TRINITARIANISM, THE ETERNAL EVANGEL AND THE THREE ERAS SCHEMA

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INTRODUCTION


As the above, by no means exhaustive, list of examples illustrates, thinking in threes is a very common occurrence. A moment's reflection, indeed, indicates that this trinitarian inclination is made manifest in many ways, shapes and forms, whether it be the Three Wise Men, three course meals, the Three Musketeers, the Three Stooges, the Three Degrees, three piece suits, three wishes, three dimensions, three little pigs, three blind mice, Three Men in a Boat, three card trick, three points for a win, the three Rs of reading, writing and 'rithmetic, three coins in a fountain, three times a lady, three strikes and you're out, three steps to heaven or, on a more elevated plane, trichotomous concepts like Freud's id, ego and superego, Hegel's thesis, antithesis, synthesis, Popper's three worlds theory, Newton's three laws of motion, Peirce's sign, designatum and interpretant, Chomsky's three models of language and Aristotle's tripartite classification of literary genres. True, thinking in twos and fours –
and their derivatives, most notably five, seven, ten and twelve -- are also deeply embedded in the human psyche, but there is no doubt that the trinity remains of very great significance (see Butler 1970; Sebok 1988; Campion 1994). As the good book itself makes clear, 'a threefold cord is not quickly broken' (Eccles 4:12).

Regardless of the extent of one’s agreement or disagreement with commentators, such as Adair (1994) and Reeves and Gould (1987), who consider thinking in threes to be imbued with deep symbolic-cum-cabalistical power - and doubtless bad luck, which also runs in threes, attaches itself to anyone who scoffs at such mysticism - it is undeniable that trinitarianism is widespread in the theory and practice of marketing. The latter is exemplified by the copious advertising slogans predicated on trichotomies: Beanz, Meanz, Heinz; Work, Rest and Play; Anytime, Anyplace, Anywhere; Snap, Crackle and Pop; Finger Lickin’ Good; We Try Harder; Master the Moment; kills Bugs Dead; Just Do It; Vorsprung durch Technik; Where’s The Beef?; Tense, Nervous Headache; Prolongs Active Life; Soft, Strong and (very, very) Long (Twitchell 1996). The former, as a glance through any textbook amply demonstrates, includes such redoubtable conceptual constructs as STP (segmentation, targeting, positioning), intensive/extensive/exclusive distribution, convenience, comparison and specialty goods, core/actual/augmented products, discount, congruent and premium prices, cognition, affect and conation, limited decision taking, extended decision taking and routinised response behaviour, Porter’s generic strategies (cost, differentiation, focus), Kotler’s typology of publics, products and organisations, Hunt’s three dichotomies model, Calder and Tybouts’s triadic classification of knowledge, Bristol and Fischer’s three schools of feminist consumer research, Bagozzi’s three types of exchange and, not least, the marketing concept itself with its tripartite emphasis on profit, co-ordination and customer orientation. Granted, dichotomous and, especially, quadripartite thinking are also a commonplace in marketing (industrial/consumer, quantitative/qualitative, product/service, above/below the line, 4Ps, SWOT, four utilities, Ansoff Matrix, PLC stages and so on), but the trinity appears to possess what can only be described as unerring, undying and universal appeal.

Undoubtedly the most prevalent, and perhaps the most excoriated, expression of trinitarianism in marketing thought is the familiar ‘production era, sales era, marketing era’ schema. Recycled in the opening chapters of almost every introductory text, the three eras framework is also one of the finest examples of eschatological thinking in marketing. As this chapter will seek to demonstrate, the construct is on a clear line of descent from the apocalyptic vision of an enormously influential twelfth-century theologian, the Eternal Evangel, Abbot Joachim de Fiore. In appropriately trichotomous fashion, therefore, the chapter commences with a consideration of the three eras periodisation schema; turns to a discussion of the characteristics, context and communication of Joachimism; and concludes with an exposition of what I modestly consider to be the ‘mother of all marketing models’.

THE THREE ERAS SCHEMA

THREE ERAS SCHEMA

Thirty something years ago, a momentous paper entitled ‘The Marketing Revolution’ was published in the Journal of Marketing. Written by Robert J. Keith, then Executive Vice President and consumer products director of The Pillsbury Company, it intimated that his organisation was in the throes of a marketing equivalent of the Copernican revolution in science. According to Keith, from its foundation in 1869 to the 1930s, Pillsbury was ‘product orientated’, in that it was preoccupied with the manufacturing process, with new products being launched to dispose of manufacturing by-products rather than serve a market need. From the 1930s to the 1950s, the company was characterised by a ‘sales orientation’, where a sophisticated sales organisation, backed up with advertising and market analysis, was assembled to help purvey its many and varied product lines. The ensuing era, however, was ‘marketing orientated’, in so far as the purpose of Pillsbury was no longer to mill flour, nor to manufacture and sell a wide range of products, but to satisfy the needs and desires — both latent and actual — of its customers. Just as the celebrated sixteenth-century Polish scientist had demonstrated that the earth was not the centre of the solar system, so too The Pillsbury Company was no longer at the centre of the business universe. ‘Today,’ Keith (1960: 35) portentously announced, ‘the customer is at the centre.’

Although the article is only four pages long, contains not a single citation and, to be perfectly frank, now reads like a hackneyed after-dinner speech or carefully air-brushed Pillsbury press release, Keith’s paper is widely considered to be the marketing analogue of St Augustine’s City of God or Martin Luther’s ninety-five theses. Along with Levitt’s (1960) contemporaneous classic, Marketing Myopia’, it is one of the most frequently anthologised papers in the entire marketing canon. Its fame, admittedly, is partly attributable to the fact that it is one of the easiest — and most cogent — articulations of the modern marketing concept. However, the Copernican analogy, the ‘scientific’ overtones, the suggestion that his organisation’s experience was typical of most major American businesses, the hints of a heroic internal struggle to have the marketing concept accepted within Pillsbury, the intimation that the glorious marketing revolution had only just begun and, above all, the production-sales-marketing eras schema itself, combined to ensure that Keith’s rhetorical tour de force quickly earned its place in the pantheon of marketing ‘classics’.

Seminal statement though it was, ‘The Marketing Revolution’ has not been without its critics. Apart from the seemingly perpetual debate over the precise nature of the modern marketing concept, which comprises an implicit critique of Keith’s paper, a recent textual deconstruction by Marion (1993) concludes that it was essentially a politically motivated document, designed to promote a palace revolution within Pillsbury, and which eventually propelled Keith into the position of Chief Executive Officer. Be that as it may, the principal bone of academic contention concerning this much-reprinted contribution is its
After undertaking a detailed content analysis of twenty-five introductory and advanced marketing textbooks, which revealed that the three eras schema was included in all but four, Hollander (1986) posited that Keith’s periodising framework was hopelessly flawed. It completely ignored the fact that many companies were ‘marketing oriented’ by the mid-nineteenth century, that marketing degree programmes, professional associations and research organisations were established long before the so-called ‘marketing era’, and, as illustrated by his arresting titled monograph, *The Top Generation Before Pepsi Discovered It*, youth-based market segmentation was widespread prior to the 1940s (Hollander and German 1992). While the periodising schema undoubtedly served a purpose, primarily the ease with which it could be adapted for machine-readable examination papers, it also impeded the serious study of marketing history and reinforced marketing’s traditional preoccupation with managerial perspectives, rather than (say) broader societal concerns (see Hollander 1986).

Alongside reinforcing Hollander’s critique of the three eras schema, another devastating attack on the framework was published in the premier marketing journal. Concentrating on the ‘myth’ of the production era, Fullerton (1988) argued that the supposed characteristics of the 1870–1930 period — demand exceeded supply, limited competition, firms concentrated on production rather than marketing, which was unnecessary since products sold themselves — simply did not accord with the historical facts. Indeed, as Fullerton’s exhaustive list of examples convincingly demonstrated, received wisdom concerning the period did not correspond with the evidence in any of the three most advanced economies of the time, Britain, Germany and the United States. By thus highlighting that ‘modern’ marketing institutions and practices were commonplace during the so-called ‘production era’ — and, moreover, throughout the subsequent ‘sales era’ — the entire periodising schema was shown to be totally inadequate and in sore need of replacement. To this end, Fullerton proposed a ‘complex flux’ model of marketing evolution, which comprised four separate but interpenetrating eras: the era of antecedents (c. 1500–1750); the era of origins (1750–1870); the era of institutional development (1850–1929); and the era of refinement and formalisation (1930–present). Despite appearances to the contrary, however, the model was not simply a substitution of four eras for three and the judicious manipulation of key dates. On the contrary, Fullerton’s framework sought to combine elements of continuity and incremental development, whilst allowing for the possibility of sudden, catastrophic change.

Although it provides a more nuanced and historically informed picture of the evolution of modern marketing in the western world, the ‘complex flux’ model has not been universally acclaimed. Besides Fullerton’s (1988: 121) spurious attempt to legitimise his sub-Annales School schema by claiming that it represents ‘mainstream historical research’ (history is as riven with intellectual faction-fighting as marketing and the Annales School has long passed its best-before date), the model has been attacked by Gilbert and Bailey (1990) for concentrating on marketing practice and its caricature of the established framework. However, perhaps the most damning critique of the complex flux model is the simple fact that it has not succeeded in supplanting the production-sales-marketing era schema. It is ten years now since Fullerton (1985) first articulated his position (according to Gummesson (1993), the period necessary for cutting-edge academic thinking to make its way into mainstream textbooks) and, notwithstanding the imprimatur of marketing’s most prestigious journal, the fact of the matter is that the three eras framework is still featured in many best-selling textbooks (Pride and Ferrell, McCarthy and Perrault, etc.). True, an analysis of fifteen recent introductory volumes by the author, revealed that the traditional periodising schema, albeit very common, is no longer ubiquitous, but it has most certainly not been replaced by the complex flux model. If anything, there is some evidence to suggest that texts have become slightly less historical than hitherto, in that the traditional ‘evolution of marketing’ sub-section has occasionally been excised completely or transmuted into the contention that, at any given time, organisations may be ‘production oriented’, ‘sales oriented’ or ‘marketing oriented’. Clearly, it would be unfair to regard this apparent anti-historical tendency as a profoundly paradoxical outcome of the evangelical endeavours of distinguished marketing historians like Ron Fullerton or Stanley Hollander. Nevertheless, it is legitimate to ask why ‘historically minded’ textbook writers continue to opt for the three eras schema when superior alternatives are readily available or, more to the point, why extensive criticism of the periodising concept ‘has not changed the general academic outlook’ (Hollander 1995: 100). In this respect, it may be worthwhile attempting to examine the roots of the production–sales–marketing schema since, as one of Hollander’s acolytes aptly put it, looking back helps us see ahead (Savitt 1989).

**THE THREE ERAS SCHEMA**

By any reckoning, Abbot Joachim de Fiore (c. 1135–1202) must rank as one of the most remarkable figures in the history of western thought. Various described as ‘a twelfth-century prophet-genius’ (Nisbeth 1980: 8), ‘massively overestimated’ (Campion 1994: 601) and ‘the most influential European until Karl Marx’ (Rubinsky and Wiseman 1982: 77), his works and attributed works have impinged directly or indirectly upon the consciousness of countless generations of intellectuals. Even today, some eight hundred years after his death, Joachimite prophesies continue to generate considerable academic debate among theologians and philosophers of history, as does the hypothesis that de Fiore was the original source of the ‘progressive’ western worldview (e.g. Reeves 1995; Kumar 1995; Kermode 1995; Bull 1995).

The son of a court notary, Joachim was born in Celica, a small town in Sicily, and, after a deeply affecting pilgrimage to the Holy Land, he first became a
hermit on Mount Etna, then a Benedictine monk, and eventually founded a new order at San Giovanni la Fiore, high in the Calabrian mountains. In 1183, primed by decades of biblical study, exegesis and contemplation of works of prophecy (Johnnite revelations and Sybiline oracles in the main), Joachim experienced the first of several visions concerning the nature of the Trinity, the future of the church and the end of the world. Encouraged by Pope Lucius III, the abbot recorded his speculations in a series of works, principally the Liber Concordiae, the Expositio in Apocalypse and the Psalterium decem choralium. His reputation as a magus propheta thereby established, Joachim was consulted in his inaccessible mountaintop retreat – by a procession of popes, princes and kings, including Richard the Lion-Heart, and was once uniquely honoured with an invitation to expound his theories in front of the papal court.

History, according to this much-vaunted Calabrian abbot, had a clearly discernible shape or pattern. The shape comprised three great, slightly overlapping ages (status), each of which was associated with one of the elements of the Trinity, and between which lay degraded periods of transition (transitus). The first status, which ran from Adam to Jesus Christ, was the Age of the Father; the second, which commenced with Jesus and was due to end in 1260, was the Age of the Son; and the third, final and soon to be consummated dispensation was the Age of the Holy Spirit. Each of these three great phases was qualitatively different from, in most respects an improvement on, its predecessor, though as a consequence of concordance between the eras (i.e. direct parallels), it proved possible to identify and predict the distinctive features of the impending Age of the Spirit. Indeed, in a virtuoso display of trinitarian thinking, Joachim associated a distinctive array of plants, animals, images and symbols with each of the individual stages. Thus, for example, whereas the first status was symbolised by Winter and the second by Spring, the third was the equivalent of high Summer. The Age of the Father, likewise, was associated with infancy, nettles and the light of the stars; the Age of the Son with youth, roses and the light of the Moon; and the forthcoming Age of the Spirit with maturity, lilies and the light of the Sun. Most importantly for the subsequent secularisation of his millenarian schema, however, the first era’s emphasis on labour, slavery and the rule of law, having given way to a second phase concerned with discipline, service and the pursuit of truth, was about to be superseded by an Elysium of contemplation, praise and, not least, liberty (Manuel 1965; Campion 1994).

As a loyal servant of the church, with no discernible heretical or schismatic inclinations, Joachim de Fiore was held in very high regard by his spiritual and lay contemporaries. Yet it is clear that his schema contained very serious implications for religious orthodoxy. By creating, in effect, a pecking order among the elements of the Trinity and intimating that the established church – which was associated with the Second Age – was soon to be replaced by two new ascetic orders of ‘spiritual men’, Joachim’s three age framework possessed revolutionary potential. Within a few years of his death, pseudo-Joachite tracts, containing sub-Sibylline prophesies and teachings, were in widespread circulation. Thanks, moreover, to the proselytising endeavours of a breakaway monastic order, the Franciscan Spirituals, his revelations had been elevated to quasi-canonical status. This eventually led, in 1254, to one of the most notorious incidents in medieval Christendom, when an over-enthusiastic Joachite, Gerardo de Burgos, declared that the contents of the Old and New Testaments – associated with the first and second status respectively – had been utterly abrogated (McGinn 1979, 1985). Henceforth, all scriptural authority resided in the Third Testament – the so-called Eternal Evangel (or everlasting gospel) – made up of the teachings of Joachim de Fiore. Although Gerardo had zealously assembled, edited and glossed a selection of the master’s thoughts, the appearance of his book, Introductory in Evangelium Aeternum, provoked an enormous outcry. A list of thirty-one errors in de Burgos’ argument was forwarded to Pope Alexander IV, who duly set up a papal commission, which declared Joachim a heretic, ordered the burning of Introductio and imprisoned Gerardo for good measure. The controversy, however, only served to further publicise the prophesies of Joachim, not least his calculation that the Second Age was due to end in 1260. Thus, by fanning the flames of Joachite-induced apocalyptic expectation, which were further stoked by famine in 1258, plague in 1259 and the first recorded procession of flagellants in 1260, the Eternal Evangel episode prompted one of the most serious outbreaks of millenarianism in the entire pre-Reformation period (Cohn 1970).

While the all-embracing catholicism of Joachim de Fiore’s tripartite paradigm has induced raptures of ecstasy among many subsequent commentators (e.g. McGinn 1980; Gruner 1985; Kermode 1985; Reeves and Gauld 1987), it is necessary to stress that his periodising framework was not created ex nihilo. On the contrary, the notion of three great historical ages, associated with the father, son and holy spirit respectively, had been employed by a host of earlier theological thinkers including Hildegard of Bingen, Robert of Deutz and the ninth-century Irish philosopher, John Scotus Eriugena (McGinn 1985). The historical schema, what is more, and Joachim’s evident fondness for threesome were a commonplace of the Classical world – Platonism in particular – and have been traced back to the proto-literate civilisations of the ancient Near East (Trompf 1979). In fact, some sceptics have gone so far as to suggest that Joachimite thought contains nothing original and that his reputation rests entirely on being in the right place at the right time (Campion 1994).

It is, of course, undeniable that Joachim de Fiore was blessed with a formidable publicity machine in the shape of the Spiritual Franciscans and the hapless Gerardo de Burgos. He was writing, moreover, at a time of great social, economic and spiritual dislocation, when millennial tensions were widespread and the established church was believed to be irremediably corrupt. Human nature being what it is, Joachim’s reputation as both a renowned prophet and a notorious heretic, whose books and teachings were officially proscribed, undoubtedly added considerably to the Calabrian abbot’s innate attraction.
Nevertheless, by succeeding in, first, positioning the (then) present in a degenerate and tumultuous transition zone at the end of the Second Age; second, suggesting that a qualitatively superior era was at hand and due to be realised here on earth; and, third, that the appearance of the Age of the Spirit could be accelerated by human intervention, Joachim's tripartite schema was ripe for adoption, adaptation and application by ensuing generations of visionary utopians and exponents of 'progressive' historical teleologies (Manuel and Manuel 1976; Nisbet 1980; Kumar 1991).

As the minutely detailed bibilographic analyses of Reeves (1969), McGinn (1985) and Reeves and Gould (1987) clearly demonstrate, Joachim de Fiore's tripartite model of history has proved enormously influential in the centuries since his death. Apart from its direct effects on the intellectual endeavours of pivotal theological thinkers like St Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Thomas Muntzer and Martin Luther, and non-theological notables such as Columbus, Cortes and Nostradamus, the gradual secularisation of Joachim's periodising schema by Petrarch, Postel, Le Roy and Campenella amongst others, ensured that it continued to underpin manifold post-Enlightenment models of historical development (Manuel 1965; Gruner 1985). The three-age theories of Lessing, Schelling, Fichte and Vico were all directly indebted to the work of Joachim de Fiore, as was Hegel's dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Henri Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte, the founding fathers of modern sociology, openly acknowledged the influence of the Calabrian abbot (Comte, for example, arranged history in three great ages — the theological, the metaphysical and the positive — and his entire system of positivism was predicated on threesomes). Marx's three stages of primitive society, class society and communism were also deeply Joachite in tenor and, indeed, it has been suggested that trinitarian schemata as diverse as Stone Age—Bronze Age—Iron Age, Ancient/Medieval/Modern, the Third Reich, the Third International, the Third Rome and even the contemporaneous division into first, second and third worlds are latter-day instantiations of Joachimism (Campion 1994).

In addition to the monumental periodising frameworks of Comte, Marx and analogous historicists, a host of creative writers and artists have drawn heavily upon the teachings of Joachim. Building upon a tradition that stretches back to Donne, Dante and beyond, literary luminaries as diverse as George Sand, George Eliot, Matthew Arnold, Walter Pater, W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Max Jacob, Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen), Muriel Spark and, most recently, Umberto Eco, have all been inspired by the visions of the great twelfth-century prophet. There is, admittedly, an on-going debate in scholarly circles about the precise limits of Joachim's influence. Some analysts of the history of thought argue that almost any tripartite model of historical development owes a debt to the Calabrian abbot (Nietzsche's, Jung's, Foucault's and Baudrillard's spring immediately to mind), whereas others contend that de Fiore's influence can only be inferred when his works, or clearly identifiable aspects of his corpus, are specifically referred to (see Campion 1994; Reeves 1995; Kermode 1985, 1995). Regardless of whether one subscribes to the former or latter position, the fact remains that Joachim de Fiore's periodising schema is deeply embedded in the intellectual unconscious of the western world and ever ready to manifest itself in many, varied and, as often as not, mutated forms.

THE MOTHER OF ALL MARKETING MODELS

In a recent overview of his life's work, Stanley C. Hollander (1995) has returned to the emergence of the modern 'marketing era', contending that this issue represents one of the most thorny topics on the research agenda of marketing historians. Restating his earlier position that the supposed postwar 'revolution' in marketing practice and thought was not particularly revolutionary (though it may have seemed revolutionary with the resumption of marketing normality in the aftermath of the hostilities), he suggests that the perpetuation of the production—sales—marketing eras myth is little more than a self-serving conspiracy on the part of marketing executives and academics, who like to think that they are somehow better or more sophisticated than their predecessors. While there is more than a little merit in Hollander's belief that the three eras schema is mad, bad and dangerous to know, the prevalence of trinitarian thinking in the western intellectual tradition, coupled with the long and influential arm of the Calabrian abbot, suggests that the traditional tripartite framework will not be readily dislodged. On the contrary, it is arguable that the postulation of more sophisticated and historically precise models simply cannot compete with the elementalism — some would say archetypal power — of the established schema. Indeed, as the deconstructionists rightly point out, the very act of engaging critically with the original only serves to ensure its continuation (Brown 1995a).

Rather than seeking to censure the three eras schema, it may be more appropriate to fight fire with fire by proposing an alternative but equally debatable three stage framework: for example, the Pre-modern Marketing Era (up to approx. 1900), the Modern Marketing Era (1900—99) and the soon to be consummated Post-modern Marketing Era (2000 plus). Marketing historians, of course, are likely to be aghast at such recidivism and postmodernists outraged since it implies an underpinning meta-narrative. I however, since when has historical accuracy or academic apoplexy ever inhibited the dissemination of a provocative or outlandish suggestion? In truth, by sidestepping the discredited production era/sales era elements of the established schema, whilst retaining its inherent trichotomous appeal, and implying, in time-honoured Joachite fashion, that a whole new, qualitatively superior age is impending, such a model could be the answer to textbook writers' prayers. What is more, by failing to specify precise dates for the various eras, it offers enormous scope for further academic debate and publication opportunities, thereby ensuring its successful propagation.
Amusing as it is to contemplate the replacement of the original three era schema with a parodic postmodern version of the same, the very longevity of the production—sales—marketing era paradigm means that it is unlikely to be superseded by a framework that offers little more than a triadic interpretation of historical events. After all, there are any number of tripartite models of marketing periodisation which have failed to set academic imaginations alight (Kotler's three stages of marketing consciousness, Kelly's three ages of marketing ethics, Telow's three eras of mass marketing and so on). It is clear, therefore, that for a model to make a serious impact on the academic marketing mindset, it must be as primordial as the three era schema, only more so. Ideally, such a conceptualisation should not only employ the established trinitary division, but it should also seek to embrace several other symbolically significant numerics, such as twosomes and foursomes. With this objective in mind, it is possible to assemble a 'mother of all marketing models' which postulates a three era schema concerning a dichotomous debate (e.g. art versus science) using a fourfold taxonomic typology (such as the 4Ps).

The pro-science era (1945–83)

Fifty-odd years ago, a pivotal event occurred in the history of marketing scholarship, when Paul D. Converse (1945: 14) alluded to the 'science or art of marketing ... the classified body of knowledge which we call the science of marketing'. Although these were little more than throw-away remarks in a paper primarily devoted to the results of a questionnaire survey of sixty-four marketing researchers, they started a debate which still periodically erupts in the marketing literature and the changing course of which can be divided into three broad eras. The first of these commenced in 1945 with Converse's passing comments, but despite the early salutations of Brown (1948), Alderson and Cox (1948) and Vaile (1949), it didn't really get started until the following decade. In a substantive, closely argued paper, Barretts (1951) assessed the current state of marketing scholarship and the nature of scientific endeavour. He surmised that while there was some evidence of the use of the scientific method in marketing, the discipline's manifest lack of theories, principles and laws meant that it did not yet qualify as a science. With continued, systematic effort, however, marketing could well become a science in the fullness of time.

Barretts' suggestion, coupled with the growing preparedness to speak openly of 'marketing science' (e.g. Cox and Alderson 1950), prompted Hutchinson (1952) into penning a tart rejoinder.

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

(Hutchinson 1952: 287–91)

Notwithstanding Hutchinson's heroic attempt to emasculate marketing's seemingly insatiable 'physics envy', it is fair to say that by the early 1960s the battle had been decisively won by the scientific wannabes. In an era informed by the Ford and Carnegie Reports and the celebrated Two Cultures controversy, the establishment of the Marketing Science Institute in 1962, combined with the AMA's stated aim of advancing the science of marketing and the publication of Buzzell's (1963: 32) famous paean to the scientific worldview ('to be against science is as heretical as to be against motherhood'), ensured that no-one seriously questioned the appropriateness of marketing's aspiration to scientific status. Granted, there was a great deal of discussion about whether the discipline had or had not attained its ultimate objective. For some commentators marketing was already a science or proto-science (Mills 1961; Lee 1965; Robin 1970; Kotler 1972; Ramond 1974). For others, it had either a considerable way to go or was pursuing a pleasant if somewhat utopian day-dream (Borden 1965; Halbert 1965; Kernan 1973; Levy 1976). Nonetheless, as Schwartz (1965: 1) stressed at the time, 'the various expressions of opinion have not revealed anyone who is opposed to the development of a science of marketing'. Indeed, the culmination of the 'debate' occurred in 1976, when Shelby Hunt, in a much-cited, award winning article, evaluated the state of marketing scholarship against the three – naturally! – characteristic features of science (distinct subject matter, underlying uniformities and intersubjectively certifiable research procedures) and found that it passed, or certain aspects of it passed, on all counts. 'The study of the positive dimensions of marketing', he concluded, 'can be appropriately referred to as marketing science.'

In retrospect, therefore, it is apparent that the first phase of the 'art versus science' controversy was characterised by the 4Ps of positivism, penitence, pabulence and positioning. Positivism does not simply refer to the fact that the model of science being pursued by marketers was characterised by universal laws and objective knowledge, but also to the overwhelmingly positive, progressive, optimistic, forward-looking attitudes of the individuals concerned. The attainment of 'scientific' status was generally considered to be A Good Thing, a
worthwhile pursuit, a noble endeavour and, indeed, one that could be attained if it were not for the bad old intuitive, seat-of-the-pants, unscientific attitudes that still too often prevailed and about which prospective marketing scientists were suitably 

tentitive and self-critical. In fact, Newman (1965: 20) went so far as to threaten recalcitrant revolutionaries with 'the pains of hastened obsolescence'. Set against this, it was generally acknowledged that marketing's continuing preoccupation with piecemeal data gathering, rather than theory construction, was attributable to 

pulviscence, the comparative youth of the subject area, the fact that it was only fifty years old and, unlike analogous applied sciences like engineering and medicine, had not progressed beyond the artisitic or craftsman stage of disciplinary development. Yet despite its academic immaturity and predilection for improper procedures, many maintained that marketing was moving in the right direction, had achieved a great deal in a short period of time and, for some enthusiasts at least, already warranted the 'scientific' appellation. Such assertions – and diverse counter-claims – ensured that much time and effort was devoted to positioning, to defining the nature, scope and characteristics of both 'marketing' and 'science' and placing the perceived state of marketing thought against these putative measures of 'scientific' attainment.

The anti-science era (1983–99)

If the first great age of the art–science debate began with a whimper, it ended – and the second era commenced – with an almighty bang. In the fall of 1983, Paul Anderson challenged the fundamental philosophical premises of marketing 'science'. The received view, variously described as 'positivist', 'positivistic' or 'logical empirist' rested on the assumption that a single, external world existed, that this social reality could be empirically measured by independent observers using objective methods, and that it could be explained and predicted through the identification of universal laws or law-like generalisations. Aided and abetted by like-minded revolutionaries, Anderson sought to highlight the shortcomings of this scientific worldview, principally its reliance upon the flawed 'verification theory of meaning', the inadequacies of its falsificationist procedure, the difficulties presented by the inherent theory-ladenness of observation and, nor least, the fact that innumerable attempts to demarcate 'science' from 'non-science' had signally failed to do so (see Peter and Olson 1983; Deshpande 1983; Hirschman 1986).

In these circumstances, Anderson (1983, 1986, 1989) concluded that marketing was ill-served by the traditional positivistic perspective – what he termed science' – and that a relativist approach – dubbed science2 – had much more to offer. This maintained that, although an external world may well exist 'out there', it was impossible to access this world independently of human sensations, perceptions and interpretations. Hence, reality was not objective and external to the observer but socially constructed and given meaning by human actors. What counted as knowledge about this world was relative to different times, contexts and research communities. Relativism held that there were no universal standards for judging knowledge claims, that different research communities constructed different worldviews and that science was a social process where consensus prevailed about the status of knowledge claims, scientific standards and the like, though these were not immutable. Science was as social, in fact, that Peter and Olson (1983), in their ringing endorsement of the relativist position, concluded that science was actually a special case of marketing, that successful scientific theories were those which performed well in the marketplace of ideas thanks to the marketing skills of their proponents.

It almost goes without saying that this eschewal of the orthodox idea of marketing science – as objectively proven knowledge – and its attempted replacement with the notion of science as societal consensus, provoked a ferocious reaction. The foremost defender of the faith, Shelby D. Hunt (1984, 1990, 1992) was particularly scathing about relativism, arguing that its pursuit would not only lead inexorably to nihilism, irrationalism, incoherence and irrelevance, but it also threatened to subvert the past four hundred years of scientific and technological progress (Western Civilisation in Peril – Shock!). Battle was thus joined, and over the next decade or thereabouts the heavyweights of marketing scholarship slugged it out, though it is apparent in retrospect that the revolutionaries triumphed (in so far as marketing scholarship is much less epistemologically and methodologically monolithic than before). At the same time, however, the controversy opened the door for contemporary, postmodern critiques of the western scientific worldview, which are often couched in virulent, not to say apocalyptic, phraseology (Firat et al. 1994; Venkatesh et al. 1993). While postmodernists recognise that western science has provided enormous material benefits, they contend that its promise of perpetual plenitude has been achieved at a very heavy social, environmental and political price. The mass of society may be better off than before, but the division of wealth is as unequal as ever, arguably more unequal. The rise to the west, they argue, has been at the expense of the subjugation, exploitation, usurpation and coca-colonisation of 'the rest'. And, while progress may have been made by some people (white, male, heterosexual, university professors, for instance), and in certain economic-technocratic spheres of activity, the same is not necessarily true for other groups of people – coloured, female, homosexual, the unemployed, etc. – and in non-scientific areas of human endeavour, such as morality or spirituality (Brown 1995b).

Just as the first great era of the art or science debate could be encapsulated in a 4Ps framework, so too the second can be summarised in terms of the 4Ps of philosophy, patern, partition and perplexity. Regardless of one's assessment of the outcome of the Hunt–Anderson contest, there is no question that it was conducted at a high level of philosophical sophistication and that the associated skirmishes on terrain as diverse as 'truth', 'reification', 'realism', 'incommensurability', 'objectivity', 'method' and more besides, forced mainstream marketing academics to consider issues that go to the very heart of scientific
understanding. The caricature – the cartoon version – of science that characterised much of the first phase of the great debate was well and truly buried. No less comprehensively interred, as marketing scholarship descended into extremely acrimonious and highly personalised polemics, was the hitherto prevailing sense of collegiality, of community, of collective endeavour. True, the participants in first era exchanges were quite prepared to disagree over the precise placement of marketing on the art–science continuum, but there was a general consensus about the desirability of the ultimate aim of attaining scientific status. The demise of this sense of overall purpose in the second era resulted in the effective partition of the marketing discipline into embittered and mutually antagonistic factions, variously, often pejoratively, labelled as positivists/post-positivists, realists/relativists, modernists/post-modernists and, not least, practitioners/academics (cf. O'Shaughnessy and Holbrook 1988; Calder and Tybout 1989; Hunt 1994). Hence, the ultimate legacy of this period of internecine warfare appears to be a widespread sense of perplexity and bemusement. By almost any measure, marketing is more 'successful' now than it has ever been, but mounting challenges to its hitherto unimpeachable 'scientific' mission have created an all-pervasive air of uncertainty and a growing preparedness to explore alternative, 'post-scientific' possibilities (Kavanagh 1994).

The non-science era (2000–)

In appropriately Joachimite fashion, the present phase of the great 'marketing – art or science?' debate lies in a degraded transition zone between dispensations two and three. It is characterised by schism, cynicism, ennui and, dare one suggest, pre-millennial unease. The overwhelming optimism of the first great age of marketing science – the sense of progress, of forward movement – has been supplanted by a profoundly pessimistic, some would say nihilistic, worldview where achievements are few, crises many and science no longer offers the prospect of salvation. When we re-read the publications of first generation scientific aspirants, we are not only appalled by their preparedness to hold up the Atom Bomb as an exemplar of scientific achievement (Brown 1948; Mills 1961), but cannot fail to be amused by the naive assumption that, irrespective of its ultimate attainability, western science was an appropriate, unproblematic role model for marketing. By contrast, Anderson's (1994: 14) recent contention that 'the dogged pursuit of the mantle of sciencehood has severely damaged marketing's credibility', is much more in tune with contemporary sentiment – sentiments shared by many academic specialisms (Appleyard 1992; Midgeley 1992). Indeed, even the proponents of marketing science have attempted to step back from their earlier, extravagant expectations or expressed serious doubts about the present, parlous state of affairs (Buzzell 1984; Hunt 1984, 1994).

Although it is impossible to predict the precise nature of the impending third status, Joachimite teachings emphasise three important facts: (1) that the eras are qualitatively different and in most respects an improvement on one another; (2) that the essential character of each succeeding stage is already apparent within its immediate predecessor; and (3) that there is always an element of concordance between the various dispensations. Certainly, when the first two phases of the great art–science debate are examined, these historical lessons appear to hold good. As we have seen, the first age, with its optimistic unilateralism and emphasis on positioning, was superseded by a second era of pessimistic pluralism and sophisticated philosophical argument. Similarly, the characteristic feature of the Second Age – a concern with the type of science considered appropriate for marketing – was alluded to by several first phase commentators some time prior to Hunt's official pronouncement and Anderson's subsequent heresy (Taylor 1965; Robich 1970; Dawson 1971; O'Shaughnessy and Ryan 1979). Both dispensations, moreover, were distinguished by a dialectical tendency, in so far as the emergent ethos was quickly challenged and, as often as not, the challengers succeeded in mustering and articulating the most coherent arguments, even though they failed to carry the day (e.g. Hutchinson in Age One and Hunt in Age Two).

If we accept that Joachimite tendencies are discernible in the art versus science controversy, then the following possibilities suggest themselves for the forthcoming Non-science Era (a.k.a. the Age of the Marketing Spirit). First and foremost, marketers will recognise that the time spent pursuing 'scientific' status is time wasted and that marketing should seek to be designated an 'art'. It seems astonishing that in the entire history of the debate almost no one attempted to make the case for marketing as art. Many people, most notably Hutchinson, maintained that marketing was an art and destined to remain an art, but they did not suggest that marketing should aspire to artistic status. In fact, most discussions of the art of marketing focused on art, as in artisan (i.e. the craft or technology of marketing), rather than art as in aesthetics, art as the very pinnacle of human achievement, art as a quasi-spiritual endeavour.

Second, it is clear that this qualitatively different – and arguably superior – status of marketing scholarship is already discernible within the present Second Age. Thus, several prominent marketing intellectuals have advocated the study of artistic artefacts – books, films, plays, poetry, etc. – and itemised the benefits to be obtained from the liberal arts (humanities) end of the academic spectrum (Belk 1986; Holbrook and Grayson 1986; Holbrook et al. 1989). Other prescient thinkers have espoused an increasingly aesthetic-cum-spiritual orientation (Kavanagh 1994) and, indeed, certain creative individuals have demonstrated, through the use of new literary forms (NFL), that marketing scholarship can be an artistic achievement in itself (Sherry 1993; Holbrook 1995; McDonagh 1995; Smithiee 1996).

Third, and most significantly, the impending aesthetic turn in marketing is likely to inspire a dialectical reaction, where the proponents of marketing science will seek to articulate a cogent defence of their position, or, more likely, move to an increasingly postmodern conception of science (chaos theory,
fuzzy logic, GAIA, etc.). However, whereas the second age was characterised by schismatic tendencies, a seemingly irrevocable split into multifarious warring factions, the non-science Age of the Marketing Spirit will revert to the first great era of mutual tolerance, collegiality, magnanimity and co-operation, and prompt the realisation that there are many forms of marketing knowledge, numerous routes to marketing understanding, both 'artistic' and 'scientific', and that marketing always has been and always will be a very broad church.

Doubtless for some died-in-the-wool marketing fundamentalists, this vision seems less like a non-science era than a nonsense era. If, however, it does come to pass, it can be tentatively prophesied that the following 4Ps will obtain: 

- **Product**: an increased concern with aesthetics and spirituality; 
- **Price**: where there will be a smorgasbord of intellectual choice; 
- **Place**: in so far as the divisions of the past are successfully transcended; and, 
- **Promotion**: wherein a whole new sense of direction is apparent. Marketing paradise, in short, is just around the corner, almost within our grasp, but only if we pray hard enough, pardon our enemies and, last but not least, the lion of marketing science is prepared to lie down with the artistic marketing lamb.

**CONCLUSION**

A complete generation has now passed since Keith (1960) sketched out his celebrated production—sales—marketing eras schema and, while the construct has been criticised on numerous occasions, it remains a permanent fixture in many if not most best-selling marketing textbooks. For some marketing scholars, this is a comparatively trivial matter — a minor introductory-level irritation — even though it can be convincingly argued that textbooks comprise the repository, the shop window, the very epitome of marketing knowledge (see Bartels 1951; Peter and Olson 1983; Gummesson 1993). For others, the mindless recycling of Keith's model is indicative of the innate slothfulness of slapdash textbook writers or, worse, a malevolent attempt to inculcate an entirely false sense of marketing progress (Hollander 1986, 1995). It is equally arguable, of course, that invoking the customary periodising framework performs a simple 'ritual' function, in that it provides an obligatory and easily assimilable nod to the past by proponents of an essentially ahistorical worldview. More to the point perhaps, the three eras schema is predicated upon a primordial, possibly archetypal, human tendency to think in threes. This trinitarian inclination is made manifest in many ways, shapes and forms, but it is exemplified by copious tripartite models of historical development, of which Joachim de Fiore's has proved profoundly influential. While it is a gross exaggeration to suggest that Keith was directly influenced by the Eternal Evangel, his framework unquestionably lies on a clear line of descent from the work of the great twelfth-century apocalyptic.

Given the primeval power of trinitarian thinking, this chapter has contended that the discredited production—sales—marketing eras schema will only be de-

*THE THREE ERAS SCHEMA*

leted from the disciplinary record when it is trumped by a typology that succeeds, in effect, in upping the archetypal ante. To illustrate the point, a 'mother of all marketing models', comprising a three stage explanation of a dichotomous debate employing a quadripartite taxonomy, was postulated. The model deliberately contravenes almost every precept of acceptable marketing scholarship — it is crude, it is speculative, it is historicist, it is factually inaccurate, it is pre-postmodern — but it is premised on the presuppositions that twosomes, threesomes and foursomes possess primordial appeal, that truth is less important than rhetorical dexterity and (Lynxian) performativity, that in these degenerate times the suckers of marketing scholarship can be duped into accepting anything with vaguely utopian overtones, and, above all, that by offending so egregiously against convention, the schema might be condemned out of hand by apologetic marketing academies, thereby ensuring that it is widely discussed, developed and disseminated.

Irrespective of its future demonisation, the mother of all marketing models demonstrates an important point about the Three Eras schema; namely, that this periodising framework has an intellectual history of its own. Indeed, when the trajectory of the conceptualisation is examined, it is clear that the three eras saga can itself be divided into three eras — the Three Eras Production Era, the Three Eras Sales Era and the Three Eras Marketing Era. The Three Eras Production Era commenced with Keith's paper and first generation textbook writers' propagation of the construct to an undiscriminating yet eager marketing audience, one which considered itself in the commercial vanguard but lacked a sophisticated sense of its past. Keith's model, in other words, was the intellectual equivalent of 'you can have any schema you want, as long as it's the three eras schema'. The Three Eras Sales Era involved attempts by marketing historians, like Hollander and Fullerton, to persuade marketing academics of the error of their historicist ways, to highlight the scholarly shortcomings of stage-type models of development and, most importantly of all, to sell their own more historically informed alternatives. Unfortunately, the upshot of these high-pressure sales tactics has been largely negative, in so far as many textbooks appear to have abandoned historical perspectives completely (or, alternatively, added several more stages to the original model). By contrast, the impending Three Eras Marketing Era is premised on a recognition of the fact that people need and want simple, easily remembered, progressivist models of historical development, especially ones predicated on a trinitarian framework with all its archetypal-cum-caballistic power. After all, if we don't believe that we know more than our marketing predecessors, that we have advanced and are going to continue to advance, why do we bother to go on? The production—sales—marketing eras schema may be a complete myth, but, as the above exercise in instant myth-making seeks to show, myths are necessary, myths are important, myths have their place, myths help foster our sense of ourselves, myths are the mother tongue of humankind (Reich 1985).
NOTES

1 Although the three eras schema is usually attributed to Keith, his paper also mentioned a fourth era of ‘marketing control’, albeit in passing. This element of the model has been conveniently forgotten in the ensuing decades of indiscriminate recyling by textbook writers. It would be an interesting philhological task to uncover who was responsible for dropping Keith’s fourth era and when it occurred. Certainly, the ‘classical’ schema was in circulation by the mid-sixties (e.g. King 1965).

2 This exercise was deeply unsound, since it involved examining all the basic marketing and management texts and textbooks on the 1995 AMA Summer Educators’ Conference. Only one drew upon Fullerton’s framework, though the ‘complex flux’ model was not mentioned by name.

REFERENCES

