Postmodernism and Marketing: Separating the Wheat from the Chaff

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Postmodernism, as a philosophy and a set of doctrines, has made incursions into marketing. The incursion into marketing has given postmodernism visibility among marketing academics. This article argues that there is a need for a critical appraisal of postmodernism's potential contribution to marketing. What has been written so far on postmodernism as applied to marketing tends to be peripheral to the key doctrines of postmodernism. In setting out the postmodernist claims, this article argues that while some of these claims may be defensible, most are not. Insofar as the influence of postmodernism has been benign or progressive, it is because it has dramatized and intensified criticism already under way of the claim that the methodology of the physical sciences represents the only way to certain knowledge. The downside of postmodernism is an untenable extension of this insight that would, if adopted by marketing, be highly dysfunctional.

Postmodernism is a fashionable topic, and Venkatesh (1999) in the *Journal of Macromarketing* lists some of the marketing journal articles on the subject. Venkatesh confines himself to what he describes as the five important conditions of postmodernism: the sign system, hyperreality, particularism, fragmentation, and symbolic behaviors. He discusses the global economy based on signs and images, the flexible nature of production and consumption, and the emergence of informational capitalism or the information economy. Except for some of the terms he uses, such as *hyperreality*, much of what he writes is postmodernism in the sense of "after-modernism" or the postmodern condition, not postmodernism as propagated by postmodern writers. Speculations about the postmodern condition are not the same as postmodernism, although descriptions of the postmodern condition (postmodernity) describe certain characteristics of Western societies that postmodernism seeks to explain. This article is a critique of postmodernism. In the process, it is also a critique of claims of postmodernity from the point of view of marketing.

When Venkatesh (1999, 145) talks about postmodernism attempting to "restore aesthetic approaches in human discourse giving prominence to the linguistic and symbolic aspects of human life, elevate visuality and spectacle to levels of critical discourse, recognize subjective experiences as a meaningful part of human practices, and redefine the human subject as both a cognitive and an aesthetic subject," readers might have wondered what the controversy was about since few are still obsessed with the calculating machine-like model of man as the only way to go. But a wider acquaintance with postmodernism is needed to evaluate its merits. This is the purpose of this article, which first gives a general orientation to postmodernism together with background concepts such as modernity, postmodernity, structuralism, poststructuralism, and deconstruction before considering the validity of postmodernism's empirical and philosophical claims.

REVIEW OF POSTMODERNISM AND BACKGROUND CONCEPTS

The term *postmodernism* was coined by the American Marxist critic Fredric Jameson (1984) to embrace a whole host of ideas that together claimed to represent a new phase in Western culture. It entered into architectural writing in the 1950s to describe a move away from shiny machine-like edifices. It only later came to cover a whole sweep of criticisms of modernity (Harvey 1989). However, the writers most associated with postmodernism do not speak with one voice, simply being united by an antagonism to modernity. As Stephen Brown (1995, 11) says, "For the cynical, indeed, the only discernible point of consensus among postmodernists is their lack of consensus on postmodernism." Jane Flax (1990, 188), a sympathetic writer on postmodernism, gives a brief overview of writers and topics that are discussed in this article:

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> The persons and modes of thinking aggregated under the category of postmodernism are quite heterogeneous in regard to voice, style, content and concerns. Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Michel Foucault are four particularly influential writers associated with postmodernism. Yet each writer's focus and the salience he assigns to certain issues differ. . . . Although internally varied, postmodernist discourses *are* unified in identifying certain subjects of conversation as particularly appropriate to and necessary for "our" time. These crucial subjects include: (1) contemporary Western culture—its nature and the best ways to understand it; (2) knowledge—what it is, who or what constructs and generates it, and its relations to power; (3) philosophy—its crisis and history, how both are to be understood, and how (if at all) it is to be practiced; (4) power—if where, and how domination exists and is maintained and how and if it can be overcome; (5) subjectivity and the self—how our concepts and experiences of them have come to be and what, if anything, these do or can mean; and (6) difference—how to conceptualize, preserve, or rescue it.

Postmodernism has no generally agreed definition. In philosophy, it often substitutes for what are essentially only elements of postmodernism, such as Derrida's deconstruction or associated concepts like poststructuralism. In academic courses, postmodernism crosses disciplines such as cultural studies, science studies, postcolonial studies, and feminist studies. Readings on postmodernism borrow freely from authors such as Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard, Julia Kristeva, and Lyotard (Lechte 1994).

Postmodernism is a loosely structured set of ideas around a few central notions such as emancipating us from power structures and dogma masquerading as truth. Postmodernism announces the exhaustion of *Modernity* as inaugurated by the Enlightenment (see later). Postmodernism is commonly viewed as a French variant of the *linguistic turn* in social science, asserting there is no apprehending of reality except through the intervention of language because all perceptions, concepts, and claims to truth are constructed in language. The term *linguistic turn* was given its airing in Richard Rorty's (1968) edited volume, *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method*. In this book, every claim is viewed as a *text* to be interpreted and not something to be checked against an objective reality as there is no such thing. The linguistic turn claims that the primary way in which human beings know the world and interact with it and others is through the medium of language, and different (cultural) linguistic ways of expressing thought give different shapes and constructions to that thought, which, in turn, evokes different senses of reality. This is called *dereferentialism* or the claim that there is no nonlinguistic reality because everything is mediated by language. (Those who make a distinction between postmodernism and poststructuralism might argue that this view belongs more to poststructuralism than postmodernism.)

Postmodernism is a philosophical orientation rather than a coherent ideology: an orientation toward pluralism and relativism, combined with a certain antagonism to authority claims, and the pretensions of science. Postmodernism eschews mechanistic and deterministic explanations and attacks all forms of totalizing explanations (overarching theories of buyer behavior would be condemned) and rejects reductionist goals that seek to reduce, as a final aim, everything to physics. Although postmodernists talk about the "exhaustion of modernity," the fact is that most research in marketing journals falls clearly into modernity, or the neological positivism of logical empiricism. What mainstream postmodernists are saying is that this whole approach is based on fundamentally flawed assumptions. For a movement that denies all talk of truth, postmodernists *implicitly* take for granted that they have the truth on their side.

Extreme postmodernists such as Baudrillard (1975) regard postmodernism as discontinuous from modernity. Moderate postmodernists such as Rorty (1991) reject that there is any fundamental break with modernity and typically regard postmodernism as simply an intensification of modernity, ridding it of its pretensions while revealing its hidden presuppositions. This is the position advocated by Best and Kellner (1997), who are concerned to uphold the concepts of truth, objectivity, and empirical inquiry.

Best and Kellner (1997) argue that the defining features of postmodernism emerged in the nineteenth century. Thus, Nietzsche (1844-1900) stressed there were no "external facts" but only biased interpretations, with claims to objectivity being simply a mask for "a will to power." Nietzsche claims that reality is too complex to be encompassed by a single perspective, and a multiperspective is needed. This, if accepted, leads to an undermining of claims to absolute truth. Much of postmodernism is older than Nietzsche. Devaney (1997) shows the very early intellectual origins of postmodernist claims. Moral relativism, reality as something constructed, and the mediated nature of knowledge all go back to Plato.

Advertising is of particular interest to postmodernists since many ads are regarded as masterpieces of condensed nuance, parodies of the mightier melodramas of cinema and soap opera. Postmodernists are fascinated with the totems of consumerism and the manufacturing that caters to it—its dynamism, its abundant creativity, and its constant productivity with its ability to mine all cultures, media, history, and the contemporary for persuasive symbols. For postmodernism, marketing equalizes everything in the service of consumption.

Postmodernism, Modernity, and Postmodernity

Postmodernism contrasts with modernity. Modernity is characterized by the spirit of the Enlightenment in eighteenth-century France, Germany, England, and Scotland (Porter 2000). It is identified with a belief in rationality; belief in progress through Reason; a conviction that nature is subject

to a single set of laws that are, in principle, discoverable by man; and that the laws governing inanimate nature apply also to animals and sentient human beings, with these human beings being regarded as capable of continuous improvement in terms of the universal goals of happiness, knowledge, justice, and liberty (Berlin 1993). It was the Enlightenment that inspired the outlook of the Founding Fathers of the United States and led to science being viewed as built on a firm basis of observable facts, not faith or tradition. Modernity is rooted in the concept of constant human progress and the power of reason to produce freedom from superstition and oppression.

Postmodernity, or the postmodern condition, refers to those social (including the ideological) changes that are claimed to be replacing modernity (Lyon 1994). While postmodernism, as an intellectual movement, is on the decline, speculations about what constitutes the postmodern condition (postmodernity) are as vigorous as ever. But the terms *postmodernity* and *postmodernism* are commonly used together. This is because, while arising from different disciplines, they overlap (Berkhoffer 1995). Postmodernism makes similar claims to postmodernity about a new phase in Western culture, with postmodernism giving explanatory depth to the descriptive claims of postmodernity (Lyon 1994).

While modernity is rooted in the idea of progress, postmodernism argues there is nowhere in fact to go. While Kant's (1724-1804) motto for the Enlightenment was "Dare to know," postmodernism replaced this by the slogan "Dare to believe that there is nothing to know." Postmodernism attacks the Enlightenment vision of their being deterministic laws and denies the dominance of reason in forming beliefs in contrast to the determining influence of rhetoric and emotion. If we go back to John Milton (1608-1674) and argue that "reason is but choosing," it suggests that substantive reasons, cognitive decision processes, and the deliberation of the pros and cons of buying would have little influence in buying. Nietzsche (1844-1900) is the historical hero of the movement because, it is claimed, he exposed the hollowness of Enlightenment hopes, showing systems of reason to be just systems of persuasion. The Nietzsche slogan, "The Death of God," was meant to say we can never be sure of anything.

Las Vegas is regarded as the exemplar of postmodernism, "where fantasy eclipses reality." As one person worded it, "We sell perception, not reality." Nadelson (1999, 4) offers the following:

> This is a postmodern paradise where fantasy and reality, illusion and the perception of it merge with hard cold cash and dance along a narrow strip of Nevada desert. . . . It's as if Las Vegas has finally fulfilled its destiny. After all, postmodernism was born here. *Learning from Las Vegas* by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour (MIT Press) was the design bible of the movement that elbowed aside the modernists.

(This book by Venturi, Brown, and Izenour [1972] has been regarded as a seminal work on the postmodern turn in architecture.)

Postmodernism covers such a wide range of viewpoints and positions, it is difficult to identify its *distinctive* cognitive content. Yet it is claimed that the ideas associated with postmodernism are basic to charting cultural change and to understanding today's society for marketers as well as others. But as Rosenau (1992) shows, postmodernist thought is far from being monolithic. The French version of postmodernism is extreme while postmodernism in the United States is more compromising and moderate. Rosenau labels the American postmodernists as *affirmative* postmodernists. The affirmatives are less dogmatic and, while skeptical about rationality, do not discredit it altogether. On the other hand, French postmodernists have little faith in rationality. This is typified by Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, which is a postmodern novel illustrating the futility of analytic reasoning and having faith in causal explanation. Still another distinction is made by Ebert (1996) between *ludic* postmodernism, more a form of lighthearted play for its own sake, and the *postmodernism of resistance*, which engages in politics to make changes in society. The ironic playfulness of the ludic form of postmodernism is illustrated by the Arnold Schwarzenegger movies, whose concentration on spectacle and excess reaches a point of amused self-parody.

Structuralism and Poststructuralism

Postmodernism links with the *structuralist* and the *poststructuralist* movements in Europe. Structuralism accepts that all human activity has structure in forming some meaningful whole (Sturrock 1993). It is based on the work of Saussure (1857-1913), the founder of modern linguistics. Poststructuralism takes language to be the paradigm of a structural system. Whereas structuralism investigates signs and symbols for the deeper underlying reality, poststructuralism suggests that beyond signs such as words and images, there are simply more signs with no underlying certainties of meaning.

Many strains of poststructuralism have melted into postmodernism. Poststructuralism argues that because all concepts and claims to truth are constructed in language, there can be no apprehension of reality except through the medium of language and that everything can be viewed as a *text* put forward for reading (interpretation). This implies that a text can only be understood in terms of other texts and not in relation to any objective reality. Language, it is argued, is the limit of our world as language intervenes in all thinking about the world, and there is no going beyond it. Although there is a world "out there," there is no going outside the text to understand that world.

Postmodernists, in line with poststructuralism, refer to different scientific ideas as merely different ways of talking or thinking and argue that simply manipulating words in the

mind does not ensure reliable inferences about reality. The main thing that unites postmodernists, however, is an anti-Enlightenment bias. Postmodernism also shares a number of claims about the postmodern condition as expressed in postmodernity. Although *all* postmodernists do not subscribe to the following claims made by postmodernity about the postmodern condition, probably most postmodernists would endorse them.

CHARACTERISTICS OF POSTMODERNITY OR THE POSTMODERN CONDITION

Although the following characteristics, said to be descriptive of the postmodern condition, have intuitive appeal, they are a matter for empirical inquiry rather than mere assertion. They are in essence *descriptive hypotheses* in that, providing we get agreement on the operational definitions of the terms used, we are in a position to test whether they are true or false. Failing this (see below), we must rest on common observation and whatever social science findings we possess to determine their validity. There is probably some truth in most of them, but the key problem lies in assessing incidence. But postmodernists refuse to talk of testing hypotheses since testing requires evidence that is commonly regarded as a meaningless concept (Rosenau 1992).

Decline of Social Classes

As consumerism develops, with many of the same images reaching society's consumers, class distinctions and ideological distinctions tend to disappear. The declining importance of social classes occurs as other social differentiation, such as gender, ethnicity, and age, is assumed to be of greater concern to consumers.

In the United States, since the American Revolution, class divisions are often denied. The denial originated by contrasting America with England where, at the time of the American Revolution, social class in England was almost something determined at birth. But social class is a guide to values, and since values in a final analysis determine trade-offs in buying, social class is considered crucial in marketing as it points to what is likely to appeal. As Melvin Kohn (1969, 3) says about social class or hierarchical position in the social structure,

> Hierarchical position, is related to almost everything about men's lives—their political party preferences, their sexual behavior, their church membership, even their rates of ill health and death. Moreover, the correlations are not trivial; class is substantially related to all these phenomena.

If social class is disappearing, this is of fundamental importance for segmentation and promotion. But in the absence of empirical research giving the answer, would one expect social class to be much less important today? It is assumed that, with mass media, more income, and more global brands, there is more homogeneity of tastes and thus fewer outward signs of social class. In the 1970s, the young seemed to detach themselves from their class roots and become a new class as far as entertainment was concerned. The middle class, once distinct, not only in income but taste in clothes, social behavior, housing, choice of reading, and, in the United Kingdom at least, by speech, were invaded by masses of people who had the incomes of the middle class but adhered to lower-class values. But this invasion has not continued. Social class persists. This is because higher social classes possess higher social status, and social status is highly desirable as reflecting one's position in the social pecking order. What has been changing is the ranking within the middle classes in that the traditional professions have become less important than income in establishing status. This is probably a reflection of the decline in the social worth of "respectability" vis-à-vis money worth.

Inequality in income is growing in both the United States and the United Kingdom, with a sustained rise in economic inequality throughout the 1980s and 1990s. No Western democracy is less equal than the United States, although the United Kingdom is not far behind. This spells lots of differences in social behavior. Large-income differences mandate differences in spending patterns, and these, in turn, lead to class perceptions. The child of the deprived in both the United States and the United Kingdom looks to the upper classes as belonging to another planet. Social stratification remains as people seek status, visibility, and to rise above the masses (Douglas 1996). If it is claimed that gender, ethnicity, and age are assuming greater importance than class, the answer can only be found by research or theory showing why these things are inevitably of more concern today. We should not be misled by the universal popularity of pop stars and sports celebrities among all classes of the young into believing that class is disappearing and no longer useful for segmentation purposes.

Move Away from Big Government

At the political level, it is claimed there is a move away from big government and public ownership toward self-reliance and privatization, competitiveness, and a reduction in the welfare state.

This may be so but doubts remain in Europe, given the centralizing tendencies of the European Community (EC). There is universal resentment of central government interference in all its forms, largely because of a lack of faith in government bureaucracies and the effectiveness and efficiency of government social policies. Vito Tanzi and Ludger Schuknecht (2000) show that growth in the share of public spending over the past forty years has not brought about improvements in public welfare as measured by a very wide range of indicators. However, the trouble with predicting any move away from big government is the "see-saw" effect in politics in that the floating vote tends to swing away from the policies of those currently in power as trade-offs change, giving rise to a

belief that more of the same should not be pursued but support should be given to others who want to retreat or pursue new policies.

Growing Importance of the Culture Industries and the Aestheticization of Everyday Life

It is claimed that the culture industries are of growing importance as is the "aestheticization" of everyday life. Consumers, it is argued, seek to turn their everyday lives into an aesthetic enterprise when trying to achieve a coherent style in what they wear and buy for the home.

Aesthetic judgments are based on a feeling of pleasure and perceptions of beauty and may account for the unity in aesthetic experience. Given the assumption that the standard of living is rising and leisure time increasing, it follows that cultural pursuits, aesthetics, and coordinated purchases are likely to receive more attention. But this is something different from any claim to the aestheticization of everyday life. It may be that the more affluent consumer is giving more weight to aesthetic appeal rather than mere functional performance, but the more basic question is whether aesthetic tastes are becoming more refined. Whether we look at furnishings or clothes, what is most striking is the sheer ugliness that defines much of today's informality in style.

The Construction of Identity through Personal Choice

The construction of self-identity through personal choice rather than through social ascription is an assertion that inadvertently offers support for the maintenance of the social class system. The assertion is consistent with the postmodernist claim that *fragmentation* characterizes the postmodern age rather than uniformity. The fragmentation is not simply individualism reflected in buying but fragmentation of personal identity at each of the life stages and in different social settings.

The extent to which the above is true, the more important for consumer marketing. The possessions of the wealthier classes have always reflected the idiosyncratic tastes of the individual rather than social pressures to conform, while changes in all manner of possessions and pursuits occur at different life stages and social settings (e.g., dressing for dinner). Perhaps the individuality of the wealthy will be followed by others with the rise in discretionary income. But there are strict limits to pure unfettered personal choice. Although many consumers may fail to conform to society's norms, their behavior is nonetheless conformative to subgroup norms as adherence to the social norms of one's social milieu makes for bonding or a sense of sharing and acceptance.

Some marketers, postmodernists claim, regard consumers as a bundle of fixed needs against which the consumer compares what is on offer. If marketers are doing this, it is manifestly wrong. If the idea of consumers being a bundle of fixed wants were accepted, it would reduce marketing to merely identifying known wants and developing products to match. If postmodernism reminds us that the consumer is not fixed in his or her wants but "fickle," with wants in constant flux and defying being pinned down, this is all for the good.

A World of Flux and Fragmentation, without Absolute Values

This is an extension of what has already been said and the idea, popularized in the 1960s, of our wanting to do "our own thing." But, as Unger (1984) says, social life is a constant struggle between the desire to adhere to the social norms of our social milieu and at the same time avoiding being subjugated by social pressures. This suggests a limit to fragmentation since differences in buying among those within the one social grouping will still have a family resemblance. To belong to a culture suggests some sharing of values, while talk about the *complete* absence of absolute values is a straw man. There are no sustainable absolute values when buying because values are tied to trade-offs in decision making, and trade-offs vary with circumstances.

No Absolute Truth, Faith in Scientific Rationality, or the Inevitability of Progress

The dismissal of any belief in absolute truth, faith in scientific rationality, and the inevitability of progress are central tenets of postmodernism. Truth is rejected as a legitimate goal while scientific theory is regarded by some postmodernists as an "authoritarian weapon." These claims are discussed later in this article.

The Importance of Emotion, Spectacle, and Fantasy; the Erasing of the Distinction between Reality and Unreality; and the Role of the Unconscious in Influencing Behavior and the Corresponding Irrationality of Consumers

There is nothing new in stressing the importance of emotion and the unconscious in influencing behavior. Nonetheless, it stands repetition since emotion, with its link to values, determines trade-offs in buying (de Sousa 1990). The information-processing approach of cognitive psychology, rooted in the metaphor of the computer, may have neglected this but not marketing practitioners. But postmodernists such as Debord (1990) go further and argue that consumption revolves around the production of spectacles and images as these project the promise of the good life and the fantasy of happiness and wealth. He places stress on the "aesthetics" of a product as being a more decisive element in buying than use value. For him, the spectacle is intimately tied to entertainment, in which consumers consume "commodity spectacles" without much involvement. The world of the spectacle is the "real" world to consumers as it offers novelty and excitement. With images increasingly constituting the world, the consequence is that the distinction is lost between appearances and "reality." Baudrillard (1994) argues that the use and exchange

value of products has given way to "sign value," where products become primarily symbols to be consumed and exhibited. Thus, for example, the consumer, through designer labels, consumes the symbols of power, status, and prestige. But Baudrillard, unlike Debord (1990), sees consumer society not as a constellation of spectacles but of sign values that constitute a hierarchy of prestige. He claims that the distinction between reality and unreality, as a consequence, has been eradicated. There is a breakdown of the distinction between the real and the imaginary as the consumerist society and the technology that goes with it creates its own reality for marketing purposes. Rejecting any stable relationship between the signifier (e.g., product) and the signified (symbols of prestige), signs have no necessarily distinct referent to any reality. There remains only *simulacra*, which refer to nothing but themselves, as signs (e.g., in ads) lose contact with the things signified. As a consequence, the twentieth century has witnessed the destruction of the cultural meanings of signs on a massive scale. All ads that evoke images of satisfactions that are pure fantasy seek to arouse desires. From this we have Baudrillard's claim that we are in a state of *hyperreality*, where the distinction between objects and their representations is dissolved, being left only with simulacra that are copies of a copy for which there is no original and no distinction between the real and the representation. Poster (1988) claims that ads tend to mirror the fantasies of social groups, so the academic analysis of consumption needs to shift from the analysis of technical/economic factors to the linguistic categories of sign and signifiers. As TV controls the context of its message, even heroes can be created of villains.

The world of the consumer is thus viewed by some postmodernists as composed of signs, with the distinction between what is real and what is mere appearance becoming lost. We move from the belief that the meaning of language is transparent to the recognition that language throws up ambiguous images (a move from *logocentrism* to *iconocentrism*). Logocentricism, in contrast to iconocentrism, implies a desire to eliminate difference and fix meanings. The logocentric stance of modernity is dismissed with the recognition of the indeterminacy of language meaning. The new electronic media introduce a world of pure simulacra that erode the distinction between the "real" world and images. The era of television in politics, for example, has eroded the distinction between symbol and reality and promoted style and symbol over substance. Lyotard (1984) even argues that knowledge legitimated by computers passes as the "real." The problems posed by electronically mediated communication with its power to exercise control, like the surveillance capacities of information technology, are of central concern to postmodernism.

The idea that the consumer sees anything beyond some melange of styles and images is denied. Thus, signifiers in, say, TV advertisements float freely with little or no connection with the products advertised. Symbols become detached from their cultural moorings; the crucifix, for example, becomes merely another form of bodily adornment along with tattoos and earrings. Brand images, designs, and styles are ways of conferring *symbolic* meaning rather than anything substantive in the products themselves. Whatever coherence in meaning occurs, it is attained through the use of symbols. This fits Baudrillard's (1975) claim that we are in a situation of *hyperreality*, where the distinctions between objects and their representations, the real and the unreal, are dissolved. The world of the consumer is seen as composed of pure *simulacra* or the hyperreal, where just the signs themselves constitute the realm of consumer experience. In a situation of strong hyperreality, the consumer is unable to separate reality from illusion. On the other hand, in a situation of weak hyperreality, the consumer separates the two but prefers to remain with the illusion.

Under the heading of the construction of personal identity, objections were expressed to similar claims, but additional claims being made here need to be challenged. First the role of fantasy. We have no difficulty in seeing the role of fantasy in the life of the consumer. Women's magazines (and many men's) are all about fantasy and escapism. However, it is doubtful that readers are unable to separate the reality from the fantasy or that they read these magazines for their correspondence to the reality. If people could not distinguish between, say, the science fiction fantasies in films and reality, they would quickly find that life outside the cinema was impossible. And advertisers are not as influential as critics think, even among schoolchildren. Studies discussed by *The Economist* (January 6, 2001, p. 65) found that children as young as six years of age understood the purpose of commercials and distinguish them from entertainment, while fantasy was distinguished from reality. Many would agree that modern media can help to form as well as to mirror realities, but this does not result in a situation in which sign or image is everything.

In any case, is this ability to fantasize universal? Campbell (1987) regards the ability (as opposed to the capacity) to daydream or fantasize as analogous to the ability to read, that is, as something that requires a particular type of exposure and learning. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) agrees and quotes Jerome Singer (1973) that daydreaming is a skill that some children never learn to use. Csikszentmihalyi regards daydreams as helping to bring emotional order to the mind, allowing both children and adults to rehearse imaginary situations so that the best strategy for confronting a situation can be adopted. He does not view the daydreams as constituting a person's whole reality. The claim about people being unable to distinguish fantasy from reality amounts to saying consumers in a postmodern society are psychotics (except, of course, the writers on postmodernism). An example generally quoted is of an actor in a soap opera, playing the role of villain, being attacked by some viewer. But this is a rare event and may simply be a gesture of protest against the values symbolized by

the role the actor plays. The idea that consumers cannot rise above the images seems very removed from the current attacks on consumerism. The metaphor of consuming spectacles and symbols implies the consumer is indifferent to substance or cannot get beyond symbolization. But student activists are currently claiming that many major international brands symbolize for them the exploitation of child labor, environmental pollution, and deception. This revolt (as against Nike at the University of Oregon) has been termed *brand boomerang* and is currently of corporate concern. No belief in advertising fantasy here. With regard to simulacra that refer to nothing but themselves, this suggests a complete absence of any associations. There is an echo here of those companies who fallaciously believe they can choose computer-generated "meaningless" brand names. They cannot. Every word and every brand name will evoke associations, that is, will have some referential meaning. Tarytak and lamolay may name no entity in the real world, but both will still have associations. Which would you choose as the name of a toilet paper?

Consumers are, of course, influenced on occasions purely by image—images that give rise to the consumer acting purely on gut liking (the likability heuristic), without further reflection. However, this does not imply the consumer is no longer able to distinguish reality from image. We must accept that customer enjoyment depends not just on what a product is objectively but on what it is taken to be. The symbolic meanings of, say, prestige and status that are attached to a brand influence perceptions and are just as much a real part of the brand as substantive properties. But this is not the same as saying people live in a world of their own. Consumers know full well they are buying not just a pair of sneakers but prestige, visibility, and status. Go out and speak to a group of youngsters from the age of nine years onward and see what they believe they are buying. No use telling them that the nonbranded, lower priced sneaker is just as good in every respect. They will tell you (as they told one of the authors in protocol statements) that that is not all they are buying.

If Baudrillard (1975) is right, brand image would be the major influence in buying, not substance. This assumes that signifiers, like the product itself, become unanchored to anything signified in terms of substantive properties, simply floating in their own orbit divorced from all reality. But the fact that consumers are so often influenced by image is because they have learned to take much else, such as quality, for granted while image can signify prestige, status, and so on as well as giving reassurance in conditions of uncertainty. Brand choice is not just the result of evaluating objective evidence. This is usually ambiguous or vague. Brand choice is also a matter of trust, and brand image can provide that trust. There is a perceptual interdependence between brand image and the assessment of substance. It would be fatal for marketers to believe that it can all be done with mirrors as substance never counts. It may be that the images attached to Joe DiMaggio were mainly a media creation, but the substance of being a great baseball player was essential to the legend (Cramer 2000). Appearances are not everything. Thus, American farmers created the perfect apple in appearance: lipstick red, broad-shouldered, uniform in size and color, a health food that looked dazzling. But the same farmers are now falling into debt because consumers complain the fruit does not taste like the original Red Delicious (Egan 2000).

The Baudrillard world of the consumer ignores a wide range of goods and services where distinctive technical benefits provide the competitive edge. While the symbols of status, visibility, and prestige can be very important for the consumer in deciding what to buy, not all goods and services fall into this category. Few brands with crucial use functions to perform are likely to remain supreme without being competitive in the utilitarian aspects of the product. The imagery part of brand image is tied to *affect*-driven choices, while a brand's reputational capital is tied to *belief*-driven choices. In any case, brand attributes and the symbolism attached to the brand form a gestalt, and the aim of advertising is to ensure this is so.

The claim about the media determining opinion (as opposed to strongly influencing what is talked about) can also be debated. In the first place, we might ask, which media, since all media do not advocate the same opinions. Even when the media are seemingly united in promoting one viewpoint, there is no difficulty in finding examples where this is not decisive. An example is the Danish referendum in the year 2000 on the adoption of the Euro. The media were unanimously in favor, but the Danes, nonetheless, voted against entry.

Finally, there is the claim that people are nonrational with an orientation toward instant gratification, with feelings always dominant. It is certainly true that behaviorism has demonstrated the strong desire for instant gratification. But much depends on how we define *nonrational*. Although we accept that consumers have flawed rationality (Gilovich 1991), they cannot be persuaded to believe black is white or to harm themselves without some compensating reason, such as cutting off an arm to save one's life. If people were generally nonrational, rational choice theory would have had little predictive success. This is contrary to findings (Young 1997).

Consumerism Dominates Our Lives as Citizens

It is argued that consumerism dominates; that is, consumer lifestyles and mass consumption control people's lives. For the postmodernist, social class has less relevance in Western societies than does lifestyle and consumption. Featherstone (1991) speaks of shopping in shopping centers becoming an experience of spectacle, luxury, or nostalgia. Thus, it is argued, ads become less concerned with functional utility and more concerned about associating the brand with a lifestyle and valued cultural images. This latter claim was discussed earlier.

While it is true that shopping malls and spectacle can make shopping a potentially more pleasant experience, and much shopping can be exciting, it is also true that much shopping is still a chore, and this is what shopping on the Internet is trying to exploit. The claim about consumption controlling the lives of citizens is an empirical proposition that would need to be operationalized and tested. But there are good reasons for rejecting the claim. It rests on the implicit assumption that the primary concern of people revolves around possessions. This is usually supported by the additional claim that possessions provide people with their self-identity (Dittmar 1992). But self-identity is based on things that concern us, including many variables captured by demographics such as social class, occupation, age, ethnicity, and so on (Flanagan 1996). What amazingly empty lives people would lead if the postmodernists were right. The truth is that there are just too many concerns in life to be so self-indulgent.

Relativism

Relativism denies there are objective standards of truth. Relativism, as a philosophy, distinguishes postmodernism. But modernity itself has its own form of relativism, namely, ethical relativism. In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Alasdair MacIntyre (1989) argues that Enlightenment rationality sanctioned the universal acceptance of moral relativism. Modernity's morality begins with the claim that what is right is the liberty for self-satisfaction.

It was the logical positivists of modernity who argued that statements must be either "meaningful" or "nonsensical." While meaningful statements are either analytic (true by definition) or synthetic (could be checked empirically), value judgments, ethical declarations, or religious pronouncements are simply emotive or nonsensical, matters of assertion or preference. An ethics based on emotivism is implicitly moral relativism. However, our critique of the relativism of postmodernism is reserved for later consideration.

Denial of Distinctions between "High" and "Low" Culture

Postmodernists have contempt for distinctions between popular culture such as pop music and high culture such as the opera. They argue that the distinctions between high and mass culture and between artistic genres are disappearing as elements of style in the postmodern world are drawn from different contexts and historical periods. A simple example might be the man who wears his blue jeans under a formal black cashmere overcoat. Pastiche ("bricolage") puts together elements of style from radically different contexts and periods of history. It is currently in fashion. TV also has had the effect of mixing audiences, which results in more commonality of values and tastes.

One implication that might be drawn from this is that segmentation based on traditional differences in cultural tastes will not distinguish different target groups. Some TV channels have accepted this, catering to the lowest denominator of taste. However, the fact is that consumers within different culture segments do differ (e.g., those who attend the opera in contrast to a rock concert). Even if some consumers are in both segments, each segment caters to different wants and will need different appeals.

The Rejection of the Notion of Constant Progress

The idea of constant progress in history is known as the "Whig" interpretation of history, where history is viewed as a conflict between "progress" and "reaction," in which progress in the end is always shown to be victorious, bringing in its train ever-increasing enlightenment and prosperity. The Whig interpretation of history is underwritten by few, if any, historians today. There is the recognition that technological and scientific progress are a mixed blessing while operationalizing the concept of progress always calls forth personal values that differ widely. There is no inevitability of progress, however defined, but to reject the notion of their being progress is equally unwarranted. John Horgan's (1996) *The End of Science* is often quoted as a book on science in line with postmodernism's gloomy view. Although this book is an excellent popular guide to what is happening in science, the interviews and discussions it contains cannot reasonably be viewed as supportive of the book's title, which is probably the reason why many scientists are (too) critical of the book, dismissing Horgan as a mere science journalist, not a real scientist. There are still many puzzles to solve in science. Thus, the continuing conflict between relativity theory and quantum mechanics is still unresolved, cosmology is in a state of confusion, and there is still the problem of string theory refusing to go away while we are not even sure we have mastered the fundamental nature of matter, as reflected in our lack of understanding of consciousness (Damasio 2000). Even in an applied science such as medicine, there is a profound ignorance of the biological causes of many diseases, with the public being fobbed off with all-embracing pseudo-causes such as "unhealthy lifestyle." However, there is a popular belief in the inevitability of progress, which marketers exploit when describing products as a technological breakthrough.

The Reduced Importance of the Author as the Creator of the Text

Postmodernists speak of the "intentional fallacy" or the "death of the author." The intentional fallacy is said to occur when we believe that any kind of evidence "external" to the text helps clarify its meaning when this simply confuses a psychological aspect of the author with the text itself. For Derrida (1982), the text is a material trace removed from whomever was its author. As a consequence, it must be studied as an independent artifact. The meaning of the text is a function of the discourse (speech-type act) alone. This claim is basic to Derrida's technique of deconstruction (see later),

where any initial deconstruction of a text is always open to further deconstruction with no final definitive interpretation. Dismissing the need to discover authorial intention allows the reader (interpreter) more flexibility. However, this is not regarded as a license "for anything goes," for the text's content will not endorse just any reading.

Derrida (1982) attacks every theory of meaning based on the notion of *logos* (reason or meaning based on the relation of word to the thing to which it refers, that is, referential meaning). The goal is not to retrieve whatever the author intended by whatever the text will support. In this Derrida parts from traditional hermeneutics (science of interpretation), which is concerned with intention. This position is defensible if our only interest lies in the personal meaning or significance of the text to the reader, but this is not always the case.

For critics of Derrida, it is not at all clear why author and text do not form the relevant system for the purpose of interpretation. If finding out the author's intention is an irrelevancy, then it follows that it is not necessary the author should have meant to say anything at all. In marketing research, understanding a question in a questionnaire raises the question of the semantic understanding of the utterance. This requires not only an understanding of the literal meaning of the question but also inferences about the questioner's *intention* if the pragmatic meaning of the question to the respondent is to be made clear. Similarly, in interpreting buying action, marketers are concerned with the buyer's intentions and, more specifically, the wants and beliefs lying behind these intentions. Action, as opposed to involuntary behavior, always presupposes intention. Marketing is vitally concerned with intentional action and cannot ignore an author's intention.

For many critics, a text and its author are perceptually interdependent, and interpretations are affected by beliefs about the author, just as respondents are influenced by the assumed intentions of the sponsoring author behind the questionnaire. Even the "realist" school of lawyers in the United States, who insist that the intentions of the framers of the Constitution have no relevance, were among the first to look for guidance as to what the framers intended by such phrases as "other high crimes and misdemeanors" when the question of President Clinton's impeachment was being raised. As Rosen (1992, 247) says, "To say that the text has a life of its own, independent of the intentionality of the author or the reader, is to identify life with abstract structures and, in this sense, is like treating the mathematical model of reality apart from the reality." Rosen regards postmodernism as an attempt to assert Nietzsche's doctrine of "noble nihilism" and, in this sense, is actually a defective version of modernity.

Derrida's way of reading (interpreting) a text, however, appeals to many in marketing. This is because Derrida focuses *not* on the meaning of a sign in terms of what is *signified* but on the meaning of the sign as a *signifier.* In more conventional terms, he shifts the focus from what signs refer to (referential meaning) to symbolic meaning. *The focal point for all deconstructive readings is the style of the discourse.* It is thus argued that what meaning comes across is dependent to a large extent on the mode of expression. This is because *how* something is expressed, and not just *what* is said, influences the target audience. What gives meaning to a text is language dependent. Few in marketing will have much quarrel with this even if this is contrary to the assumption made in economics (where the "framing" of an issue is assumed to have no direct effect). Nonetheless, many find it difficult to separate referential meaning from symbolic meaning. A brand name signals something concrete and also symbolizes something, just as fire signals burning but also symbolizes life. The symbolic meaning of a brand cannot just float anywhere but must be anchored to something real if the consumer is to act on the symbolism. What is true is that a consumer may remember the symbolism of an ad but fail to notice the name of the brand being advertised. This is common with emotional symbolic advertising since so much attention is taken up with the emotional symbolism that all else is ignored or forgotten.

CENTRAL PHILOSOPHICAL ASSERTIONS OF POSTMODERNISM

Assertions such as the above are meant to be descriptive of the postmodern condition (postmodernity) and tend to be endorsed by postmodernism. They are essentially empirical questions, although postmodernists do not undertake empirical investigations, simply considering alternative discourses and meanings. However, what really distinguishes postmodernism from postmodernity lies not in describing the postmodern condition but that postmodernism, unlike postmodernity, sets out a number of philosophical positions. Postmodernists show approval of plurality, indeterminacy, and instability, regarding them as inherently positive while being highly negative toward consensus as something basically oppressive. But philosophical assertions that are not a matter of empirical inquiry are the most controversial.

There Is No Such Thing as Truth; What Is Said to Be the Truth Simply Reflects Some Consensus

This claim is made on the grounds that there are no objective standards of truth. There can be no certainty. Although the philosopher Karl Popper claimed that, though we can falsify a hypothesis, we can never prove it, Pierre Duhem ([1906] 1954), a physicist, argued that scientific theories (as opposed to descriptive hypotheses) can never be conclusively established or conclusively refuted by observation. Duhem pointed out that a physicist never subjects an isolated hypothesis to experimental testing but can only test a group of hypotheses. When experimental results disagree with predictions, the physicist learns only that at least one of the

hypotheses in the group is unacceptable. But the experiment does not indicate which of the hypotheses must be rejected. A test does not just test the hypothesis itself but a whole set of hypotheses. Every test of a hypothesis takes account of many hypotheses in respect of the following:

(a) the initial conditions governing the conduct of the experiment (including the validity of the correspondence rules or operational definitions);
(b) auxiliary assumptions to the effect that nothing else interfered.

Thus, if

H = hypothesis,

IC = initial conditions,

AA = auxiliary assumptions,

P = the predicted consequences,

we argue the following:

If (H, IC, AA), then P

or

If (not-H, and IC and AA are accepted as unproblematic),

then probably not-P.

Science is thus not capable of achieving complete certitude. Because we test hypotheses in conjunction with initial conditions and auxiliary assumptions, we can never be absolutely sure we have confirmed or *refuted* the hypothesis itself. When new evidence is in conflict with current theory, scientists may simply reject one or more of the background premises. It follows that the data in support of a theory are always underdetermining; that is, the data do not uniquely determine the theory since more than one explanation can always be found.

The postmodernists stress this lack of certainty and attack the very concept of deterministic laws. However, all that this means is that we can never be *logically* certain that some theory is valid; it does not deny *practical* certainty. Logically, there are an infinite number of hypotheses to test when we set about testing any one of them, but in practice, the number of feasible rival hypotheses is likely to be no more than five (Miller 1987). Furthermore, just because there can be several explanations for some phenomena does not imply that each of these is equally likely. However, postmodernists argue that consensus is the method by which scientific "facts" are determined without the hard evidence providing a backing for that consensus. For example, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* is compiled this way, with the unfortunate premise that patients are assumed to have one specific disorder that is corrected by a specific treatment (Schiffer 1998). We accept that there are no deterministic laws in marketing, but the weight of evidence for a claim provides, on occasions, practical certainty.

Facts Are about the Consensus of Opinion

Postmodernists question the very idea of "facts." For them, facts are simply things about which there is consensus. Facts and so-called truths, it is claimed, are relative to the "interpretative communities" (e.g., the physics community and the marketing community) that accept or reject them according to their persuasiveness, which, in turn, rests more on the power of rhetoric than "material objectivity." Each interpretive community looks at the world through its own conceptual lens, never questioning presuppositions or values. For postmodernists, a scientist is never a detached observer as all observations occur within the boundaries of some theoretical perspective or paradigm. Theoretical perspectives implicitly promote certain values. Thus, Prilleltensy (1984) argues that psychological theories are full of implicit ideological assumptions supportive of the status quo. For him, the very concept of a value-neutral psychology has been used to advance values that benefit the dominant segments of society while being portrayed as benefiting society as a whole. Postmodernism denies that science is built on a firm basis of observable, objective facts because all phenomena are interpreted and expressed in language.

Postmodernism denies that there are inherent differences between literature, science, and the way reality is represented. This is because literature, science, and reality are texts like other cultural objects. Postmodernism attempts to turn the tables on science. Scientists commonly demand that all inquiries, if judged to be knowledge seeking, should be conducted in a scientific way. The postmodernists, in contrast, say that everything is just a text for analysis, whether science or literature. And whenever texts are interpreted, there are always rival interpretations based on rival perspectives. And these perspectives can be incommensurable. In the case of the historian, for example, historical texts are interrogated rather than trusted.

If we substitute model or paradigm for perspective, postmodernists are saying that the marketing model or social science paradigm that is adopted determines what is seen as well as what are chosen to be the relevant facts. The model, perspective, or paradigm adopted is the conceptual lens through which scientists view the area of interest. As an example, there are the studies of the village of Tepoztlan in Mexico by two anthropologists, Robert Redfield and Oscar Lewis (Coleman and Watson 1992). Because Redfield's perspective saw urban life as the source of cultural disintegration, rural Tepoztlan was interpreted as idyllic. On the other hand, from Lewis's perspective, peasant life was one of disease, poverty, and backwardness, so his interpretation of

village life in Tepoztlan was diametrically different from that of Redfield.

The postmodernist goes further, though, to argue that because we look at the world through a particular perspective, we cannot have knowledge of an independent reality as all so-called facts are tied to conceptual viewpoints. Searle (1999) will have none of this. Just because we always see reality from a point of view—what Searle calls *perspectivism*—it does not follow that we never directly perceive the independent reality. Just because I need a language to identify, describe, and communicate the facts, it does not follow that the facts as described have no independent existence. It is a fallacy to suppose that the linguistic and conceptual nature of the process of identifying facts means that the facts identified must be purely linguistic in nature.

As to the argument about different conceptual schemes providing different descriptions of reality, Searle (1999) sees this as analogous to different systems of counting: each system is capable of providing an alternative and true description of the world. He sees a failure here to distinguish observer-dependent concepts from observer-independent concepts. For him, features of the world such as force, gravitational attraction, and mass are observer *independent*, in contrast to features of the world such as knife, chair, or sentence in English, which are observer *dependent*. Gravitational attraction is a fact of nature, while a *knife* is the name we give to anything that fulfills the functions of a knife. It is simply a non sequitur to reason from "facts have to be interpreted"; therefore, "there are only interpretations and no facts." We find a similar non sequitur when postmodernism argues that because there is no absolute proof, all theories are equal to each other, which denies the very idea of weight of evidence.

The claim that the interpretation of facts always depends on theories held is also disputed by Hacking (1983). He denies that *all* scientific observations are interpretations in the light of theories held. While agreeing that interpretation is always involved, he argues nonetheless that the early development of optics depended solely on noticing surprising phenomena that preceded any formulation of theory.

All Knowledge Is Relative

If we believe that everything can be treated as a text, that the method of investigating texts is through interrogation leading to interpretation, and that there can be no right or wrong interpretations, we move toward *relativism* or the notion that no absolutes exist. To say something is "relative" is to say it varies from time to time and/or with circumstances. *Relative* contrasts with *absolute*, which is that which does not vary with time or circumstances. Relativism is the doctrine that beliefs and principles are not universally valid across time and across cultures but are valid only for some historical period, some social group, or the individuals holding them.

Isaiah Berlin (1981) distinguishes "pluralism" from relativism. Cultural values can be incompatible, simply representing a *plurality* of values that cannot be structured hierarchically. After all, no two language cultures in the world order the world in exactly the same way. Pluralism is simply a matter of recognizing the fact that human goals are multiple, not all of them commensurable. This is different from relativism. Putnam (1981) defines relativism as the claim that there are no standards of truth or rationality that transcend particular cultural or linguistic communities. He himself rejects relativism on the grounds that it undermines the distinction between a belief's being right and merely *seeming* to be right.

A *strong* relativist position is one that denies there are any universal standards. Thus, strong moral relativism claims that all moral beliefs are relative to the culture, the group, or the individual: they are right for them. The most common objection to strong relativism is that in denying universal standards, it denies its own universal that everything is relative. Although we may not be able to verify moral standards by the methods of natural science, we are in a position to show the dysfunctional consequences of following no moral standards. Also, some moral standards are better defended than others in terms of the basic need for survival, the need to belong, and the need for order and security. As Rapoport (1953) says, there is no point in trying to justify our pursuit of these four invariant needs. Similarly, with regard to cultural *cognitive* relativism, we can point to the consequences of assuming that beliefs are all equally acceptable.

Relativism embraces many different types of relativism, not all of them equally contested. Muncy and Fisk (1987) distinguish relativism from "relativity" in that relativity, in the sense of cultural relativity, simply claims that cultural entities must be understood in their cultural setting. In contrast, the relativist would go further and claim that the culture provides all standards of evaluation. Haack (1998) points to other distinctions such as ontological relativity, linguistic relativity, conceptual relativity, meaning-invariance relativity, and pluralistic relativity. But whatever kind of relativism, she finds the idea that "true" makes sense only relative to some background theory, perspective, or paradigm, an alarming claim. While she acknowledges that perception involves conceptualizing, she denies this requires us in any way to concede that reality is concept relative. She points out that what demonstrates that our perceptions are still in contact with something real and independent of our expectations and interpretations is the potential for surprise.

Several writers in marketing (e.g., Anderson 1983; Peter and Olson 1983) talk about supporting a relativist orientation in marketing. In contrast, Hunt (1991) is a passionate advocate of freeing marketing from all forms of relativism. What Hunt finds most objectionable is the implication in relativism that there are no objective appraisal criteria for evaluating beliefs and principles. He points out that just because no evaluative criteria guarantee certain knowledge does not mean that everything is relative to the culture, group, or

individual. Just because we cannot *absolutely* prove scientific laws does not mean we have no good reasons for believing them. With respect to cultural relativism, Hunt points out that the evidence suggests that the basic elements of morality and rational thinking are the same in all cultures.

Stanley Fish is a prominent postmodernist in the United States. Fish's (1999) relativism arose from the recognition that there are no agreed ways of adjudicating between different interpretations of a text. From this he moves (illicitly) to the conclusion that interpreters create their own meanings, divorced from any guidance from the text. According to Fish, getting texts "right" is simply a matter of negotiation within the interpretive community. Truths are relative to particular interpretative communities whether in marketing, physics, psychology, or literature. Interpretive communities (part of which are the review boards of the academic journals) appraise claims according to their relative persuasiveness, and this has more to do with power and rhetoric than with the natural order of things. It was on such a basis that Peter and Olson (1983), in an article entitled, "Is Science Marketing?" argued that science was a special case of marketing.

The idea of the dominant interpretation being tied to those whose power is dominant is associated with Foucault (1972). It is not uncommon for writers influenced by Foucault to explain everything from advertisements to sexuality in terms of this hidden control. On this claim, whatever doctrines dominate in marketing academia will be the doctrines being advocated by those with the most power to close off other viewpoints. There is no question of truth ultimately winning out; the powerful elites ensure their own views are the orthodox ones. While there are powerful voices in every discipline who make their views count, with so many outlets for novel views, few in the sciences would endorse the notion that "might" is always to be considered "right." If one scientist cannot understand the argument of another, the two scientists may occupy worlds of discourse that are incommensurable. Such incommensurable discourses are not in conflict as they cannot even be compared. But this view cannot go unchallenged. Just as different ways of classifying things depend on purpose, various ways of conceptualizing the world also depend on purpose. This does not mean these different ways of seeing the world are incommensurable as they may simply represent different windows onto a problem.

One form of relativism promoted by postmodernists is that there is no universal rationality as different cultures exhibit different types of rationality. However, Lloyd (1990) has illustrated how these so-called different mentalities represent nothing more than different cultures possessing different conceptual schemata that change through time and are influenced by other cultures. John Searle (1999) also denies cultural relativism and points out that, for example, when the Nuer (a tribe in Sudan) make sense of their claims, it turns out that they make sense by our standards. Hence, the apparent irrationality within a tribal culture can be made intelligible by universal standards of rationality.

A more circumscribed version of relativism is "robust relativism," which avoids the usual charge of incoherence. This version is put forward by Joseph Margolis (1991). *Robust* relativism is regarded as operating in "carefully selected contexts of inquiry." The robust relativist rejects the idea of "truth" on the grounds that there can be many truth-like claims that do not rule out all other claims that are "incongruent" with them. He argues that the traditional truth-false dichotomy is rooted in "archism" or the idea that there is a fixed, objective reality against which claims can be tested by a correspondence theory of truth, that is, tested by correspondence to the "facts" in the world outside.

Robust relativism is simply recognizing there can be no certainty, but this in itself does not constitute a justification of relativism. Of course, science cannot tell us *with certainty* what is true. There is no absolute (logical) certainty in this world since there is no absolute certainty to any prediction, scientific or otherwise. However much evidence we have for believing the consumer tomorrow will act as he or she has done today, we can never be sure. Science can only tell us what the evidence suggests comes closest to the truth at the time the question is posed. Yet as Thagard (2000) says, the advances made in the physical control of the world that have made possible the technologies of transportation, communication, and medicine are totally mysterious unless theories such as gravity, electromagnetism, and the germ theory of disease are at least approximately true. It may be, as Cartwright (1993) shows, that physical laws are idealized claims rather than being exactly true to reality. As Giere (1999) argues, scientific theories are not so much making truth claims about the world so much as they define models that approximate reality: models that are similar to maps in being more or less accurate and more or less detailed. There can be no claim to absolute truth. As Deutsch (1997) points out, even solipsism, the notion that only our own mind exists and what appears to be an external reality is just a dream, cannot be *logically* disproved beyond any doubt.

Gellner (1995) argues that total relativism ends by underwriting cheap dogmatism as, if anything goes, you are allowed to be as utterly dogmatic as you wish (and many postmodernists are highly dogmatic) since the critical standards that might have inhibited such dogmatism are nullified. He points out that the "ecumenical relativists," eager to respect all systems of truth and value, find themselves committing the very sin they would wish to avoid, namely, endorsing evil regimes. In implicitly endorsing such systems by adopting relativism, the relativists pledge themselves to spurning that which they spurn, within or outside their own borders.

Philip Kitcher (1993) claims that the logical positivists and their relativist postmodern opponents are just opposite sides of the same coin. While the logical positivists

worshipped science for its claimed conformity to how the world is, the relativists condemn science for failing to live up to those standards. What unites both these views is the imposition of unrealistic standards for science to achieve. As A. J. Ayer (1973) once said, it is in demanding impossible standards of perfection that the skeptic feels secure.

Old ideas never die but hibernate for a more favorable climate. So it is with relativism. It is in tune with education systems that exalt pluralism of any sort *without* always evaluating what is being taken onboard. Although this is likely to be denied, it is also in line with the implicitly held claim that the only *absolute* value is absolute toleration. Absolute toleration is an implicit tenet of postmodernity, though if we tolerate all, we teach nothing. Toleration, as the absolute value, means that justice, community well-being, and even honesty are subordinated to "being tolerant." Well not quite, since in the Western world, people continue to condemn practices of other cultures that lead, say, to the exploitation of children or the subordination of women.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism in postmodernism is sometimes (wrongly) taken as implying a denial that there is a reality "outside the text": that the human mind does not discover nature but merely constructs it. But if we ask about the social construction of, say, quarks, do scientists actually believe this refers to something real or simply to the ideas scientists have of quarks?

There is no contradiction between saying that something is real, yet socially constructed. Social constructionists generally acknowledge the existence of a real world independent of our observations. They are not in the business of showing that what scientists claim to be reality reduces to nothing but language divorced from substantive content. At the "most" minimal level, they are simply pointing out that how we describe and explain that world is socially constructed since all scientific vocabularies, like vocabularies generally, are socially constructed. How we conceptualize the world, how we think about things, and whether certain things are even worth thinking about are not determined by the way the world is but by cultural and social factors. Social constructionists may take a scientific term, such as, say, *consumer attitude*, and point out that it is in no way inevitable and that, as a construct (a concept that is part of a discipline), it could perhaps be improved on. The aim is simply to "unmask" the construct to show an "extra-theoretical" function, undermining any claim that the construct represents a unique way of organizing reality.

There are several distinct ideas in social constructionism (Hacking 1999). The first is that the labels we give to things, such as the name "convenience goods," are produced by society itself. This is trivially true. The second view is that cultural *systems* such as "markets," "money," "Congress," and the "law" are socially constructed as they are social products of society. The argument here is that these things would not exist if we had not created them. If there had been a different type of society, where values and interests were different, these things might not have emerged or emerged in a very different form. They contrast with things that naturally exist in nature, which humans had no hand in creating or shaping beyond labeling. The third view is the claim that the way we think about things in the world is not determined by the way the world is but by our being part of society. This is where the controversy lies. It seems obvious to nonpostmodernists that anything that exists independently of human society, such as quarks, or even before human society, such as dinosaurs, could not have been socially constructed beyond being given a name.

A seminal work on social constructionism is Berger and Luckmann's (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality*, but more recently, there has been John Searle's (1995) *The Construction of Social Reality*, which makes a lesser claim for the scope of social constructionism while defending it against the charge of denying any reality beyond what society constructs. First, he agrees that the functions we emphasize are tied to our interests. Thus, because survival is a key value, we place emphasis on the function of the heart to pump blood, not to make a noise. Similarly, we emphasize the motivating function of emotion or its dysfunctional consequences in respect to decision making. These are socially constructed functions. Second, Searle argues that the acceptance of socially constructed rules, like the traffic laws, rests on "collective intentionality" in the sense of collectively agreeing to something; that is, culture is key to what rules are accepted. Third, Searle claims that social constructs involve rules about what constitutes a social construct such as "attitude" and the rules that regulate the uses of the construct. A test of a genuine social construct for Searle is whether we are able to explicitly codify the relevant rules.

It is not the social construction of *ideas about human behavior* that causes most controversy. It is accepted that mental constructs such as self-esteem, attitudes, motives, and so on are not "real (physical) entities" (natural kinds) in the brain but are hypothetical constructs, that is, constructs that are created to explain some phenomena on the basis that they seem to be analogous to what appears to be happening in the mind. It is also accepted that many models in marketing and social science involve hypothetical constructs that can lose touch with reality, becoming just variables in some mathematical model. Elegance and deductive rigor in economics are mainly achieved by putting to one side ignorance and uncertainty, to the detriment of relevance to the practical issues of life (Hutchison 1994). It is the recognition of all this that makes many in marketing and the social sciences wonder what all the fuss is about. But the natural sciences think differently.

The real controversy is about the social construction of knowledge in the natural sciences. The objection of those in

the physical sciences lies in postmodernism's claim that physics and biology, say, could have evolved just as successfully without the discovery of quarks and genes. Natural scientists deny that progress to the outer reaches of physics and biology could have occurred without knowing the existence of quarks and genes and that these are natural entities in nature and not simply social constructs. Science cannot construct things like quarks but simply discovers their existence in nature. Science advances on a foundation of knowledge that, with rare exceptions, remains extremely stable. This makes it is difficult to claim that quarks are just one way of constructing social reality as opposed to equating with something "real" about nature.

While the shift from Aristotelian physics to Newtonian physics was a paradigm shift (a revolutionary scientific change, in Kuhn's terms), it is denied that anything similar in physics has occurred since then. Contrary to the postmodernist position, scientific concepts (constructs) do not constantly change in meaning but simply come to have deeper meaning, leading to added properties or a change in emphasis. Thus, Putnam (1991) argues that the seeming changes in the meaning of scientific concepts are best described as successive changes in belief about the same object, not as a story about successive changes in meaning. While social constructionism is not relevant to the facts studied by the natural sciences, beliefs can change about the facts. On the other hand, basic changes in concepts and meanings are common in social life. Thus, some measures of "attitude" have moved away from the original view of an "attitude" being simply a predisposition to react in a particular way to some person, item, or thing to embracing a cognitive, evaluative, and a conative component echoing Plato's concept of the mind.

Science Can Be Fully Explained in Terms of Social Determinants

The acceptance of a relativist position leads to the view that what prevails in science reflects the most persuasive rhetoric. This is a claim made by many postmodernists. It is the position of Alan Gross (1999), a sociologist of scientific knowledge. Throughout science, he finds the subtle art of persuasion at work so that scientific knowledge becomes the sum of what scientists collectively persuade each other to believe. This is not quite the same as saying that the most powerful win out since power includes coercion and material incentives.

Much scientific discourse is indeed rhetorical. Peter and Olson (1983) are right to the extent that there is a marketing dimension to science. For instance, Darwin's *Origin of the Species* is steeped in rhetoric. Even scientists must put the best "frame" around their ideas if colleagues are to be persuaded. In fact, as soon as we move away from putting across arithmetic, we are in the realm of persuasion (and many would not exclude arithmetic). Persuasive rhetoric, however, is but one determinant of what is accepted within the discipline.

Gross (1999) belongs to that group of sociologists who argue that whatever is accepted as true in science results from social factors. This is the view of the so-called "strong programme" in the sociology of knowledge, which points to the importance of rhetoric in the adoption of theories (Bloor 1983). The strong programme claims also that all standards encountered in a social setting reflect the interest of those imposing the standards. Observation of nature does not make scientists agree on what constitutes a true account of that world. It is not just experience but cultural/social/group influences that determine what will be believed. On this basis, theory choice is far from being objective but reflects the particular scientific group's interest in maintaining and/or increasing the importance of its intellectual capital, as reflected in its methods and techniques. The strong programme takes Popper and other philosophers to task for reconstructing the history of science to coincide with some normative, rational model that is at variance with what actually goes on. The strong programme downgrades the role of reason and the methods of science, in favor of rhetoric.

Another who focuses on rhetoric as the basis of acceptance is Fish (1995), who claims that establishing belief systems is a matter of the right rhetoric as it is persuasion that determines, not reason or logic. Strangely, he argues that all activity is rule bound and we cannot help doing what we do automatically, thus inadvertently putting forward a universal truth while elsewhere dismissing the very idea of universal truths. Other postmodernists also argue that scientific inquiry is never objective but simply masks the lust for power; the rationality of science can always be unmasked as ideology whose purpose is to exclude other perspectives.

While scientists might agree that social values enter into the context of discovery, in the context of justification, it is the evidence that counts. As for the claim made for power, this is a single-motive view of motivation when the motives lying behind any action are apt to be many and varied as well as conflicting. The idea, following Nietzsche, that the lust for power completely dominates action can be compared with the claimed dominance of the sexual motive among Freudians. Power is just one, albeit important, motive lying behind human actions.

Foucault (1972) followed Nietzsche to stress this lust for power. Three topics dominate in his writings. The first is society's barbarous treatment of social deviants. The second is associated with his claim that we only make sense of our experiences through beliefs and ideas we take on trust. This view supports those in consumer behavior who view the consumer as mainly acting on unevaluated information from whatever sources are considered credible. For Foucault, all forms of knowledge are used to support systems of power. The idea of a disinterested search of the truth is just absurd. Every law, value, and even habit of thought are all masks for

bourgeois power (Eribon 1992). Freedom is a figment of modernist philosophy, given that we are all manipulated by whoever holds the power (Foucault 1975). All texts are thus perceived as tools in a power struggle, with the dominant texts reflecting the dominant power. The third topic is Foucault's work on the history of sexuality, with the aim of putting across a deeper understanding of the concept of sexuality itself. Like Marx, Foucault downplayed the role of "human agency" in history, not surprisingly, as he was a member of the French communist party early in his twenties. His focus is always on structures/systems, not individuals. His work considerably influenced the way reformers perceive incarceration, women's rights, and gay rights. But Hamilton (1998), in a highly entertaining way, demolishes much of Foucault's scholarship. For example, power elites do not always win. Hamilton shows how English juries in the eighteenth century refused to convict on capital charges, thwarting state power.

Critics of the strong programme worry that treating science as something to be explained by social factors leads to the claim that science is purely a social construction or that science is simply a discourse (speech act) whose claims only make sense *relative* to a particular perspective or paradigm. Questions of truth in the sense of correspondence to reality become irrelevant with the dominant perspective, simply reflecting what group holds most power.

Roth (1987) points out that much of the criticism leveled against Popper and other philosophers attacked in the strong programme could also be used to undermine the strong programme's case since it suggests its own claims are culturally/socially determined. Hunt (1991) attacks the so-called "strong programme" in the sociology of knowledge on the grounds that we should only look for social causes when it is evident there are no rational reasons underpinning the scientific claims. While, as a pragmatic rule, we support this position, it could nevertheless be argued that whatever led to the adoption of a knowledge claim is always a matter of empirical inquiry and never one for dogmatism. If the strong program is wrong to assume the universality of (collective) causal social factors in adoption, it may also be wrong to assume that because a knowledge claim can be rationally defended against all criticism, such reasons were the *sole* basis for adoption.

While rejecting the primacy given to social factors in the adoption of a theory in marketing or elsewhere, it would be wrong to assume that factors other than rationality play no part in theory preference, particularly in marketing and the social sciences. While people will not believe black is white just because of self-interest or loyalty, these factors can make themselves felt in choice of theories. As Toulmin (1990) points out, if we wish to understand what convinced Newton about the truth of his scientific beliefs, we should do well to remove all limits on the factors that may be accepted as relevant. Thus, the fact that Newton's theories about the heavens seem to mirror the Anglican Church hierarchy may have supplied Newton with additional reasons for adopting them. Social factors do enter into what claims are accepted. Thus, some marketing academics prefer to view marketing as catering to "needs" (little talk of wants) and eschew talk of manipulation. This viewpoint is attractive in being more socially acceptable to academics and marketers alike but gives inadequate direction and lacks explanatory force.

Science is done by humans who are naturally going to be influenced by political, economic, and ethical factors. However, this is something different from the claim that social factors are decisive, all a matter of persuasion and consensus. Taken literally, the notion that all scientific knowledge is a social construction that comes about through the right rhetoric and power plays denies altogether the role of the rational and the role played by nature, implying that the methods by which scientists establish new knowledge are completely disconnected from nature itself. That "truth" is inextricably linked to rhetoric or that rhetorical analysis alone fully accounts for the content of science would not be accepted by any scientist. It relegates the explanatory and predictive power of theories to having no cognitive content beyond their rhetorical elements. Only those unfamiliar with science would make such a claim since there is an overwhelming amount of empirical evidence in support of all its central claims. Of course, there is no final explanation of any phenomena and an initial explanation may lack depth, but this is something else.

Kitcher (1993) claims, contrary to postmodernists and relativists, that victory in science does not typically go to the scientific power brokers who dominate the discipline by bullying fellow scientists into submission by controlling jobs, journals, and funds. He shows, with historical examples stretching from Copernicus to Francis Crick and James Watson, that scientific wars only terminate when compelling evidence decides the issue.

As Deutsch (1997) says, a more profound explanation has more generality, incorporates more connections between diverse findings, and explains more with fewer unexplained assumptions. As a consequence, the discoverer of a theory, like Einstein, may have less understanding of the theory than later theorists. New explanations are judged on whether they leave fewer loose ends, require fewer and simpler postulates, and mesh more easily with good explanations in other fields. And justification is not just a simple matter of confirmatory evidence. Justification requires a refutation of rival theories; confirming instances in themselves have no determining significance. In practice, this makes the acceptance of scientific knowledge something much more than a matter of rhetoric and social pressure. While it may be true that Galileo was very conscious of his patron's wishes and Newton had faith in alchemy and biblical numerology, the fact remains that their achievements in science are backed by masses of empirical findings. The fallacy of *argumentum ad hominem* applies here, that is, rejecting a person's claims by attacking

something about him or her personally as opposed to providing evidence that the claims are incorrect. Similarly, the claim that modern science rests on knowledge that is no more firm than witchcraft and that it is impossible to establish any underpinnings for knowledge is unlikely to have wide appeal, not even among most postmodernists.

Scientific Study Is No Different from Literary Studies

French postmodernism, as applied to the social sciences, is not concerned with adding to the store of knowledge but with undermining all claims to knowledge. This is because such postmodernism argues that the social sciences are no different from the humanities generally. While the modernist tradition in science favors explanatory models and the so-called scientific method, the French postmodernists prefer storytelling and claim that science has no privileged linguistic position. For many postmodernists, all theory is specific to some context, and they deny the superiority of abstract models over concrete experience. On the other hand, the *affirmative* postmodernists, unlike the French postmodernists, seek a postmodern social science that is descriptive, rather than causal and predictive, while focusing on the singular and the unique. Geertz (2000), an eminent anthropologist, argues that anthropologists interpret anthropological data in the way a literary critic might interpret a poem and simply cannot be precise about causal connections in the way a biologist might be. Many social scientists outside anthropology have found Geertz's work liberating in freeing them from the impossible standards set by physics. However, if marketing or the social sciences used methods similar to literary studies, what would be involved (Chaouli 1999)?

First, literary critics, influenced by postmodernism, draw on Freud for ideas. This is not really surprising since Freudian psychology has been stranded between science and literature from the beginning. While Freudian psychology has lost any prestige it once had in psychology departments because of its lack of an empirical grounding, it has found a home in many humanities departments. Postmodernists in general vehemently eschew all totalizing theories and so reject Freud's totalizing theory of the mind. But Freud has nonetheless influenced postmodernism. The most important Freudian psychoanalyst among postmodernists is Jacques Lacan (Roudinesco 1990). The Freudian focus for marketing would be (as it is now) on the hidden meanings in buying. The key claim by Freud was that *meanings* that are highly significant for human well-being are obscured from immediate awareness. Whereas Freud's predecessors considered the unconscious as something ancillary to consciousness, Freud claimed it was just the opposite in that the most important mental processes occur in the unconscious (Person 1996). Freud saw the unconscious as the storehouse of motivation—motivation that enters into dreams and fantasies, slips of the tongue, and neurotic symptoms. His *method* focused on dreams and the unstructured, free-association interview, his *focus* was on the unconscious and the "irrational" elements in behavior, and his *legacy* is the large body of psychoanalytic and psychiatric literature stemming from his work.

In marketing, the Freudian legacy lies primarily in motivation research using projective techniques and in various concepts such as the ego, the unconscious, and so on that have also become part of folk psychology. Motivation research, associated with Ernest Dichter's work during the 1950s and 1960s, considerably influenced marketing research (Dichter 1960). The use of *projective techniques* to uncover the unconscious meanings of products became common in all types of consumer research. Focus groups are still used to generate motivation research data, usually employing projective techniques. But although marketing uses techniques with links to Freud, the impact of Freudian ideas on marketing has not been extensive, though not for want of trying. In any case, a purely psychoanalytical interpretation of buying behavior would be a very partial reading indeed. However, a Freudian perspective for marketing is of interest for stimulating ideas, even if not as an authoritative source of theory.

Biopsychiatrists are apt to treat Freud as unworthy of more than a passing glance to illustrate past error in the field. Crews (1998) (not a psychiatrist but an early devotee who changed his mind) is particularly damning. He claims Freud invented the data on which his major theories were based and that he lied about the outcome of treatments based on these theories—and that he was simply a master of image management. For many, Freud was just a fraud with his writings full of untestable theories, conceptual confusion, and the ignoring of counterexamples, amounting to chronic untruthfulness—all aimed at parting credulous patients from their money. But to others, Freud is an interpreter of behavior of the highest order (Elliott 1998).

Once we acknowledge that consumers are not always aware of their deepest needs and motivations (as we do not have access to the nonconscious processes that underlie many of our decisions), it follows there will always be attempts to delve into the "unconscious" mind. And, for those interested, Lear (1988) offers a most sympathetic account of Freud. He argues that the real attack on Freud is on the idea that humans have unconscious motivation, that there is "method in our madness" even when our actions appear weird and bizarre. A view initiated by Wittgenstein (1953) is that psychoanalysis is essentially an interpretive system and not like the natural sciences in seeking lawlike generalizations. This is perhaps the most useful way to approach psychoanalytic psychology (Rycroft 1995). If we accept a central message of Kuhn (1962) that an existing paradigm will continue to be used until another paradigm comes along to replace it, then Freud's system of the mind is not likely to relegated to history for some time. As Horgan's (1999) *The Undiscovered Mind* demonstrates, we are a long way yet from having a unified theory of the mind.

Second, if marketing followed literary studies, Derrida (1991) and his deconstructionism would be a major tool. Derrida's *deconstruction* is a form of analysis that analyzes the interplay of signs. Whatever is signified by a sign (e.g., a brand name) simply leads on to other signifiers, like a dictionary might lead from just one definition to another. Thus, the name Nike signifies expensive running shoes, which, in turn, signifies something else such as status, which signifies something else, and so on. The signified of any sign is just a point in a chain that simply links one signifier to the next. This means there is no final cutoff that fixes a sign's content or meaning. In other words, the brand name Nike can have no fixed meaning, with individual consumers locating their own meaning. To the postmodernist, a brand image will vary among consumers influenced by context as context is likely to affect what signifiers are thrown up along the chain. The aim of poststructuralist analysis in using deconstruction is not to register meanings but to see where and how a text falls apart, that is, where its logic and coherence fail and, as a result, where the author can be said to have lost "authority" over the text. Influenced by Derrida, postmodernists speak of "locating" meaning in a text rather than discovering "meaning" since there are multiple "readings" (the more extreme postmodernists, in fact, prefer to avoid terms such as *interpretation*, always substituting the word *reading*).

Derrida's (1991) strategy of *deconstruction* raises questions about all texts, whether a consumer protocol, a consumer questionnaire, or any subject of interest, denying that the meaning of any text is settled. Deconstruction involves tearing apart a text on the grounds that this will reveal its internal, arbitrary hierarchies and its presuppositions, allowing us to trace the contradictions that shadow a text's coherence. Meaning is not regarded as inherent in the text but in the interaction between reader and text. The final word as to the meaning of a text does not reside with the author or the author's intentions because of the "semantic authority" of language. In other words, language can a carry meaning that is independent of the communicative goals of the author. The diverse readings (interpretations) of a text oblige us to look beyond authorial intentions. A reader may note, for example, the binary opposites in the text such as "male" and "female," with one term given a privileged position in the text. What is advocated is a radical decentering of such implicit hierarchies embedded in texts. According to Howells (2000), a Derrida admirer, deconstructive readings of texts aim not at revealing flaws in logic but at exposing the gap between authorial intention and textual meaning itself.

The concept of deconstruction is a central canon of postmodernism. The deconstruction of a text looks beyond and away from the author's assumed intentions to critique concepts and hierarchies that link to the traditional criteria of certainty, identity, and truth. For Derrida (1991), cultural life consists of the production of "texts," intersecting with other texts. In the reading of texts, meaning is always negotiated, with emphasis on the "subversive," with postmodernists claiming to see subversion everywhere, even seeing oppositional readings in Nazi films.

What critics find puzzling about Derrida's (1991) deconstructionism is how we are to understand deconstruction's own propositions when Derrida uses language to claim that language cannot make unambiguous claims! Suffice to say that deconstruction would not allow any validity claims beyond subjective feelings. Interpretation of buying behavior could never end in any consensus. Derrida leaves whatever is signified unanchored to any determinate meaning. We are left without any clues as to why any text can be meaningful, either in terms of what it refers to in the world "out there" or what someone must know to claim to understand the language. Of course, there is vagueness and ambiguity in any isolated text. This sort of vagueness and ambiguity would be lethal if it were not for the fact that communications are interpreted within some specific context that removes the ambiguities.

Derrida is the most controversial figure in postmodernism. When Derrida was put forward (and subsequently awarded) an honorary degree at the University of Cambridge, supporters pointed out that Derrida's ideas (Honorary Degrees 1992),

> developed initially out of an engagement with the thought of Husserl and Heidegger, have been enormously influential not just in philosophy and literary theory, the areas of his own major intellectual achievements, but in a whole range of other disciplines from law and history to bio-geography and architecture.

Opponents of the granting of the degree claimed the following of Derrida's writings:

> Understood fully, those doctrines undermine the fundamental grounds which provide a place in the scheme of things for intellectual enquiry in any field; and so, for the very existence of universities in society.

The philosophy faculty contributed its own separate objection, which neatly sets out the general objections of many academics to Derrida. In the original English spelling, it reads as follows:

> Derrida is not merely a sceptic, for real sceptics apply objective criteria to challenge established orthodoxies. Derrida, by contrast, though well-established in academia, appears to acknowledge no such criteria. . . . The perceptions widely attributed to him—the need to examine the unacknowledged presuppositions of any discourse, to attend to philosophers' metaphors as well as to their logic, and to realize that language is not used only to convey information—are hardly original to him though literary critics who learned them from Derrida may think so. . . . It is for example both absurd and disabling to say that all texts, and all interpretations of texts, are on a par. . . . What determines us to oppose this award is not just the absurdity of these doctrines, but their dismaying

> implications for all serious academic subjects. In literature, by denying the possibility of distinguishing between important and trivial texts, and between plausible and implausible readings, they dissolve the character of authors and periods. In history, they deny that old documents have meanings independent of the readings we choose to impose and hence the obvious need to reward them correctly in order to avoid anachronistic explanations of historical events. In law, they imply that neither precedents nor statutes have meanings which make some interpretations of them inadmissible. By denying the distinctions between fact and fiction, observation and imagination, evidence and prejudice, they make complete nonsense of science, technology and medicine. In politics, they deprive the mind of its defences against dangerously irrational ideologies and regimes.

These contrasting positions for and against Derrida's writings neatly summarize the debate. One constant critic is Brian Vickers (1999). In a review of several books written on and by Derrida, he complains bitterly of Derrida's distortions of Saussure and his complete ignorance of modern linguistics outside of Saussure's original work. He agrees with those who claim that Derrida misread Husserl, misrepresented his arguments, inserted claims Husserl never made, and overlooked key texts that would have undermined his own claims and distorted C. S. Peirce's work—and all were self-serving distortions. Raymond Tallis (1997) seems to regard the whole postmodernist thought as having a political tendency that is both revolutionary and ultimately nihilistic. For him, Derrida's motive is exhibitionism.

What can be said is that political radicalism gave the impetus to French postmodernism. Derrida's aim is to take apart the whole system of Western thought since the time of Plato on the grounds that it has been led astray by failing to grasp the nature of language and meaning. He attacks the very idea of any concept being apprehended without first being mediated by signs. This is debatable. We can immediately grasp when water is hot, without any sign interpretation (Harris 1996). Also deconstruction, with its avowed aim of denying any claims to truth, could never have any place in science as we know it.

The third strand would be the ideas of Karl Marx. Postmodernists (1) dismiss Marx's totalizing or meta-narratives of history, (2) reject his historical materialism, (3) diminish his focus on the class struggle, and (4) reject his labor theory of value and perhaps his political theories. However, they tend to accept his theory of alienation, that is, that human beings are alienated from their real (creative) selves because they live in exploitative relationships. Marxism is influential in postmodernism in showing that every law and proclaimed set of values are masks for holding onto power, so even the most innocent of promotions are reinterpreted as instruments of oppression. For Foucault (1975), courts, police, asylums, hospitals, the press, television, and the state are all intolerable. For Derrida (1998), though rejecting Marx's economics and philosophy, deconstructionism is essentially a radicalization within the spirit of Marxism. Derrida believes the only way to achieve the democratic values in the West that he espouses is to destroy the language that upholds a contrary position—as if it is just language that makes Western democracies imperfect.

Jhally (1990), in line with Baudrillard, claims to bring Marx up-to-date by arguing that *symbolic* meaning given to a product by advertising provides the product with an exchange value in excess of what the brand would command for its utilitarian use value: advertising builds symbolic meaning into a product and in the process makes a fetish of the product.

Fourth, if literary criticism were to guide marketing, the traditional idea of "method" in science would be abandoned. Instead, we would substitute description for making different aspects and tonalities in the world more accessible. But would this give the depth of explanation needed for marketing? For instance, Paul Treguer, who chairs an advertising agency that focuses on marketing to senior citizens, is reported as the expert on marketing to senior citizens (Tromans 2000). He claims from his experience that consumers older than age fifty are the most discriminating, educated, rational, and experienced of all consumers—and most careful in making up their minds and slow to decide. But the evidence from cognitive psychology, based on experimentation, paints a different picture (Park and Gutchess 1999). Older people are shown to have more difficulty with comprehension, have limited information-processing capacity, seek out less information when making a decision, tend to make rapid decisions as compared with younger adults, are more willing to rely on advice, and make fewer comparisons among options and exhibit less sophisticated reasoning—and a decreased ability to ignore distracters. Which view has more the ring of truth and which would you be more prepared to accept?

All Cultural Texts Must Be Treated Equally

Integral to postmodernism is an equal treatment of all cultural texts. This is consistent with postmodernism's contempt for the distinction between high and low culture. Thus, the textual study of soap opera receives the same critical scrutiny as a classical text while dignity is ascribed to ephemera. As Shakespeare and soap opera both give pleasure, are they not therefore equal? One advocate goes so far as to argue that the difference between Shakespeare and Mickey Mouse is simply the difference between a hoagie and a pizza! But to deny that some experiences are not more uplifting than others, that there are no ethical differences between pornography and writings to elevate the status of women, while consistent with relativism, coarsens society and demeans women. There is a willful failure to think about the consequences for society, as if consequentialism (one version of which is utilitarianism), as an ethical philosophy, can be completely dismissed.

General Criticism of Postmodernism: Hermeneutics as a Traditional Alternative to Achieve Methodological Pluralism

The failure to think out the consequences for society has been a major criticism of postmodernism. As Lazere (1992, 52) says, in talking about teachers influenced by deconstruction, they

> think it's a fine idea to tell children or college remedial writing students that they don't need to learn to read accurately because all meaning is indeterminate, that they don't need to learn the conventions of written English because they are all arbitrary, and that they don't need to learn to make moral or aesthetic judgments because they are no more than forms of social domination. That way lies madness.

Habermas (1985) has been a constant critic as he regards the postmodern "mood" as a turning away from responsibilities. Ernest Gellner (1992), in an attack on postmodernism, also offers a most robust defense of the Enlightenment intellectual tradition.

We need an infusion of theory into marketing in order to conceptualize, provide sensitizing concepts, give direction, and allow talk about marketing to be conducted in an intelligent manner. To rule out judgments of better and worse reduces marketers to merely expressing differences. Many of those in marketing, however, who talk about a postmodern approach are merely emphasizing the rejection of the methodology of seeking causes as per the natural sciences and stressing the need for some interpretive approach. But interpretive approaches that seek the most coherent interpretation are rejected by French postmodernists on the grounds that all "readings" are equivalent. For postmodernists, all interpretations are up for negotiation as per Derrida's deconstructionism.

Postmodernists always reject the "monistic view" of interpretation that claims there is a correct interpretation for every text or that any conflict among interpretations can be overcome by a "super-interpretation" that takes account of what is true in each of the conflicting interpretations. Postmodernism denies there is just one correct interpretation since any number of interpretations meets the criteria for acceptance. They reject the idea of a uniquely correct interpretation as simply dogmatism. Not surprisingly, the deconstructionist view of literary meaning is essentially pluralistic since the very idea of any final determinacy of meaning is rejected for all texts.

Natural scientists deny this pluralist view. Science makes many assertions that are not open to negotiation. This is because there are facts that cannot be ignored. Scientists argue that the natural sciences are not just another language game, and natural scientists are generally wedded to some form of scientific realism whether interpreted in terms of the reality of scientific theories or in terms of the reality of scientific concepts such as quarks. They reject the postmodernist view that scientific theories are simply the ways adopted to organize experience. But when it comes to the social sciences such as marketing, *complete* objectivity is not attainable, and claims need to be more modestly asserted. In any case, many postmodernists seem to assume that modernity itself is monolithic. This is not so. There were always philosophers and social scientists who viewed the attempt to investigate all disciplines by the methods of natural science as misguided, tending to work against sensitivity to uniqueness, and stressing uniformity at the expense of richness of content and variety. This is so in marketing, particularly macromarketing. The insistence on *methodological monism* rather than *methodological pluralism* would confine marketing to what can be subsumed under the methods of the natural sciences, rejecting as just unknowable any approach to questions not amenable to these methods.

Side by side with the urge to make the social sciences (including marketing) follow the natural sciences in methodology, there is the hermeneutics tradition, which is the general theory and practice of interpretation. There is work in this tradition in marketing (O'Shaughnessy 1987). It was Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) who made a sharp distinction between *causal explanation* as applied to the natural sciences and understanding as applied to the humanities: Nature we explain: psyche life we understand. From this it was argued that the focus in the humanities should be on hermeneutics. Jerome Bruner (1990) argues that to insist in psychology on explanation in terms of (physical) "causes" bars us from trying to understand how human beings interpret their worlds and how we interpret their acts of interpretation. He goes on in the same preface to ask, "Are not plausible interpretations preferable to causal explanation, particularly when the achievement of a causal explanation forces us to artificialize what we are studying to a point almost beyond recognition as representative of human life?" (p. xiii).

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), a German theologian, invented the hermeneutic circle approach to interpretation. He claimed that in trying to understand a text, the interpreter should approach the parts by reference to the whole and grasp the whole by reference to the parts. In other words, interpretations must move back from the parts to the whole and from the whole back to the parts. However, in the search for a text's meaning, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975) argues that this is not enough as the researcher's own perspective and thinking must be fused with the meanings emanating from interpretation. This *fusing of horizons* is needed because it allows the interpreter to bring to bear on a text the whole range of modern ideas, including sensitizing concepts drawn from modern social science. Gadamer argues that this is the way to achieve any depth of understanding. For Gadamer, the interpreter is far from being neutral. He or she is always situated within some tradition "out of which the text speaks." The postmodernist Ricoeur (1976) distinguishes between the hermeneutics of belief and a "hermeneutics of suspicion." The

hermeneutics of suspicion, associated with such figures as Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud, is not concerned with clarifying a text but demystifying it as texts need to be distrusted rather than revered.

Hirsch (1967) adds that to avoid a "babel of interpretations," there is a need to distinguish between "meaning" and its "significance" for the interpreter. It is the significance of meaning for the interpreter that is of concern. When it is the meaning intended by the author, however, meaning does not change. Unfortunately, an author's intention is not always transparent, and postmodernists are inclined to dismiss it altogether. In any case, postmodernists are right in claiming that language generates fresh meaning irrespective of the author's intentions. It is this interest in the personal meaning of texts that links postmodernism with many who study buyer behavior.

The attack on the idea of their being "facts" that are not simply the interpretations of an interpretive community is important for undermining the claims of science and follows from the belief that the natural sciences proceed by the method of induction. This is just not so, though; at one time, induction was put forward as *the* scientific method by positivist philosophers. The assumption was made that if a large number of observational facts converge on one viewpoint, and none deviate from it, the hypothesis or theory is validated. No scientist today believes that science proceeds from extrapolating or generalizing from the results of many observations (Deutsch 1997). In fact, it is not possible to extrapolate from observed "facts" unless they are placed in an explanatory framework and different explanatory frameworks lead to different predictions from the same observations.

Scientific understanding does not emanate from the collection of a lot of facts but on having the right concepts and an explanatory theory that covers an infinity of otherwise indigestible facts. Facts in science become so after being explained. As Deutsch (1997) says, prediction is part of the *method* of science, but the main reason theories are rejected is because they are bad explanations, not because they necessarily fail experimental tests. Unfortunately, all too commonly, marketing journals are apt to forget this, so prediction is equated with validity. Deutsch claims no scientific reasoning has ever fitted the inductivist position. In contrast to Fish (1995, 1999), a literary scholar, who claims that theory cannot guide or indeed exert any critical function, Deutsch regards explanatory theory as basic to improving techniques, concepts, and the language with which we are trying to understand the world. He points out that we understand reality only by understanding the theories that explain it. As he says, the two deepest theories in physics—the general theory of relativity and quantum theory—provide the detailed explanatory and formal framework within which all other theories in modern physics are expressed, and they contain physical principles to which all other theories in physics conform.

Some of the Philosophical Background to Postmodernism

Postmodernism (at least the French version) is full of contradictions that are infuriating to anyone not of the faith. Pauline Rosenau's (1992) book highlights many such contradictions. In fact, the postmodernists' denial of truth is a contradiction in terms since, if there is no truth, their own claim that there is no truth cannot claim to be true. While asking nothing demanding of themselves, postmodernists use reason (which they sneer at) to undermine scientific achievement. Putting astrology on the same level as astronomy assumes both make claims that are equally warranted. (In fairness, no American postmodernist makes this claim, but other postmodernists can say things equally as silly.)

Susan Haack (1998) makes some of the most trenchant criticisms of postmodernism's claims, though her focus is more on the philosophers who lend them support. Some recent philosophy does seemingly lend support, such as the work of Thomas Kuhn (1962) and Paul Feyerabend (1975). Also, the "new" physics exemplified by (the as yet not reconciled) Einstein's (special) relativity theory, with its break with Newtonian physics, and Planck's quantum mechanics, with its underwriting of indeterminacy, have been interpreted as supportive of a postmodernist science.

It was Nietzsche who asserted the primacy of "perspective" or the notion that we always view the world from some particular perspective and that there is no privileged perspective showing the world as it truly is (Richardson 1997). This claim rejects any notion of truth. Nietzsche saw the search for truth as reflecting a desire for a firm foundation for one's ideas, resulting from a fear of the potentially chaotic diversity of nature.

Feyerabend today is categorized as a postmodernist (though it is uncertain whether he even knew the term!) whose "anything goes" slogan is similar to Lyotard's (1984) declaration that science is best characterized by a proliferation of theories. Although Feyerabend's (1975) book *Against Method* is not in fact against method but simply against those who claim that there is one best methodology for science to follow in its quest for knowledge. For him, there is no one best way but lots of ways to achieve sound knowledge. He is against any form of intellectual or ideological dominance. Nonetheless, he did suggest that science was corrupted by arbitrariness and irrationality. And he did argue that appeals to rationality and to evidence amounted to nothing but rhetorical bullying. Feyerabend's claim that observations and theoretical terms are paradigm dependent would, if accepted, undermine science as we know it. However, Nagel (1979), a philosopher of science who did much to help social science establish itself as a science, denies that all observation terms involve theory and are therefore unavoidably "theory laden." He claims, in fact, that

> most if not all the terms employed in describing the observations that are made with the intent of testing a given theory usually have established meanings that are not assigned to those terms by the very same theory. . . . It is simply not true that every theory has its own observation terms, none of which is also an observation term belonging to any other theory. (P. 93)

Hacking (1983) similarly argues that it is false to assume that observational reports *always* embody theoretical assumptions unless Feyerabend subsumes under the word *theory* every assumption being made. If this is, in fact, Feyerabend's definition of theory, then the assertion that every observational report is theory loaded may be true but trivial. Hacking agrees that we see things because we have a theory that points in that direction, but it is also possible on occasions to notice things because there is no theory to give direction. Finally, Nagel (1979) makes the point that even though the weight of evidence for some given statement may not be measurable, it is often possible to objectively evaluate the evidence to judge (say) whether it is adequate,

> even when individuals make their assessments independently of one another, they concur in their evaluations more frequently than is compatible with the supposition that evaluations are wholly subjective and idiosyncratic. (P. 91)

Nagel (1979) claims that the principles of scientific method were never meant to be applied without qualification or without reference to the contexts in which the principles are to be used. He sees no rigid or exhaustive set of rules as being traditionally advocated since

> all methodological rules are candidates for adoption, and that only experience in applying a rule can provide the needed evidence for deciding whether or not the rule contributes to the success of inquiry. (Pp. 87-88)

Feyerabend (1975) takes an extreme position, following his own maxim on the need to dramatize if existing orthodoxy is to be undermined. But Feyerabend has a point if he is arguing that there can be no closure on rationality since new considerations, additional reasons, develop along with experience. Just as buying is a learning experience so that buyers change their minds during the process of buying, so scientists change their minds about what constitutes rationality in the circumstances or after having more familiarity with the data and the domain. Many social scientists and marketers champion this view of their being no closure on what constitutes rationality, even if it took Feyerabend's gross exaggeration to make them recognize it more clearly. Thus, Le Fanu (2000) shows that progress in medicine has been far removed from what we consider to be the scientific method. In the first place, progress owes a good deal to pure chance, while observation and insight rather than technology and experimentation have often produced the most significant step forward. Indeed, the most vital element in success typically has involved some driven individual, unwilling to be put off by setbacks. Le Fanu, for example, shows how heavily financed chemistry randomly produced remedies that eluded more theory-driven doctors and the more rational, less random approaches. But carried to extreme, the principle "anything goes" frees scientific discourse from any constraints whatever. It suggests we abandon any attempt at objectivity in science on the grounds of its being an impossible goal.

While objectivity cannot be guaranteed by the methods of science, it can and does emerge from the integrity of individual scientists and the open debate over scientific findings. If "anything goes" is simply a recognition of *methodological* pluralism, this is to be endorsed as methodological pluralism recognizes that different subject matter requires different methods of investigation while rejecting the belief that there is just one set of methods that provides a privileged, universal access to both reality and truth. If marketing is to address a full range of relevant questions, it cannot just confine itself to the methods of the natural sciences. The particular method used must relate to the type of understanding or explanation it seeks. We agree with Taylor (1983) that humans are beings for whom the question arises of what significance (meaning) things have for them, and this question may not be answered by the information-processing approach of cognitive psychology. The metaphor of the computer is inadequate for understanding the consumer. Sherry (2000), in fact, claims that in consumer research, the postmodern era goes from 1983 to 1992, while the methodological pluralists, with their multidisciplinary cross training, have been in the fore since 1992. We would like to think so, but it seems a bit of wishful thinking. One can only wonder where all this interdisciplinary learning has taken place, given the trend has been to more and more specialization.

Feyerabend (1975) and Kuhn (1962) popularized the view that successive scientific paradigms in the history of science can be shown to have been "incommensurable"; that is, there was no shared language to determine which was best. That for theories, endorsed before and after a conceptual revolution, the very language in which they are stated and the values upheld are so different that they are in effect incommensurable. This view was challenged earlier in this article, but it is not entirely clear that this is Feyerabend's position on incommensurability or whether he has been incorrectly interpreted (Terpstra 2000).

Kuhn (1962) argues there is no sharp distinction between observation and theory since theory influences what is observed. He focuses on tradition and the collective judgment of scientists working within that tradition as determining or at least influencing what is acceptable, while he claims there are no paradigm-neutral standards of evidence. Evidence is always *relative* to the paradigm (perspective) adopted. In other words, the paradigm of cognitive psychology would

have its own standards for what it considered to be evidence as would the paradigm of behaviorism. Furthermore, Kuhn argues, science does not progress in an evolutionary way but through revolutions whereby new paradigms arise that are incommensurable with the old. A scientific revolution wins out more through propaganda and control of resources than through any objective weighing of the relative evidence. Scientists resist the new paradigm with any eventual conversion being like a religious conversion.

Such claims were questioned earlier in this article. Incommensurability is denied by scientists who argue that, though meanings change, they do so in the direction of increased richness and so do not lose their ability to understand past theories. The "thing" itself does not change, but judgments change based on a richer set of beliefs. Thus, Deutsch (1997) comments on the Kuhnian thesis (pp. 323-327):

> But Kuhn is mistaken in thinking that holding a paradigm blinds one to the merits of another paradigm, or prevents one from switching paradigms, or indeed prevents one from comprehending two paradigms at the same time. . . . Kuhn's theory suffers from a fatal flaw. It explains the succession from one paradigm to another in sociological or psychological terms, rather than as having primarily to do with the objective merit of the rival explanations. . . . I have never come across anything like the Kuhnian situation. . . . The discovery of quantum theory was a conceptual revolution, perhaps the greatest since Galileo, and there were indeed some "old fogies" who never accepted it. But the major figures in physics, including almost all those who could be considered part of the physics establishment, were immediately ready to drop the classical paradigm. (Pp. 323-27)

Susan Haack (1998) argues that the claim that evidence is paradigm bound has led to the erroneous conclusion that the standards of what is considered good or bad evidence are also culture bound. This is not so. She argues that the New Cynics (the whole set of postmodernists plus their supporters in philosophy) make two errors. The first is not making a distinction between the *warrant status* or evidential support for a theory and its *acceptance status*, which is the standing of the theory in the eyes of the scientific community. The focus on the acceptance status of a theory allows the postmodernists to view science on their own terms as a purely social activity. But the acceptance status and the warrant status must be separated even if highly correlated. It does not follow from the fact that a warranted theory can turn out to be wrong, that evidence never establishes anything. The second error lies in failing to distinguish the *worth* of evidence for a theory from the problem of how to conduct inquiry. We have good ways of assessing the value of evidence in terms of its truth-likeness (*verisimilitude*), but the methods of inquiry are still mainly at the level of guidelines and heuristics.

Take Popper's falsification principle in scientific inquiry. While the physicist Deutsch (1997) underwrites Popper's (1972) view about scientific methodology, Popper's focus on the falsification of hypotheses is a doubtful way to proceed. Nagel's (1979) criticism of falsificationism is that it fails to show how knowledge could advance through applying tests designed to falsify hypotheses. As Ravetz (1990) says, if the hypothesis is falsified, we gain only the knowledge that some particular hypothesis is false. On the other hand, if the test does not falsify, we learn only that the hypothesis has not yet been proved false: as a principle of method, such an approach is bankrupt. Ravetz also points out that the theory of evolution seems structurally incapable of falsification but is accepted simply on the grounds that it appears the only conceivable rational explanation of how the rich and subtle order of nature has come to be.

Anything Good in Postmodernism?

If postmodernism has been influential in the humanities, it has also had a bad press as the more extreme views (rationally indefensible views) tend to be quoted. Thus, most postmodernists deny they believe there are no defensible values or any reality outside of the text. They claim that they are mainly concerned to question the assumptions on which taken-for-granted values and assertions are based, pointing out that new metaphors and other literary forms are the basis for capturing new aspects of reality. Few marketing academics would disagree here. There is in every discipline what the Greeks called *nomoi*, the set of foundation beliefs (e.g., customer orientation in marketing) that are so accepted as to become part of the unquestioned background to all else. This constitutes a perspective against which all else is judged. Critical thinking about marketing begins with the questioning of marketing's nomoi. Postmodernists are right to ridicule the idea that the methods of the natural sciences are the only way to go and to remind us that rhetoric and the framing of an issue do count and that people can be very far removed from the normative model of rationality.

If extreme postmodernist views are the straw men for critics, it is still true that these views need to be attacked. Thus, we have Foucault's claim about our seeking knowledge purely to gain power—that there is no truth but statements that are legitimate or illegitimate in the light of existing power relationships. There is also the suggestion of postmodernists, such as Baudrillard, that there is no genuine distinction between truth and untruth (Norris 1991). If the humanities were to accept many of these views, we can only say how awful it would be not to find value in literature, to explore it for what is illuminating about life, but instead to deconstruct it or search for the power behind the viewpoint.

The good side to postmodernism lies in its attack on the more dogmatic versions of rationality and pretensions to final truth. The crass dogmatism and abuse of "expert" authority in all fields do need to be contested. Best and Kellner (1997)

argue that postmodernism obliges us to reflect and rethink many of our basic presuppositions, methods, and modes of practice. Although sympathetic to moderate (affirmative) postmodernism, they recognize that many postmodernist claims are extreme, failing to provide empirical evidence for their claims.

As in the sciences generally, there is a need in marketing for a more critical stance. It is not uncommon in marketing to move from ignorance to fallacies, such as the move from ignorance of consumer decision making to the fallacy that consumers follow the multiattribute model in decision making. (It is not even "as if" consumers behave that way except in a laboratory setting, where information is fed to them to bring about such action. Predicted results offer no guidance as to the antecedent mental processes involved.) Best and Kellner (1997) talk of postmodern theory having influenced every contemporary theoretical discipline. This all depends on what is considered postmodern theory. There is no postmodern theory as such. There is only the writings of people categorized as postmodernist, and we doubt that many natural scientists will have heard of any of them. Talking about theory in postmodernism is not like talking about Marxism, which does have a core set of doctrines. All that can be said is that those confronted with having to refute postmodernist theses will find intellectual benefit. But writers pushing radical skepticism in the past have had the same effect (Harman 1973). Best and Kellner argue that postmodern "science" has arrived with a new mode of scientific thinking based on concepts such as entropy, evolution, organism, indeterminacy, probability, relativity, complementary, interpretation, chaos, and complexity. All these concepts were, however, out and about without any of their originators having heard of postmodernism. Best and Kellner boost the legitimacy of postmodernism by implicitly suggesting its ideas were behind some of today's central conceptual innovations or that postmodernism is an all-pervasive zeitgeist affecting all disciplines. If we confine postmodernism to the writings reviewed here, this seems doubtful. Changes are being made all the time either toward or away from the postmodern paradigm. Thus, while extreme determinism has gone from physics, it seems that recent biology has become more deterministic and less organismic.

Best and Kellner (1997) claim that both modern and postmodern science use experimental and empirical methods involving hypotheses, observation, experiment, and prediction and that both are interested in detecting order and in discovering laws and regularities. On the other hand, postmodern science moves more toward probability and statistical regularities and away from absolute certainty, and it rejects notions of fixed immutable order and absolute truth in favor of conceptions of evolving complexity and probability, so breaking away from the mechanistic metaphor to affirm organism and biological models. This is surely postmodernism falling into the "after modern" category. This postmodernism (if it can be recognized as such) is so far removed from the postmodernism we have discussed that it would hardly cause any major controversies if this were all postmodernism was claiming.

We agree that scientists, eager to stress the distinctiveness of science, do err in suggesting a science of timeless laws and eternal truths, in contrast with social science composed of ephemeral claims. But the desire to join the scientific elite has pushed marketing into too much abstractness and formality in the hope of sharing the prestige of the name "science," often showing scorn for any explanation that does not borrow from the jargon of a "scientific" paradigm. Much of it has meant sacrificing reality for intellectual rigor, leading to a good deal of conceptual confusion for technological decoration.

There is no such thing as finality in science or in marketing since assumptions can always be questioned. Bonjour (1998) shows that every claim or justification leads in a final analysis to the acceptance of a foundation based on the intuitiveness of its propositions. This is not to say that we are sympathetic to the postmodernist undermining of the claims of science. After all, the same laws of science are validated by men and women in every culture. But at the same time, it is only right to reject the view of science as pristine, pure, and authoritative in all respects.

Postmodernism sensitizes us to the complexities of meaning inherent in media texts and how texts can be subject to multiple interpretations—for example, how a seemingly ideologically saturated message can be undermined by surface decoration such as a raised eyebrow. Postmodernism attunes us to this because it does question notions of authorial intent and portrays textual meanings as free floating. This we have questioned, but nonetheless it can be useful to advertising because the social-political content of ads may sometimes have to be ambivalent to stimulate sections of the target audience to avoid, for example, declaring openly whether profeminist, socially conservative, pro-family, or anything else.

Finally, we agree with Best and Kellner (1997) that moderate or affirmative postmodernism is not a rupture with modernity but an intensification of modernity as it comes to grips, in a more sophisticated way, with such concepts as rationality, truth, and determinism. The distinction is less between the modern and the postmodern than it is between the ancient and the modern. Being justifiably critical of various aspects of modernity does not undermine the whole of modernity, and we should not throw out the baby with the bath water. Postmodernism is more a slogan of dissent against domination, intellectual or otherwise, and the current obsession with technique and the rule-imposed mechanization of reason.

Kirsh (1983) talks about the relevance of philosophical research to the human sciences and discusses five areas in which philosophical research is useful—namely, (1) questioning methodological assumptions, (2) operationalizing concepts, (3) conceptual analysis, (4) pragmatic issues, and (5) questioning basic conceptual propositions. Would his

suggestions on philosophical research be more worthwhile than considering the postmodernists' critique? Kirsh's recommendations would substitute for the postmodernism's injunctions about examining marketing presuppositions. However, it would not perhaps provide the shakeup to our thinking that postmodernism provides even after we have separated the wheat from the chaff.

CONCLUSION

It is seldom the case that an intellectual movement that has attracted a large following will have nothing to recommend it as it would fail to resonate with the audience as worthy of attention. Postmodernism appeals because (1) it offers a rationale for the disturbing lack of certainty that characterizes most disciplines; (2) it seemingly coheres with recent claims made by various philosophers or historians of science; (3) it is confidently asserted by clever scholars such as Derrida; (4) the set of doctrines constituting postmodernism offers no quick way of telling whether they are true and, in any case, such inquiries are banned as illegitimate; (5) it is emotionally appealing in its attack on the oppressive authority and dogmatism of so-called experts in various fields; and (6) there is a recognition in marketing, for example, that scholars are too obsessed with overintellectualizing buyer behavior, with its focus on normative models of rationality and neglecting the role of imagery and fantasy in everyone's life.

Flax (1990) regards the most important contribution of postmodernism as being its undermining of the "faulty" ideas about "self, knowledge, and power still prevalent in the contemporary West." But perhaps postmodernism's lasting contribution lies, like all oppositional movements, in making defenders of current orthodoxy review and justify their belief claims. The result can only be less dogmatism, more modesty, and a rejection of any one-best way to valid knowledge. On the other hand, extreme versions of postmodernism fail to register as having a credible agenda for adoption and are easy to dismiss altogether. While postmodernism may have some cache on campus, it lacks any sort of standing in the world outside, being simply considered an academic fad. This is a pity if the good then gets buried with the bad. While the French version of postmodernism is in danger of fade-out as a philosophy through self-inflicted wounds, it has done much to shake academic complacency in its search for "truth" and has made a contribution to the history of disciplines and institutions.

However, we do not feel the postmodernism as described is that which is normally underwritten by colleagues who describe themselves as postmodernists. Often, they simply mean that they are post*positivist* in orientation in that they reject the positivist hallmarks of mainstream psychology, namely, reductionism, determinism, and the autonomous individual. They may instead put a great deal of emphasis on the human search for the higher meaning of things. Thus, Vitz (1996) views the hallmark of postmodern psychology as being the human search for meaning. "The search for the *meaning* of things" is what, they claim, really distinguishes the human sciences from the natural sciences. All experience has meaning or significance for people because it is in experience that people find order, aesthetics, morality, and values that guide purposive behavior tied to what people find meaningful. Traditional psychology ignores the notion of "meaning" and the view that people act toward things on the basis of the meanings these things have for them.

Viktor Frankl (1978), a pioneer in focusing on meaning, formed his views on the importance of "meaning" through his experiences in German concentration camps in World War II. His "logotherapy," an approach to psychotherapy (which literally means "therapy through meaning"), is the reverse of traditional psychotherapy, which he characterizes as "meaning through therapy." The Freudian "pleasure principle" is replaced by the more emotionally motivating principle of the "will-to-meaning," with frustration of this "will-to-meaning" giving rise to emotion and neurosis. What is being claimed is that, of all our concerns, the most important is the search for life's meaning (making sense of and determining the significance of life and the events in our life). Those concentration camp inmates who survived were those who had found meaning in life and in their suffering. This search for meaning for Frankl is the major motivator with the most emotional (energizing) basis. It explains the search for spiritual and religious enlightenment and at times the attachment to cults, creeds, nationalism, tribalism, and political ideologies.

Bruner (1990), one of the pioneers of cognitive psychology, argues that the cognitive revolution in psychology started as an all-out effort to establish "meaning" as the central concept of psychology but that early on it became seduced by the metaphor of the mind as a computer. Nonetheless, the search for "meaning" is central to many social science approaches. *Ethnomethodology* studies the "folk methods" used by people in everyday life to give meaning to the roles they and others play in life and in the institutions that surround them. In *symbolic interactionism* (the study of the process by which people in interaction come to interpret the situation), it is argued that the meaning of a social situation emerges from the social interaction itself as captured through the interpretive process. *Ethogeny* also focuses on meaning specifically, on how action is made meaningful by those who carry out the action and those who observe the action being carried out. In cultural anthropology, too, there are those such as Geertz (1984) who focus on symbols and how they function to mediate meaning. If the assertions of postmodernism as described in this article are becoming less and less fashionable, this is not true of the move away from positivism to something like the focus on meaning. This movement is strengthening, and it is something many will applaud.

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