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## *Unpacking My Library: The Marketing Professor in the Age of Electronic Reproduction*

My title steals from Walter Benjamin twice. The main title is taken from his “Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Book Collecting” (1968b). In that somewhat obscure paper, Benjamin wistfully conveys some of the rich memories conjured up by the books in his library. Each volume evokes a detailed recollection of how it was ardently stalked, carefully acquired, and lovingly placed on his shelves, even though Benjamin, like most book collectors, never sullied his treasures by reading them. Likewise, he did not play with the toys he collected. Strange as this may seem, it is characteristic, if not definitive, that objects in a collection are taken out of their ordinary uses and given special revered status as part of a sacred set (Belk 1995). This part of the title is meant to announce that in this essay, I intend to say something about books, collecting, and the mnemonic power of objects.

My subtitle is a transmogrification of another Benjamin (1968a) paper title, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” In this more famous paper, Benjamin worries about the loss of mystical “aura” when visual artistic images are no longer produced as totally unique hand-wrought works of art but are instead duplicated in mass quantities through photography, film, and printing (this was before television, e-mail, faxes, videocassette recorders, digital versatile disks [DVDs], compact disks [CDs], and the Internet and before Andy Warhol began mass producing pop art in a loft he called The Factory). My transliteration of this title is meant to suggest that marketing professors might be thought of as works of art but that their value may be subject to rapid decline in an age in which access to scholarship is democratized through new electronic media. But this is only one of the senses in which my subtitle is intended. I also explore the more positive opportunities that the emerging electronic age provides for professionals who study and

teach about marketing and consumption. Among other things, these changes mean that professors may not all die of white lung disease from scratching calcium carbonate on blackboards. There are some additional benefits of new technologies as well.

To preface these inquiries and provide a thin thread that bastes them together, I include a short narrative about my own encounters with books and alternative electronic media. Lest I be thought to be presumptuously comparing myself to Walter Benjamin, I hasten to emphasize that the only partial similarities are some shared German Jewish heritage (though I lack a Jewish upbringing) and an abiding interest in consumption phenomena and art. Furthermore, whereas Benjamin’s material trajectory from his family of birth was decidedly downward from affluence, mine has been modestly upward, thanks to being the first college graduate in my family. Whereas Benjamin was born before the dawn of the twentieth century and felt the turmoil of Hitler’s rise to power in Germany, I was born just after World War II and felt the rush of consumer culture’s rise to power in the United States. Whereas Benjamin regarded it as a virtue never to use the first person singular in his writings (even his “autobiographical” writings), I do not, as is already evident. And, most significantly, whereas Benjamin has been described as the last of the great intellectuals, I would hardly describe myself as such, even in my fondest imagination.

### **Memoirs of a Shy Librarian**

Like many middle-class, suburban American, first-wave baby boom children, my brother and I were proud preadolescent possessors of a small library that included the ten-volume Junior Classics, the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, *World Book Encyclopedia*, *Ripley’s Believe It or Not*, a Bible, assorted Little Golden Books, a world atlas, and a big book about zoo animals. But this was also the age of Sputnik and the space race, which meant that we also had a spate of science books. We possessed, no less proudly, books about minerals, fossils, dinosaurs, electronics, home repair, camping, trees, flowers, insects, scientific discovery, space, stamps, coins, and woodcraft. In our home, regular periodicals included *Life*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Sunset Magazine*, *Reader’s Digest*, and occasional comic books featuring Donald Duck, Archie, and Fox and Crow, as well as every issue of *Mad Magazine* we could find.

I must have been affected by books at quite a young age, because surviving volumes show considerable evidence of

my preliterate scribbles. In truth, my handwriting has not improved much, and my present margin annotations do not really differ that much from my early attempts at writing. Although my scribbles may have presaged a career of writing, I was also a would-be child entrepreneur. In addition to attempts at a sidewalk lemonade stand, a basement zoo, a neighborhood newspaper, and an outdoor carnival, I decided to put my books to work by opening a library. In the back of each volume, I carefully pasted a typed due date slip, though I cannot recall anyone ever checking out a volume, much less my assessing and collecting any late fees.

By the time I was in sixth grade, two momentous media events changed my home environment: Our family bought a television set, and I obtained a copy of Vance Packard's (1957) *Hidden Persuaders*. The television began to attract my attention away from books. Given the quality of television programming at the time, my intellectual development is no doubt the poorer for this acquisition. But Packard's book had the opposite effect. My father was then an advertising agency production manager, and the book precipitated extended critical discussions with him of what advertisements (like those on our new television) do and how they affect people. I did not realize it for some years, but I now have no doubt that those discussions were instrumental in my becoming interested in marketing and consumer behavior. I did not realize it when I enrolled in college in geophysics or when I switched to English literature. But eventually I found myself taking business courses, and as I approached graduating with a master's degree in business, I considered taking an offer to work for General Mills in marketing research. Fortunately the master's program at University of Minnesota at the time required either a thesis or three long "Plan B" papers, and by pursuing the latter papers, I had learned the joy of doing original research. This led me to go on for a doctorate so that my career could be devoted to doing my own research rather than others'.

## Technology

When I wrote my doctoral thesis in 1972 (multiple experiments and a three-mode factor analysis of situational effects on consumer behavior), we were still using mainframe computers and carrying around boxes of computer punch cards. That was also how I input the three-mode factor analysis program I wrote. There was also a computer lab full of mechanical Friedan calculators that we would set up to do a complex calculation we called "The Freddy Friedan March" at the end of the day. Shortly before I graduated, the marketing department invested in two four-function, two-memory electronic calculators. One was manufactured by Wang and the other by Singer, so it seems appropriate that each machine was the size of a portable sewing machine, but not that each cost about \$1,200. Because my department was not sure how reliable these new devices would be, it also invested a similar amount in yearly service contracts. Today, such calculators are somewhat anachronistic, are the size of a credit card, and are either give-aways or \$5 purchases at Wal-Mart or OfficeMax.

In writing my thesis, I used an electric typewriter and lots of correction fluid. Although I used some drawings for

mock advertisements in both my thesis and one Plan B paper, it was several years before I began to explore 35-millimeter photography and more years before I began to incorporate it in my research. Electronic copying machines were available, but most classroom materials were still mimeographed after being typed on those blue film sheets that required another messy liquid to make corrections. Like other instructors, I made the breakthrough to black-and-white overhead transparencies for use in class and eventually began to incorporate color slides as well. But the blackboard still loomed large in any college class. Come to think of it, for many marketing professors, including those with access to classroom computers, white boards, liquid crystal display (LCD) projectors, Elmo imaging machines, and a host of other electronic classroom technology, it still does.

My big breakthrough into multimedia research did not come until 1984, when I proposed a project that came to be known as the Consumer Behavior Odyssey (see Belk 1989). Shortly before this, I had acquired an early consumer camcorder and had taken a videography class. The possibility of studying consumer behavior using video intrigued me. Although I had been reading anthropology and sociology literature for more than ten years in pursuing my research on gift giving, I had yet to do any qualitative research. Fortunately, two of those who joined the Odyssey project early on were John Sherry, an anthropologist, and Melanie Wallendorf, who, unlike me, had some training in sociology and who was at that time toying with nonpositivist research. Together, they joined me in a demonstration project at a swap meet in Arizona, where I began to learn to conduct depth interviews, take field notes, and use still and video photography in research (see Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1988). This was in November 1985, and by the following summer, we were joined by nearly two dozen other researchers in the cross-country Odyssey from Los Angeles to Boston. We bought a couple of early laptop computers to assist in taking field notes, borrowed a big three-quarter-inch video camera from University of Illinois, and bought 35-millimeter bulk film to load for photography. We were fortunate to be joined by Tom O'Guinn, who had some professional video camera experience from the television series *Austin City Limits*. A major sponsor, the Marketing Science Institute, suggested that we do our final report for it as a video, and after much trial and error learning, the result was a video distributed by Marketing Science Institute (Wallendorf and Belk 1987). I describe the details of this project elsewhere (Belk 1989), but for me and others who participated, it opened up the worlds of both qualitative research and visual methods. There is no necessary relationship between qualitative and visual methods, but both were largely unknown in academic marketing and consumer research at the time.

After the Odyssey project, I began to require my students to use video and still photography in class research projects as well as to prepare field notes and transcriptions from depth interviews they conducted for these projects. I began to use more videos and slides in class and bought an LCD panel to connect to my laptop computer in order to demonstrate software for managing qualitative data. Students then used this software to find and organize the data

transcriptions pooled from student data collection. I began attending meetings of the Society for Visual Sociology and the Society for Visual Anthropology, and following one meeting in Rochester, N.Y., I took a week-long course in photography from visual sociologist Howie Becker. By the time I did a sabbatical year in Romania in 1991–92, I was committed to qualitative research but still used some questionnaires as well. In addition to an audio recorder, I took along a still camera and film, and when I returned I set up a dark room and began to develop and print black-and-white photos as well as color slides. Seven years later, when I did my sabbatical year in Zimbabwe, I had along two digital video cameras, three tripods, assorted microphones and lights, a digital still camera, an audio recorder, a laptop computer, and an LCD projector for classroom use. I taught my students in Africa to use the cameras and assist me in my research as well as carry out their own (see Belk 2000).

Between these two sabbaticals, Ron Groves and I hooked up (sometimes with other researchers, including Per Østergaard and Ron Hill) for a series of visual and qualitative research projects in Australia and Thailand and over Antarctica. Although it is not necessary to go to another country to benefit from visual methods, such media help make the strange familiar to people elsewhere. In the Australia work, we initially had the help of a three-person professional camera crew and subsequent professional editing for these videos (e.g., Belk and Groves 1994, 1997). This is a wonderful luxury, but one of the costs is a partial loss of control. So when digital camcorder and editing equipment became affordable (complete costs dropped from more than \$100,000 to less than \$10,000 during the 1990s), we began to do our own visual work throughout the process (e.g., Belk and Groves 1999). We received research grants for some of the equipment and bought the rest ourselves—in my case, partly by picking up used equipment through eBay and online classified advertisements.

Meanwhile, back in the classroom, I moved from requiring my students to videotape some of their depth interviews to also giving them the option of editing a videotape rather than turning in a written paper. Thus far, students who have chosen this option have spent two to three times as long as those who write papers, but they report enjoying it far more. In classroom teaching, I have long tried to incorporate multimedia. In addition to videos, slides, films, overhead transparencies, and PowerPoint presentations (interactive when feasible), I use CD-ROMs (advertising clips, music such as that by Marketing Mike and the Suits, interactive learning tools, and old promotional films), DVDs, and the Internet. All have proved useful and popular with students.

## Back to Benjamin

With my multimedia adventures as backdrop, I return to the more theoretical and practical issues raised by Benjamin's essays. Having held appointments at three U.S. schools and having spent three sabbaticals outside of the United States, I have had the experience of unpacking my library (or at least the portions I brought along) several times. My first sabbatical was in Vancouver, and I am pleased to report that the University of British Columbia has a first-rate library. By

the time I got to Zimbabwe, I could obtain some of what I needed online and on CD-ROMs I had brought along. This was not the case in Romania, however, and I was pleased to have a few books with me. I was at this time (the start of the 1990s) even more dependent on the laptop computer I brought. There was no e-mail in Romania at the time, and the university to which I was attached had four personal computers for 40,000 students. Until the 1989 Christmas revolution, typewriters in Romania had to be registered as instruments of propaganda. As a result, even students who gained access to computers had no typing skills. Nevertheless, the newly released flood of advertising on Romanian television and in the streets made students anxious to acquire computers so they could keep track of the flood of new consumer information. Western cynicism toward advertising had yet to set in, and there was instead incredulity that both Pepsi-Cola and Coca-Cola could claim that they were the choice of the young generation. But by the time I made a return visit four years later, Romania had become a part of global consumer culture. This was entirely predictable. During the revolution, the first thing the rebels broadcast on the commandeered national television station was a bootlegged copy of the movie *E.T.*

During the year my wife and I spent in Romania, I was more like these Romanians craving the new than I was like Walter Benjamin reveling in the memories evoked by old books. But visual material was another matter, and the photographs my daughter sent of her graduation from Rutgers University were especially treasured. In receiving her degree, she carried out a family in-joke dating from her fourth birthday by wearing a Groucho nose, moustache, and glasses. I cannot remember enjoying a photograph more than this. Other than a few such photos, I was attached to very little in Romania, and it was an interesting experience to learn how little I really needed. Nevertheless, my wife and I craved a few basic services, such as reliable food sources, 24-hour access to water, hot water, reliable electrical power, and copying machines. The desire for copying machines may be linked to a time when I needed to reproduce some questionnaires to measure materialism in Romania. I brought a ream of paper (from the United States) and the obligatory quart of Scotch whiskey to the senior professor to see if he would obtain the copies from the university copying machine. When I received copies two weeks later, they were on poor-quality newsprint paper, and still the professor demanded money for his facilitating services.

I wish I could say that living in Romania and my newfound appreciation of how little we really need gave me an urge to live more simply. Instead, after my return I rewarded myself with a new (well, two-year-old) Audi. Never mind that the price was \$12,000 because of a false story about sticking accelerators on *60 Minutes* or that I needed the four-wheel drive where I live in the winter; it was a luxury compared with my previous Subaru. Since that time, I have heard a few anthropologists talk about how they too "reward" themselves with an extravagant purchase after living in some remote third-world society. My self-reward helped me understand why Romanians at the time rated highest of 12 countries in materialism scores (Ger and Belk 1996). The explanation I heard over and over from Romani-

ans was that they had suffered long enough during a decade in which Ceaușescu exported all desirable consumer goods in order to repay a massive foreign debt. They too offered a deprivation-based justification of deservingness for their insistent consumer desires now that the window on the world was opened. So if I did not carry much of the United States with me when I went to Romania, I may have inadvertently carried more of Romania back with me on my return to Utah. And like Benjamin, my reflections (not on my book collection, but on my joys in being back in a land where finding potatoes is not an all-day search and students do not need to wear mittens and stocking hats to keep warm in class in the winter) prompted a desire in me for more, not less.

I took many photographs in Romania, but as foreigners we were still under the surveillance of the secret police, *Securitate*, which had occasion to stop me, take my camera, and ask why I was taking photographs. Fresh from the days of suspicion of everyone under Ceaușescu, Romanians also were understandably wary of being photographed. So I have not been able to convey those experiences as visually as I might wish to students and colleagues. Words can do a good job of conveying what has been called “propositional knowledge,” but visual images are generally superior for conveying “experiential knowledge” of what something feels like. Whereas propositional knowledge is knowledge *about* something and produces cognitive understanding, experiential knowledge is knowledge *of* something and produces emotional understanding that ideally enables the recipient to gain a shared sense of what it might be like to be another person embedded in another culture. I do have a few photos of Romanian consumption on my Web page, but other than that, my reported research from these experiences is primarily written.

As suggested previously, my sabbatical in Zimbabwe was much better documented visually, primarily through videotaped observations and interviews (55 hours of videotape before editing). I also recorded approximately 6 hours of television commercials that are used in one of the resulting videos. One of the other two videos I have made on the basis of fieldwork in Zimbabwe is a collaborative effort with my MBA students there. Because the focus of this video is the consumption patterns of the new black elite in Zimbabwe and because these students were virtually all a part of this elite (with the exception of those from other African countries), the project lent itself to such joint representation quite well. The issue of who represents whom is a critical one in postmodern ethnography (e.g., Clifford 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986), though because I did the editing after my return to the United States, I still retained interpretive authority. Although I can hardly regard my interpretations as definitive and although they are not necessarily the emic interpretations shared by my informants, I believe that to abrogate this interpretative role in favor of someone else’s does not make the best use of my meager talents. Unlike in Romania, during my year in Zimbabwe, I had access to e-mail and the Internet, which allowed me to stay in much closer touch with friends, family, and colleagues around the world. When my daughter became pregnant, my wife and I were able to see a sonar-gram image sent by e-mail. I have

perhaps never appreciated visual images more, at least until I received pictures of my granddaughter Zoe by e-mail as well. And sure enough, one of these photos showed week-old Zoe sporting a Groucho nose and glasses (Belk 2000).

## The Marketing Professor in an Age of Electronic Reproduction

But suppose researchers return from the field or laboratory ready to share their videotapes, photographs, and other recordings with others through either local access digital formats such as videotape, CD-ROMs, and DVD or distributed access digital media such as the Internet. Are these researchers obsolescing themselves at the same time that they are democratizing access to their data and interpretations by sharing such experiential knowledge? Isn’t this just a case of inflating available knowledge with the predictable result that it is cheapened? That is, as more knowledge is put into circulation and made more accessible, the market becomes subject to the forces of inflation, and as with Gresham’s Law, the bad money of cheap electronic information drives out the good money of flesh-and-blood marketing professors. Contrary to Gresham’s Law, however, professors are subject to decay and cannot be readily stockpiled, whereas electronic media can remain fresh on the shelf and in cyberspace indefinitely until they are brought to life. Perhaps these fears have some merit, but I have no fear that flesh-and-blood marketing professors will be rendered obsolete any time soon. Furthermore, there are benefits to both the professor and others from sharing knowledge in these new ways. In addition to providing potentially more vivid experiential knowledge, such images may reach broader audiences than academic journal articles and books ever will. Although I have not seeded my Web page at all, it has stimulated comments from consumers and researchers interested in Fiji, collecting, gift-giving, Zimbabwe, Romania, and French literature. It has provided a way for me to share some of my research conclusions with my former collaborators in Zimbabwe. And it provides a ready resource for students, both mine and others’, who can access it with increasing ease. Furthermore, purely visual media transcend language and literacy barriers, increasing not only the potential audience for such images but the potential supply of images as well. No doubt because of international and global marketing, the field of marketing has not been as ethnocentric as psychology, but marketers primarily draw on the United States for their concepts, research subjects, and research outlets. Other than language (and translation programs help transcend this barrier), the Internet knows no such national boundaries. As bandwidth increases, streaming video will become as accessible as photographs on the Web.

Given such benefits from making use of a broader library of materials (both academics’ and others’) than print media alone, why has the academy continued to resist visual media and clung to the tacit belief that text is superior? Although part of the answer is no doubt resistance to change and innovation, Heisley (2001) suggests some additional answers. Today, we regard the gaze at others as somewhat voyeuristic. Promotion and tenure committees have a diffi-

cult time evaluating visual material in the behavioral sciences. There is generally no peer review of such material before “publication.” Because it provides the audience a greater opportunity for interpretation, scholars may feel a heightened vulnerability or loss of control of their material. It is hard to use yellow highlighters or adhesive notes with visual material. And it takes a lot of work and new skills to produce good visual material. Although each of these explanations has some merit for the time being, all are likely to be decreasingly persuasive in the future, as more professors acquire visual skills and as the academy begins to feel more comfortable with such media. Furthermore, students raised in a television/Internet/video/CD/DVD/MP-3-saturated environment respond favorably to such media in the context of university education. Instructors who produce and provide such materials are likely to have an advantage in teaching and research over those who do not. And with time, I have faith that academic curmudgeons will begin to appreciate such materials more and more. If the audience at the 2000 and 2001 Association for Consumer Research sessions at which Rob Kozinets and I showed our videos is any indication, there is rapidly budding curiosity and enthusiasm about videography.

One further thing might dismay Walter Benjamin about the electronic revolution that is going on in research and teaching media: The materials made available within these new media are generally more ephemeral experiential objects of consumption than are books. It is possible to hold and even caress a book. The reader can feel the pages and leave his or her marks on them. Readers can curl up with a book and get lost in revelry or contemplation of ideas. Books may even acquire a slightly musty smell that no doubt aided the recollections that prompted Benjamin’s nostalgic reflections on his library. None of this applies as readily to visual materials. Although some of the same things can be done with a book of photographs, videotapes, CD-ROMs, DVDs, and Internet pages are not very cuddly, and some experiences with these objects (especially the Internet) cannot be put on a shelf and stored in some possessive manner as can be done with books. Given what I have said about possessions and the extended self (Belk 1988), it might well seem that the fleeting nature of these visual experiences will keep people from incorporating and assimilating them. But students are ahead of professors here, and I find it necessary to try to convince students that there is more to the sum total of human knowledge than that which can be found on the Internet. In addition, my studies with collectors suggest that people can also be collectors of experiences and regard them no less dearly than the more tangible objects in others’ collections of books or other objects. Indeed, as Walter Benjamin’s reflections on his books suggest, he was collecting not just the objects themselves but the experiences of hunting, discovering, and acquiring them. However, unlike Benjamin and other collectors’ extra-utilitarian fascination with objects taken out of their original uses, I hope that users of visual media will continue to benefit from the content of the visual image. Despite changing content and disappearing sites, some Internet sites are likely to prove as permanent as the printed word—and much more quickly locatable and accessible. Unlike books, which use a linear approach, ver-

bal or visual images can be acquired in a nonlinear way and can be considered more collages than fixed narratives directed solely by the author. This means they can be used more creatively as well. Such advantages are likely to more than outweigh the lack of tangibility in some visual media.

I see new electronic media supplementing rather than replacing the printed word. I encourage students to read promiscuously—anything and everything they find interesting, without regard to whether the sources are high or low (a distinction that is also disappearing in a postmodern age; see Seabrook 2000). The same advice applies to visual material. Thanks to university human subjects regulations, people need not feel they are guilty voyeurs for being fascinated with images of the Other. In an undeniably global world, people need to expand their scope and become more attuned to cultural differences and similarities. People need to gain critical visual literacy and become more actively involved in both scrutinizing images they see and creating images for others to use. This is the threshold of an era in which access to still and moving visual images and accompanying sounds will be quick, easy, and randomly accessible. Although the printed word will continue to be useful, it will increasingly seem inadequate to fully capture the meanings of interesting activities, people, and events.

I have referred to several videotapes about consumer behavior and marketing in this discussion. Although these are in the documentary genre, many researchers have discovered how parts of feature films and other visual and oral media can also convey “truths” about human behavior. As an invitation to delve more deeply into this new world of images, I close with a brief suggestive bibliography of potentially useful materials. I hope readers will find some of them they may not have encountered as fascinating as I do. And I hope that use of the insights and examples provided by such works will help professors themselves become works of art in an age of electronic reproduction.

## Brief Bibliography of Visual and Oral Material Dealing with Consumption

### Feature Films

*American Psycho* (I think the film is better than Bret Easton Ellis’s book, especially the scenes of comparing business cards; 2000, directed by Mary Harron).

*Babette’s Feast* (based on a novel by Isak Dinesen [Karen Blixen], the joys of food versus the pleasure-denying austerity of the Protestants in this case; 1987, directed by Gabriel Axel).

*Bonfire of the Vanities* (a bomb—Tom Wolfe’s book is much better—but still a telling portrait of the 1980s as the decade of greed, much more consumption oriented than *Wall Street*; 1990, directed by Brian De Palma).

*Chocolat* (Joanne Harris’ book is a bit deeper, but the film is also quite effective in depicting consumption joys versus religious austerity in a French village; 2000, directed by Lasse Hallström).

*Clerks* (the antithesis of relationship marketing; 1994, directed by Kevin Smith).

*Fanny and Alexander* (a seemingly strange choice perhaps, but some wonderful scenes redeeming consumption as a source of

fantasy that opposes the everyday world of somber adulthood; 1983, directed by Ingmar Bergman).

*The Gods Must Be Crazy* (steeped in postcolonial racism, a Western fairy tale about the power of Western goods to beguile the hapless native; 1981, directed by Jaime Uys).

*The Great Gatsby* (it is hard to do justice to F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel and Daisy Buchanan's awe at the beauty of Gatsby's shirts, but an instructive look at consumption nevertheless; 1974, directed by Jack Clayton).

*The Jerk* (materialism, especially the scene in which Steve Martin has gone bankrupt and leaves his mansion, saying he needs nothing of his former possessions, except...; 1979, directed by Carl Reiner).

*Like Water for Chocolate* (based on a novel by Laura Esquivel and a logical companion piece to *Chocolat*, but Mexican, and based on the emotional content of food; 1992, directed by Alphonso Arau who was then married to Laura Esquivel).

*Pretty Woman* (Cinderella tale in which poor prostitute Julia Roberts is transformed into the fiancé of Richard Gere with the help of Rodeo Drive; 1990, directed by Garry Marshall).

*Pulp Fiction* (early scene in which European and America fast food are compared; 1994, directed by Quentin Tarantino).

*Trading Places* (a "there but for the grace of God go I" look at wealth, poverty, and consumption; street smarts win out over Wall Street, prep schools, and the Ivy League; 1983, directed by John Landis).

*Scenes from a Mall* (Woody Allen and Bette Midler show how to be a postmodern consumer in the shopping mall [see Belk and Bryce 1993]; 1991, directed by Paul Mazursky).

*Wayne's World* (the scene in which Wayne decries product placements and endorsements while blatantly displaying and promoting a long series of brands; 1992, directed by Penelope Spheeris).

### Videos

*The Ad and the Ego* (much more effective than *Affluenza* in appreciating media influences on consumption; San Francisco: California Newsreel, 57 minutes).

*Affluenza* (a PBS dramatized comedy about the affliction of affluence and consumption; KCTS, Seattle and Oregon Public Broadcasting, 1997, 58 minutes).

### Photograph Books

Aaland, Mikkel (1981), *County Fair Portraits*. Santa Barbara, CA: Capra Press.

Agee, James and Walker Evans (1941), *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. New York: Riverside Press.

Aperture (1996), *Everything that Lives, Eats*. New York: Aperture.

Conkelton, Sheryl and Anne Lamott (1993), *Home and Other Stories: Photographs by Catherine Wagner*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Evans, Christopher (1990), *In The Money*. London: Blue Window Books.

Goldberg, Jim (1985), *Rich and Poor*. New York: Random House.

Hansen, Ursula and Karin Blüher (1993), *Handel und Konsumkultur*. Hannover, Germany: Fackelträger-Verlag.

Hoover, Dwight W. (1986), *Magic Middletown*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Kugelmass, Jack (1994), *Masked Culture: The Greenwich Village Halloween Parade*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lesy, Michael (1973), *Wisconsin Death Trip*. New York: Random House.

Levinson, Joel D. (1983), *Flea Markets*. Berlin: Braus.

Lewandowska, Marysia and Neil Cummings (1995), *Lost Property*. London: Chance Books.

Mahardige, Dale and Michael Williamson (1989), *And Their Children After Them*. New York: Random House.

Owens, Bill (1999), *Suburbia*, 2d ed. New York: Fotofolio.

Pratt, Gretta (1994), *In Search of the Corn Queen*. Washington, DC: National Museum of American Art.

Putnam, Tim and Charles Newton, eds. (1990), *Household Choices*. London: Futures Publications.

Rousseau, Ann Marie (1981), *Shopping Bag Ladies*. New York: Pilgrim Press.

Rutkovsky, Paul (1982), *Commodity Character*. Rochester, NY: Visual Studies Workshop Press.

Salinger, Adrienne (1995), *In My Room*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.

Seale, William (1981), *Tasteful Interlude: American Interiors Through the Camera's Eye, 1860–1917*, 2d ed. Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History.

Secretan, Thierry (1995), *Going into Darkness: Fantastic Coffins from Africa*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Tuchman, Mitch (1994), *Magnificent Obsessions: Twenty Remarkable Collectors in Pursuit of Their Dreams*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.

Verra, Yvonne et al. (1996), *Images of the West*. Harare, Zimbabwe: Baobab Books; Copenhagen, Denmark: Images of Africa.

Williams, Heathcote (1991), *Autogeddon*. New York: Arcade Publishing.

### CD-ROMs

Material World Scholarship Fund (1994), *Material World: A Global Family Portrait*, CD-ROM. Napa, CA: Ignite.

Prelinger, Rick (1996a), *Our Secret Century, Archival Films from the Dark Side of the American Dream, Vol. 1: The Rainbow Is Yours*, CD-ROM. New York: Learn Technologies Interactive.

——— (1996b), *Our Secret Century, Archival Films from the Dark Side of the American Dream, Vol. 2: Capitalist Realism*, CD-ROM. New York: Learn Technologies Interactive.

Queensland University of Technology (1999), *Consumer Behaviour*, Version 1.1, Interactive CD-ROM. Brisbane: School of Marketing and International Business, Queensland University of Technology, Teaching and Learning Support Services.

Wardlow, Dan (1998), *Principles of Marketing: An Interactive Approach*, CD-ROM. Cincinnati, OH: South-Western College Publishing.

### Web Sites

Center for Consumer Culture [available at <http://c3.business.utah.edu>].

Rick Wilk's Museum of Weird Consumer Culture [available at <http://www.indiana.edu/~wanthro/museum.html>].

Rob Kozinet's Web page [available at <http://www.kellogg.nwu.edu/faculty/Kozinets/htm/>].

Russ Belk's Web page [available at <http://www.business.utah.edu/~mktrwb/>].

Society for Visual Sociology [available at <http://www.sjmc.umn.edu/faculty/schwartz/ivsa/>].

### Music

Marketing Mike and the Suits (1996a), *Business Blues*, CD. Mountain View, CA: Biz Blues Records.

——— (1996b), *Marketing Blues*, CD. Mountain View, CA: Biz Blues Records.

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***Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, New York: Scholastic Press, 1998, 309 pp., \$19.95; *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, New York: Scholastic Press, 1999, 341 pp., \$19.95; *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, New York: Scholastic Press, 1999, 435 pp., \$19.95; *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, New York: Scholastic Press, 2000, 734 pp., \$25.95.**

## Harry Potter and the Marketing Mystery: A Review and Critical Assessment of the Harry Potter Books

"Fads" is the four-letter word of marketing research, more so even than "hype," "puff," "plug," and "spin." For most academicians, fads are an anomaly, a profanity, a pustular pain in the proverbial posterior. Whether it be Beanie Babies, Teletubbies, Pet Rocks, or Rubik's Cubes, fads, crazes, and gimmicks are an affront to the modern marketing paradigm, the absolute antithesis of analysis, planning, implementation, and control. They seem to erupt spontaneously (in an inexplicable, unpredictable fashion), they are the domain of all sorts of disreputable hucksters, drummers, and quick-buck makers (veritable throwbacks in an era of calm professionalism), and they quickly disappear over the marketing horizon (until the next kiddie craze comes hurtling down the preteen pike). At best, fads are an example of word-of-mouth marketing or a component part of the innovation diffusion process (Gladwell 2000). At worst, fads are a mutant form of the product life cycle, commercial instantiations of Mackay's (1995) "extraordinary popular delusions and the madness of crowds." At all times, however, fads are something to be avoided; to be belittled; to be broken, bucking bronco fashion, and transshipped into the more respectable conceptual categories of "trends," "tendencies," and "traits."

The irony, of course, is that marketing itself is incorrigibly faddish, as is management studies generally. True, there is no shortage of scholarly commentators who roundly denounce management by buzzword, readily condemn fad surfing in the boardroom, and repeatedly excoriate the craze-blazing antics of self-appointed marketing gurus, Tom call-me-crazy Peters in particular (Collins 2000; Morris 1998; Shapiro 1998). So voluminous, indeed, is the antifad literature that fadlessness is the latest management fad, according to *Harvard Business Review* (Wetlaufer 2001). However, if past performance is anything to go by, this too will be unceremoniously abandoned when someone makes the case for crazes and the profad fad kicks in. Conversely, the concept might be "broadened" beyond products and services to embrace fadscapes (Las Vegas), fad ads (Budweiser's "Wazzup"), fad prices ("blue-light" or "13-hour" specials), and, ultimately, fadology (the scientific study of faddishness, faddisms, fadplexes, fadnomena, fadformulae, and so forth).

### There's Something About Harry

Management metafads and scholarly denial notwithstanding, an academician would need to be pretty obdurate not to have noticed Harry Potter. The brainchild of the British author J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter is perhaps the most astonishing kiddie craze of recent years (Zipes 2001). To date, approximately 70 million copies of the first four books in a seven-book series have been sold. The texts have been translated into 30 languages and published in multitudinous formats (e.g., illustrated, Braille, audiocassette, adult cover, large print, box sets) and are chart-toppers in 120 countries,

Britain and the United States especially. An \$85 million live-action movie is scheduled for release in November 2001, and though forecasting the fate of feature films is fraught with difficulty, it is estimated that the release will gross \$650 million in tie-in merchandise alone. Harry hysteria, furthermore, has been held responsible for everything from the stratospheric share price of Scholastic Press and capacity pressures in the printing industry to the revival of British boarding schools, as well as increased visitor numbers at “magical” holiday destinations (e.g., Hamilton 2001; Hutton 2000; Wilsdon 2001). Indeed, the Potter parlance of “Muggles” (people without magical powers) and “quidditch” (a popular team sport, akin to hockey, which is played on broomsticks) not only has been inducted into the august pages of the *Oxford English Dictionary* but also has been appropriated by the advertising industry. A Marketing Muggle, apparently, is an advertising executive who lacks the all-important creative spark or suffers from imagination deficit disorder.

Although many readers might be tempted to dismiss Harry Potter as a passing marketing fad, yet another in a long line of preteen obsessions, it is precipitate so to do. Apart from the inspiration that many cutting-edge management commentators are drawing from kiddie culture (see Frank 2000), Harry Potter is particularly pertinent to the contemporary marketing condition. The books, after all, are as much about marketing as the outcome of marketing. They deal with marketing matters, they are replete with marketing artifacts, they contain analyses of marketplace phenomena, and they hold the solution to an ancient marketing mystery. The books are not merely a marketing masterpiece, they are a marketing master class.

Thus, the Potter portfolio refers to almost every element of the marketing mix as well as aspects of buyer behavior, environmental conditions, marketing research, and many more besides. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, for example, one character is preparing a market research report on cheap continental cauldrons, most of which fail to conform to U.K. safety standards and, on account of their unacceptably thin bottoms, must therefore be denied access to the great British market. Another aspiring importer wonders whether there is a niche in the U.K. market for flying carpets, the minivans of the wizarding world, only to be brusquely informed that the British will never give up their broomsticks (even though carpets were once the English conveyance of choice). Broomsticks, in fact, provide Rowling with a wonderful vehicle for exploring buyer behavior. Every phase of the purchasing process is described in detail, all the way from the consumer’s desperate desire to acquire new and improved models through the information-gathering phase, in which impartial consumer reports are consulted, to the heartbreak of a broomstick owner whose pride and joy is written off in an unforeseen accident:

He didn’t argue or complain, but he wouldn’t let her throw away the shattered remains of his Nimbus Two Thousand. He knew he was being stupid, knew that the Nimbus was beyond repair, but Harry couldn’t help it; he felt as though he’d lost one of his best friends. (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, p. 137)

Advertising, likewise, is incorporated in the shape of huge hoardings, akin to electric scoreboards at football stadiums, with constantly changing sales pitches for broomsticks (“The Bluebottle, a broom for all the family”), detergents (“Mrs Skowers All Purpose Magical Mess Remover—No pain, no stain”), and outfitters (“Gladrags Wizardwear—London, Paris, Hogsmeade”). Pricing figures prominently, furthermore, both in a general sense (the sheer expense of sending a child to Hogwarts school) and more specifically (the exact cost of objects, such as dragon’s liver and beetle’s eyes, in the wizard currency of Galleons, Sickles, and Knuts). Added-value is not forgotten either, as the Knight Rider Bus bears witness (the flat fare to London is 11 Sickles, but 14 gets a mug of hot chocolate and 15 a hot water bottle, plus a choice of colored toothbrushes). Logistics also get a look-in, albeit in the form of Floo Powder (a magical mixture that transports wizards, Santa Claus-like, to chimneys of their choice), Portkeys (graspable objects, such as old shoes and discarded soda cans, that ferry groups of holders very long distances), the Owl postal service (color coded, naturally, by breed and distance—big Barn Owls cover the country, tiny Scops Owls deal with local deliveries), and the emblematic Hogwarts Express (an old-fashioned steam train that takes pupils to and from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry). Consumption-rich anniversaries and holidays are equally evocatively described (Christmas and birthdays especially, though a St. Valentine’s Day extravaganza features in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*), as are personal selling (when Harry gets fitted for his wand and uniform, for example), promotional gimmicks (the Weasleys win a holiday to Egypt, courtesy of a newspaper competition), the cheesy correspondence courses found in the small-ads pages of tabloid newspapers (“Feel out of step in the world of modern magic? Find yourself making excuses not to perform simple spells? Ever been taunted for your woeful wandwork? *There is an answer!*”), and, of all things, Harry Potter-ish marketing crazes (Hogwarts pupils collect Pokémonesque wizard cards, which are swapped and traded incessantly).

The books, in short, take the objects and artifacts from traditional fairy stories—cauldrons, wands, broomsticks, flying carpets, magic potions, wizard’s apparel, and so forth—and give them a marvelous marketing spin. The Firebolt, for example, is not a bog-standard broomstick but the top of the top of the range. It is the BMW of broomsticks, the Ferrari of flying household effects, a veritable Porsche Carrera of aeronautically engineered cleaning appliances. Harry first spots it in the display window of an exclusive dealership, where he is literally stopped in his tracks by “the most magnificent broom he had ever seen.” So enraptured is the apprentice wizard that he returns again and again to stare, agog, at the precious, perfect product. Consumed by commodity fetishism—“he had never wanted anything so much in his entire life”—Harry is completely bowled over by the beautiful object’s auratic power, as are his fellow pupils (“Can I just hold it, Harry?”), as is the sports mistress (who waxes lyrical about great racing brooms of the past), as is the official announcer of the climactic quidditch tournament (who spends more time describing the broomstick’s attributes than commenting on the match, which prompts

one disgruntled spectator to shout, “Jordan! Are you being paid to advertise Firebolts? Get on with the commentary!”).

Above and beyond the fabulous Firebolt, almost every product category is given the marketing spit and polish. Codices of curses, spells, and hexes are sold from a Borders-style superstore, Flourish and Blotts, which organizes book signings, arranges special promotions, and retails gimmicky best-sellers such as *Where There’s a Wand There’s a Way*, *Men Who Love Dragons Too Much*, and *The Invisible Book of Invisibility*. The Quidditch World Cup is accompanied by the promotional razzmatazz that attends major sporting events, everything from an extravagant pregame buildup through the hard-sell antics of team sponsors and outdoor advertising agencies to the plague of cheapjack souvenir sellers, with their rip-off rosettes, overpriced apparel, unlicensed posters, and unofficial programs. Confectionery, furthermore, is brilliantly realized in the form of Cockroach Clusters, Jelly Slugs, Canary Creams, Chocolate Frogs (containing the wizard card collectibles), Sugar Quills (perfect for sucking surreptitiously in class), and Rowling’s *pièce de résistance*, Bertie Bott’s Every Flavor Beans. As the brand name implies, these come in every conceivable flavor—chocolate, peppermint, marmalade, toast, coconut, baked bean, strawberry, curry, grass, coffee, sardine, sprouts, spinach, liver, tripe, earwax, booger, and vomit. Aptly, their advertising slogan is “A risk with every mouthful.”

Servicescapes, similarly, are arrestingly addressed, thanks to Rowling’s remarkable ability to convey a sense of place. Again and again, the author’s grasp of *genius loci* is made manifest, and these exercises in evocation often refer to retailing environments. For example, a wizarding pet emporium, the Magical Menagerie, is cogently described as follows:

A pair of enormous purple toads sat gulping wetly and feasting on dead butterflies. A gigantic tortoise with a jewel-encrusted shell was glittering near the window. Poisonous orange snails were oozing slowly up the side of their glass tank, and a fat white rabbit kept changing into a silk top hat and back again with a loud popping noise. There were cats of every color, a noisy cage of ravens, a basket of funny, custard-colored fur balls that were humming loudly, and, on the counter, a vast cage of sleek black rats which were playing some sort of skipping game using their long bald tails. (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, p. 48)

The olfactory overkill, tactile temptation, and pharmacological intrigue of an old-fashioned potions purveyor are equally persuasively posited:

Then they visited the apothecary’s, which was fascinating enough to make up for its horrible smell, a mixture of bad eggs and rotted cabbages. Barrels of slimy stuff stood on the floor, jars of herbs, dried roots and bright powders lined the walls, bundles of feathers, strings of fangs and snarled claws hung from the ceiling. While Hagrid asked the man behind the counter for a supply of some basic potion ingredients for Harry, Harry himself examined silver unicorn horns at twenty-one Galleons each and miniscule, glittery black beetle eyes (five Knuts a scoop). (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, p. 62)

As might be expected, however, Rowling reserves her most perspicacious place-imparting powers for Honeydukes candy store in the village of Hogsmeade, adjacent to Hogwarts school:

There were shelves upon shelves of the most succulent-looking sweets imaginable. Creamy chunks of nougat, shimmering pink squares of coconut ice, fat, honey-colored toffees; hundreds of different kinds of chocolate in neat rows; there was a large barrel of Every Flavor Beans, and another of Fizzing Whizzbees, the levitating sherbet balls that Ron had mentioned; along yet another wall were “Special Effects” sweets: Droobles Best Blowing Gum (which filled a room with bluebell-colored bubbles that refused to pop for days), the strange splintery Toothflossing Stringmints, tiny Black Pepper Imps (“breathe fire on your friends!”), Ice Mints (“hear your teeth chatter and squeak!”), peppermint creams shaped like toads (“hop realistically in the stomach!”), fragile sugar-spun quills and exploding bonbons. (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, p. 147)

## Dirty Harry

To be sure, Rowling’s reflections on marketing phenomena are not confined to elements of the mix, the external environment, or magical market research reports. She also offers two diverting pen portraits of disreputable marketing types, both deeply unattractive in strangely attractive ways. Vernon Dursley, Harry’s oafish stepfather, is a narrow-minded, nit-picking, no-nonsense marketing man, who works for the unspeakable industrial conglomerate, Grunnings. On the first page of the first book, he is anticipating a large order for drills. In the second book, he wines and dines an important client, only to have his sales pitch ruined by the apprentice wizard upstairs. And in the third book, he vaingloriously gloats over his company car, which is admired loudly in front of eavesdropping neighbors. Vernon, in short, is the epitome of marketing pragmatics, obsessed with order, planning, and precision, who has no time whatsoever for magic, mystery, or imagination. He refuses to let Harry use the word “magic” in his house and specifically states that he doesn’t approve of imagination. What is more, he doesn’t like surprises, as the detailed plans for his order-snaring dinner party attest. The guests arrive on the stroke of 8:00 P.M. At 8:15 precisely, they are escorted into the dining room. At 9:00 P.M., Vernon cracks his joke about the Japanese golfer and brings the subject around to drills. Coffee is served, and “With any luck, I’ll have the deal signed and sealed before the *News at Ten*. We’ll be shopping for a holiday home in Majorca this time tomorrow.”

If Vernon Dursley personifies the positivistic marketing mindset, Gilderoy Lockhart is a Barnumesque grotesque. The acme of self-marketing and a stranger to self-mockery, Lockhart is a self-centered, publicity-seeking celebrity author; a larger-than-life trickster figure; a twenty-first-century snake oil seller. A complete humbug, in other words. Handsome, hirsute, expensively attired, and orthodontically enhanced, Lockhart is five-times winner of *Witch Weekly’s* Most-Charming-Smile Award, and à la Richard Branson, “it was remarkable how he could show every one of those brilliant teeth, even when he wasn’t talking.” Like a book-

writing Barry Manilow, he is adored by witches of a certain age; he bestrides the best-sellers list with his arresting adventures among outré occultists (*Gadding with Ghouls*, *Holidays with Hags*, *Travels with Trolls*, and so forth); and he is a lion of the book marketing circuit, where he draws huge crowds to his signings, readings, and fan club conventions. He even has a special quill, made from an enormous peacock feather, for such autograph-hungry occasions. Never let it be said, however, that all the attention has gone to Lockhart's head or that he has forgotten his roots. On the contrary, his secret ambition is to "rid the world of evil and market my own range of hair-care potions."

## Selling Harry by the Pound

Now, it may be a while before Lockhart's Hair Lotion is available in friendly neighborhood drug stores, but Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans are already on sale, as is a host of Harry Potter collectibles (Mahoney 2000). Warner Brothers signed a seven-figure, five-year, two-film deal with Rowling in October 1998, and thus far, the conglomerate has granted 46 licenses to all sorts of corporate supplicants. These include Mattel, for board games and toys; Hasbro, for trading cards and candy; Electronic Arts, for video games and computer-based ancillaries; Lego, for the eponymous building bricks; and the Character Group, for plastic and porcelain figurines. Coca-Cola has also signed a \$150 million sponsorship deal, and rumors of everything from Hogwarts theme parks to Harry Potter Happy Meals are circulating (*The Economist* 2001). It remains to be seen how many of these will come to fruition, but with three books still to be written and possibly six to be filmed, it is fair to assume that the Harry Potter fad will be flourishing for some time yet. Indeed, such is the power of the Potter multiplier that a substandard Warner Brothers comedy, *See Spot Run*, was carried to the top of the U.S. movie charts on the strength of its "first look" Harry Potter trailer (*Entertainment Weekly* 2001). It seems that even a crippled dog can be given legs by the tyro wizard's supernatural prowess.

Gratifying as it is to *See Spot Run* all the way to the bank, thanks to the Harry Potter pyramid-selling scheme, its success raises an intriguing issue about the marketing of Harry. Most commentators on the Harry Potter phenomenon make great play of the fact that it came about without marketing, that Rowling's staggering commercial triumph transpired despite formal marketing, not because of it (Ignatius 2000). In this regard, pontificators on Pottermania invariably refer to the "purity" of his popularity—how it was achieved and is sustained by personal recommendations; schoolyard conversations; Internet chat rooms; and sheer consumer satisfaction, enthusiasm, evangelism (Gladwell 2000; Godin 2000; Lewis and Bridger 2000; Rosen 2000). Although this may have been true for the first two books, it certainly was not the case for subsequent episodes. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, in particular, was given the full marketing treatment (Brady 2000). Press junkets, television appearances, radio interviews, newspaper spreads, book signings, online discussions, launch parties, and every other trick in the arts marketing armory was pressed into Potteresque service. Interestingly, however, Scholastic's Pottermarketing

strategy was not predicated on analysis, planning, implementation, and control, the Vernon Dursley school of thought. It was based, rather, on mystery, on intrigue, on unavailability, on postponement, on absence, on deferral, on denial, on tricksterism, on ballyhoo, on P.T. Barnumism, on Gilderoy Lockhartery. Whereas the modern marketing concept aims to make life simple for the consumer by getting the goods to market in a timely and efficient manner, so that they are available where and when they are wanted, at a price people are prepared to pay (Kotler 1999), the Potter-marketing concept deliberately eschews the here-it-is, come-and-get-it, there's-plenty-for-everyone proposition by limiting availability; delaying gratification; heightening expectation; tantalizing, teasing, and tormenting the consumer; and insinuating that stock-outs are a very real possibility (Brown 2001).

Thus, the mysterious marketing strategy for *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* comprised a complete blackout on advance information. The original manuscript was reputedly locked in a carefully guarded safe, accessible only to top executives. The title, pagination, and price were kept secret until two weeks before publication. Review copies were withheld, no author interviews were allowed, and foreign translations were deferred for fear of injudicious leaks. Juicy plot details, including the death of a key character and Harry's sexual awakening, were drip-fed to a slavering press corps immediately before the launch. Printers and distributors were required to sign strict, legally enforceable confidentiality agreements. Meanwhile, booksellers were bound by a ruthlessly policed embargo, though some were allowed to display the tantalizing tome (in locked cages) for a brief period prior to "Harry Potter Day," July 8, 2000. Many outlets opened at midnight to long lines of eager-beaver, pajama-wearing, broomstick-clutching, wizard's cloak-clad children and even longer lines of no less excited publicity agents and television crews, who dutifully recorded the late-night revelry and recorded the recordings of the late night revelry and recorded the recordings of the recordings of the late night revelry. The fadplex at its finest. Harry will eat himself.

## HP Sauce

More than 20 years ago, Jagdish Sheth (1979) pointed out that marketing fads are a mystery, and they are no less mysterious today. Despite recent attempts to map the fadscapes (Farrell 2000; Godin 2000; Rosen 2000), fads remain as inexplicably enigmatic as ever. Although I am hesitant to draw lessons from a single case study, let alone a purported passing fad, the Harry Potter megafad suggests that the answer to this marketing mystery is mysteriousness itself. Mystery, admittedly, has no place in the modern marketing paradigm, which is predicated on openness, on trust, on transparency, on integrity, on opalescence, on the avoidance of opacity. But marketing practice has always had a mysterious side. One only needs to peruse the promotional practices of megabrand marketing organizations to appreciate that mystery, enigma, intrigue, and puzzlement are important parts of their appeal. Consider the "secret" recipes that help purvey all sorts of comestibles—Coca-Cola, Heinz

Varieties, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Mrs. Field's Cookies, Kellogg's Frosted Flakes, Grey Poupon Mustard, Brach's Chocolate Cherries, Campari, Carlsberg, Chartreuse, Benedictine, Angostura Bitters, and, naturally, HP Sauce. Consider the gift-giving business, which is predicated on secrets, surprises, and agonizingly delayed gratification, as are gift-rich occasions such as Christmas, birthdays, and St. Valentine's Day. Consider the teaser campaigns, advertising soap operas, and who'll-be-the-lucky winner promotions that are launched incessantly by Machiavellian marketers. Consider the self-help marketing gurus, who claim to possess the secrets of success, leadership, efficiency, effectiveness, time management, corporate well-being, or—Heaven help us!—the Harry Potter way to higher profits.

Marketing, then, moves in mysterious ways, in magical ways, in mysteriously magical ways. Yet academicians seem determined to pretend otherwise. Vernon Dursley—like, marketing scholars ceaselessly pursue the chimera of truth, of science, of general theories and axiomatic insights. The unstated assumption is that with more powerful computers, more sophisticated statistics, more elaborate models, and more time please, the secrets of the marketing universe will be revealed. But as Baudrillard (2001, pp. 80–81) astutely observes:

We cannot rely on the pretext of an insufficient development of the scientific, intellectual or mental apparatus. The apparatus has given all that it can give; it has even passed beyond its own definitions of rationality.... It is the event horizon, as they say in physics, beyond which nothing makes sense and nothing at all may be discovered.... That, if there is any, is the secret of the universe. As a metaphor, I would say that at the core of every human being and every thing there is such a fundamentally inaccessible secret. That is the vital illusion of which Nietzsche spoke, the glass wall of truth and illusion. From our rational point of view, this may appear rather desperate and could even justify something like pessimism. But from the point of view of alterity, of secret and seduction, it is, on the contrary, our only chance: our last chance.

Although I hesitate to hold up Harry as “our last chance,” marketing fads in general and Potter in particular are reminders that mystery has its place, that intrigue is necessary, that riddle-me-ree is right and proper, that secrecy is the secret of the universe. As the twenty-first century dawns, perhaps Harry Potter should replace Karl Popper as the cynosure of our field. Anyone for quidditch?

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