MAKING A DRAMA OUT OF A CRISIS

The final curtain for the marketing concept

Pierre McDonagh and Andrea Prothero

INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with a short play depicting, amongst other things, the demise of the marketing academy and its subsequent, more eclectic revival. The play’s main message is further explored by examining the academy’s forerunner of marketing knowledge development, the marketing concept. A play was chosen as the main means of communicating our message first, and foremost, as a result of the authors’ (the first author in particular) boredom with conventional academic marketing papers. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly as an attempt to move away from yet another ‘scientific’ paper in marketing. The literature already shows the reliance upon the scientific method in marketing (Brown 1995b, Wright and Pickton 1995, Anderson 1994, etc.) and as this work considers issues, for example marcomarketing, which cannot be examined scientifically (Tambiah 1992), then a scientific treatment was obviously not the way forward for us. This said the authors are not aiming to partake in the Hunt versus Anderson debate (see Kavanagh 1994) but simply see their artistic New Literary Form (Brown 1995b) as the most suitable for this chapter. Thus this work should be judged on the basis of its literary and aesthetic value rather than on its functional utility or methodological rigour (Kavanagh 1994). As Brown (1995b) stresses,

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.

(p. 310)

The second aim of this work is to highlight why we believe it is finally time for the marketing academy to allow the final curtain for the marketing concept to be ceremoniously drawn and permit the academy to move forward in its research efforts. As this chapter highlights there are too many add-ons and extensions to the marketing concept, and we do not wish to contribute yet another addition. More meaningful concepts are called for.

PROLOGUE TO THE PLAY

This short play is written in the tradition of a Greek Tragedy. It revolves around the day-to-day happenings in a night-club called The Metropolis, based in a small village called Banbridge, located somewhere in the Northern Hemisphere of the marketing academy. Clearly, in reverence of tradition, it has to be inferred that the characters are fictitious and any resemblance to persons alive or dead is coincidental. Suffice it to say that, in reality, one of the authors grew up some twenty-two miles away from a town with the same name and a very well-known night-club.

The Metropolis is analogous to the present day fortress marketing of our academy, based in a dilapidated building, need of internal renovation and externally of a new coat of paint. Its bar, stage area and dance floor, the disco inferno, were once the club of Northern youth activity. But many of the locals have now stopped ‘strutting their stuff’ on a Friday and Saturday night down at The Metropolis in favour of new haunts. The 1970s neon sign still flashes sporadically over the main hacienda-like entrance of white marble pillars headed by crafted golden eagles, weathered by the unknown lashings from the north westerly wind common in the region.

The Oracle, or Big O as the locals call him, is the owner of The Metropolis and the fount of all knowledge about entertainment in the area. Many say he’s an entertainment, the maestro, certainly his sidekick and resident DJ, DISKET, reveres this man’s view of the business world, not to mention his religious choice of the nightly Top 40 records to be played. These people are representatives of the guardians of the marketing faith, the professorial literati.

The Princess, an American-born in Nashville of European extract, is Big O’s star attraction, known for her purist renditions of classic songs. She is a close personification of marketing knowledge which is currently referred to as muzak. Her stage name, given by Big O, is MOTHERLAND and she has a backing group called the oracles who have been chosen for their similarity of appearance, albeit deliberately flawed, to the Princess. At the time of writing the Princess is being held very much against her will in The Metropolis. Bored and forced to sing songs that she is tired of, she is declining in health and is very, very irritable.

The Bourgeois Stocky, Aching and Watery patrol the entrance to The Metropolis with the prowess of Welsh serenaders, who have seen better glory days. They are akin to the majority of the reviewers of marketing knowledge creation. Elsewhere, a well-travelled FROG roams the Northern hemisphere, previously a glamorous PRINCE fallen on hard times. P can be whoever or whatever you want him to be.
IN THE BEGINNING – THE MARKETING ACADEMY CREATED THE MARKETING CONCEPT

The marketing concept was first discussed in the 1940s and 1950s (Barksdale and Darden 1971; Bell and Emory 1971; Converse and Huguey 1946). According to Barksdale and Darden (1971), the first business to adopt its core principles was the American corporation General Electric. It was developed (Bell and Emory 1971: 38) in order to ‘operationalise a basic philosophy of marketing held by economists and marketing theorists’, stemming from the eighteenth century (Dixon 1992). Over time it has been affirmed as the ‘optimal marketing management philosophy’ (Houston 1986: 81), and one of the most accepted general paradigms of the discipline (Day and Wensley 1983) where,

The marketing concept has not only provided the foundation for the methodology and organization of marketing it is also the raison d’être in the Western world.

(Arndt 1977, in Elliott 1990: 20)

Thus the development of marketing theory within the marketing academy has:

tended to focus on operational problems relating to customer decision making within the confines of the marketing concept.

(Day and Wensley 1983: 88)

Whilst the concept itself has been defined in different ways (Lichtenenthal and Wilson 1992) its basic elements centre on three broad principles (Barksdale and Darden 1971; Bell and Emory 1971; Hollander 1986): first, the concept sees an orientation to the needs and wants of the consumer as the core element of business activity; second, profit is the main evaluation criterion; and, third, the successful use of the concept requires an integrated effort within the organisation.

THE DEMISE OF THE MOVING STATUE

Despite the profound glorification which the concept has enjoyed in the marketing literature in the past fifty or so years, it has been subject to criticism from various quarters, from as long ago as 1971 (Bell and Emory 1971). Indeed, criticisms have tended to focus on the same issues (Brown 1995a). As Dixon (1992) reminds us, the ideas addressed are old ones and discussed at the expense of more important issues. Table 3.1 provides a summary of relevant areas which help explain the slow, painful but necessary demise of the concept. This has occurred in broad daylight, albeit unnoticed by many modern marketing academics and writers of basic/introductory marketing textbooks. The following quotations from the recent edition of The Marketing Book illustrate this,

Market segmentation is at the very heart of the marketing concept.

(Evans 1994: 329)
The mythical identity of the marketing concept, consumer sovereignty and social welfare arises from a complete misunderstanding of the conceptual foundations of a free market economy” (Dixon 1992: 124).

**Competition – a disciple lost in the wilderness**

1. No original emphasis on competition
2. Not just satisfying consumers’ needs but doing so better than the competition
3. Adopting marketing concept may actually make companies less competitive

**We have the technology (not included with adoption of the marketing concept)**

1. What about technological/production, R&D capabilities of companies?
2. Companies do not only satisfy consumer needs. What about technological expertise, R&D resources, labour and production capacity, strategic objectives and existing product/market experience?
3. Role of consumer is product improvement, not product development: ‘...few if any of the really significant product innovations which have been placed on the market to date were developed because the inventors sensed that a latent pool of needs was yearning to be satisfied’ (Kerby 1972: 31).

**Welcome to the real world**

1. Reality of marketplace is different to that suggested by marketing concept
2. Marketing concept irrelevant because of changes in organisational environment
3. Few companies take on board the concept

**And the problem is... implementation**

1. Main problem not the concept but its implementation
2. Suggestions for improvement:
   a. Internal marketing
   b. Development of a market orientation

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**MAKING A DRAMA OUT OF A CRISIS**

**Shortcomings**

1. Concept may never have been ‘properly tried’ within companies
2. Concept focuses on the marketplace at expense of internal HRD

**Authors**

Brownlie and Saren 1992
Dixon and Diehn 1992

**The extension on the extension**

1. Extension rather than elimination is preferred response of the marketing academy
   a. Inclusion of innovation, competition and society
   b. Strategic marketing concept which considers the external environment
   c. A professional concept which considers the needs of marketing practitioners
   d. Compromise between satisfying consumers’ and company’s other needs
   e. A customer value driven concept
   f. A repositioned concept which considers ‘affected’ and other customers

“The upshot is that if the marketing concept does not encompass the needs of business and social organisations today, a new discipline will emerge. Issue by issue, other disciplines will teach what marketing overlooks” (Dixon and Diehn 1992: 439).

**Macromarketing/societal marketing – a new sacred cow?**

1. The welfare of consumers, society at large
2. MC considers individuals, business, economics, profitability but not society as a whole
3. What about the consequences of materialism for society?
4. What about consequences for the natural environment?

**Authors**

Bell and Emory 1971; Feldman 1971
Abratt and Sacks 1988; Lazer 1969; Schwartz 1971; Takas 1974
Lavidge 1970; Prothero 1990

**Macromarketing... and the problem is implementation**

1. What’s in society’s best interests should not be determined by marketers because:
   a. this is undemocratic
   b. Marketers do not have the qualification to determine what is in the best interests of society

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A business can be successful only if its offer matches the wants of buyers at least as effectively as its best competitors. Marketing management is the task of planning this match. It is based upon the analysis of distributors,
the selection of target market segments and the design of marketing mixes which will provide the firm with a differential advantage. 

_Doyle 1994: 420_

It is the concept which has helped lead to the development of a definition of marketing. The AMA definition developed in 1988, however, is micro in nature and takes, for example, no account of macromarketing, this is despite the fact that A lack of understanding about macromarketing is really a lack of understanding about marketing itself and its rich intellectual history. . . . To say that the tumultuous 1960s or 1970s gave birth to macromarketing gives the impression that it was then that marketing’s broader impact on society was first noticed and needed to be studied. It presumes that past marketing scholars had been impervious to marketing’s societal perspective. Nothing could be further from the truth given that early economists turned marketers qua macromarketers focused most of their attention on macro issues . . . It is somewhat ironic to think that the very nature of macromarketing as a general understanding about marketing is now relegated as a sub-field or niche within the marketing domain.

_Família 1992: 90_

Some writers have however witnessed the act and said of the marketing concept it is ‘limited and unrealistic’ (Elliott 1990: 20) and is ‘deeply, perhaps irredeemably flawed’ (Brown 1995a: 8).

Table 3.1 shows fundamental difficulties with the concept’s development, ideological problems and theoretical foundations. One must therefore ask what this means if much of the research, as suggested above, conducted within the marketing academy stems from a flawed concept. What is interesting to ask is not only what the problems of this are (as indicated in Table 3.1), but perhaps more importantly why this has happened. In the opinions of the authors, this scenario has resulted because of the biased nature of the marketing academy, in its one-sided generation of marketing knowledge. Despite numerous criticisms, the marketing academy still uses the concept as one of the front runners in the pursuit of marketing knowledge (one only has to look at the recent market orientation literature to highlight this). Returning to the analogy of the preceding play, Muzak in this case is the marketing concept. The developers of that muzak, the mainstream members of the marketing academy, can therefore be blamed for the lack of alternative paradigms and epistemological and methodological pluralism within our discipline.

Many attempts at suggesting more pluralistic research methods within the marketing discipline are quickly dismissed. Those who have attempted to look at the marketing concept from a macromarketing perspective, for instance, face a two-pronged attack: first on the relevance of the subject to marketing; and, second, questions on the reliability, validity and generalisability of their chosen research method. All of this seems ironic when one considers the suggestion by Austen (1983) that the marketing concept (upon which so much mainstream marketing knowledge is based) is dogmatic rather than scientific.

A discussion of the marketing concept is just one example of the development of marketing knowledge within the marketing academy. Whilst the debate surrounding the pursuit of more pluralistic means of developing marketing knowledge continues, the marketing academy is still publishing biased journals and continuing to develop one-sided marketing knowledge. Those who attack this remain on the outskirts of The Metropolis and are not welcome to participate in the future development of mainstream marketing knowledge [muzak]. This is because the heads of the discipline [Big O and his merry friends] do not believe in the pursuit of eclectic marketing knowledge [muzak]. Wise up guys or you may find those on the fringes get pissed off at waiting to have their knowledge base accepted and publish their work in other, more pluralistic disciplines, which, by the way, just happen to be more credible in the social sciences than marketing! Worse yet (from the point of view of the current mainstream) the fringe may become so big it eventually becomes the mainstream. Even worse, when this happens, the new mainstream may decide to also become biased and one-sided and pursue the same goals of exclusivity currently pursued by the mainstay of today’s marketing academy. A Metropolis, part two? Watch this space.

It therefore seems safe to suggest that the marketing concept’s life has come to an end. Indeed, there is more to life than the marketing concept. Thus, the time has come to announce publicly that the concept is dead. As Descombz (1993) argues, certain projects fail because they try to account for the culture of a period by linking it to a metaphysics or a particular form of rationality. Presently the marketing academy is moving on to more meaningful ways of understanding our world. Thus, in order to avoid a marketing apocalypse we need a new beginning where one can build upon constructive criticism (Alvesson 1994; Geuss 1981; O’Connor 1994; O’Neill 1989) and emerge, perhaps via some postmodern catharsis, into our period of reflexive modernisation (Beck 1992; Lash and Wynne 1992). It is the opinion of these authors that this new beginning should not entail yet another extension on the marketing concept, as illustrated in Table 3.1. At the end of the day the concept itself is seriously flawed, and extending it, or improving its implementation is not the best way forward. This key player in our discipline has outlived its usefulness (if it ever had any uses in the first place). What we need are new, more creative ways of moving the discipline forward.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE (WE ARE NOT ALONE)

Whilst there is not enough space in this work to go into great detail as to what this new beginning may entail, such discussion is found elsewhere (McDonagh 1995a, 1995b; Prothero 1995), we feel some ideas for further thought should be
introduced. One main factor is how we study consumption in the future. Now we have abolished the notion of ‘satisfying needs and wants at a profit’, what are we going to put in its place? The first issue of consideration is perhaps allowing ourselves to learn from our extended family of social science in seeking the common ground and adopting the rhetoric associated with the study of the manufacture of consumption. Recently there have been a number of excellent general texts on the subject of consumption (Boock 1993; Miller 1995) and this must surely be a stronger contender as the beginning of our new way forward. We have a lot to learn from our colleagues in other social sciences who have been studying consumption for many years (Beck 1992; Campbell 1995; Goldman 1992; Leff 1995; Veblen 1912, 1953; Williamson 1978). As marketing academics we should be prepared to acknowledge this fact.

We feel this process has thankfully already begun; unfortunately, but not surprisingly, going unnoticed within the mainstream marketing academy. One of the aims of this chapter is to highlight the process to all the realms of the marketing academy. There is a danger of remaining incessant in the academy so that those outside its domain will offer society a more meaningful and acceptable interpretation of what marketing has become (Brownlie and Saren 1995; Whittington and Whipp 1992).

One could argue that marketing can be viewed in a richer vein as the symbolic manufacture of consumption (Baudrillard 1993 and 1995) and not the satisfaction of needs and wants in what has been called marketique (McDonagh 1995). Thus, rather than extend the marketing concept as previous marketing academics have tended, we must bury it and celebrate a new life with the study of this manufacture of what Leiss et al. (1990) call the ‘theatre of consumption’ in contemporary society. In this scenario the academic community in contemporary society form an eclectic group of social scientists offering a rich analysis of consumption. Indeed there are already, within the marketing academy, pioneers of this new beginning (O’Donohue 1992, 1994; Lennon 1994; Ritzer and Elliott 1995, Brown 1995), we must commend their stance and learn from their chosen research topics, methods and views of the world. This may well permit a new eclectric beginning to the study of consumption within the marketing academy of the future and may help eliminate the potential problem recently discussed by Baker (1995: 631).

In losing sight of the origins of our subject and the principles upon which it was founded, there seems to be a distinct threat that we will seek to erect a new temple of knowledge without any adequate foundations.

This temple of knowledge however must not only be built on the foundations of the marketing academy, but also on those of other disciplines in the social sciences.

It is refreshing to note that we have some friends in the wilderness experiencing the same dilemmas as ourselves (Goddard 1993) – but we have the exciting prospects of investigating the various cultures of marketing (Griswold

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MARKETING APOCALYPSE
Eschatology, escapology and the illusion of the end

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