: The Anti-science Era (c.2000–?)

For many outsiders, the paradoxical sight of Shelby Hunt espousing the quasi-relativist position "science is marketing", or expounding on the relativist's favourite topic of "metaphor" (e.g. Hunt and Menon 1995), is the appropriately absurd outcome of an abstruse slanging match between marketing philosophers *manqué*. It is becoming increasingly apparent, however, that the second stage of the great "art or science" debate was merely a precursor to the apocalyptic postmodern critique of the western scientific worldview. Now, "postmodern" is one of those slippery words that, as Fielding (1992, p.21) points out, "everyone has encountered or heard of but no-one can quite explain precisely what it is". For some commentators, it is a distinctive, late-20th century artistic and cultural movement. For others, the term pertains to latter-day developments in social, economic and political life. For yet others, it is essentially a periodising concept or, indeed, a fashionably chic - some would say *passé* - posture espoused by pseudo-intellectual poseurs, the fashion victims of thought (Hollinger 1994; Dickens and Fontana 1994; Adam and Allan 1995; Seidman 1995).

For the purposes of the present discussion, and at the risk of descending to gross caricature, it can be contended that the postmodern consciousness - characterised though it is by cacophonous currents of competing conjectures - is premised upon the repudiation of the Western scientific paradigm. Or, to be more precise, it is exemplified by its renunciation of "scientism", the long-standing assumption that science is capable of solving all our problems (provided enough resources are made available), that science is a force for the good, that science is unproblematic (Sorrell 1991). While postmodernists recognise the enormous material benefits that Western science has provided - we are better fed and educated, more affluent and live longer than our ancestors, we are free to think and say what we like, and exist in the reasonable expectation that things will continue to improve, albeit fitfully - they draw attention to the dark side of science, to the fact that it brings costs as well as benefits, that it is not the "be all and end all", and that the achievements of Western science have been accomplished at a very heavy social, environmental and political price. The mass of society may be better off than before, but the division of wealth is as unequal as ever, arguably more unequal. Technological and industrial innovations may have produced

the wonders of modern medicine, motorised transport, household appliances, the Sony Walkman and Nintendo Gameboy, yet they have also spawned weapons of mass destruction, raised the neo-eugenic spectre of genetic engineering and contributed to resource depletion, environmental despoliation and the threat of ecological catastrophe. The rise of the West has been at the expense of the subjugation, exploitation and coca-colonization of "the rest". And, while progress may have been made by some people (white, male, heterosexual, university professors, for instance), and in certain economic-technocratic spheres of society, the same is not necessarily true for other groups of people (coloured, female, homosexual, the unemployed etc.) and in non-scientific areas of human endeavour, such as morality or spirituality (Brown 1995a). For postmodernists, then, the appellation "science" is no longer considered honorific. On the contrary, it is an epithet of opprobrium. Science, to put it crudely, is seen as cold, calculating, austere, authoritarian, sterile, inhuman, uncontrollable, Frankensteinian, deceptive, self-serving, patriarchial, rapacious, destructive and downright dangerous. It is a force for human immiseration rather than liberation. It is morally bankrupt, spiritually bereft and intellectually barren. It has given us a very great deal - where, after all, would we be without the pop-up toaster? - but it has not made us any happier or succeeded in explaining the meaning(s) of life (Appleyard 1992; Midgley 1992; Haynes 1994; Gillott and Kumar 1995). Although such antinomian, tending towards nihilistic, sentiments are shared by numerous postmodern commentators on the *cul de sac* that is Western science, it is fair to conclude that they have thus far failed to capture the academic marketing imagination. Many, if not most, mainstream marketers still appear to subscribe to the "classic" version of science that characterised the first phase of the great debate (Baker 1995b; Greenley 1995), or, alternatively, to the "multiple realities-many sciences" model that was being propagated by Anderson and his manifold second phase followers in the mid- to late-1980s (Foxall 1995; Holbrook 1995). Granted, a rapidly growing number of marketing academics appear to be grappling with what is sometimes termed "postmodern science" — chaos theory, fuzzy logic, GAIA etc. (Diamond 1993; Fisk 1994) — but as Best (1991) makes clear, the ostensible parallels between postmodern social theory and latter-day developments in the physical sciences do not withstand close scrutiny. Indeed, since marketing's dilatory ascent to the dizzy heights of scientific status has often been attributed to the fact that human phenomena are inherently more intractable and complex than the inanimate, albeit predictable, objects studied by physical scientists (see Bartels 1951; Ramond 1974), the recent realisation that the physical world is itself highly complex actually renders us worse off than before. Marketing must be even more complicated than we thought!

Despite marketing academics' seeming reluctance to articulate the anti-science position that characterises continental European versions of the postmodern (as opposed to the slightly less sceptical view of the postmodern moment offered by many of its Anglo-American exponents), this denial of

scientific authority cannot fail to strike a chord with observers of the contemporary marketing scene. Albeit devoid of the accompanying postmodern lexicon, a growing number of commentators appear to be turning their backs on the grail of marketing Science. In a recent, devastating assessment of the discipline's post-war academic achievements, for example, L. McTeir Anderson (1994) maintains that "the dogged pursuit of the mantle of sciencehood has severely damaged marketing's credibility at a time when international competitiveness demands acumen and leadership - not the continued railings of pseudo-scientists". Kavanagh (1994), likewise, has excoriated marketing science for its utter lack of moral, spiritual and ethical fibre, as have many academic advocates of an ecologically informed marketing worldview (Fisk 1995; McDonagh 1995). In fact, even prominent proponents of marketing science have attempted to step back from their earlier, extravagant expectations or expressed serious doubts about the present parlous state of affairs (Buzzell 1984; Hunt 1994; Kotler 1994).

Most significantly of all perhaps, the burgeoning literature on marketing's so-called "mid-life crisis" is predicated on the basic premise that, for all its mock-scientific posturing, for all its self-satisfied claims to the contrary, for all the facile addenda on the "managerial implications" of published papers, for all the grandiose predictions of impending accomplishment, marketing scholarship has actually achieved very little of practical, implementable worth in the post-war period (Brady and Davis 1993; McDonald 1994; Lynch 1994). And, in this respect, it is noteworthy that when all the smart-ass excesses and self-indulgences are set aside, postmodernism *does* seem to describe a world - turbulent, unstable, indeterminate, counterintuitive - that is *closer* to current marketing practice than the clinical, clear-cut, sub-scientific scratchings proffered by the mainstream marketing academy. After all, in a paradoxical marketing milieu where organizations are increasingly exhorted to be both global and local, centralised and decentralised, large and small, and planned yet flexible, and are expected to serve mass and niche markets, with standardised and customised products, at premium and penetration prices, through restricted and extensive distribution networks, and supported by national yet targeted promotional campaigns, it is not really surprising that the traditional, linear, step-by-step marketing model of analysis, planning, implementation and control no longer seems applicable, appropriate or even pertinent to what is actually happening on the ground (Brown 1995a).

The very clear parallels between the condition of postmodernity and contemporary trends in the marketing environment, suggest that it is only a matter of time before the postmodern critique of Western science is brought to the attention of academic marketing community. The delay is partly attributable to the fact that "postmodern marketing" is still a comparatively recent development and the implications are still being evaluated by its rapidly growing band of exegetes (Firat *et al.* 1993; Elliott 1993; Venkatesh *et al.* 1994; Firat and Venkatesh 1995). What is more, the accompanying miasma of pseudo-intellectual obscurantism, coupled with postmodernists' inclination to sit on the fence making snide, world-weary remarks about the

sheer futility of empirical research, have undoubtedly encouraged mainstream marketers to ignore postmodern intrusions thus far, or fail fully to appreciate the seriousness of its implications. Indeed, after a decade-long war of paradigmatic pugilism over relativism and interpretivism, it is fair to say that a palpable air of battle fatigue has descended on the marketing academy. Albeit understandable, such intellectual lassitude not only overlooks the beneficial effects of internecine conflict - while it may have seemed debilitating at the time, few would deny that the Hunt-Anderson contest probably did more to raise the all-round standards of marketing scholarship than any number of undistinguished disquisitions on marketing philosophy (Brown 1995b) - but it also merely serves to defer the fateful day of postmodern reckoning. Postmodernism, of course, is characterised by deliberate indecision and, in keeping with the earlier attempts at encapsulation, it is tempting to predict that the third great era of debate will be marked by the four Ps of *postponement*, *procrastination*, *protraction* and *pedantry*. The fact remains, however, that by subverting some of the most deeply held assumptions concerning the past achievements, present status and future direction of marketing research, the postmodern critique of Western science plunges a dagger into the very heart of our academic specialism. Regardless, therefore, of the seemingly wide-spread reluctance to get involved in another round of paradigm wars, the challenge posed by postmodernism will not go away and cannot long be avoided.

Past Imperative

Rather than continuing to put off the postmodern marketing paroxysm, it may be worthwhile attempting to release the tension by drawing some potentially fruitful lessons from the past 50 years of the great art or science debate. The first, and arguably most self-evident, of these is that despite half a century of academic endeavour, the holy grail of marketing Science has not been achieved (see Willmott 1993; Desmond 1993; Anderson 1994). In 1963, during the salad days of pro-science enthusiasm, Buzzell maintained that by the turn of the millennium, marketing would become "a full-fledged science". Well, the millennium is now upon us and the first phase model of science - rigorous, objective, predictive, theory building, law giving etc. - has simply not transpired, nor is it ever likely to transpire. Notwithstanding Hunt's specious claims to the contrary and macho-modellers' much repeated contention that this land of marketing milk and honey is just around the corner, provided we all pull together and refuse to be distracted by the siren voices of postmodern promiscuity, importuned by the sodomites of post-structuralism or seduced by any analogous whores of intellectual Babylon, this academic Arcadia has not been attained by any other social sciences, most of which are longer established and more intellectually cultivated than ourselves (Bass 1993; Little *et al.* 1994). These days, only the most arrogant, recidivist or, dare one say it, myopic marketing academic continues to assume that we can succeed where our elders and betters have demonstrably failed.

A second and closely related point is that even if scientific status were attainable, or could be achieved with one last superhuman effort, the question has to be asked: is it something that we really want anymore? When we look back at the great debate, the early days in particular, we cannot help but be struck by the sheer naïveté of the assumption that, regardless of its realisability, Western science was an unproblematic role model for marketing. In truth, and not to put too fine a point on it, we are appalled by first phase commentators' preparedness to hold up the Atom Bomb as an exemplar of scientific achievement (Brown 1948; Mills 1961), now find the very idea of a single, all-embracing General Theory of marketing laughably absurd, consider the advocates of "broadening" over-ambitious at best and megalomaniacs at worst, and, to be frank, increasingly regard our discipline's pseudo-scientific aspirations, its underpinning progressivist, gung-ho, we-have-the-technology metanarrative, more a manifestation of 1960s-style American intellectual imperialism than a meaningful aspiration for late-20th century marketing research (Brownlie and Saren 1992; Brown 1995a). By continuing to aspire to "scientific" status, when all our sister disciplines have renounced it, merely serves to reinforce marketing's reputed lack of intellectual sophistication. We are the academic embodiment of stack heels, flared trousers, gold medallions and open-to-the-navel wing-collared shirts - the Englebert Humperdinck of higher education, the oldest swingers in town.

A third intriguing aspect of the "art versus science" confrontation is the fact that it was never a straightforward, head-to-head contest. At each stage of the debate, other marketing considerations - usually of a political nature - invariably interposed themselves and, to some extent, succeeded in shaping the trajectory of the dispute. In the very early days, for instance, the debate was not about art or science as such, but about academic delusions of grandeur, about attempts to shake off marketing's unseemly snake-oil salesperson image, about the abandonment of its intuitive, cracker-barrel, seat-of-the-pants style wisdom for a more elevated, professional, progressive and suitably scholarly ethos. Likewise, Shelby Hunt's climactic pronouncement of 1976 actually did more to curtail the contemporaneous "broadening" debate than it did to resolve the art-science issue. By conflating the two topics and insinuating that the anti-broadeners were impeding the ever-onward, ever-upward march of marketing science, Hunt succeeded in carrying the day for the Kotlerites. In a similar vein, the second great phase of the debate was ostensibly fought on philosophical terrain - realism versus relativism etc. - but it was actually about the legitimacy or otherwise of diverse, mainly qualitative, alternative research methodologies being proposed by a younger generation of avant-garde marketing intellectuals (who, despite Hunt's claims to the contrary, unquestionably prevailed). Indeed, the hidden and as yet unarticulated agenda of contemporary postmodern marketing critiques seems to concern the nature of the relationship between academics and practitioners (see below).

The fourth distinguishing feature of the 50-year contretemps is its dialectical and what can only be described as zeitgeistian qualities. Clearly,

the very fact that we describe “art versus science” as a debate implies that the articulation of one position invariably calls forth critics of the opposite persuasion. However, it is evident in retrospect that the exponents of the most cogent and carefully argued positions often failed to carry the day. The undoubted highlight of the earliest exchanges, for example, was Hutchinson’s (1952) excoriation of marketing’s scientific pretensions, a stance subsequently dismissed as a serious error of judgement. Similarly, Shelby Hunt’s (1984, 1991) undeniably robust and philosophically sophisticated second era critique of relativism is now widely regarded as an irrational rant, a neo-Luddite attempt to prevent, or at least delay, the introduction of interpretivist perspectives. In this respect, there is some evidence to suggest that the dominant approach in any individual phase is anticipated in its predecessor. Converse, as previously noted, was not the first marketer to wrap himself in the flag of “science”, yet his utilization of the terminology, at a time when Science was in the ascendant, ensured that his name will forever be associated with it. Likewise, the characteristic feature of the second great phase, a concern with the *type* of science considered appropriate for marketing, was alluded to by several first stage commentators some time prior to Anderson’s monstrous heresy (e.g. Taylor 1965; Robin 1970; Dawson 1972; O’Shaughnessy and Ryan 1979). But, it was Anderson’s critique, coming at a time of widespread disillusion with the dominant hypothetico-deductive perspective and when the children of the ‘60s counter-culture were rising to positions of prominence within the marketing academy, that captured the moment, that shaped the contours of the ensuing debate and that is now cited as a milestone in post-war marketing research.

If this dialectical pattern of development holds good, and the lineaments of the emergent third stage of the altercation are already discernible, then the key to the future may well be inscribed in the fifth, final and, it has to be said, somewhat postmodern aspect of the whole controversy — the appropriately hyper-real fact that the great art/science “debate” *never actually took place!* As a glance at even the earliest contributions clearly indicates, the controversy was always about “market-ing: science or non-science?”. Art never came into it. Not a single person in the entire history of the contretemps attempted to make a case for marketing as an “art”. True, many people (most notably Hutchinson) maintained that marketing was an art and destined to remain an art, but they did not suggest that marketing should *aspire* to artistic status. In fact, most discussions of the art of marketing focused on art, as in artisan (i.e. the craft or technology of marketing), rather than art as in aesthetics, art as the very acme of human achievement, art as a quasi-spiritual endeavour.

Interestingly, however, growing numbers of prominent marketing academics are advocating the study of artistic artefacts, such as books, films, plays and poetry, arguing that they can provide meaningful insights into the marketing condition, or stressing the benefits to be obtained from drawing upon the liberal arts (humanities) end of the academic spectrum rather than the traditional reliance upon the hard sciences (Belk 1986a; Holbrook and

Grayson 1986; Holbrook *et al.* 1989; Hirschman and Holbrook 1992). Other prescient thinkers have espoused an increasingly aesthetic-cum-spiritual orientation (Kavanagh 1994) and, indeed, certain creative individuals have demonstrated, through the use of new literary forms (NLF), that marketing scholarship can be artistic achievement *in itself* (Holbrook 1995; McDonagh 1995; Smithee 1995). Yet, despite academic marketers' burgeoning enthusiasm for all things aesthetic, it would appear that its adepts are unwilling to argue for the *superiority* of the artistic "paradigm", or advocate the abandonment of the discredited scientific model, with its outmoded methods, mechanistic worldview and unattainable axiology. At most, the artistic apologists attempt to make a case for the acceptance of such non-scientific insights, or postulate art as a useful complement to established approaches. Notwithstanding the endorsement of innumerable philosophers (Nietzsche, Heidegger and Rorty among them), who argue that the only "authentic" form of knowledge is found in Art, it remains something of a second-class marketing citizen, the disregarded "other" of academic marketing discourse, the preserve of postmodern marketers and similar occupants of the lunatic fringe.

Future Perfect

Regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with the foregoing assessment, it is undeniable that we are faced with several contrasting scenarios for 21st century marketing scholarship. The first alternative on offer is to continue to chase the early post-war version of Science, the chimera, the illusion, the marketing mirage that we have trailed for the past 50 years. Surely, so the argument seems to go, if marketers try hard enough, if we crunch ever-larger data sets through our ever-faster computing facilities and develop ever-more sophisticated mathematical models, we will eventually break through to the bright uplands of absolute marketing understanding. And, having done so, we shall descend in triumph bearing our tablets of marketing stone, the iron, inviolate, universal laws of the marketplace, thereby confounding faint-hearted scholarly sceptics and pusillanimous practitioners alike. Admittedly, the single-minded pursuit of this noble aspiration has taken longer than we anticipated and, indeed, may take a tad more time to come to fruition, but the ultimate fruits of our labours - the bright and shining Science of Marketing - will make all the sacrifices worthwhile. In the meantime, we can attempt to mollify marketing practitioners (and our cerebrally challenged academic peers) by publishing periodic bulletins in the burgeoning number of "managerially orientated magazines", the subtext of which seems to comprise "we know you cretins can't understand a word of *JMR*, but lest you conclude that cutting-edge marketing thinkers have lost the common touch, here's the low brow, bullet-pointed, God-but-you're-thick version of where we're at".

Unbearable as the arrogance of this first generation variant undoubtedly is - condescending to practising managers, most of whom are more capable

than the average academic, simply beggars belief - the second option is even worse. Championed by many of the leading lights of the relativist, stage two model of marketing science, this involves severing the long-standing link with marketing practitioners (e.g. Holbrook 1985; Belk 1986b). Such a stance, however, does not simply comprise an open and, in some respects, refreshing acknowledgement of the patently obvious fact that marketing academics and practitioners have all-but gone their separate ways (Brinberg and Hirschman 1986; Sheth *et al.* 1988). Nor, as some cynics might conclude, is it an indication that fifty-something years of fruitless searching for the Great White Whale of Marketing Science (or should that be Great White Elephant?) has finally unhinged the latter-day Captain Ahab's of the marketing academy. It derives, rather, from the relativists' belief that continuing association with practitioners - with a particular interest group in society - has hopelessly tainted marketing scholarship by compromising our desire to be accepted as a "legitimate" social science. If, according to these intellectual adepts, we wish to gain admittance to the Elysium of the Academy, we must be born again. We must beg forgiveness for our managerial bent, confess our sins of commission and renounce for ever the profane, irredeemable world of the practising marketer. Although the relativists' attempt to extirpate the sins of the marketing flesh, even to the extent of declaring disciplinary UDI, at least has the merit of honesty, it is not only élitist and unattainable but a recipe for academic disaster. It is predicated on the erroneous premise that any dealings with marketing practitioners are automatically tarnished, not to say unspeakably corrupt. While disinterested and objective analysis might be too much to hope for in our present cynical and degraded times, one doesn't have to be in thrall to marketing managers in order to study them (as the growing number of sociological investigations bear eloquent witness). What is more, the notion that marketing intellectuals can somehow abandon their connection with marketers is manifestly absurd. For outsiders, it is the thanatic equivalent of (say) academic educationalists attempting to cut themselves off from educators, medical researchers from practitioners of medicine, legal studies from lawyers, the architectural academy from architects, or scholars of nursing from nurses. We may not like some of the things marketing practitioners do - exploiting customers, price fixing, misleading advertising etc. - but short of relocating to another discipline (doubtless equally beset by "grass is always greener" leanings), academic marketers are and always will be indissolubly associated with their managerial brethren. After all, the very term "marketing" carries connotations of "doing" (Levy 1976).

The third possibility on offer is simply to abandon the pursuit of marketing science, to give it up as a bad job, to recognise the fact that, despite half-a-century of endeavour, marketing science has produced considerably less than all the effort warranted (Willmott 1993; Desmond 1993). We have neither attained the academic Utopia of scientific status, nor significantly improved the everyday lot of practising managers. If anything, our unending search for the impossible intellectual dream has only served to distance us

from, and diminish our standing in the eyes of, those front-line foot-soldiers who battle day and daily in the marketing management trenches. For many, this suggested eschewal of marketing science may seem like an act of nihilistic irresponsibility - a lunatic disposal of the baby, the bath water and the very bathtub itself - but such an undeniably understandable reaction overlooks a couple of very significant points. Apart from the fact that the decision to abandon our birthright, to admit that we made a serious mistake, to acknowledge that we got it wrong, is actually harder to take than the comparatively easy option of continuing as if nothing were amiss, it is necessary to recognise that there is a *positive* side to nihilism, that there are benefits to be gained from, in effect, wiping the slate clean and starting again. As Feuerbach, one of the progenitors of European nihilism makes perfectly clear, "no-one without the courage to be absolutely negative has the strength to create anything new" (quoted in Hayman 1982, p.99). More importantly perhaps, it is worth remembering that there *is* an alternative - a meaningful alternative - to marketing science. This, for want of a better term, can be called marketing aesthetics.

It would be foolish to pretend that the couplet "marketing aesthetics" does not carry negative connotations. The very mention of aesthetics conjures up images of the effete, the flighty, the emotional, the self-indulgent, the subjective, the impractical, the otherworldly, the very antithesis of what modern marketing is supposed to be about, whether it be the down-to-earth, horny-handed, pragmatic, aggressive, no-nonsense machismo of practising managers, or the cool, objective, dispassionate, systematic stereotype of the academic marketing scientist. However, as the growing preparedness of museums to add marketing ephemera to their collections clearly indicates, marketing phenomena have already had artistic status conferred upon them (Benson & Hedges posters on display in the Tate, the Coca-Cola "Museum" in Atlanta etc.). Like the works of art that they unquestionably are, truly great marketing achievements are capable of inducing an ineffable sense of awestruck wonder among observers (merchandise displays in Japanese department stores, British Airways' television advertising, customer service in Nordstrom and so on). Like the creative artists that they undoubtedly are, outstandingly successful marketing practitioners - the individuals we lionise in our lectures - do not follow rules, guidelines or the conventional wisdom of the marketing textbooks. They eschew conventional wisdom, assume the guidelines apply to everyone but themselves and not only break the rules, they completely rewrite them (*Economist* 1989).

These contentions, of course, should not be taken to mean that all practising marketers are endowed with innate creative genius that - notwithstanding the power of "undiscovered artist in garret" archetype - has gone unrecognised, unacknowledged and unappreciated hitherto. Clearly, the majority of people in any walk of intellectual, professional or cultural life are, by definition, nondescript, mediocre and followers rather than leaders (who both require and benefit from rules and guidelines). Nor does the foregoing seek to suggest that the distinctions between art and science are

clear-cut. On the contrary, numerous physical scientists have attested to the essentially aesthetic qualities of scientific discovery and research - Bohr's injunction that we must try to think like poets being just one among many (Tolstoy 1990) - and a copious academic literature now exists on the art of science (Locke 1992; Halliday and Martin 1993; Selzer 1993). The arts likewise have not been unaffected by scientific-cum-technological considerations, ranging from Le Corbusier's "machines for living in" and the much-vaunted "factory" of Andy Warhol, to the post-war scientific "turn" in many of the humanities (Cliometrics in History, New Criticism in Literary Theory, spatial science in human geography and the hypothesis testing endeavours of Archaeology, Social Anthropology and more besides). Nor, for that matter, should the above comments be taken to mean that all of the extant procedures, approaches and methods of academic marketing understanding - the 4Ps, the PLC, social marketing, macro-marketing etc. - must be abandoned forthwith. They merely intimate that there may be some merit in substituting the hoary "marketer as scientist" metaphor, or its latter-day epigone, the "marketer as technician" trope, with a long-overdue "marketer as artist" analogy. In other words, to cease viewing marketplace behaviour from a perspective informed by images of laboratories, experiments, accelerators and theories of everything, or indeed to see it as some sort of quotidian engineer's workshop, where dexterous mechanics assemble the bits and pieces of the marketing machine and then watch it go, but imagine it instead as a colony of smock-clad painters (sculptors, poets, novelists, musicians, film directors or what have you), armed with palettes of pricing, promotional, product and place-related possibilities, from which they create their enduring, their transcendent, their majestic marketing masterpieces.

Naturally, the aestheticisation of marketing practice has major implications for marketing scholarship, since there is no point in attempting to assess "artistic" accomplishments by established "scientific" procedures and methods. In this respect, Eisner (1985) notes 10 key differences in artistic and scientific approaches to academic research. Summarised in Table 1, these include: *mode of representation*, poetic rather than literal language; *criteria for appraisal*, believability versus validity; *the nature of generalisation*, inscribed in the particular not extrapolated from a sample; *importance of form*, diversity of expression contra unity of approach; and, *ultimate aims*, creation of meaning as opposed to discovery of truth. Although the rewards of this attempted re-imagination of marketing understanding are potentially enormous, not least the long-overdue realignment of academics and practitioners, there is inevitably a price to be paid for intellectual re-incarnation, for re-focusing the marketing discipline. Apart from the unavoidable marginalisation of manifold "insightful" papers in *JMR* and analogous journals, the principal casualty is likely to be the underpinning philosophy of science, wrestling with which has absorbed so much academic energy and provided such rich pickings for the conceptually inclined, over the past few decades. Set against this, however, the philosophy of aesthetics is

Table 1. Differences between Scientific and Artistic Approaches to Research

Criteria	Science	Art
Mode of Representation	Formal statements; literal language	Non-literal language; evocative statements
Appraisal Criteria	Validity paramount; unbiased methods of data collection and analysis; conclusions supported by evidence	Persuasiveness paramount; seek illumination, penetration and insight; arguments supported by success in shaping concepts
Point of Focus	Concentrates on overt or expressed behaviour (which can be recorded, counted and analysed)	Concentrates on experiences and meanings (observed behaviour provides springboard to understanding)
Nature of Generalisation	Extrapolates from particular to general; randomly drawn sample is deemed representative of universe and statistically significant inferences drawn about latter from former	Studies single cases and the idiosyncratic, but presupposes that generalisations reside in the particular, that broad (if not statistically significant) lessons can be learnt from the unique
Role of Form	Results reported in neutral, embellished manner (third person, past tense) and according to a standard format (problem, literature review, sample, analysis, implications)	Avoidance of standardisation; form and content interact; meaning of content determined by form in which it is expressed
Degree of License	Factual emphasis; little scope for personal expression or flights of imaginative fancy	Subjective orientation; imaginative self-expression both permitted and expected
Prediction and Control	Aims to anticipate the future accurately, thus enabling or facilitating its control	Aims to explicate, thereby increasing understanding; less algorithmic than heuristic
Sources of Data	Standardises instruments, such as questionnaire surveys or observation schedules, used to collect data	The investigator is the principal research instrument and his or her experiences the major source of data
Basis of Knowing	Methodological monism; only formal propositions provide knowledge (affect and cognition separate)	Methodical pluralism; knowledge conveyed by successful evocation of experience in question (affect and cognition combined)
Ultimate Aims	Discovery of truth and laws of nature; propositions taken to be true when they correspond with the reality they seek to explain	Creation of meaning and generation of understanding; statements seek to alter extant perceptions about the world

Source: Adapted from Eisner (1985).

not only an equally well-developed branch of intellectual life (e.g. Sheppard 1987; Hanfling 1992; Cooper 1992), but one that is comparatively untouched by marketing academics thus far, thereby providing all sorts of welcome opportunities for publications, consultancies, and, not least, career-making controversies.

Conclusions

In endeavouring to evaluate and derive some lessons from the past 50 years of the great “marketing: art or science?” debate, this paper has come to the regrettable yet inevitable conclusion that much of post-war marketing scholarship has proved to be a complete waste of time and effort, an heroic but utterly wrongheaded attempt to acquire the unnecessary trappings of “science”, a self-abusive orgy of mathematical masturbation which has rendered us philosophically blind, intellectually deaf and spiritually debilitated. Clearly, this assessment is unlikely to prove popular with the hairy-handed sons of toil that comprise the academic marketing mainstream and, indeed, if the dialectical character of the debate continues, it is likely to induce a highly personalised torrent of pro-science vitriol (albeit cogently argued, no doubt). Yet, however much they protest or purport to be on the point of intellectual “take-off”, the simple fact of the matter is that marketing science has achieved little or nothing of note in the half century it has held sway. Unfortunately, we are no nearer to the academic Arcadia of overarching theory, objective knowledge, unified method and the like than we were when Converse contended otherwise or Buzzell boasted of impending breakthrough. Sadly, we have not been embraced as kindred spirits by the physical sciences; we continue to be treated with comparative disdain by the hard social sciences, such as economics; and, our fixation with an unattainable — in fact, non-existent — model of science has reduced us to little more than a laughing stock among the humanistic social sciences and liberal arts.

Most importantly of all perhaps, marketing's ill-advised quest for scientific respectability has only served to alienate its principal constituents - practising managers and prospective managers. Not everyone, admittedly, would accept the contention that marketing is essentially an applied discipline, but it is undeniable that, 40–50 years ago, some of the most enthusiastic contributors to academic marketing journals were practitioners (Keith, McKitterick, Lavidge and Steiner etc.). Today, it is almost inconceivable that a paper by a marketing manager would appear in the premier American and, increasingly, European academic outlets, though possibly not as inconceivable as the notion of practising managers turning to these journals for guidance. Many scholarly papers continue to disport a so-called “managerial implications” section, but what manager in their right mind would proceed to act on such recommendations? In truth, how many of us would *want* managers to implement our pseudo-suggestions, especially if we were held responsible, despite all the standard caveats and get-out clauses, when things went awry?

If, in sum, marketing is to move forward conceptually, if it is to attract practitioners back into the fold, if it is to transcend its current mid-life crisis, if it is to face the 21st century with renewed confidence, it must abandon its futile fixation with Science and it must abandon it forthwith. It must set aside the naïve belief that a Galileo, Newton or Mendel of marketing science will

eventually appear and unravel the underlying laws and principles of the marketplace. It is important, indeed necessary, to appreciate that we have been pursuing an impossible dream, a vision of plenitude that can never be attained, no matter how hard we try. It is time to join Markaholics Anonymous, to confess our hopeless addiction to the academic narcotic that goes under the appellation Science and, having acknowledged our dependency, to set out on the rough and rocky road to recovery. It is then that we will be able to come to terms with the side of ourselves that we have tried to suppress - the fact, the glorious fact, that marketing is an Art, it always has been an Art, it always will be an Art. And, the sooner academic marketers acquaint themselves with the tools and techniques of aesthetic appreciation, the sooner marketing scholarship will make a quantum leap forward (if you'll pardon the scientific expression).

Now, this entire paper may be dismissed by mainstream marketing academics as yet another irrational postmodern diatribe, a disingenuous and self-serving attempt to attract attention through pre-meditated intellectual iconoclasm, a studied act of teenage rebellion by someone who's old enough to know better. Postmodernists, moreover, are unlikely to be impressed with its three-stage model of historical development or the suggestion of an underpinning metanarrative, albeit with the eschaton "Art" replacing that of "Science". Before such conclusions are drawn, however, it may be worthwhile reflecting on the wonderfully ironic outcome of the whole "marketing as aspirant science" episode: namely, the changing fortunes of its constituent parts. Fifty years ago, Western science was in the ascendent. It could do no wrong. All our problems would be solved if we could place our faith, and not a few precious resources, in the hands of that happy but robustly masculine band of selfless do-gooders, whose reasoned pursuit of objective knowledge was the one sure route to a brighter, better future, an impending golden age of peace, love and understanding. Marketing, by contrast, was the fetid lair of mendacious, self-serving charlatans, who foisted unwanted and unnecessary products upon the credulous, easily manipulated proletariat - housewives in particular - and stoked the insatiable flames of consumer desire for their nefarious, unprincipled, capitalistic, hegemonic, profit-gouging ends.

Fifty years on, the good ship Science has foundered on the reefs of Chernobyl, Exxon Valdez, global warming, African famine, feminism and the scholarship of Kuhn, Feyerabend and the sociologists of scientific knowledge. Marketing, paradoxically, has never been so popular. Despite the critiques of self-aggrandising postmodernists, it is widely considered to be the key to long-term business success; it is being embraced in hitherto hostile fields as diverse as health-care, public administration and the not-for-profit sector; it is successfully infiltrating the former command economies of Eastern Europe and China; and, after decades of disdain and derision, it is being treated with grudging admiration by academics hailing from the far left of the political spectrum (Brown 1995a). This admiration, admittedly, is directed towards the essentially aesthetic endeavours of marketing

practitioners (advertisers in particular), rather than the pseudo-scientific achievements of the sluggards of marketing scholarship, but it represents a dramatic turnaround from the abhorrence-cum-condescension that once prevailed (Brown 1995b). Indeed, arguably the most incongruous development of all is that, faced with mounting public scepticism, funding agency concerns over value for money and, not least, its wholesale abandonment by young people, the scientific establishment now acknowledges the need to become more marketing orientated, of science's need to get its message across to the great unwashed, to claw back talented students from low-life academic disciplines like Business Studies and Marketing (Carey 1995; Brockman 1995).

I fully appreciate that this point seems to contradict my contention that marketing is in "crisis". However, I have elsewhere endeavoured to show that success and failure are not necessarily incompatible, that the latterday triumph of marketing is the root cause of its seemingly terminal illness (see Brown *et al.* 1996).

It would appear, then, that science now needs marketing more than marketing needs science. Yet the Cro-Magnons of the marketing academy still cleave to an outdated notion of scientific accomplishment. We continue to aspire to an imaginary and utterly unrealizable idealization of science, an idealization that never existed, an idealization that we were partly responsible for *creating*, thanks to generations of washing powder, shampoo, cosmetics and patent medicine advertisements (white coats, spotless labs, all-pervasive air of rigour and objectivity etc.). Isn't it time we woke up to the fact that modern marketing is dead, that postmodern marketing is extant and that, despite 50 years of a head start, the hare of marketing science is about to be overtaken by the artistic marketing tortoise? Way to go!

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*Postmodern Postscript*³

Like many academics, I hate reading what I've written and I avoid it at all costs. The errors, typos and, in my case, cringeworthy attempts to be creative, leap off the page to excruciating effect. I don't know what my papers do for other people, but by God they frighten me. Past publications are like distant relatives, I reckon. They are part of the family, though you don't see them that often, thank goodness. They turn up when they're least expected, usually at the worst possible time. And they always succeed in embarrassing you, despite their very best intentions.

So it is with "Art or Science". I suppose I should be flattered by *The Marketing Review's* decision to reprint my scribbles as part of their "modern classics" series. When you think of all the other papers they could have picked to inaugurate their inventory (please excuse the unfortunate stylistic flourishes, I can't help myself), it is a great honour to have my work singled out in this manner. While I am very grateful to the editors, and while my Dean will doubtless be delighted by their decision, I find it difficult to welcome, let alone celebrate, the article's reappearance. Although I occasionally refer to "Art or Science" on occasion – as one does in these cite-sensitive times – I haven't actually read it for years. Nor do I really want to. It's sure to prove a mortifying mess of maladroit metaphors and misbegotten malapropisms.

On rereading the paper, however, I'm struck by three things (aside, that is, from the toe-curling typos etc.). The first of these is that it is too optimistic. Yes, I know that's a strange thing to say about an article that arrogantly dismisses decades of academic endeavour as "a complete waste of time" and superciliously asserts that marketing's scientific aspirations will never come to fruition. Yet there is an optimistic subtext, insofar as the paper intimates that aesthetics will come to marketing's rescue, that postmodernism will save the day, that all we have to do is get in touch with the inner artist and everything will be fine and dandy. I'm not so sure about that anymore.

Now, please don't misunderstand me. I still feel that the arts have much to offer marketing. There's no doubt in my mind, moreover, that many excellent young researchers are rallying to the martistic flag, if I can describe it as such. However, I have latterly spent a lot of time in the States and that was something of an eye-opener. The American marketing academy is largely made up of dyed-in-the-wool scientists, washed-in-the-blood modellers and praise-the-Lord-and-pass-the-pie-chart neo-positivists. The interpretive research community, by contrast, is very small, very marginalised and, sadly, very incestuous. It thus seems to me that the American branch of marketing's artistic colony has not only failed to deliver but that it's unlikely to

³ This retrospective was written in October 2001.

deliver in the short- to medium-term. Science's stranglehold on marketing scholarship is much stronger than I thought and the postmodern gunslingers aren't as quick on the draw as they really ought to be. Boot Hill beckons, I fear.

The second thing that struck me in my reluctant rereading of "Art and Science" is that it is too dichotomous. The distinction between art and science seems awfully sharp. Excessively sharp. Erroneously sharp. Granted, the paper is a polemic and, in order to make their case, polemicists are wont to portray positions as more polarised than they actually are. In fairness, furthermore, my article does draw attention to the interpenetration of art and science, though this point is made late in the day and, even then, is manifestly a defensive rhetorical manoeuvre (as all arguments have their weaknesses, it's often prudent to pre-empt one's opponents). That said, there is a black and white quality to the piece, which is perfectly understandable but ultimately indefensible. Art and science are a lot closer than I imply in the article. The history of the arts reveals that creative writers and artists are routinely inspired by the latest scientific breakthroughs, be it Darwinianism, Einsteinian astrophysics or latter-day developments in genetics and chaos theory. Scientific geniuses, what is more, are no slouches when it comes to symbolic representations of their "discoveries". Mathematics, admittedly, is the principal mode of scientific expression, nevertheless the best sellers list bears witness to the fact that many write well as well. The Stephen Hawkings, Stephen Pinkers and Stephen J. Goulds of this world are the latest in a long line of artistically inclined scientists and, as David Hockney has recently demonstrated, the titans of western art owe much to cameras obscura and analogous optical instruments. The boundary between art and science is not clear-cut. Or, rather, it's much less sharp than I intimate in "Art or Science".

Some readers, no doubt, will pounce on this confession and conclude that the original article is deeply flawed, which is fair enough. I would argue, however, that just as it is necessary for marketing artists to acknowledge the importance of the scientific approach, so too marketing scientists should be cognisant of the artistic imperative that underpins their activities. There's more to marketing science than rigour, reliability and replication, despite appearances to the contrary, and there's more to marketing aesthetics than fantasies, feelings and fun. Not much more, I grant you, but hey...

My third and final thought on rereading the "Art or Science" article is that it is too short-sighted. (Well, okay, strike short-sighted. Myopic, it is!) In classic product-orientated fashion, I failed to see that the artistic turn in marketing scholarship would be led by "outsiders", as it were. That is to say, I missed the fact that the best marketing research these days is being done by non-marketers. Sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, historians, literary theorists and suchlike are heavily into marketing and consumption, as a glance at their journals and publishers' catalogues attests. Some of their writing is extremely creative. Their depth of insight and sheer scholarly firepower are superior to anything we marketers can muster, I'm sorry to say.

Think about it. By far the best-selling marketing book of recent years, *No Logo*, was written by an exo-marketer and, although we might disagree with what Klein says about us, it's hard to argue with her sales figures, with her good old-fashioned marketing acumen, with her decision to copyright the No Logo logo. Now, that's what I call creativity!

In these circumstances, it seems to me that the art or science debate is a sideshow, an irrelevance, "a complete waste of time" in itself. The unfortunate fact of the matter is that, in our epistemological self-absorption and preoccupation with methodological probity, we've allowed our specialist domain, our area of alleged expertise, our competitive advantage in the intellectual agora, to be usurped by adjacent academic disciplines. The cutting edge of marketing scholarship is no longer found in marketing and, rather than continue to dismiss the interlopers as anti-capitalist know-nothings, it is incumbent upon us to reinvent the field. Mouthing the platitudes of the past isn't going to help. Blaming marketing practitioners for failing to implement our learned insights is a complete cop out. Arguing the toss over art or science is the intellectual equivalent of – incoming cliché alert – fiddling while Rome burns. Sure, inertia will sustain us for a while; we can condescend to the exomarketers who don't know Sheth from shinola; and we can continue to fill our scholarly journals with trivial, minor-twist, me-too articles. But the day of research reckoning is coming and, on that dark dawn, the artistic or scientific standing of our cerebral labours will count for next to nothing.

All is lost, fellow marketers. Man the lifeboats, me hearties. Women, children and marketing aesthetes first...

About the Author

Professor of Marketing Research at the University of Ulster, **Stephen Brown** has written or co-edited ten books including *Postmodern Marketing* (Routledge), *Postmodern Marketing Two* (International Thomson), *Marketing – The Retro Revolution* (Sage) and *Songs of the Humpback Shopper* (www.sfxbrown.com). He has been a visiting professor at Northwestern University, University of California – Irvine and the University of Utah, amongst others, and is a distinguished alumnus of Pseud's Corner.