Writing consumer research: The world according to Belk

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• Writing is a core scholarly competence. Not only is it a skill that every academic must acquire, regardless of their methodological, philosophical or empirical affiliations, but also it is 'a substantial differentiating characteristic of eminent researchers'. This article offers an analysis of the writing style of one of the field's most eminent researchers, Russell W. Belk. It identifies five literary devices that help Belk's writing stand out from the crowd and, while the article does not claim to contain the secret of writing success, it considers the crucial part writing plays in the consumer research process.

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Introduction

Writing is only one among many forms of human communication (Fischer, 2001), but it remains the pre-eminent form in scholarly circles. As Mick (2004, 1) observes, 'writing is the primary mode of communicating scholarship on consumer behavior'. This primacy is apparent almost irrespective of an academic's methodological, philosophical or empirical allegiances and notwithstanding the recent rise of photographic, videographic, stereoscopic and cybernetic modes of representation (Stern, 1998).

Indeed, of all the skills that consumer researchers are required to possess, placing words on a page is perhaps the most elemental.

Yet writing is something that rarely commands the attention of the consumer research community. Granted, the process of putting pen to paper periodically surfaces at academic conferences (Holbrook, 1985, 1986, 1987) and forms the basis of occasional authorial reflections on classic articles (Zaichkowsky, 2002; Schumann, 2003). The pros and cons of poetic representations of consumer research have also been persuasively appraised (Sherry and Schouten, 2002). Literary criticism, moreover, has made remarkable intellectual inroads, although it is normally applied to advertising narratives, brand stories and consumer reportage rather than the professional writings of renowned researchers (Stern, 1989; Scott, 1994). Nevertheless, given the prominent part that writing plays in the creation and sustenance of scholarly reputations, the topic is ripe for further study.

The aim of the present article is to raise writing's profile. It does so, neither by canvassing the opinion of consumer researchers, nor by longitudinal studies of leading learned journals, insightful though such exercises might prove. In keeping rather with literary tradition, which tends to focus on the classic, the canonical, the corpus, the creator, it explicates

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the published work of one of the most singular literary stylists in our discipline, Russell W. Belk. It is an approach that has been applied in many adjoining academic domains, marketing included (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1988; Stern, 1990; McCloskey, 1998). It is an approach that concentrates on literary style rather than empirical content, while recognising that the two can never be completely separated (Yagoda, 2004; Hunt and Sampson, 2006). It is an approach that is positive rather than normative, insofar as it focuses on how consumer research is actually written rather than how it should be written according to 'the rules' of best writing practice (rules, incidentally, which great writers rarely adhere to).

There are of course many other ways in which academic writing can be studied and many other consumer researchers who are worthy of detailed investigation. If, however, we wish to move beyond an osmosis model of writing skills acquisition - the belief that writing somehow takes care of itself - then Russell Belk is an excellent point of departure. Not only is he one of the most distinctive literary stylists in the discipline, but also he has published sufficient solo-authored articles to render the elements of his style readily identifiable. The present paper, therefore, commences with a brief overview of Belk's academic career, continues with a detailed analysis of his signature stylistic devices, and concludes with some suggestions for future research on this hitherto neglected topic. Our aim, it must be stressed, is not to develop a list of dos and don'ts for consumer researchers. It is rather to better understand what Strunk and White (2000, 66) aptly term the 'high mysteries' of style, that which is 'distinguished and distinguishing'.

**Publications and the extended Belk**

Once memorably described as a 'welcome ray of hope' (Wells, 1991, iii), Russell Belk is an eminent, much-admired and widely published consumer researcher. A graduate of the University of Minnesota, his first impactful academic article appeared in 1974 and, in the 33 years since then, he has written more than 300 learned papers and sixteen (mainly edited or co-edited) books. Professor Belk is noteworthy not only for the amount and extent of his oeuvre - approximately 30% of his article output is published in non-business and management journals, everything from Behavioral and Brain Sciences to Journal of European Ethnology - but also for the calibre of his corpus. He has won some 30 scholarly accolades, including the Paul Converse Award, the Sheth Foundation Award and the JCR 1989-1991 Best Paper Award. He is one of the most highly cited researchers in the social sciences and a nine-time member of the AMA Doctoral Consortium Faculty. At least two of his publications, 'Situational Influences' and 'The Sacred and the Profane', are regularly reprinted in 'classic article' anthologies (Kas-sarjian and Robertson, 1991; Enis et al., 1994).

As if that were not enough, he is a past president of the Association for Consumer Research; a visiting professor at seven academic institutions on four continents; and, in recognition of his unstinting scholarly service, he has received numerous 'Best Reviewer' commendations (Belk, 2006).

So vast and variegated is Russell Belk's 'unified vision of the world' (Hirschman, 1985, 231) that it is almost impossible to encapsulate (see Schau, 1998). However, perhaps the most appropriate way of summarising the great academic's output is in terms of the four-stage model of personal development contained in his award-winning article on the 'Extended Self' (Belk, 1988). Applied to Belk's own
oeuvre, the four stages are: (1) distinguishing self from environment by the study of situational influences on consumer behaviour (Belk, 1974, 1975); (2) distinguishing self from others by focussing on 'non-managerial' matters like gift giving (Belk, 1976, 1979), collecting (Belk, 1982), Christmas (Belk, 1987a), comic books (Belk, 1987b) and the manifestations of American materialism generally (Belk, 1985); (3) adolescent/adult identity formation through the landmark Consumer Odyssey project, which completely transformed the methods, discourse, philosophy and direction of the discipline (Belk et al., 1989; Belk, 1991a); and (4) the senior scholar's search for conceptual continuity by encouraging others to pursue the interpretive path to intellectual enlightenment (Belk, 1995a, 1995b, 1997) and by recapitulating his earlier research achievements, albeit in different cultural contexts (e.g. Belk et al., 2003; Belk and Kimura, 2005; Belk and Tian, 2005).

**Ballets Russ**

Fascinating as it is, the reflexive development of Russell Belk's academic career - from experimental studies of dog treats, through denunciation of 'dog food level' research to analyses of eating domestic pets in Asia - is not the most striking component of his prodigious scholarly corpus. More remarkable still is Belk's individual, irrepressible, inimitable literary voice.

Voice, according to Alvarez (2005), is the unmistakable 'sound' or 'sense' of an author. Voice is not the same thing as style, though it is made up of stylistic elements (Yagoda, 2004). Nor is voice a synonym for mannerism, the flowery flourishes that many mistake for literary elan (Hunt and Sampson, 2006). Voice is what happens when stylistic elements - the nuts and bolts of basic writing technique that are acquired through constant practice - cohere into an intonation unlike any other and mannerisms give way to authorial authenticity. 'Finding a voice', the Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney (1980, 40) maintains, 'means that you can get your own feeling into your own words and that your words have the feel of you about them'. Voice is what makes Belk Belk (or Levy Levy or Levitt Levitt, etc.). It is what renders his writing instantly recognisable; so much so that double-blind review is no protection. Like French perfume or fine wine, it is the intangible essence of Belk. It is what a parody of his style would concentrate on.

But, what would a burlesque of Belk's literary voice contain? What, exactly, is the essence of Belk? For the purposes of the present exercise, five key elements can be identified: **prodigality**, **paraphrase**, **peripateticism**, **paronomasia** and **paratext**.

**Prodigality**

The first and by far the most distinctive element of Belk's literary voice is prodigality. The sheer amount of heavily referenced information in his papers is almost overpowering. Sherry (2005), a colleague and co-author, drolly calculates that the bulk of Belk's papers are two-thirds text to one-third citation, but many greatly exceed this ratio and, in an admittedly extreme case, the cites/text balance soars to 60:40 (Belk, 1995a). Indeed, 350-plus references are not unusual in a standard length paper and one typical 8-sentence paragraph yields 208 words and 72 citations, totalling 113 individual authors (Belk and Dholakia, 1996, 3-4). Belk's cites, what is more, tend to be bunched together, as opposed to evenly spread throughout his articles, which means that the flow of the argument is frequently swamped by a tsunami of date-studded surnames:

Nevertheless, postacquisition possessions play a significant part in our lives, symbolizing past experiences (Sherman and Newman 2006, 24); in effect, the unmistakable 'feel' or 'sense' of an author.

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The term 'voice' is used in a variety of ways by literary theorists. As Stern (1998, 9) observes, their arguments are conducted in terminology so arcane and idiosyncratic that opinions are not easily comparable. In the present paper, 'voice' is taken to refer to 'the choice and juxtaposition of words, the rhythms and tone of the language' (Hunt and Sampson, 2006, 24); in effect, the unmistakable 'feel' or 'sense' of an author.
Alongside the cites, the sources are cornucopian. Whereas most publications within consumer research are anchored within a particular academic tradition - marketing, psychology, economics and so on - Belk's papers are noteworthy for the extent of their intellectual palette. The range of his referencing is staggering. Just about every academic discipline is grist to Belk's mill and those he does not refer to are, by implication, not worth referring to. '[T]his article', he characteristically declares (Belk, 1988, 145), 'will...draw upon a broad base of literature from psychology, consumer research, psychoanalytic theory, material and popular culture studies, feminist studies, history, medicine, anthropology and sociology'. As if that were not enough, the same paper further recommends that, 'Future research...would benefit from consulting the additional literatures in Marxism and neoMarxism, critical theory, folklore, political philosophy, environmental psychology, macromarketing, semiotics, impression management and collective memory' (Belk, 1988, 145). With Belk, what is more, it does not stop with distant academic disciplines. Manifold strands of popular culture are ordinarily drawn upon - cinema, comics, cartoons, computer games, comedy routines, et cetera - and woven seamlessly into the expansive narrative.

The abundance does not stop there. Uberty is evident in the total number of publications on Belk's vita; it is apparent in the plethora of topics he has opined upon; it is inscribed in the countless countries and cultures he has studied; it is reinforced by the manifold research methodologies he has employed; it is discernible in his compendious catalogue of collaborators (63, approximately half of whom co-wrote one article only); it is clear in the cavalcade of quotes and excerpts that pepper his papers (the Mormon Trek article (Belk, 1992) contains 86 quoted excerpts, several of which exceed 500 words); it materialises in literature reviews, where he typically contributes additional elements to established typologies or frameworks (e.g. Belk, 1975, 1982, 1984, 1986a); it is found in his fondness for extended synonym strings (no less than 76 synonyms and 61 antonyms for 'cool' are noted, for instance, four of which appear on both inventories); it is manifest in his vision for consumer research, which reaches far beyond mere buying or acquisition ('In addition to purchasing a good or service', he explains (Belk, 1982, 85), 'we can find, create, trade, be given, rent, beg, borrow or steal them'); and, not least, it is articulated in the very organisation of his articles. Belk is particularly partial to lists - extremely long lists on occasion - and not only lists within lists but also lists followed by lists:

The givers may be individuals, families, or organizations (e.g. corporate charitable donations). Recipients may also be individuals, families, or organizations, including organizations such as the Salvation Army which redistribute gifts to other recipients. The gifts may be monetary, purchased products and services (including greeting cards and accompanying wrappings), personally crafted objects, personal services, previously owned products and property, or even body organs and blood. And the situational conditions of gift-giving may differ according to the characteristics of the gift giving occasion, whether the presentation of the gift is public, private, or anonymous, and whether the gift is conveyed...
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directly or contingent upon some event such as the death of the giver or performance of agreed-upon activities by the recipient.

Belk (1979, 96)

Belk’s paragraphs, furthermore, are often huge (1½ to 2 pages is not unknown), as are his sentences (the four sentences in the above excerpt total 12, 21, 31 and 57 words, respectively). His most overused words are: ‘also’, ‘another’, ‘a further’, ‘in addition’ and, inevitably, ‘and’. Consider the short yet and-rich quotes below. It is the conjunctions, perhaps more than anything else, that convey the sheer plenitude of Belk’s writing:

Invented traditions that invoke and draw on a nostalgic and mythical past help convey modern mountain men to a fantastic time and space, representing both escape from everyday reality and a correspondingly unreal experience.

(Belk and Costa, 1998, 219)

Social class is not just a classificatory variable with which to segment the market for clothing and other consumer goods, but is rather a consumption reality, involving wealth and poverty, haves and have nots, hegemonic control, core and periphery, cultures and subcultures, and desires and frustrations.

(Belk, 1995a, 62)

Moreover, modernism involves ordered differences between high and low culture, scientific and everyday knowledge, sacred and profane, public and private, literature and popular fiction, class and mass, art and craft, education and entertainment, and serious and commercial.

(Belk and Bryce, 1993, 277-278)

In his ACR Fellows Speech, interestingly, Belk (1995b) discusses his prodigal, cite-heavy propensity. He attributes it to a straightforward desire to properly credit the sources of his ideas. Commendable though this statement is, it is necessary to appreciate that Belk’s plenitude performs a rhetorical function. The technical term for it is ‘copia’ and ever since Erasmus skilled rhetors have been urged to make full use of copia (Booth, 2004). Copia overpowers. Copia disarms. Copia persuades. In Belk’s case, copia speaks volumes. It implies that the author is widely read - which of course he is but extravagant citation provides incontrovertible ‘proof’ - and communicates the important rhetorical corollary that his contentions are inarguable. Uberty not only helps suspend readers’ disbelief but also it ensures they will overlook any improbabilities or indeed errors in the accompanying argument.³

Copia, clearly, is Belk’s signature scholarly stratagem. It is a literary trick he turns on even the most ‘informal’ occasions. For instance, his ‘top ten’ reading list for the ACR Newsletter, runs to 75 items, plus one for luck, an impressive figure by any reckoning. Impressive figures, in fact, are an integral part of Belk’s plenitudinous prodigality. Although his reputation largely rests on qualitative methods, he repeatedly resorts to the rhetoric of big numbers, especially when discussing research procedures. The methods sections of his papers are replete with gee-whiz statistics which signal the stupendous, near-enough superhuman effort that has gone into the article - years taken, transcript pages, equipment used, informants consulted, data sources synthesised and so on. Belk may not be a number cruncher as such but he uses numerical rhetoric to telling effect.⁴

³In ‘The Sacred and the Profane’ paper, for instance, Belk et al. (1989) contend that the department store does not conform to the classic ‘wheel of retailing’ theory. In the retail management literature, however, department stores are widely believed to be a prime example of low cost retailing institutions that traded up through time, in accord with the wheel theory (McGoldrick, 2002).

⁴Russell Belk, admittedly, is not unique in this regard. Itemising inventories of researcher-acquired data is an integral part of reporting interpretive consumer research. But Belk helped establish this particular rhetorical trait and, although he notes that the quantity of data is no guarantee of quality (Belk et al., 1989), it is also necessary to note the tautological yet rhetorically important point that impressive numbers impress (Boyle, 2000).
The pilot study data consist of 121 single-spaced pages of fieldnotes and journals, 130 still photographs and slides, two hours of videotaped interviews, and an artifact file. The Odyssey data include approximately 800 pages of fieldnotes and journals, 4,000 still photographs and slides, 137 videotapes lasting 15-18 minutes each, about a dozen audio tapes and the artifact file.

Paraphrase

A determined critic of Russell Belk might be inclined to disparage his reference-replete endeavours as recommended reading lists writ large. Some, certainly, smack of the bibliographic database or deep hanging out in dusty library stacks. Such criticisms, however, overlook his single greatest scholarly strength: paraphraseology. That is, his ability to summarise sources. Belk's articles are crammed with artful abbreviations of the works he cites so assiduously. In Belk (1989), for example, he provides potted summaries of ten Christmas comic books including 'Never Trust a Skinny Santa' and 'Oh What Fun to Laugh and Sing a Slaying Song Tonight'. In Belk and Bryce (1993), he encapsulates the complicated plots of two contrasting Yuletide movies, *Miracle on 34th Street* and *Scenes From a Mall*. In Belk (1995b), he abridges - and expurgates - a somewhat chauvinistic Grimm Brothers fairy story, 'The Fisherman and his Wife'. In Belk (2003), he captures the kernel of a popular computer game, *The Sims*, and thereby renders its rationale comprehensible to even the most games-averse reader. In Belk (1986b), he proffers a pitch-perfect précis of an eclectic mix of material on materialism, ranging from the magniloquent novels of Henry James to the mock materialistic song lyrics of Louden Wainwright III ('I've got three guitars, I've got credit cards, I've got more money than you').

Belk's summarising abilities are not confined to abstracting novels, movies, songs or computer games, moreover. He is blessed with an ability to distil the spirit of places like the Coke Museum in Atlanta (Belk and Ger, 1996), a members-only nightclub in Salt Lake City (Belk, 1994), the cultural geography of Romania (Belk and Paun, 1995), a religious theme park in South Carolina (O'Guinn and Belk, 1989) or a Rocky Mountain rendezvous site at dawn:

In the morning, the smell of burning wood mixes with evergreen scents and the earthy smell of damp ground slowly heated by the morning sun. As buckskinnners arise, generally an hour or two after sunrise, they begin preparations for the morning meal. The aromas of sizzling grease and percolating coffee fill the air. Early risers begin to call out to one another, stopping for a chat and a cup of coffee. In these high altitude camps, the morning temperature is crisp, sometimes below freezing. The sound of cracking fires is soon complemented by the sharp retorts of black-powder rifles at the nearby shooting range, and acrid black powder smoke begins to waft across the campsites. As the day proceeds, many gravitate to the hustle and bustle of traders' row, where exuberant greetings of acquaintances from past years are often heard. In the early evenings, smoke rises from the campfires, contributing to a nostalgic ambience and a sense of disjuncture with the modern world that lies somewhere beyond the rendezvous site.

Similarly, he can brilliantly synthesise historical processes such as the evolution of Ancient Roman sumptuary laws or kosodes collecting in Edo Japan (Belk, 1995c). He can explain the workings of a complex CD Rom more lucidly than the instruction manual (Belk, 1998a). He can tap a tiny autobiographical memory and turn it into something that is almost Proustian in its intensity (Belk, 2000a). Above all, he can extract the essence of academic arguments - even the most abstruse academic arguments - and render comprehensible convoluted scholarly constructs or controversies. His snappy summary of the marketing concept, a much debated notion, is clearer than that contained in most introductory marketing textbooks.
(Belk, 1995c, 133). His review chapter in Miller's anthology of cross-disciplinary consumer studies is a cogent compression of 40 years of published consumer research (Belk, 1995a). His abridgements of poststructuralist thinkers, like less-than-limpid Lacan or next-to incomprehensible Deleuze and Guattari, are models of intellectual rectitude (Belk et al., 2000). His encapsulation of Benjamin's celebrated cri de coeur about artworks in an era of 'mechanical reproduction' is a miniature work of art in itself:

He feared a loss of magical aura when art images are separated from their creators. He felt that churning out prints, film copies, and photographs would take something vital from us. He prophesied that it would doom us to a less authentic experience of the sacred when cheap reproductions substitute for the real thing. And he suggested that life itself would become less meaningful under these circumstances.

(Belk, 1996a, 88)

In the pantheon of professorial prowess, paraphrase may seem like a low-level skill. Likewise, lauding someone’s paper filleting-ability smacks of condemnation by faint praise. Russell Belk, however, is no purveyor of intellectual chicken nuggets. Paraphrase is a core scholarly competence. One only has to read the writings of Wroe Alderson, another promethean marketer who drew upon an extensive repertoire of sources, employed heavy citation to impress his readers and was partial to the rhetoric of big numbers, to appreciate the importance of paraphrase (Brown, 2005). Whereas Alderson’s publications are almost unreadable - as Holbrook (2001, 37) accurately observes, 'he couldn't express himself clearly' - Belk's overviews of even the most convoluted sources are remarkably lucid. Summarising a novel like Vathek is not easy (Belk, 1996a), glossing Freud is challenging to say the least (Belk et al., 1991), and capturing the genius loci of Las Vegas is beyond all but the Hunter S. Thompsons of this world (Belk, 2000b). But it is not beyond Russell Belk.

Paraphrase, what is more, is the essence of persuasive interpretive research. Extracting meaningful themes, concepts and/or typologies from a vast array of diverse documentary sources - interview transcripts, video recordings, photographic records, personal logs, consumer collages, member checks, feedback from auditors, interviewees, third parties and so forth - is ultimately an exercise in abstraction, as is the art of choosing an apt quote or telling excerpt to illustrate the point in question. If nothing else, Belk has an unerring eye for evocative excerpts and compelling quotations. As the Einstein of encapsulation, the Copernicus of compression, he even paraphrases his paraphrases. The preliminary study for the Consumer Odyssey, for example, yielded eight initial themes, four of which were extracted for the Red Mesa paper (Belk et al., 1988) and one of which - sacred and profane - formed the basis of arguably the most influential article in the history of interpretive consumer research (Belk et al., 1989).

Interestingly, in a commentary on another landmark article, 'Possessions and the Extended Self', Belk (2002a) summarises his scholarly aesthetic. Far from being a 'putter in' - that is, a writer like James Joyce who adds more and more and more - he sees himself as a 'taker out', an auteur akin to Samuel Beckett who cuts back and back and back. The extended self-paper began life as a full-length book but was boiled down to a single ecumenical article. Or, as Belk (2002a, 14) puts it, 'Perhaps I'm a bit like a stone sculptor who takes away parts that don't resemble the intended subject matter, as opposed to a painter who keeps adding to a work until closure is achieved'. It thus seems that whereas readers tend to see Belk's prodigality - understandably, since his articles are a textual thicket of cites and quotes and synopses - the author sees himself as a chainsaw-wielding lumberjack in the groves of academe.
In the same article, appropriately, Belk (2002a) accounts for this publications pollarding propensity. At the start of his career, the tyro scholar's attempts to develop a bibliographical database were hampered by computer memory limitations. There was no alternative but to be extremely succinct and, once this source-compression pattern was established, he continued it thereafter. If ever there were an academic example of formal constraints encouraging artistic achievement - as in the 17-syllable requirements of haiku, the 5-feet demands of iambic pentameter or the 14-line structure of sonnets - then Belk's 30-pound, dual-floppy-drive Osborne computer performed that function for the aesthetics of Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

Peripateticism

Peripateticism refers to walking about and, when it comes to walking about, Russell Belk's work is a wonder of wandering. Travel, in truth, is his root metaphor. Apart from manifold articles on all manner of places, past and present, from Japan (Belk and Kimura, 2005) and Zimbabwe (Belk, 2000c) to Thailand (Belk et al., 1998), and medieval Europe (Belk, 1995c), Belk spends much of his time on the road. Since the Odyssey of 1986, he has given more than 250 guest lectures worldwide (Belk, 2006). He also expounds at length on the perennial theme 'travel broadens the mind' (Belk, 1987c, 1997). So comprehensive are his lists of travelling thought leaders - Homer, Herodotus, Gilgamesh, Gulliver, Hansel and Gretel, Little Red Riding Hood, etc. - that it is easy to forget Albert Camus' contention concerning the homing-bird benefits of motionlessness. Discussing Nietzsche, Camus famously remarked, 'it proves you have a life of wildest adventure without ever leaving your desk' (quoted in Alvarez, 2005, 111). Belk would surely beg to differ.

To be sure, Russell Belk does not just travel physically, or comment authoritatively on the perils and problems of international tourism (Belk and Costa, 1995), he travels intellectually as well. He scouts the hinterlands of scholarship, like the mountain men of yesteryear, trapping ideas, postulates and analogous conceptual creatures for the consumer researchers back home. More pertinently perhaps, his articles themselves are peripatetic. They transport the reader. They take us to places we might not otherwise visit. The Thomas Cook of consumer research, he proffers package tours of pedagogic attractions and provides his patrons with potted summaries - Belkian Baedekers - of the professional panoramas en route:

The sacred world of Heritage Village is clearly separated from the profane by its physical layout. After entrance through a gate, the visitor drives past a large wooden sign welcoming visitors and a welcome center, then passes through several miles of hardwood forest flanked by mown grass, flowers and a split rail fence, past the real estate center, several housing and time share condominium developments, a reconstruction of the childhood home of Billy Graham (more sacred contamination), to the center of the complex: the 504-room, four-story Heritage Grand Hotel; the 25-store, Victorian-motif main Street Heritage USA shopping mall; and the entrance to Heritage Island, the water-focused amusement park. There are large parking lots here, and a uniforms doorman with white gloves and pompomed hat greets those who drive to the hotel entrance.

(O'Guinn and Belk, 1989, 230)

In this regard, it is noteworthy that the basic structure of Belk's articles is cyclical rather than linear. Unlike the bulk of published articles in the social sciences, which follow the standard trajectory of introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, conclusion, Belk's articles not only break with the linear norm but also loop back on themselves. They frequently start with findings, or an opening vignette from an informant, or a discussion of methods. The literature review or historical background often appears
quite late and may be revisited several times for good measure. The narrative is repeatedly put on hold, prior to a scholarly digression-cum-return to the point of departure, as in the oft-deferred discussion of Freud's phallic statues (Belk et al., 1991). The introductory remarks, furthermore, are often reprised at the very end, thereby giving the piece a satisfyingly circular shape. The opening words of the Mormon Trek paper are 'we move those possessions that are most apt to move us', as are its closing words (Belk, 1992). The epigraph from A Streetcar Named Desire, 'I don’t want realism, I want magic', reappears at the end of his chapter on insatiable consumer desire (Belk et al., 2000). 'Against 'Thinking' commences with an excursus on the state of social psychology and concludes with another direct inter-disciplinary comparison (Belk, 1984). The Shakespearean sonnet at the start of 'Possessions and the Sense of Past' is recapitulated when the paper reaches its poetic climax (Belk, 1991b). As the legendary literary critic Richards (2001, 127) memorably opined about poetry’s effects on the reader, ‘We shall never understand metre so long as we...fail to realize that the pattern itself is a vast cyclic agitation spreading all over the body, a tide of excitement pouring through the channels of the mind’.

This tendency is also evident stylistically. One of the most striking things about Belk’s voice is that it operates in two separate registers. Many articles begin and end on a lyrical or off-beat note (e.g. Belk, 1987d, 1996b, 2000b), but the intervening material is often written in by-the-numbers boilerplate. True, this two-tone tendency articulates Belk’s (1986b) distinction between ‘propositional’ and ‘experiential’ knowledge - though some might consider them his sacred and profane styles - but the important point is that the top and tail of Belk’s articles are ordinarily written in similar tones of voice, which unfailingly induces a there-and-back-again sensation in the reader.

This to-ing and fro-ing is no less apparent at the expositional level. Again and again, Belk’s arguments are couched in an on-the-one-hand/on-the-other-hand manner. True, he rarely uses the terms one hand/other hand, since he prefers constructions involving ‘although’, ‘another’, ‘while’, ‘whereas’, ‘some’, ‘others’, as in the following instance:

Advertising’s critics have generally held that advertising shapes our way of life (e.g. Berger et al., 1972; Peterson 1983), while advertising’s defenders have argued that advertising merely echoes existing patterns (e.g. Brown 1981; Peterson 1975). Others have concluded that advertising both molds and reflects life (e.g. Kuhns 1970; Williamson 1978). This is a significant but largely unresolvable debate.

(Belk and Pollay, 1985, 888)

Similarly, Belk’s articles are characterised by even-handedness, the fact that he invariably presents both sides of an argument. Materialism, he contends, is widely regarded as a bad thing. But it has redemptive aspects. Materialism, therefore, is both good and bad (Belk, 1985). He makes much the same both/and case about collecting, possessions, globalisation, gift giving, consumer desire, cool consumption, artistic and scientific approaches to scholarship and just about everything he investigates. Some may see this as sitting on the fence - or simply good academic practice - but rhetorically it is very astute. As Thouless (1963, 45) explains in Straight and Crooked Thinking, his renowned inventory of 38 persuasive arguments, ‘Lastly, there is...the device of presenting one’s own view as the mean between two extremes. We all love a compromise, and when someone recommends a position to us as an intermediate one between two extreme positions, we feel a strong tendency to accept it’.

Nowhere is this astuteness better illustrated than in the ‘Sacred and Profane’ paper, which was very divisive in its day, practically the apotheosis of ‘weird science’ (Belk et al., 1989). At one point in the article, the authors quote an auditor’s criticism of their excessively rigorous approach, the fact that they had gone to such great lengths to render their qualitative results robust, scientific and therefore
acceptable to mainstream, positivistically inclined consumer researchers. The positivistically minded mainstream, however, would likely regard the auditor's 'extreme' position as completely unacceptable, not so much off-the-wall as beyond the pale. By thus insinuating that there is even weirder stuff out there and that the Consumer Odyssey is in fact really quite mild methodologically - compared to what it could have been - Belk et al. (1989) brilliantly seize the middle ground in the discursive space they have constructed.

Belk's writing style, in sum, is inherently dialectical, as are the interpenetrating themes that striate his findings (male/female, sacred/profane, local/global, core/periphery, past/present). The dialectic, to be sure, is itself peripatetic, insofar as the word peripatetic actually means 'a follower of Aristotle', who developed the dialectic method of philosophising as he walked around the ancient Greek agora. Be that as it may, Russell Belk's prose pulses to the syncopated rhythm of the dialectic.

That said, Belk often ends his articles on a curiously downbeat note. The findings are frequently presented as 'tentative' or 'preliminary' or 'partial' or 'superficial' or 'speculative' or 'suggestive' or 'skeletal' or as 'one small step' or in conjunction with repeated use of a qualifying word like 'perhaps', 'may' or 'might'. If ever a work warranted immodesty, that work is Highways and Buyways. Yet it ends as follows:

> There is a broad unexplored world of consumption waiting to be investigated and I hope that the Odyssey has in a small way helped us to be better prepared for this greater journey.

*(Belk, 1991c, 238)*

Such restrained discursive devices are admittedly integral to the modest rhetorical demeanour demanded of serious scholars - only the most megalomaniacal describe their own findings as revolutionary or pathbreaking - but there is nevertheless a disjunction here between the overstatement of Belk's citation-strewn case and the understatement of his conclusions. Rhetorically speaking, however, this overstatement/understatement dialectic is a masterclass in persuasion, since the unassuming conclusions encourage readers to assume much, much more. They buy an argument that they might otherwise resist had it been couched in hyperbolic rhetoric. Intellectually, it is the equivalent of the suit salesperson showing the expensive item first, followed by the cheaper alternative, knowing full well that customers are psychologically primed to purchase the former (Cialdini, 2001). The fact that Belk once worked as a suit salesman is certainly suggestive in this regard.

**Paronomasia**

Paronomasia is the standard literary term for puns and similar forms of wordplay (Abrams, 1993). Russell W. Belk is a punster par excellence. The titles of his papers, to say nothing of associated section titles, betray his paronomasiac propensity. Many are either outright puns, or wry allusions to popular culture, or both. 'May the Farce Be With You', 'Can't Buy Me Love', 'Ella's Elephant and Three Blind White Guys', 'Do Not Go Gently Into That Good Night', 'Yes We Have No Theory', 'Where Have All the Flowers Gone?', 'Santa Claus is Coming to Town', 'Seen From a Mall', 'Once in a Lifetime', 'Living in a Material World', 'In the Arms of the Overcoat', 'Remembrance of Things Past', 'Three Coins in Caesar's Palace Fountain', 'The Missing Streetcar Named Desire', 'Out of Sight and Out of Our Minds' and, perhaps most famously, *Highways and Buyways*, are testament to Belk's relentlessly allusive inclinations. Indeed, perhaps the single most important literary artefact in his entire academic career, the letter he circulated prior to the putative Odyssey project, contains a play on words in its opening sentence: 'May I bounce an off-the-wall idea off you?' (Belk, 1991a, 1).

To be sure, paronomasiac allusions are not Belk's only stylistic mannerisms. In addition to periphrasis (where he pauses the argument to...
digress and return), meiosis (calculated understatement) and polysyndeton (repeated use of conjunctions). Belk is particularly partial to alliteration ('the broken battered and bruised, the dirty, dying debris, the whimsical, wistful and wonderful stuff that we accumulate in life'), equivocation (a single word or phrase, like 'moving possessions', with two disparate meanings), diacope (the repetition of a word with one or two words in between such as 'the desire to desire', 'how prolonged is prolonged?', 'the overflow area overflowed', 'stuffing them with stuff') and good old-fashioned wordplay ('the bane of abundance', 'Indianness is Indianless', 'Las Vegas swinger swagger', 'the fire of desire', 'possessions possess us'). In fairness, his paronomasial repertoire is much less extravagent than that of many stylistically conspicuous scholars in marketing and consumer research (Morris Holbrook, John Sherry and Ted Levitt, for example). Most of Belk's prose is flat and factual; understandably so, since the cornucopian cascades of citations and sources would be almost unreadable if the linking text were a turbulent torrent. Set against this, Belk is cognisant that long lists soon become tedious. Hence, he unfailingly salts them with quirky or transgressive factlets which capture the reader's attention. Consider the following, far from atypical inventories. In the first, the rhetorical eye-catcher is 'brothels', and in the second, 'dinosaur excrement' is Russell's Believ-e-It-or-Not item:

Data collection sites and occasions might include high-end department stores, low-end discount stores, new and used auto dealerships, garage sales, flea markets, auctions, Salvation Army stores, tourist attractions, real estate inspections, supermarkets, motels, fast food and four-star restaurants, backyard barbecues, picnics, weddings, brothels, country clubs, bars, dance halls, pet stores, pet shows, the Metropolitan Opera, rock concerts, etc, etc.

(Belk, 1991a, 1)

The U.S. Smithsonian Institution, for example, in 1982 had 100,000 bats, 2,300 spark plugs, 24,797 woodpeckers, 82,615 fleas, 12,000 Arctic fishing tools, 14,300 sea sponges, 6,012 animal pelts, 2,587 musical instruments, and 10 specimens of dinosaur excrement in its warehouses.

(Belk, 1995c, 147)

Wordplay aside, playfulness is the key word here. Belk's punning prose bespeaks fun, irreverence and impudent usurpation of 'scientific' scholarly norms. From his academic excursus on comic books (Belk, 1987b), through his happy thoughts on weird science and what consumer research wants to be when it grows up (Belk, 1986a, 1987e), to his latter-day reflections on The Sims computer game (Belk, 2003), he has repeatedly stressed the importance of a playful, transgressive, irreverent scholarly attitude ('It is essential', he proclaims (Belk, 1997, 29), 'that the creative scholar engage a playful liminal spirit rather than a deadly serious quest for knowledge'). Hence the witty quips he interjects from time to time ('consumer behavior examples include giving or denying treats to our pets, children, students and other small animals over whom we exercise authority') or the mock disclaimer in 'A Modest Proposal', where he dryly denies any financial involvement in roboconsumer:

A number of authors (e.g. Cook 1981; Levin 1972) have envisioned android-like human computers before; Pohl (1983) has described the necessity for robot consumers. But to the best of my knowledge, I am the first to recognize the potential for computerizing consumers. However, lest this be construed as self-interested recommendation, it can be verified that I have no direct or indirect financial interest in either silicon or bionic technology, nor do I stand to benefit in any way from the implementation of this proposal.

(Belk, 1987d, 369)
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Belk's stylistic form, in other words, reflects the scholarly content of his articles. Serious play is not only the mark of a successful collector (Belk et al., 1991), but also the secret of successful scholarship. There is, nonetheless, a noteworthy exception to this form/content congruence. And that concerns metaphor. Belk frequently sermonises on the importance of metaphorical thinking and the part it plays in intellectual creativity. He also discusses the metaphors employed by his informants, such as the 'family' trope found at Red Mesa (Belk et al., 1988), and interrogates certain conceits in detail, as in the case of the 'balance' metaphor that shapes gift giving (Belk, 1976, 1979). Yet the pelf of Belk's prose is bereft of metaphorical heft. As a rule, he does not write metaphorically and when he does the metaphors can be maladroit or mishandled. Even the seminal sacred and profane paper makes its mark by treating the 'sacred' metaphor literally (i.e. he contends that consumption really is sacred).

These figurative failings, it must be stressed, are far from fatal and in fact help humanise his seemingly superhuman research endeavours. But they remain significant insofar as Belk's literal claim to fame, the extended self - a concept he specifically terms 'metaphorical' (Belk, 2005) - is not a metaphor, as such. It is a striking image, to be sure, but it is not a metaphor. Had he compared the self to, say, an onion or geological layers or even an elastic band, the construct would qualify as a metaphor. As it stands, however, the extended self is more like a metonym than a metaphor, whereby the word 'self' is taken to refer to something beyond itself, as it were (though strictly speaking it is a form of prosopopeia, personifying what is ordinarily regarded as impersonal or inanimate).

A metaphor-maker he may not be, but metonymy and the related trope synecdoche are central to Russell Belk's modus operandi. The part repeatedly stands for the whole, as when he talks about 'Cratchit-like' and 'Scrooge-like' views of Christmas (Belk, 1989). In keeping with William Blake's injunction concerning the world in a grain of sand, Belk unfailingly finds the universal in the particular (Belk, 1998b). His most overused conjunction is 'for instance', closely followed by 'for example'. These instances and examples, of which there are many in a typical Belk paper, are mentally extrapolated to universal verities by readers, even though the numbers involved may be small. His overview of collecting in eighteenth-century France, for instance, is based on a 'sample' of three, but the impression conveyed is of comprehensiveness, plenitude, satiety. The same is true of almost all of his papers, as it is of the interpretive research tradition generally, which Belk did so much to inaugurate (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

Russell Belk's method, in effect, is best described as 'academic Gnostic', where the macrocosm is in the microcosm and vice versa (as for example when he expands single words like 'luxury', 'Yuppie', 'desire' or 'cool' into encyclopaedic scholarly articles or where the three vignettes at the start of the 'Sacred and Profane' paper serve as mini-metonyms for all of the Odyssey informants).

Paratext

Russell Belk not only 'sounds' different from other consumer researchers, given the prodigious, paraphrased, peripatetic, paronomasiac tone of his literary voice, but also 'looks' different. His articles are punctuated with
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parentheses, littered with lists, riddled with references, full of footnotes, affixed with appendices, peppered with photographs and engorged with endnotes, epigraphs, excerpts, etc. They are festooned, in other words, with what French literary theorists call 'paratexts' (Genette, 1997). Paratexts are ancillary appendages that dangle from the body of a text. In the case of books, they include dedications, titles, copyright pages, authorial commentary, endpapers, back cover blurbs, dustjacket flap copy and so forth, whereas in academic articles the paratextual add-ons ordinarily comprise abstracts, acknowledgements, institutional affiliations, figures, photographs, bibliographies and suchlike.

To be sure, Belk's paratextual proclivities are hardly unique. The vast majority of interpretive research articles are swaddled in paratexts. However, it was Belk who helped create the paratext-garlanded template that dominates the shape of Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). And just as collecting is the quintessence of consumption (Belk, 1995c), so too his articles are quintessential exemplars of the paratextual form. The references are fuller. The appendices are longer. The quoted excerpts are more abundant. The epigraphs are extra eclectic, everything from nursery rhymes to Bonnie Raitt lyrics. It is arguable indeed that Belk's research agenda is congenitally paratextual. That is to say, the phenomena he investigates and the sources he employs are paratexts in and of themselves. For many conventionally minded consumer researchers, the legitimacy of comic books, Playboy cartoons, fairy tales, slasher movies or computer games is questionable at best or on the very periphery of scholarly respectability at worst (i.e. they are appended to the body of the field). Analogously, it can be contended that Belk's intellectual preoccupations - materialism, collecting, the extended self - are paratexts by another name. The collections attached to collectors, the possessions that adhere to consumers and articulate their identities, the extended self with its interpersonal appurtenances like family members, domestic pets and memento mori are, if not quite paratexts, certainly para-paratexts.

Belk's literary corpus has become increasingly paratextual through time, moreover. Photography and videography in particular have loomed ever larger in his research output. Not only has he produced numerous videographies - 21 at the last count - but also he co-founded the ACR Film Festival, co-edited several videographic issues of a prominent consumer research journal and, not least, published a number of pieces that make the case for photography, video and visual modes of representation per se (Belk, 1998a, 2001; Belk and Kozinets, 2005). His career overview commentary in the Journal of Marketing, for example, was largely devoted to the need to take visual paratexts seriously: 'We need to gain critical visual literacy and become more actively involved in both scrutinising images we take and in creating images we make for others to use' (Belk, 2002b, 123).

Stylistically too, Russell Belk's prose is strikingly cinematic on occasion. His description of the ceremony at the start of the Mountain Man paper (Belk and Costa, 1998) is more visual in certain respects than many of his videographies, which often lack the élan vital that his best writing exhibits. His account of the priapic Halloween party in Salt Lake City is no less vivid (Belk, 1994), as is the delineation of the Las Vegas Strip (Belk, 2000b), as are his wonderful descriptions of wonder-cabinets (Belk, 1995c), as is his compelling evocation of entering Heritage Village, quoted earlier. The very structure of his paragraphs is not unlike a movie storyboard: establishing shot, close up, two shot, long shot, et cetera. Indeed, if Belk's 'art' had to be categorised, the obvious comparison would not be with novelists like Max Barry (2003), whose gimmick in Jennifer Government - characters named after brands was deftly anticipated in Belk's (1996b) 'hyperreality' paper (see below), but rather with Steven Spielberg or, better yet, the French Impressionists. Like the pointillist Georges Seurat, Belk's oeuvre consists of carefully placed spots of scholarship which illuminate
specific consumption situations: Christmas, Swap Meets, Heritage Village, Gay Pride Parade, the Coke Museum and, naturally, the famous 'situational effects' that launched his academic career.

The crucial question, of course, is how does he achieve these artistic effects? Three literary devices are particularly noteworthy. Whereas most marketing and consumer researchers are inclined to employ the past tense when presenting their results, their research programs and, especially, their literature reviews - so and so said such and such, our sample was made up of, we conducted an experiment, etc. - Russell Belk almost always writes in the present tense. Even historical information is presented as if it were hot off the presses, as in the following discussion of the sumptuary laws that prevailed in pre-consumer society:

One imperfect but useful index of the change from a rigid aristocratic society to a more democratic mass-consumption society is the sumptuary laws that often emerge during the transition period. These laws attempt to stem the changes taking place in consumption through legislation restricting luxuries, either by outlawing them or restricting them to certain ranks of society. Appadurai (1986) notes that such laws are common both when the status quo is threatened from within by developments such as capitalism, and when it is threatened from without as with a rapid influx of foreign goods. Miller (1987, pp 135–136) observes that when rigid social hierarchies begin to break down, sumptuary laws are an attempt to keep goods as signs of status rather than allowing them to become directly constitutive of such social status. However, sometime sumptuary laws have been enacted as reactions against consumption extravagance in general rather than being aimed at parvenus.

(Abelk, 1995c, 5)

The principal effect of this aesthetic decision is that it gives Belk's writing an immediacy that other publications lack. It also, so to speak, reduces the depth of textual field insofar as the entire article takes place on a single flat plane, what postmodern literary theorist Fredric Jameson (1991) terms the 'perpetual present'. The entire article unfolds in the here and now and the result is closer to a scholarly collage than an historical chronicle. This is what gives Belk's best writing, as in the Red Mesa, Mountain Men or Las Vegas articles, a slightly hyperreal, almost hallucinogenic, quality. He not only writes about hyperreal worlds apart, but also his articles are hyperreal worlds apart:

Archaeologist Gucci Toyota Rolex, a recent graduate of Ralph Lauren University (once Karl Marx University) in Budapest, sits in his IBM sensorium seeking clues that will help him understand the obscure origins of major World holidays. He believes that some of these holidays, including Coke Day, Elvis Day, Saint Johnnie Walker Day, the Day of the Levi's, Sony Feel-Man Day, and the Feast of the Seven-Eleven, may have originated almost a millennium ago in the 20th or 21st century. But the evidence is far from clear. No major catastrophe or war has obliterated the relevant data. In fact, the period since the likely origin of these holidays is now known as Pax McDonald's, due to the extended period of World peace that was ushered in after McDonald's first entered what were then known as China, the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe. This signaled the peaceful global conquest by Saint Ronald McDonald, at a time when McDonald's sold only food products and the people of the world spoke a variety of languages.

(Belk, 1996b, 23)

A second, closely related technique is what neoAristotelian literary critic Wayne Booth (1983) calls 'showing and telling'. It is a truism of creative writing that aspiring authors should 'show' rather than 'tell'. That is, they should allow characters to reveal themselves by talking and acting naturally instead of attempting to explain their motives by means of authorial interventions. According to Henry
James, the foremost exponent of showing - and an important influence on Belk's thinking - authors should strive to remove themselves from the fictional text completely. Academic articles, admittedly, are predisposed towards telling, since the basic aim is to describe, interpret and explain, but Russell Belk prefers to let his informants or sources do the talking. The agapic love paper, for example, is essentially an integrated string of 102 separate quotations (Belk and Coon, 1993). The Mormon Trek piece weaves together huge extracts from paratextual source material such as diaries, journals, migration accounts and suchlike (Belk, 1992). The 'Possessions and a Sense of Past' essay integrates lengthy excerpts from academic sources, empirical datasets and diverse cultural forms (Belk, 1991b). This is not to say Belk never tells. Many of his articles are extended exercises in telling (Belk and Paun (1995) is a typical example), but whenever an opportunity to show arises Belk seizes it or makes the case for it:

The heavy authorial voice of a video using a voice-over soundtrack to tell the audience what everything depicted is, and what it means, is indeed a closed text. But the video that lets the voice of the informants speak for itself is far more open.

(Belk, 1998a, 332)

The third factor, again closely related, is that these 'opportunities to show' are often confined to the introductions and conclusions of his papers. The top and tail effect, referred to earlier, is an example of how Belk draws his readers into the article - a world apart - and does the same again at the end before returning readers to scholarly reality. The top and tail are authorial paratexts. As Genette (1997) adroitly explains, paratexts are literary transition zones (he compares them to the vestibule of a building or an airlock between two unequally pressurised environments). Textually, they perform a liminoid function (Turner, 1969). They are betwixt and between, neither one thing nor the other, on the margins of the text. In fact, if Russell Belk's entire literary project had to be summarised in a single word, that word would probably be liminology (Sherry, 2005). Not only is Victor Turner one of his most frequently cited sources, his entire career has been spent traversing the liminal, whether it be Halloween celebrations, or the Australian Outback, or collectors of airline sick bags, or edgy research methods on the outskirts of academic respectability, or indeed articulating an anti-managerial agenda from the bowels of the business school. Russell W. Belk is a scholarly shaman, an academic medicine man situated between the sacred and the profane. His papers are the peyote of consumer research.

Belk to the future

A peyote-peddler he may be, but Belk is only one of many fine writers in marketing and consumer research. As Mick (2004) observes, our field is blessed with numerous notable stylists. In addition to Russell Belk, he names John Deighton, Morris Holbrook, Chris Janiszewski, Grant McCracken, Marsha Richins, Deborah Roeder-John, Linda Scott and Itamar Simonson, though other commentators might include John Sherry, Elizabeth Hirschman, Eric Arnould, Craig Thompson, Dennis Rook, Douglas Holt or indeed David Mick himself. There is ample scope, in other words, for further study of scholarly writing styles. Writing is of paramount importance to each and every consumer researcher - not only in relation to personal career progression but also in terms of communicating our findings to various scholarly stakeholders - and, therefore, it is something that warrants further study. As Stern (1989) shows, literary criticism is replete with concepts, approaches and theoretical perspectives that have often been applied to 'texts' like advertisements or brands or interview transcripts, yet are no less applicable to the words on the pages of our leading learned organs. A reader-response interpretation of the writings of, say, Sidney Levy or Paul Lazarsfeld or Linda Scott or Barbara Stern might be...
exceptionally insightful - i.e. how do consumers consume consumer research? - as might empirical studies of scholarly writing regimes, behaviours and beliefs. True, we need to be wary of such sources of information, since authors are notoriously poor judges of their own writing (Brown, 2005). If, however, we wish to improve our writing skills and better understand the sometimes painful yet enormously important process of placing impressive words on the page, then dissecting the corpuses of leading consumer researchers, like Russell Belk, is a useful place to start.

Some, of course, might retort that such an agenda not only ignores social structures, linguistic constraints and environmental influences on scholarly production, but also smacks of the discredited 'great man' hypothesis, a nineteenth-century notion that individual agency rather than power/knowledge relationships is integral to the 'author function'. Academics of a poststructuralist persuasion are especially resistant to this agentic idea, having loudly announced the 'death of the author'. Hix (1990), however, shows that the author is singularly reluctant to remain interred. The passion for poststructuralist theorising has passed in literary criticism - the death of the author thesis is dead - and, if anything, recent years have been characterised by a revival of biographical approaches (Brown, 2005). The great man might not be back, but the great author is. Consequently, consumer researchers with an interest in writing are not obliged to follow the old-fashioned precepts of poststructuralist literary theorists. Individual authors are a legitimate subject for study, not least because 'writing up' is a challenge that faces every single academic, a challenge that cannot be circumvented or gainsaid or dismissed with a wave of the poststructuralist wand.

To be sure, none of this means that slick writing is a substitute for solid scholarship, careful research, insightful theorising or, indeed, addressing an issue that is relevant to the consumer research community, broadly defined. Despite postmodernist claims to the contrary, style is not as important as content. Style, nevertheless, is not unimportant. Content is insufficient in itself. Content without style is tedious at best and unreadable at worst. Good writing can do wonders for even the most mediocre research. It ensures that readers read on rather than switch off. Unread research serves no useful purpose. Writing readable research is something every scholar should aspire to and Russell W. Belk shows us the way.

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