Intellectualization in Macromarketing Revisited: A Reply to Hunt

D. D. Monieson

The title of Shelby Hunt’s article (1989) is steeped in irony, given what follows in his text. His effort produces a caricature of reason and a surprising misunderstanding of the nature of reification in the social sciences. His is no critique; it is a diatribe pure and simple.
I will not respond to Hunt’s article on a line-by-line basis. That would be too depressing an exercise. Rather, I will address what appear to be major allegations. All but his last two, his rigor-relevance issue and his reification-realism issue, are dispensed with summarily because they are superficial.

THE CRISIS LITERATURE IN MARKETING

Hunt creates what he calls a crisis literature and lumps me in with a lot of very good people who he claims are the creators of this literature. Apparently, all who question the existing philosophic foundations of marketing constitute the crisis literature gang. So, when he draws up this “me-versus-them” confrontation he shortlists that we contradict one another. There is no crisis literature club, no agenda, no manifesto, no correspondence, and there are no meetings. There is no crisis literature, save for its existence in Hunt’s mind. We each have our own philosophy of what constitutes macromarketing science, so surely there should be plenty of room for honest disagreement among ourselves. Since I believe strongly that we are blessed with a dialectic imagination (1981, p. 21), all of us eventually come to realize contradictions in our philosophic positions no matter how tight and reasoned our logic. It behooves us, therefore, to search out and confront these contradictions as a necessary condition for advancing our own personal philosophy of science. It should go without saying that we advance our own understanding when we debate our theories with our peers.

THE MOTIVATION ISSUE

Hunt claims that I attack the motivations of some of my colleagues when I assert that “to be academically respectable macromarketing must be defined as an area of study that is rational and calculable and one that accommodates itself to scientific investigation” (1988, p. 6).

It is difficult to frame a response to an attack as outrageous as this one. I have nothing but respect and admiration for all those academics whose motives he claims I am impugning. It is apparent that Hunt has no notion of the meaning of academic respectability, particularly within the context of what I wrote. Academic respectability in macromarketing is defined as that which will be achieved when we accept fully the research paradigm in forms that consciously imitate the scientific models imbedded in the natural science departments of universities (Miller 1987, p. 126). Academic respectability has nothing at all to do with what Hunt calls the “ego-needs” of individual marketing academics. The seeking of academic respectability is a collective quest. We seek to be admitted as equals to the university’s community of scholars because ours is a field of legitimate, rigorous academic study. Academic responsibility will be discussed further when the rigor-relevance issue is taken up.

THE LAW-LIKE GENERALIZATIONS ISSUE

Hunt alleges that I use law-like generalizations to claim incoherently that law-like generalizations do not exist. He points to my use of “always generate,” “never deliver,” “inevitable,” and “inevitable” to accord universality to my claims.

The particular statement to which Hunt alludes is not mine; it is attributed to the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (Monieson 1988, p. 7). In true fashion, Hunt does not complete the MacIntyre thought but stops mid-air to come up with a sudden “therefore” Monieson feels that the methods of contemporary social science are doomed and should be replaced by

D. D. Monieson is at the School of Business, Queen’s University, Ontario, Canada.

JOURNAL OF MACROMARKETING 11
"enchanted" inquiry. Nonsense! MacIntyre was referring explicitly to "a translation of the prophecy of positivistic social science into social performance" (ibid.). If contemporary social science were comprised of only positivistic social science, then indeed contemporary social science would be doomed to failure. But contemporary social science must be more than its positivistic component. I already have stated (1988, p. 9) my belief in the potential of Habermas's construct combining positivism with hermeneutics and critical rationalism.

Words like "inexorable" and "inevitable" do not constitute law-like generalizations. Hunt has a definite conception of what constitutes law-like generalizations in marketing. In his debate with Pinson and others he made the following statement (1983, p. 268; 1973, p. 69).

To summarize my position in order for generalizations to be considered law-like the *minimum* necessary conditions are that the generalizations specify a relationship in the form of a universal condition . . . which is capable of yielding predictive statements (hypotheses) which are composed of terms that have empirical referents and, thus, permit empirical testing.

By Hunt's own reckoning my use of words such as "inevitable" certainly do not equate to law-like generalizations. Yet, his meaning of law-like generalizations corresponds to MacIntyre's notion of prophesying by positivistic social science into a social performance.

In every instance where I employed the words or phrases to which Hunt refers they were used to describe the intellectualization process as envisioned by Max Weber. Weber's intellectualization is deterministic in intent and fits in with his thesis of the "iron cage" of rationalization, wherein all aspects of a society's ethos will submit ultimately to the unremitting pervasiveness of technical rationality. But there is nothing law-like in my vision. I see de-reification eventually becoming instrumental and transforming our developing golden age of macromarketing into an authentic age. The dialectical process will raise this anthesis to our consciousness, and human agency will bring it to fruition. But not for a while, because the intellectualization process still has a way to go (1988, p. 9).

THE RIGOR-RELEVANCE ISSUE

Hunt perceives me to have a disbelief in quantification, of questioning the motives of those who employ mathematics and statistics in their research, of my insisting that macromarketing is "nonrigorous" by necessity, and that rigor and relevance are engaged in some sort of zero-sum game. Not only is Hunt wrong on all counts, but also by raising the issues of respectability and rigor-relevance in such a manner he demonstrates either an ignorance or an ignoring of these historical tensions that have engulfed academia since the turn of the century.

MIT Professor Donald Schon (1983) provides one of the best contemporary summaries on the subject of academic respectability and rigor-relevance. What follows is an extremely brief paraphrase. Technical rationality is the positivist epistemology of practice, and it became institutionalized in the modern university in the late nineteenth century. As a consequence, there followed normative ideas about the proper division of labor between the university and the professions (business studies is classed as a profession). Thorstein Veblen (1965) propounded the notion that universities have the higher mission of science and scholarship, while the professional schools have the lower mission to prepare one for workaday life. The professions are to give their practical problems to the university, and the university, through research, is to provide the professions with the new scientific knowledge to be tested and applied. The professional schools were not to become part of the new university.

But early in the twentieth century the professions, including schools of business, did gain entrance to the universities and thereby achieved a modicum of academic respectability. There was a price for this admission, however. The professions had to accept the positivist epistemology of practice which by then was deeply imbedded in the universities. They had to accept the division of labor that Veblen articulated. The university-based scientists and scholars were to create the fundamental theory, which professionals and technicians were then to apply to practice. Those who create new theory were thought to be higher in status than those who apply it. Therefore, for those in the professions, such as school of business professors, acceptance as equal members of the university's community of scholars still proved to be elusive. To be truly academically respectable the professional school's faculty collectively had to create scientifically generated knowledge as prescribed by the rigorous tenets of the positivist epistemology of practice and collectively had to demonstrate the successful practical application of such knowledge. This collective consent was manifested in embracing the typical professional curricula model of, first, the mastery of the underlying discipline or basic science component of the profession and, then, the mastery of an applica-
tions science that rests on the foundation of the basic science. Professional curricula aped those of the natural sciences so that, as Herbert Simon (1981, p. 130) put it, business schools became "schools of finite mathematics." Simon goes further and states that professional schools "hanker after academic respectability": "Why would anyone in a university stoop to teach or learn about designing machines or planning market strategies when he could concern himself with solid-state physics. The answer has been clear; he usually wouldn't" (ibid.).

The problem has been that the scientific knowledge thus created has demonstrated extremely limited applications in some professional practices, marketing being one, and macromarketing being suggested as one even more so. These are the so-called "soft" practices where we are becoming increasingly "aware of the importance to actual practice of phenomena—complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict—which do not fit the model of Technical Rationality" (Schon 1983, p. 39). The dilemma thereupon arises:

This dilemma of "rigor or relevance" arises more acutely in some areas of practice than in others. In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground where practitioners can make effective use of research-based theory and technique, and there is a swampy lowland where situations are confusing "messes" incapable of technical solution. The difficulty is that the problems of the high ground, however great their technical interest, are often relatively unimportant to clients or to the larger society, while in the swamp are the problems of greater human concern. Shall the practitioner stay on the high, hard ground where he can practice rigorously, as he understands rigor, but where he is constrained to deal with problems of relatively little social importance? Or shall he descend to the swamp where he can engage the most important and challenging problems if he is willing to for-sake technical rigor (p. 42)?

This, then, is the meaning of the academic respectability and the rigor or relevance issues, and not the accusing concoctions hurled at me by Hunt.

THE REIFICATION-REALISM ISSUE

Hunt says that to reify means to treat as real, permitting him then to make the word reification synonymous in meaning with the word realism. That done, he finds me having illogical and contradictory notions about reification in marketing. For example, he contends that since I said that reification is widespread in marketing and must stop, and since reification equates to realism, therefore I nonsensically assert that scientific realism is widespread and must stop. (Actually, I wrote that de-reification must take place; intellectualization must stop.)

Reification

What Hunt writes about reification is confusion cavalierly presented. The word reify is from Latin: res, which means "thing," and facere, which means "to make," hence: "to make a thing." To reify does not mean "to treat as or to make real." Rather, to reify means to mimic, to present a distorted image of the real. Real means authentic, genuine. The most authoritative of English dictionaries, the 1989 Oxford English Dictionary, defines reification as "the mental conversion of a person or abstract concept into a thing" (volume 13, p. 532). "Converting into a thing" does not mean "converting into real." Real is applied to whatever is regarded as having an existence in fact and not merely in appearance, thought, or language; or having an absolute and necessary, in contrast to a merely contingent, existence (ibid., p. 272). I cannot find any source that defines reify as "to treat as or make real." My use of the term is in the usually accepted manner and is certainly consistent within the text and theme of my article.

The term "reification" has normally referred to certain cognitive processes by which an unjustified concreteness, autonomy, facticity, impersonality, objectivity and independence is attributed to various elements of experience. The things reified must not be the concrete, autonomous, inert facticities they are taken to be. Any claim that reification has occurred thus entails both a psychological description and an epistemological or ontological judgment—the first in so far as it identifies a particular cognitive attitude or intellectual posture; the second in so far as it condemns the attitude or posture as a falsification or distortion (Thomason 1982, pp. 11, 88). I do not deny the early Wittgenstein "picture theory of meanings" and that we think in picture terms. In marketing we create images to penetrate the consciousness of those to whom we market. However, "a cognitive item is reified when it is wrongly, falsely, illegitimately and distortively apprehended in certain thing-like ways" (ibid., p. 163). I also do not deny that
to identify reifying consciousness one has to ascertain which cognitive items are thing-like and which are not.

In 1925, Alfred Whitehead warned of the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness" (1925, pp. 50-55, 58-59), and in 1931 Morris R. Cohen likewise warned of the fallacy of reification and reified relations (1931, pp. 302, 390). The meaning behind both fallacies is contained in Thomson’s definition above. In 1937, Talcot Parsons wrote that positivistic empiricism has been predominantly a matter of the "reification" of theoretical systems, to use Professor Cohen’s phrase, or the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness," to use Professor Whitehead’s. . . . The logically closed system of theory becomes, in an empiricist interpretation, an empirically closed system" (1937, p. 476). The 1989 Oxford Dictionary uses the Parsons quote to illustrate the word "reification." In describing Whitehead’s fallacy of misplaced concreteness, the philosopher William Barrett (1978) notes that the exact but highly abstract concepts are taken to characterize matters of concrete reality. "The mathematical logic looks away from the everyday world in order to construct a more general and abstract relation among entities. He is intent on a scheme general and powerful enough, for his practical purposes, to encompass disconnected and unrelated facts within its structures. . . . The abstract structures are taken to indicate the underlying and ultimately concrete features of the world" (p. 47).

Indeed, positivism can cause reification, and so I believe it has in macromarketing.

Two Words and Love

Barrett says that we live in two worlds. The first is a world of our everyday experience, our subjective world. The second is a world that science presents to us, one that is "different and seems to make greater claims to truth" (1978, p. 46). This is the objective world. Here, the process of scientific materialism reduces the first world of concrete experience to the material components that underlie it. The second world is a special mirror of the first world, filtering out its special attributes and stripping it of particular meanings and beauties. A silhouette of the first world is captured for analysis, measurement, and manipulation. In the first world love is real in all its subjective complexities, mysteries, wonders, fears, hopes. It has ontological meaning. In the second world love is reduced to those attributes deemed to be calculable. Love becomes a mirrored phantom of the subjective experience, but it has been made into a scientifically observable thing. Given the intellectualized marketing-as-exchange concept, this love-thing then can readily assume the marketable traits of commodity.

Professor Robert Sternberg (1988, p. 156) of Yale University writes about a new field of science, love. He notes it was started about twenty years ago by Professor Zick Rubin, of Brandeis University, when he was a graduate student at the University of Michigan. Rubin had developed two scales, one to measure love and the other to measure liking. Other academics followed, exploring ways of measuring various aspects of love, using Rubin’s scales and also developing their own. Sternberg relates the accomplishments of those academics who are in universities throughout North America. The field is healthy and growing. A triangular theory of love by Sternberg has evolved and from that a taxonomy of love. There are eight kinds of love in his taxonomy, ranging from nonlove to consummative love, and these in turn are interconnected to three components of love (intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment), thereby giving rise to varying classes of love. Alternate taxonomies of love have been developed, but they are of the same ilk as Sternberg’s.

Sternberg claims scientific observations that are "anything but routine" emanate from his research. For example, he found that "on the average, whereas men love their lovers more than their best friend of the same sex, women love their lover and best friend of the same sex equally, and actually like their best friend somewhat more than their lover" (1988, p. 154). Another scientific observation: "The best predictor of satisfaction in an intimate heterosexual relationship for a given partner is not how much one loves one’s partner, or even how much one’s partner loves oneself, but, rather, the difference between how much one perceives one’s partner to love oneself and how much one ideally wants to be loved by one’s partner” (ibid.).

The intellectualization of love is proceeding very nicely. However, will this kind of love-observing and counting truly uncover the mysteries of love that we subjectively experience? I think not. The poetics of love remain intact. A young man may tell his girlfriend that he loves her eight on a one-to-nine scale, but for me love can best be comprehended by reciting Shakespeare’s “let me count the ways.”

Scientific Realism and Reification

Hunt states that scientific realism “specifically reifies unobservable concepts.” Not true. Scientific realists, appreciating the pivotal role of unobservables in their search for reality, are particularly sensitive to not fall into the trap of reifying unobservables. Keat and Urry, Hunt’s acknowledged mentors, are very concerned with the realist proposal to treat social relationships as “real” because it opens up social science to the potential sin of reification. So they tried
to specify realism in a way so as to avoid reification. They agreed that it would be a mistake to take social phenomena to be a material thing, but they denied that realism is committed to that mistake (Keat and Urry 1982, p. 199; Stockman 1983, p. 220). So while some products of human activity may have existence independent from the activity that produces them, they claim other products do not (Keat and Urry 1982, p. 186; Stockman 1983, p. 221). Keat and Urry contend that social relations and social institutions have ontological status, but it is not the same ontological status as either material objects, or individual persons wherein reification is possible. They place a great deal of faith on collective human agency to be proactive and to be able to resist reification tendencies (Keat and Urry 1982, pp. 185-186, 221).

Richard Bagozzi, a scientific realist, notes that both positivists and realists believe that reality exists independently of the attempts to explain that reality (1980, p. 27). He understands all too well the realist concern with reification and cautions the marketing researcher about inferring causality between social constructs “when these variables and the relationships between them are entirely abstractions in the mind of the observer and are acting in law-like or natural necessity content” (1980, p. 56).

Roy Bhaskar, author realist, is quite concerned about the limitations on the possibility of an independent social reality, limitations which prevent the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the social sciences:

1. Social structures, unlike natural structures, do not exist independently of the activities they govern;
2. Social structures, unlike natural structures, do not exist independently of the agents’ conceptions of what they are doing in their activity;
3. Social structures, unlike natural structures, may be only relatively enduring (so that the tendencies they ground may not be universal in the same space-time invariant) (Bhaskar 1979, pp. 48-49; Stockman 1983, p. 223).

Bhaskar is saying that a perceptual ascription of reality is not applicable because society is imperceivable. After a thorough assessment of the realist philosophy of science, Professor Norman Stockman concludes emphatically what Bhaskar was leading to: “Scientific realism has little to offer to the understanding of the social sciences, and should confine its endeavours to the source of its original insight, the sphere of the natural sciences” (1983, p. 230).

Stockman labels scientific realists as “antipositivists,” so it should come as no surprise that Russell Keat claims that positivism reinforces the reified character of social structures, and by defining reason in a narrow instrumental way, positivism undermines any critique of society that employs a reason that is grounded in human capacity for “self-reflective autonomy and emancipation” (Keat 1981, pp. 2-3). Keat believes that the distinctive character of social reality requires the use of hermeneutic, interpretive modes of analysis (1981, p. 36).

Hunt is wrong in his comprehension of the realist philosophy of social science and of the nature of reification, realism, and reason within that philosophy.

LOGICAL POSITIVISM

“Positivism is dead, we all agree,” is the opening sentence of a recent article by the philosopher Christina Bicchieri (1988, p. 100). The Encyclopedia of Philosophy proclaims: “Logical positivism, then, is dead, or as dead as a philosophical movement ever becomes” (volume 5, p. 56). Another author on the subject notes: “It is safe to say that few philosophers would be willing to describe themselves as Logical Positivists or Logical Empiricists” (Hanfling 1981, p. 1). Other comments: “I have never met a self-proclaimed positivist” (Miller 1987, p. 3). “A positivist is not a nice thing to be, and nobody will own up to being one” (Stockman 1983, p. 3). “The word ‘positivist’ has become more of a derogatory epithet than a useful descriptive concept” (Giddings 1974, p. ix).

The father of English logical positivism, A. J. Ayer, when queried by Bryan Magee of the BBC about what he thought were the main defects of logical positivism, replied: “Well, I suppose the most important of the defects was that nearly all of it was false” (Magee 1979, p. 1312). The later Wittgenstein refuted the earlier Wittgenstein, the patron saint of the Vienna Circle. Kurt Godel, himself a member of the Circle, assisted in its self-destruction through his Incompleteness Theorem.

Logical positivism is dead, but its spirit continues to pervade the research agenda of marketing academe. We all agree that macromarketing must use some kind of instrumental empirical science. But macromarketing is a social science and therefore needs something more. Knowledge derived from empirical science (information) has to meld with hermeneutics (interpretation) and critical rationalism (criticism) to produce a metascience particular to its domain (Monieson 1988, p. 9; Bernstein 1978, pp. 191-200). Only then can reenchanted begin (Griffen 1988).
REFERENCES

Bhaskar, Roy (1979), The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences, New Jersey: Humanities Press.
Magee, Bryan (1979), Men of Ideas, New York: The Viking Press.