

The top half of the page features an abstract background with a vibrant red and orange color palette. It includes glowing, ethereal light trails and a grid-like pattern, suggesting a digital or scientific theme.

PAPER THIRTY-NINE

**The science of the brands:  
Alchemy, advertising and  
accountancy**

**Anthony Tasgal,**  
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## The science of the brands: Alchemy, advertising and accountancy

Anthony Tasgal, Freelance Hyphenate

### Thesis

What I want to explore here is whether there are any guiding reasons for the loss of heart that seems to have afflicted Marketing and its various sub-disciplines over the last few years.

Just witness the outpouring of dismal negativity that is unleashed on podia and in books with greater and greater frequency. Marketing practitioners bemoan the failure rates of new products, or the glacial speed of developing new products to market; agencies lament that they are not producing (being allowed to produce?) cutting-edge ideas for their clients, who are in turn putting their best ideas to the sword of research; Creatives, most usually at the sharp end of this sword, turn to (or should that be turn on?) their Planners to get them out of this Research and Destroy Culture. Planners then pass the buck to the Market Researchers accusing them of bringing nothing new to creative development or brand measurement since whenever.

What lies beneath this malaise, I believe, is a rearguard belief in the science of management and marketing which is deeply flawed in two ways.

Firstly, it is based on the wrong type of science: a perception of science that is reductionist and mechanistic, based on "physics envy" and the model of the machine. It is also obsessed with what I term "arithmocracy", a trend that is becoming apparent in many spheres from our education system to the NHS where accountability has created a culture of obedience to the God of Numbers. Instead of the old mechanistic model, the new paradigm emerging within the sciences has more relevance to business, marketing and communication disciplines, with its emphasis on biology and the living organism that is complex and can both learn and adapt. It favours patterns and networks, rather than fixed essences, and is more interested in systems and their interactions than in the isolated performance of discrete parts.

Secondly, it gives too much weight to science itself at the expense of art or creativity. Though the methods of science are important for evaluation and

measurement, the spark that turns a product into a brand, or an organization into a company draws its strength from the creative process.

Devising a new brand, creating a new meaning embedded in it, allowing Creative people to conceive a means of communicating it that resonates with that meaning, and using the techniques of research at the appropriate times and in revealing ways- these are all essentially creative tasks. We deceive and ultimately disappoint ourselves if we fail to give the Creative muse its due along the whole line, rather than relegating it to the last third of the pitch. It is wrong to consider the period of development prior to the involvement of a Creative department to be essentially non-creative.

It may help by seeing the process in terms of a blend of the new sciences of systems thinking, where novelty and surprise emerge at the edge of chaos, and alchemy, which believes in the material transformation of nothing into something. This view sees art, science and even magic as less divisible than is commonly presented.

Instead, it is time for those responsible for the development of brands and brand strategies to recognize the need for cross-disciplinary fertilization of marketing theory. This is also conducted in the belief that exchange brings difference, and that from difference comes value and meaning.

This means letting go of the reins of input-output control, but if that is the price for survival and growth in our industry, so be it.

## Science, Marketing and The Lure of Physics Envy

What lies at the heart of the decline in Ye Olde Paradigm of Marketing, I will argue, is a reliance on the sanctity of Science (or at least, one specific version of it), and in particular physics.

At the root of this failure, I will argue, are the inexorable links that bind marketing in general and market research, as its loyal offspring, to the Scientific Mindset.

Why, you may be wondering, are we going down this road again? Hasn't the debate been done to death?

Perhaps, but I think we have unresolved business with the Art/Science debate, if only because marketing has changed (some think it may even be dead), and, indeed, science has evolved to the extent that the relationship between the two bears re-examination. Science has suddenly burst back onto the marketing stage with the advent of the Great Neuroscience Revolution, which the likes of Robert

Heath have employed to great effect to attack some sacred cows of consumer psychology and generally irritate much of Leamington Spa. On the other hand, many others have come forward to reassert the importance of creativity in the domain of the economy in general and in marketing in specific. Then there's Sergio Zyman's reaffirmation of the marketing=science argument in "The End of Marketing".

[Note: I know it says "Advertising", but I really want to cast the net to embrace all of marketing. It's just that alchemy and accountancy all begin with an "a" and my middle child was doing alliteration at school that week. In any case, I've always tended to see advertising as the provisional wing of marketing.]

### Science and Physics

Although well-known in academic circles, it is not always fully appreciated by practitioners how indebted (or dependent) marketing is on the notion and aspiration of science.

One recent example should suffice: the former head of Coca-Cola in the US, Sergio Zyman, who has gone on the offensive against what he sees as the degeneracy of marketing and (more recently) advertising. In his first assault, *The End of Marketing As We Know It* (1999), he devotes a chapter to "Marketing is Science". Here he aims to dispel what he sees as the destructive impulse that marketing is all wishy-washy, airy-fairy, guru-led idealising. Instead, he emphasises the nitty-gritty, down-and-dirty experimentalist, empirical side of things.

*"Like a scientist I collect data, I look at it and then I change my activities to reflect what I've learned" (Zyman 1999)*

Now this is all well and good as far as it goes. Advocating a scientific approach in methodology where the emphasis is on a systematic approach is perfectly admirable: assume, experiment, review and revise is part of the job description. But to assert that the whole of marketing is a logical and systematic science and is primarily concerned with making predictions and checking them fails to do justice to the other spheres that make the marketing enterprise so exciting and unpredictable. It's not enough to talk of gathering data like a scientist, looking at it and then changing activities to reflect what has been learned. Scientists will also tell you that the ideas, the theories, the hypotheses that they conceive are the bedrock of their work as much as the data gathering and refinement. If anything, Zyman's argument gives support to the cumulative pro-Science and anti-Creative lobby and belittles the (dare I say it) more creative aspects of marketing.

*"Science is built up with facts as a house is with stones. But a collection of*

*facts is no more a science than a heap of stones is a house" Henry Poincare*  
(in Buchanan 2002)

What concerns me more is that Zyman seems to be harking back to a bygone (or so I'd hoped) age of scientific management.

### **Organisational Culture and Scientific Management**

The intervening 90 years or so have seen a number of seismic cultural shifts across the globe. Wars, mass-market technological advances, inter-stellar travel, not to mention microwaveable pasta and one England World Cup victory. But whereas the world outside would appear unrecognisable in many ways, the management of companies has for the most part clung tightly to a model that really should have been consigned to the civic amenity site decades ago.

Since the publication of Frederick Winslow Taylor's book "The Principle of Scientific Management" in 1911, a certain type of system has taken hold in (mainly larger) US conglomerates and spread throughout the (business) world. To call this "mechanistic management" would not be too far-fetched. An engineer by training (relish that irony), Taylor propagated the view of science as that of the clockwork, atomistic, push-me-pull-you, tick-tock-tick-tock, one-size-fits-all engine. Put this in here and that comes out there. (Anyone who has ever given a creative brief into a Creative team will see where I am leading). Even forgetting that this was written at a time when relativity, quantum mechanics and the Copenhagen interpretation were on the verge of upsetting Newton's applecart, the tenets of this management worldview have remained as persistent as the copy in a soap powder ad.

This was management of a factory, with people as cogs, reductionist efficiency as the dominant metaphor and a system that would guarantee the three cornerstones of a contented manager: predictability, consistency and controllability. People were no better than battery hens, cooped up in insalubrious conditions with a pipe inserted somewhere painful until they produced the requisite quantity of ..whatever. Taylorism begat Fordism, and from Fordism was constructed much of the management practice that was built in the States and then exported. Despite the soothsaying of Tom Peters, for whom anarchy and chaos are the key trends affecting business, my claim is that despite a softer, more human touch being applied in Europe and/or among smaller organisations, the insidious effects of this model linger on.

*"The best management is a true science, Taylor wrote, resting upon clearly defined laws, rules and principles as a foundation" (Freedman 1992).*

In this scheme the manager is the omniscient and all-powerful scientist manipulating the passive worker.

Many managers are conflicted, I believe, as they have been trained to operate with the scientific mindset in place (either explicitly or unwittingly). This has caused a conflict between the model of science they have, of order through analysis, predictability and certainty, and the operating model of the world their companies work in which is increasingly chaotic, unpredictable and uncertain. Another excerpt from Taylor demonstrates the extent to which he emphasises standardisation as the key to implementing reductionism:

*"It is only through enforced standardisation of methods, enforced adoption of the best implements and working conditions and enforced co-operation that this faster work can be assured" (Taylor 1911)*

### **The Origins of Physics Envy**

The modern era has seen without doubt the ascendancy of science. And in the realm of science, we have seen the shift from the primacy of physics to the supremacy of biology.

Lewis Wolpert is forthright:

*"In a sense all science aspires to be like physics, and physics aspires to be like mathematics" (in Midgley 2001)*

*This was even more brutally expressed by no less an authority than James Watson, Nobel Laureate and celebrated co-discoverer of the structure of DNA:*

*" There is only one science-physics: everything else is social work" (in Malik 2000)*

But biology is plainly not physics and an increasingly populous and vocal army of practitioners and writers in the sciences have come out and undermined the Old Order. This contrasts sharply with the linear, escalator approach of classical physics with its emphasis on predictability and consequence

An elegant way of putting this fact is from Steven Rose, this time in "Alas, Poor Darwin", a collection of essays devoted to attacking the Ultra-Darwinians, whom he criticizes for being genetic determinists

*"In biology 1+1= 59"*

### **Don't Walk Away, Rene**

At a time when the machine was fast becoming the dominant icon of the age, many thinkers saw this wondrous new mechanism as the most elegant way of

seeing human endeavour. Inspired by the machines that were beginning to populate the world from fairground automata to the elaborate clocks decorating churches, they claimed that life could be explained by the same processes of physics and chemistry.

One of the leaders of this movement was the philosopher Rene Descartes. As well as coining one of the world's most T-shirtable slogans, he tried to bring the new mechanistic perspective to bear on the mind/body issue. Along with Galileo, Francis Bacon and others, he established the modern, "analytical", approach to scientific methodology. Stripped to its bare bones, his method consisted of breaking down big problems into small ones, using the method of science and mathematics. His real goal was to conquer the inner workings of the human mind. This he did by proposing that mind and body were really two different kinds of "stuff": body was easily reconcilable with the clockwork motif of the day, but mind or soul was located in a different dimension, only interacting with the body via the pineal gland. This system was known as Cartesian dualism, and the goal of formulating sciences for new domains –such as language- based on a mathematical approach.

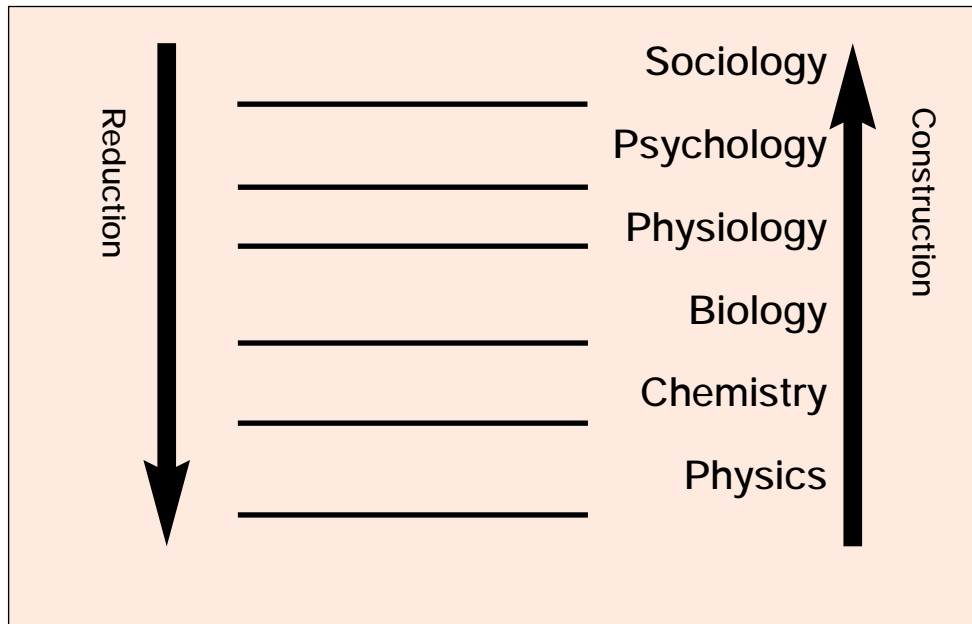
Reductionism, we should be careful to say, is not obsolescent or pernicious in itself: it has served science very well for many centuries. The issue is whether it is enough at a stage where new questions have emerged -consciousness, evolution, the mind-brain problem, the creation of life- that may need new intellectual equipment to supplement the rather Lego-like approach of reductionism.

However, as Norretranders shows, just because we know the fundamental laws and rules of nature does not entail an understanding of another that operates on a different level or scale. His chart, indicating the differing levels of science (including the so-called "social sciences") is shown here. At each level depicted, a new series of phenomena arises. More significantly, knowledge of the lower level is no guarantee of certainty of the higher level.

### **Living in an Arithmocracy?**

*"Everything Counts In Large Amounts"* (Depeche Mode, track from "Construction Time Again" album, 1983)

David Boyle's main thrust in "The Tyranny of Numbers" (and, boy, does he thrust) is that there is just too much counting in our society now, and he rails against what he feels is the "deadening effect" of statistics. (Boyle 2000). To get a sense of his rhetoric, consider that the subtitle of his book is "why counting can't make us happy". There has probably never been, he claims, a time in history that measures as much as we do now. I want to examine whether this



**Figure 1**

trend towards what I call arithmocracy in society tells us anything about how marketing is currently operating.

A number of excellent studies have traced our civilisation's interest in (and, in some cases, obsession with) numbers. The Greeks, inevitably, started it all off, chiefly Pythagoras of Samos.

The Greeks had always been great followers of "mousike", literally anything governed by the Muses. Indeed, they saw music as fundamental and timeless, just like the soul.

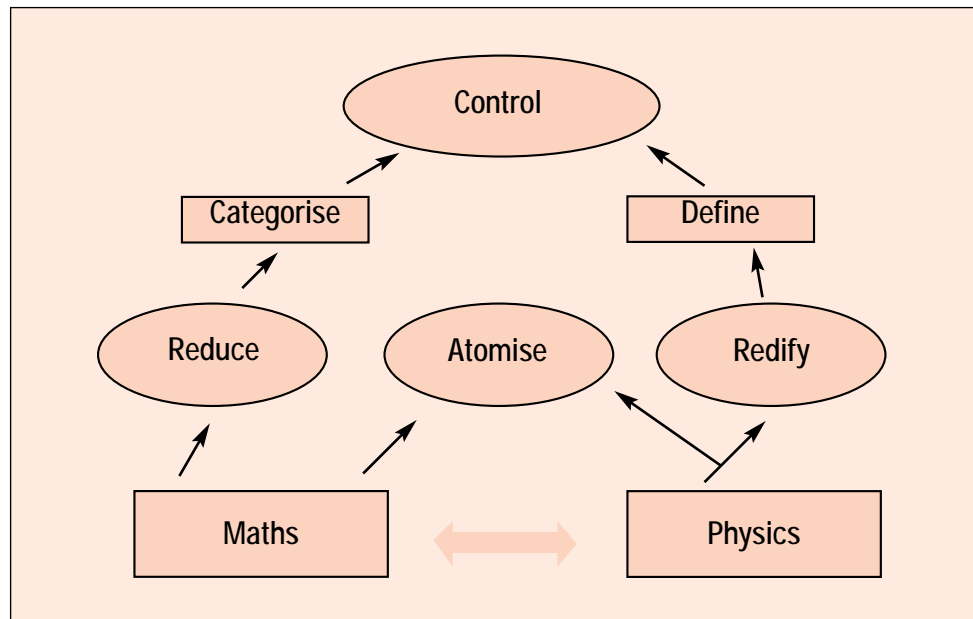
Pythagoras was a great thinker who defied categorisation; he coined the word "philosophos" (literally "lover of wisdom") and preached a gospel based on the inter-connectedness of all things (what we would now call science, art, music). More particularly, he discovered the correspondence of the abstract world of music with the equally abstract domain of numbers. In "The Music of The Spheres" Jamie James explains how Pythagoras made explicit the link between the natural harmony in the universe, that comes from the beauty of number, the role of music and the divine cosmos (or "order").

Boyle lays a lot of the current mathematical malaise unsparingly at Pythagoras's door. Not everyone will endorse his conclusions, but he highlights a number of paradoxes within the same reductionist view that we have been examining:

- If we don't count something, it gets ignored; if we do count it it gets perverted
- If you count the wrong thing, you go backwards



- The more we count the less we understand



#### The Pyramid of Arithmocracy

The danger that Boyle is exposing is that numbers count for more than words or ideas. In so many public contexts nowadays (especially politics), something cannot be stated without recourse to some incontrovertible statistical nugget. One does not have to rely on that quote to feel that the reliance on numbers –as-gods has become excessive, and that sometimes we just have to rely on words instead of the cosy comfort of a Simple Number.

Behind the rhetoric here is a simple plea. That so often, what is really important can't be measured. What can be measured is, and as a result the flood of calculation directs us away from what really matters. But the boom in auditors, accountants, financial and even (dare I say it) pollsters and researchers has created a sort of self-perpetuating oligarchy of datacrats, fuelled by what could be termed "Runaway Measurement".

But rather than view this obsession in isolation, let us consider other realms outside of marketing.

#### Runaway Measurement at School

As a parent, I can sympathise with the current state of affairs pertaining to educational measurement.. The goal was presumably to raise standards by measuring the performance of both schools and pupils. That way the schools and the children would all compete to improve standards, schools striving to gain a greater share of government money, children vying to become better educated and more rounded members of society.

Instead, what seems to be happening is a process of measurement and evaluation that is on the verge of overwhelming everything in its path. There are so many systems that the actual process of teaching is in danger of being subsumed by the management of evaluation itself. Moreover, the pressure put on both teachers and pupils as subjects of measurement seems to be creating an environment that is self-fuelling: the more pressure from schools to improve their scores, the more the children themselves are pushed to perform.

And it is not immediately clear whether this system change has led to any overall improvement in standards.

In late Summer/Autumn 2002, the main domestic news story in all media was the "marking fiasco" surrounding the claim that this year's A-level papers had been unfairly marked down. The scandal had emerged after teachers had discovered that many of their students had received marks for coursework well below their other papers, often grade U compared with grade A.

In a comment article in the Guardian (23/09/02), Jenni Russell writes:

*Finally, we should decide that we've had enough of the politicians' obsession with constantly raising standards. Let's settle for good and imaginative teaching, with very few examinations, and time in the curriculum for teachers and students to pursue interesting ideas.*

Baroness Williams, the Liberal Democrats' leader in the House of Lords and a former education secretary, called on the government to take a fresh look at school league tables, stressing that the fun in education was being replaced with a "supermarket" mentality where results were compared like prices.

The story, of course, did not end there. It was partly responsible for the sudden resignation of the Secretary of State for Education, Estelle Morris in October 2002.

It is significant that the principal task of the new Education Secretary was revealed to be "to improve the primary and secondary school "experience" to make it something that pupils actually enjoy". In other words, not to place such stringent demands on exam-taking.

### **Knowledge Management, Knowledge Measurement**

In a similar vein, Ralph Stacey of Herts. University Business School, gave a speech to the RSA (the Royal Society for the encouragement of the Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) on the subject of measuring intellectual capital and knowledge workers in particular. He pointed out that there are now huge numbers of

people in national services who are essentially knowledge workers. The question he poses is: how are we going to manage and control them?

He then goes on to illustrate the difficulties that emerge from this system.

*"That's the kind of way in which the league tables are drawn up. I'd like you to reflect for a moment on what this accomplishes. Does it say anything about the authentic quality of learning and of teaching, which is in the relationship, the interaction, between people in a classroom? I think not. I think it says absolutely nothing about authentic quality. What it is is a system, a procedure, that assures counterfeit or bogus quality, not through anybody being deceitful or being stupid, but simply because this is the kind of procedure that has been set up, this is the kind of game you have got to play." (Stacey 2002)*

His conviction is that this doesn't assure any kind of quality whatsoever. Worse than this, it is not merely time-consuming and irritating, or even a game that most involved would rather not play. Stacey's main allegation is that it corrupts the very nature of the work it is intended to enhance. Instead the new system generates its own life, flooding everything else in its wake and subverting the looser, more flexible approaches to teaching, learning or transmitting knowledge that were once the mainstay of practitioners

### **"Doctoring" The Figures**

The final instance of this, and one which arises in similar fashion from the political imperative for target-setting and accountability, is the NHS. In Summer/Autumn 2002, there were a series of reports condemning the "scandal" of waiting list fiddling. A report by the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee uncovered fiddles by 10 hospital trusts in the UK. Although the overall scale of the false reporting was relatively small (it affected 6,000 patients - out of around 6m the NHS treats), the reaction was immediate and vociferous.

The problem seems to be similar to that affecting education. The oppressive nature of the targets set comes to dominate. Targets are set to improve performance, with withdrawal of funding the threat for non-achievement. However, with accountability linked to funding and funding tied so closely to these performance indicators, the incentive to manipulate and distort or engage in statistical sophistry becomes overwhelming.

Perhaps, the conclusion should be to paraphrase George Bernard Shaw (and the current recruitment campaign for teachers): those who can should do, those who can't should do the admin.

*The issue here is, at heart, the same one underlying the debate around*

*education. Namely, that the emphasis on testing and tables is beginning to swamp the open-ended, creative aspect of these areas, with administration overwhelming imagination and fulfilment. We are beginning to turn pupils into exam-passers, police into paper-shifters, doctors into practice managers. Paper is becoming the most prominent and valued output of many of our fundamental social institutions, and those who succeed most in this system are those who can best meet the need of the paperwork. And what of marketing managers?*

### **Arithmocracy and Marketing: Perfect Bedfellows**

To translate the arguments Boyle offers in support of his thesis into language that relates directly to the domain of marketing, I would draw 6 conclusions:

1. That an over-reliance on measurement can lead to the excessive emphasis on exact results, competition and an underestimation of the higher levels of development
2. This can lead to a confusion amongst those who expect one set of answers for all questions. Boyle cites the example of the British Prime Minister Lloyd George. In the First World War, he is alleged to have said that the War Office kept three sets of casualty figures: one to delude the cabinet, one to delude the public and one to delude itself. From this comes the potential for self-delusion.
3. The background to much of our infomania is the need to (and to be seen to) control. As we now know, control is one of the pieces in the reductionist/mechanist jigsaw that we are just going to have to revise in the light of the new sciences
4. As part of the control-fixation that underlies so much measurement, the very act of counting has empowered and strengthened the counters themselves, often at the expense of the counted.
5. Boyle, too, quotes liberally from a speech by Charles Handy, one of the UK's foremost management gurus, in a speech Handy gave to London's Royal Society of Arts in 1996. Handy called it "the fallacy of the single criterion". Speaking of the pursuit of profitability and efficiency, he declared:  
*"Trying to find one number that is the sum of everything is misguided....looking for the one number has corrupted our society" (in Boyle 2000)*
6. But, most depressing of all, marketing workers are experiencing the same admin-fatigue as is afflicting those who work in the spheres of education, policing and health. As we highlighted above, the dismal insistence on targets and unstinting evaluation have drained much of the vitality and originality out of the marketing discipline.

### **The Road for Marketing: A Little Less Evaluation, A Little More**

## Invention

I hope by now that many of the phenomena I have described will have a familiar ring about them. Not just in the fields of healthcare and education, but in the way that these issues have echoes in the way that most branches of marketing are carried out.

Here are a number of "policy changes" I would recommend if I were appointed Czar of Marketing. I realise that by this point a number – a significant number, probably-of producers and users of quantitative research will be grabbing their decks menacingly. But bear with me. I come in peace.

1. Abandon the search for/insistence on The Single Criterion. Enough has been written about measures such as the advertising Awareness Index (the AI, used as a benchmark for scoring the likely or actual impact of a piece of advertising on awareness), so for sound ecological reasons I will refrain from repeating most of it here. Whatever one thinks about its validity as a measurement of effectiveness, or efficiency, it has become the main Priest at the Altar of Accountability. The obsession with predicting the outcome of a piece of (advertising) communication needs to be tempered by the acceptance that all quantitative testing procedures are liable to reduce and standardise the depth of response. The tendency to over-rely on this system derives from the scientific model of mechanism and reductionism that we have discussed. Again, I've avoided taking up an Abolitionist stance, but I believe that the scientific burden needs to be re-examined.
2. It also adds to the feeling that quantification is the ultimate source of unerring certainty and oracular wisdom, and that the evaluation process is "nothing but" the one or two figures that result. The need for standardisation is something that has become more and more prevalent over the last few years, particularly in organisations where centralisation is the norm. This almost mystical belief in numbers has a deep historical heritage (remember Pythagoras), but must be resisted. I hope to have shown that marketing evaluation is by no means on its own in its worshipping of these systems.
3. The pressure of ad-testing, in particular, leads to the temptation to beat the system at its own game. Older readers may recall the era of DAR, Day After Recall, where the systeme-du-jour for "testing" ads was to get them screened in a sample of homes and then calculate how many of them remembered seeing the ad under investigation. Procter & Gamble used DAR and Burke tests not to guarantee an ad would do well, but to minimize risk of it doing badly- it was essentially a back-covering exercise, steeped in a fear of failure and a need to justify/explain why such an ad or such a strategy was pursued. One of the many happy reasons leading to its inglorious demise was the fact that it didn't take long for ad agencies, and creative teams especially, to learn

how to write "winning ads". In this case it meant devising a mechanism that raised memorability –thus increasing the likelihood of test success – but at the expense of other factors (like involvement, brand presentation or empathy). Similarly, though the recent debate over the faults of ad-testing and some innovations has resulted in a sharpening up of the previously standardised testing methods, there is still a well-publicised lack of support for the process from the Creative end of the ordeal (sorry, process).

Remembering what we said earlier about numbers being ascribed greater significance than words, we should constantly be alert to the risk of allowing numbers to carry more weight than they are entitled to.

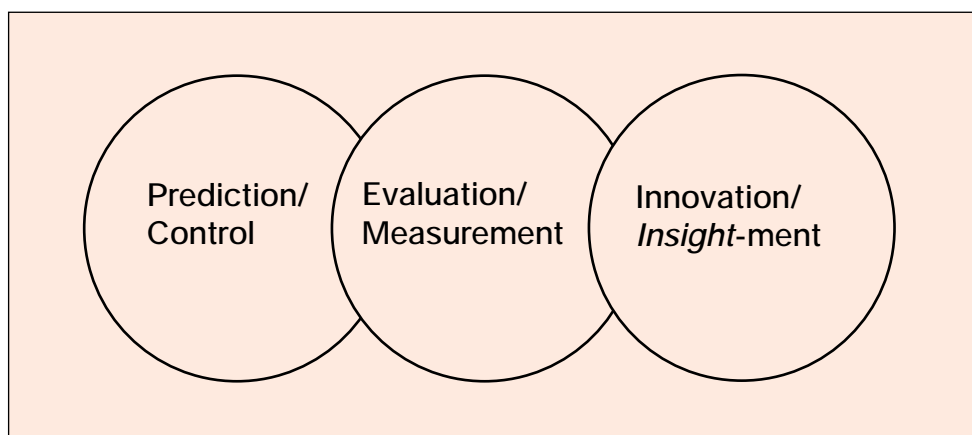
But even beyond the specifics of advertising evaluation, the obsession with accountability has now become a destructive force in the marketing and research industries. As someone who has worked on many international research projects, this is an area where the tendency to the lowest-common-denominator is most prevalent.

4. Specifically, the question of administrative overload needs to be addressed from the top-down, for marketers to get the best out of their job and to maximise their relationships (and output) with their agencies. It has become obvious to anyone in the business (or, at least anyone without a vested interest in perpetuating the status quo) that there are some fearsomely well-paid people engaged in little more than statistical spot-the-ball competitions. This accelerated, I believe, as the advent of Account Planning meant that much of this bureaucratic paper-shuffling was off-loaded into the laps of Account Management. The idea was that the Planners then took over much of the (so-called) intellectual side of brand analysis and development, the strategic direction and the creative briefs. As someone who grew up (professionally speaking) through this exchange of power, there was a mixed response to this handover from most of those involved in account management, some of whom took the loss of influence quite badly and took protracted skiing holidays in protest.

However, gradually all could see that rather than creating a race of Platonic Planners to ponder over brand-stuff transcendently, the flood of data overwhelmed the Planners, too. Now, the constant barrage of audit presentations, tracking presentations, client sales presentations, strategic conflabs, research briefings, research de-briefs, creative presentations, creative re-presentations, Take To Market meetings, not to mention internal and/or external brainstorming and awaydays of various hews- have all undermined the notion of the vacuum for Planners to actually think about the issues that vex them. The ad hoc fix, in many cases, has been to move the problem down, by staffing up (or down). So, much of this now becomes loaded onto the shoulders of a "junior" Planner, and the issue is pushed further down the

Agency food-chain.

5. Channelling talent is intended to be one of the main roles and lures of marketing and its various off-shoots. When graduates are asked why they have chosen a career in marketing and (especially) the account management and Planning disciplines in advertising, they cite factors like being close to the creative process and achieving some effect on creative and strategic outcomes. For young people seeking to become fulfilled "Creatives", the aspirations are even more clear-cut. Yet, the way the business has changed over the last 10-15 years has hardly seen the fulfilment of these forms of ambition.
- The movement of account management in agencies to become more administrative, and for teams to become more responsive and administratively-guided
  - The tendency of marketing departments to experience a deterioration in the levels of empowerment accorded to many levels of brand manager, transforming many of them into product administrators, deprived of power, responsibility and strategic input. There has been a constant outpouring of data indicating that stress in the marketplace is growing, and that vast swathes of workers are feeling under-fulfilled in their jobs.
  - The deadening power of arithmocracy which has swamped many other fields as accountability has become the latest God to be worshipped, has begun to seep into almost area of marketing, sweeping away whole swathes of originality, creativity and initiative with it.
  - The research industry has become positioned as the cornerstone of this system. As a consequence, it has become aligned with the measurement and prediction end of the spectrum, rather than the sphere of innovation or "insight-ment". This, I believe, accounts for why it has lost much of the respect of those operating at the Creative ("Art") end of the process.



**The Research Spectrum**

The individual, it seems to me, is in danger of being engulfed in a tidal wave of systems, standards, benchmarks and other marks of accountability. Just as we noted with the education system and the NHS, the deification of the marketplace is in danger of bleaching out precisely those virtues that individuals pride themselves on expressing. With schools becoming exam factories, hospitals become patient clearing-houses and the police perceived as pen-pushers with nice hats, let's not over-emphasise the cultural or political effect of what is happening to marketing. But let us at least see clearly enough that it is time to ask ourselves these questions:

Do all systems need standards? Can you have accountability without unending measurement? How can we put values like trust and responsibility, flexibility and initiative back into our system?

## **New Science, New Systems**

But science itself has not remained still, stuck in the rut of reductionism, mechanism and physics envy. The boundaries between biology and physics, for example, are blurring. New fields from evolutionary psychology, cognitive sciences and AI/A-Life to small world thinking and econophysics (the latter two barely 4 years old) can give us new frameworks more in tune with the new broader ways of seeing the world. Let us start with the notion of networks.

### **Capra's "It's a Wonderful Life"**

Fritjof Capra's book, "The Web of Life" announces itself as "A new understanding of life at all levels of living systems" and seeks to cement the paradigm shift taking place in the scientific world. Following on from his controversial "The Tao of Physics", which sought to re-enchant physics by exploring the similarities between new insights in physics and eastern religions, he gathers together a breadth of writing and thinking, both scientific and philosophical.

The term "emergence", in the form "emergent properties", goes back to the philosopher C. D Broad in the 1920s and this had been spurred on by a sequence of events. In the first place, German psychologists elevated the concept of the Gestalt (organic form). The philosopher Christian von Eherenfels, in particular, conceived of the gestalt as being "more than the sum of its parts" (it seems this may have the first formulation of this maxim). Later this led to gestalt therapy and the integration of personal experiences in to meaningful wholes and the "hunger for wholeness".

A second, if less obvious, development was the series of insights derived in the 1920s from the new science of quantum physics. Although on the surface this



seemed to be more about even tinier sub-atomic particles, the most subversive implications of quantum theory were just emerging. For a start, the notion of superposition and probability theory meant that the process of observation and measurement muddies the clear waters of interpretation: in Heisenberg's celebrated Uncertainty Principle, it was no longer possible to know where a particle was and what its velocity was at the same time. Secondly, the actual act of observation appeared to affect the outcome of experiments, as demonstrated in the experiment of Schrodinger's cat. This was a manifestation of the fact that said feline could be both dead and alive, until the observer opens the box and the states collapse into a reality.

The third connection was the ecology movement, beginning with the study of groups of organisms and the relationship of organism to environment. From there the concepts of the "ecosystem" and biosphere were conceived. This also changed, or at least, supplemented the orthodox perspective based on an architectural view of physics and saw the burgeoning of research into communities and networks. In "The Tao of Physics", he had earlier got up the collective noses of much of the scientific establishment by arguing that western science had much to learn by adopting many of the ideas of the east (or "eastern mysticism" to his critics), namely, Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism.

So, Kapra concludes, instead of being like a machine, Nature turns out to be more like human nature in that it is unpredictable and sensitive to its environment and small fluctuations around it.

### **Systems Are Doing It For Themselves**

One of the most exciting developments in the scientific arena is the science of Complexity. One of the many popular expositions of this area, called, helpfully, "Complexity" was written by Roger Lewin.

In his study, he meets many of the scientists at the heart of the new theory, including a number who have tried to create the new ecosystem of Artificial Life (A-Life) from their computers. Amongst these was Tom Ray, who was responsible for the Tierra program, the goal being to create artificial, digital life to replicate the biological model as closely as possible.

All this followed, in the terms of complexity theory, in the emergence of global patterns from simple rules.

It is worth noting that one of the central tenets of complexity and systems thinking is that small world networks may lack an organisational centre, yet global interactions still take place. What this means is that old, cherished notions of hierarchical control do not apply: the assumption inbred into generations of "scientific managers" that their role is based on controlling their

organizations, their brands and their "consumers" needs to be revised.

So, from the few simple rules imposed on the A-life by the likes of Ray and Chris Langton, massively varied "life" arose from the mere workings of a complex adaptive system. In other words, complexity could create these conditions without the need to import any extraneous explanations.

The number of popular books published on the related areas of complexity, chaos, ubiquity, universality and small worlds-best known amongst film fans via the infectivity of the Kevin Bacon/6 Degrees of Separation game- testifies to the strength of its popular appeal. It is no accident (since complexity theorists admire deep-seated, architectural coincidence-or, rather, organizing principles or power laws) that Gladwell's "The Tipping Point" may well prove to have been the point at which interest in these domains tipped.

Its talk of leverage strikes a chord with those in this industry who see that like does not always generate like: sometimes small movements can have massive effects (and vice versa).

### **The End of Essence, The Primacy of Pattern**

One of the many pillars supporting the new paradigm emerging within science is the move away from substance and towards pattern and relation. It is now (almost) common knowledge that the way we perceive our world and our place in it has changed since the impact of the cumulative insights of Darwin, Godel, Einstein and Heisenberg. Old certainties about our place in the cosmos, our relationship to the rest of creation, or our grasp of the smallest and largest boundaries of our conception were shaken forcibly by their work.

What I want to concentrate on here is the move from essence to pattern which accompanied the quantum revolution.

First of all, many scientists have come to define our species as "pattern-makers". Take the Nobel-laureate, physicist and Santa Fe complexity guru, Murray Gell-Mann- the man who coined the word "quark" after a passage in Joyce.

He talks of people as being Complex Adaptive Systems. In this way, he believes, there are universal similarities among some of the most crucial processes on earth: biological evolution, ecological systems, the mammalian immune system, the evolution of human societies and sophisticated computer software systems to name but a few. What links all these processes is that each relies on gathering information about itself and its interactions with its environment, building as it goes a model or schema of the world around it based on regularities it perceives. So in the case of human individuals, we think, learn, use symbolic language and generate new generations of CASs in our wake (chief amongst which are powerful computers and their descendants). Later on he

adapts the term to include a CAS that act as an interpreter and observer of the information: this he calls an IGUS, an Information Gathering and Utilising System (Gell-Mann 1994).

According to this thinking, through both our biological inheritance and our culture, we are primed to seek patterns. The desire to link all things together goes back as far as Pythagoras and his number-gods, and the harmony of the spheres. Patterns work as editing devices, maps of a world too complex, chaotic and swollen with information for us to survive. Our minds seek out patterns in order to let us expand our mental powers, and move on to higher planes.

It is the relationships that are primary, and a new lexicon is being created to foreground the role of the relationship or network. Gregory Bateson's "the pattern that connects" has become one of the new mantras of the Complexity Set, as has the biologist S.J. Singer's take on Descartes: "I link therefore I am".

### **Plus Ça Change...La Meme Chose**

The meme fits well into the notion of pattern and connectivity. It has already been absorbed by (or, perhaps, it has colonised the minds of) some within the marketing fraternity: Grant (2002) talks of memetic media, for instance.

The word was coined by Dawkins to postulate cultural transmission as analogous to genetic transmission, but horizontal rather than vertical. Acknowledging the notion of memes means locating power in ideas as entities in themselves, and seeing them as active agents spreading virally from brain to brain, without the (conscious) involvement of the "carrier".

It provides a vital link in an intriguing chain: between psychology and neurology (for example, the engrams publicised by Robert Heath); epidemiology and the power of viral communication promoted amongst others by Gladwell in "The Tipping Point" (Gladwell 2000); and the sort of universal patterns described in fashion, history, seismology and forest fires by Buchanan in "Ubiquity" (Buchanan 2000).

That Planners should find the meme so seductive and flattering is due to its power in prioritising the value of the idea over factual, rational content, and its insistence on the social side of communication. Moreover, recent research carried out by Giacomo Rizzolatti and interpreted by Ramachandran (Ramchandran 2000) into the mirror neurons in the ventral premotor area of monkeys hints at imitation being a driving force behind learning, empathy and the development of language.

The role of imitation and cultural infection does support research models based on "saliency" and "involvement", but adds the new dimensions of "imitability"

or "catchiness".

There is still much to be done in exploring the meme, I believe, but it could well be a store of new ideas to add to the marketing stockpile.

## Putting the Art Back in Marketing

Not only do we need to review our appreciation of the type of science we aspire to in marketing, we have to look for a new balance between the "science" and "art" ingredients. One of the components in the "arts" camp that needs re-evaluation is "risk".

### Error, Risk and Progress

There is a celebrated dictum of George Bernard Shaw, which at the risk of putting it under more stress in its venerable old age, I will wheel out again.

*"The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable man persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man (Maxims for Revolutionists).*

In one of his many essays, the palaeontologist Stephen Jay Gould also quotes the Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto (that's right, Signor 80:20):

*"Give me a fruitful error any time, full of seeds bursting with its own corrections. You can keep your sterile truth for yourself" (Gould, 1993).*

But trial and error is part of learning and thus integral to human psychology, and recent advances in evolutionary psychology have done much to reassert its relevance. The very process of Darwinian evolution thrives on errors in the copying of the genetic code. Mutations or errors in DNA sometimes lead to extinction, but more often provide a new spark of novelty and complexity. Evolution, according to Darwin's heirs, was a series of successful mistakes. Creativity, in natural selection, has error written through it.

But that is not how risk is generally perceived in our world. Ralph Stacey talks about it explicitly: risk is currently regarded as something to be shied away from, ignored, stigmatised.

Instead, let us seek to embrace and understand it, have it placed in its rightful context as one of the key contributors to a healthy, passionate and fulfilled individual, a successful, dynamic and happy company, and a thriving, vital economy.

I have worked long enough in agencies of various hues where the "R" word is one of the great fears hampering any sense of achievement and ambition. Whether it is convincing a client of a strategic leap, producing a creative idea that the team feel may be too "risky" for research, or suggesting a new product idea that breaks the mould that we've been asked to break (but only gently), the Spectre of Risk has ruined more ideas than any one person or research methodology. On top of this it has infected whole organisations (and I don't just mean agencies) and poisoned relationships between parts of the same organisation, and between producers and consumers of ideas (e.g. marketing departments and ad agencies). I remember having many discussions with Mark Wnek, Creative Director at EURO RSCG Wnek Gosper, about the notion of risk and its effect on our daily professional lives. Why can't Clients see, he mused, that risk is just another way of being brave, of showing confidence?

Clearly, those with large chequebooks and even larger pension schemes will want to make sure that their money is being spent "prudently", and will not readily give up the notion of testing, evaluating and measuring, whether it is product launches or specific communication vehicles.

But the corollary of much of this analysis is that unless the iron grip of arithmocracy is loosened everyone will be significantly worse off.

Companies will find themselves churning out more and more similar products; communications agencies will produce identikit campaigns, measured to within an inch of their originality; our brightest young prospects will leave in search of careers that cater more for their ideas, and which foster more original thinking. Many graduates have already realised that a career in advertising, once idolised as the swankiest, most glamorous and sexy of options for an idealistic young graduate has lost much of that veneer (A good thing too, I hear some of you say). But part of that allure was based on the perception of proximity to creativity and ideas, the dream of rubbing shoulders with "creative" people, and maybe contributing something to the creative process. Most people who come into the agency world (and many attracted to marketing) would not consider it flattering to compare it to the Civil Service.

Having a Brand Vision, a Big Idea or a Purpose-Idea (see Earls 2002) may be a necessary requisite for corporate well-being, but I think the endemic dependence on numbers and the terrifying spectre of risk are factors that need to be considered and understood equally. If we want to continue with a policy of riskless mediocrity, we should leave things exactly as they are and watch the failure rates of new products soar and the homogeneity of communication ideas climb relentlessly higher to the peak of bland convergence as the Blind lead the Bland (or the brand).

## Marketing as Art

*"Marketing is the art-form of the 20th Century"* (Germaine Greer, speaking on BBC2's "Late Review" 6/04/02)

There are 3 areas I want to cover briefly here. The need for more storytelling; new insights into Creativity from science; and the imperative for simplicity.

## Storytelling

Sad but true, but we often forget that we are all-at least partly- in the storytelling business.

The reasons for this wilful obliviousness seem to lie primarily with the default reliance on facts. Those who champion marketing as primarily, or even wholly, a science-based procedure (such as Sergio Zyman) might want to reflect on this. For all of the mapping, positioning, testing, predicting, evaluating and planning can't escape the fact that brands are based on ideas and ideas are stories that connect people. Then, if you do have to turn one of your pieces of positioning, testing, predicting etc. into something tangible, you (presumably) need a brief, and then you definitely need a narrative.

That this should be fundamental to the visionary company is a point well made by The Swinging Swedes, Ridderstrale and Nordstrom, in "Funky Business". Here in the context of propagandising for "funky leaders", they insist on the need for CSOs "chief story-telling officers", and manage to link Ingvar Kamprad of IKEA with Moses in a matter of sentences. (Ridderstrale and Nordstrom 2000).

In a similar context, in a lecture at the RSA, Stephen Denning, the former Programme Director of Knowledge Management at the World Bank, talked of the link of knowledge and storytelling and how it can change organisational culture. He tells of how in 1996 he tried to introduce the concept of knowledge management after being sent to the "Siberia" that was the information department. The breakthrough came when he proposed sharing the knowledge across the organisation in the form of "stories". Many of us would recognise these as case histories, where a mass of amorphous (frequently conflicting data –or information) is framed in the form of a more conventional narrative structure.

Some of the most eminent and thinkers, writers and scientists are also great writers of narratives. Think of the psychoanalyst Adam Phillips whose popularity owes much to his lucid and poetic style; or the recently-deceased Stephen J. Gould, palaeontologist and disseminator supreme, who took particular subjects for his column and wove them into a tale of interest, intelligence and (in many cases) detection. Neurologist Oliver Sacks is another example.

Looked at without rational blinkers, it is obvious that myths outweigh facts

(Bart Kosko in "Fuzzy Logic" believes that the longer the explanation, the less we trust it: eminent, if painfully learned, sense to anyone who has worked in advertising).

But it goes deeper than this. For a consensus has emerged amongst the neuroscientific evidence that now corroborates what the great writers have felt for centuries: that the individual creates much of their sense of identity from their own narrative.

Oliver Sacks author of "The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat", "Awakenings", (great book, so-so movie. There ought to be a law specifying a quality threshold for Robin Williams films), "A Leg To Stand On" and "An Anthropologist on Mars" comments:

*"To restore the human subject at the centre-the suffering, afflicted, fighting, human subject-we must deepen a case history to a narrative or tale; only then do we have a "who" as well as a "what", a real person, a patient, in relation to a disease- in relation to the physical"* **"The Man Who Mistook His Wife For a Hat" p viii**

Interest in narrative has, we have seen, swept across much of the sciences and humanities. Wherever you wish to locate it, the law has seen this resurgence of interest, too. Robin Tolmach Lakoff, Professor of Linguistics at UC Berkeley, talks convincingly of the "power of personal narrative" in "The Language War". Lawyers, she notes, are increasingly aware that a trial is about the construction and control of a narrative.

"Narratives of the same event may differ in every significant detail depending on the perspectives of individual narrators. If we can't determine who has the right to tell the story, through whose eyes we will be seeing its events, then we can't have too much confidence in the validity of the story itself, let alone its moral or meaning" (Tolmach Lakoff 2000)

The storyteller is a role that I fervently believe is understated in the marketing (and even, shamefully to say advertising) fraternities. Though it has often been used as a training tool, or as a stimulus prompt to aid brand development or characterisation in qualitative research, it is a skill that needs greater application across the board.

### **New Insights into Creativity**

According to most authorities (such as The Nomura Institute) we are now in the Fourth Age -after Agriculture, Industrialisation, Information, now it's Creativity. In the words of the writer and thinker

Edward de Bono, we have reached the end of the Information age, now it is the CONCEPT Age. (de Bono 1998).

Put another way, the explosion in brands and services means that differentiation has become the most important game in town, be it in creating new ideas and brands, or creating meaningful values for pre-existing ones. This is what I often refer to as The Same Game vs the Fame Game: Creativity breeds Difference. Where communication meets commerce, creativity is the trump card.

The physicist Peter Medawar endorsed the view that creativity can be broader than the commonly accepted definition and is by no means un-scientific, when he said:

*"Designing a hypothesis is a creative act in sense that it is the invention of a possible world, or a possible fragment of a world"*

This also recalls the words of Alan Hedges in his seminal (which for some of us is a euphemism for "neglected") treatise on ad development and testing, "Testing to Destruction", first published in 1974.

*"Devising an advertising strategy is an act every bit as creative as designing an ad"*

The "I" s seem to have it as far as denoting the key springboards for creativity in the broadest sense. Insight, Ideas, Interrogation, Imagination and Inspiration. Insight connects different fields and creates new patterns gaining new perspectives by a new arrangement, rather than new data (a distinction still lost on many purchasers of data in our business).

This also suggests that insight reaches further than any logical recipe can lead the mind.

Ideas are what link us as a species. The linguist Terence Deacon recently published a book devoted to the notion that we are "homo symbolicus", and a look at the etymology of the word "symbolon" reveals a deep truth.

From the Greek meaning to "throw together", it referred originally to a token or tally that could be used as a way of proving identity; the item was split or broken, the two parts were given to different individuals, and only when they were properly reunited could the parties be truly identified. The Greeks were interested in such cryptography, and the Spartans used a system called the scytale. This was staff around which a strip of leather or parchment was wound; the message was written on this, and then unwound leaving what would appear to be a meaningless series of letters. Only when the receiver was equipped with a scytale of the same diameter could he decode it (see Simon Singh, The Code Book").



The scientist David Bohm expressed this distinction nicely when he said:

*"You're not thinking, you're just being logical"*

### **Simplicity**

It is impossible to overstate the overlap of Creativity and Simplicity. Years of experience (to which add "bitter") working at the interface/coalface of creativity and commerce have taught me that where simplicity is concerned, less is (as Mies van de Rohe said) more. We all consciously or not prefer less information, and the brain scientists concur that the brain itself prefers it to complexity. De Bono, in the book of the concept, argues that simplicity is the "ability to extract, define and re-design concepts".

Scores of scientists have borne witness to the need for elegance; even those who are not expressing this view in terms of aesthetics feel that articulating theorems, expressing observations, solving formulae are all best achieved with a sense of aesthetic simplicity. A beautiful mind, indeed. The science writer Michael White puts it nicely in the conclusion to his study of scientific rivalry:

*"Just as the artist gorges on reality and is consumed by beauty, so is the scientist"* (White 2001)

From a different perspective, Bart Kosko's "Fuzzy Logic" looks at the extent to which concepts, ideas and terms are not always as black-or-white as certain methodologies like to think. In the course of this he point out a truth that anyone who has worked in the communication business can sense in their waters: the longer n explanation (ad copy, direct communication, face to face contact) the less we trust it.

To return to the heart of creativity as I know it, the process of preparing a brief for creative teams, agreeing it, discussing it and then bringing it to life all demands a grasp on the aesthetic of simplicity. The entire process from receiving a brief from the client (if appropriate) to generating your own version(s), to exploring it with its target audience, should be an exercise in controlled simplicity. So much has been written or just vented about the Creative Briefing process, that there is neither space nor time to do the topic justice. In this context, however, I do want to bring out the one thread that emerges from this discussion: the crucial importance of a tight, simple, elegant "golden thread". By this I mean the grip of a central idea, hypothesis, concept which acts as the skeleton for the direction that is being recommended in the brief.

All too often, the brief is used as a dumping ground, where all sorts of objections, information, prejudices and whims are thrown together on the basis that the more there is the more the Creatives will have at their disposal to allow

them to whip up a masterpiece.

THIS IS NOT HOW IT WORKS.

What they really want is a clear direction, an avenue that looks fruitful, motivating and liable to generate that necessary spark. Looked at the other way up, they want as many cul de sacs closed down as possible. This is simplicity, without being simplistic. Some agencies are renowned for going as far as having one-word briefs, and if this seems to work then all well and good (my own experience has indicated that sometimes it can be too narrowly focused, but this may not be typical).

To use a different idiom, this is about editing. Knowing what to put in and what to leave out; knowing how to construct an argument that is cogent and taut, yet has a feeling of inspiration beyond the rational; understanding how to use language and how choice of tonality, register and imagery in the brief can influence what is the desired output. These are qualities that do not seem to be in common use.

These principles are not, I believe, restricted to the creative briefing process. They are more than desirable in most pitch presentations, agency briefing documents, marketing strategies and mission statements to name but a few written standards of the marketing world.

It is sometimes assumed that the scientific viewpoint gives carte blanche to what is actually an addled form of complexity. By this I mean what in lay terms would be called an over-complicated, dense, wood-for-the-trees, throw-something-at-the-wall-to-see-what-sticks approach, as opposed to the technical definition of complexity (it has been said that a jumbo jet is complicated, but mayonnaise is complex). By the same token, simplicity is seen as a dirty word, equated with either inadequate performance; or, as leading to the simplistic, and not being sufficiently clever, professional, or (that old bugbear) rational.

If we at least adhere to these tenets and put the art back in marketing, this will lead to a situation where the nature of new product concepts, communication ideas and creative outputs across the board is likely to be more distinctive and inspiring.

When applied to research, what this means is that we need to pay closer regard to stories, narratives and tales told by people (not consumers), and be less obsessed with concepts unfamiliar and inimical to them such as strategies, designs, adcepts and mood boards. Exploring brand meaning using the language of narrative and story is a universal and will pay great dividends. It will also enable the receivers of the research findings (clients or Creatives) to respond in a way that they can empathise with first as human beings, and then as marketing professionals. At present, the tendency towards the scientific

modus operandi that I have described has led to the research process becoming more and more divorced from Normal Life As It Is Lived and Described. (One obvious exception is the burgeoning area of ethnography or observational research).

## Alchemy as a Model

But if the Arts/Science polarity doesn't satisfy you, I have one other proposal. Alchemy.

### What is Alchemy?

The renewal of interest in alchemy is clearly a sign of the times. This is at least partly a reflection of the uncertainty about the omnipotence of hard science that we have discussed, and the fears in some quarters for the implications of cloning, GMOs and other scientific interventions into our environment and our humanity. In this sense its rise parallels the emergence of many of the New Age doctrines and eastern philosophies in the West.

The recent "Metamorphosis" exhibition at the Natural History Museum in London reminded us that change, as Heraclitus said, is everywhere. This is an age where the pace of technology hand-in-hand with the advancement of science means that our identities, our species, maybe even our planet will be transformed in a way that is currently unimaginable.

Defining alchemy as a part (of varying significance) of the business spirit is hardly new, but in this context of examining physical science, it is worth reinvestigating its applicability.

As a recent book shows (Marshall 2001), despite its somewhat pagan, occult associations, alchemy has always been concerned with spiritual enlightenment through knowledge and was a handmaiden to the newly emerging experimental science of the Age of Enlightenment.

From the Arab scientists of the 9th century, through to Newton and Jung alchemy had had its followers amongst those we would now consider "legitimate" scientists. In Keynes's celebrated comment, Isaac Newton was...

"not the first of the Age of Reason; he was the last of the magicians.. the last great mind which looked out on the world with the same eyes as those who began to build our intellectual inheritance rather less than 10, 00 years ago" (J.M Keynes, cited in Marshall 2001)

It is said the Newton, as well as his more famous works, left behind a million

words on the subject of alchemy, so devoted was he to seeking its wisdom. Some have claimed that it was only his deep-seated belief in the occult (literally something "hidden") that led him to conceive of gravity, a concept that needed a sensitivity to the notion of invisible forces being at work in the operation of the universe. There is an irony, in this. As Marshall suggests, the last magician was to be the person who laid the groundwork for the analytical, reductionist science of the following two centuries.

Even as metaphor for spiritual transformation, alchemy has had an enormous effect. Jung saw alchemy as a gateway to soul transformation and individuation. It was both an allegory and aid to helping the soul achieve wholeness and a lexicon of symbols, which helped underpin his theory of the collective unconscious.

### **Alchemy and Advertising**

And what, if nothing else, are advertising and marketing if not the most contemporary arts of transformation? And this era, more than any other, is concerned with the principle of transformation and metamorphosis.

Looking at news from the neuroscience front, there seems to be remarkable consensus on the view that the "single self" is not scientifically proven. VS Ramachandran, for one, has his doubts about the sanctity of the self. "Here and elsewhere when I say that the self is an "illusion", I simply mean there is no single entity corresponding to it in the brain. But in truth we know so little about the brain that it is best to keep an open mind". (Ramachandran 1998)

*"I'm a Million Different People From One Day To The Next.." (R. Ashcroft)*

The increasing inability of people of all ages to "act their age", the desire/pressure to reinvent oneself (witness anything from the growth in cosmetic surgery to "Faking It"), the emphasis on deceit and self-deceit observed by the evolutionary psychologists, Valentine and Gordon's "moments of identity"- all this suggests that we are bent on changing ourselves and blending our identities at will.

Now more than ever as identity melts and boundaries blur, marketing is perfectly placed at heart of taking the base metal of desire and transforming it into something tangible and desirable, the metamorphosis of wish into reality, dream into tangibility, demand into satisfaction.

### **Overall Conclusions**

### **The Appliance of (the right type of ) Science**

I am happy to grant that there are some parts of the marketing process that can usefully be described as scientific in their methodology. But I worry on three counts.

First, that it may be used as an excuse for explaining marketing solely in terms of the (old) mechanistic, positivist model with its physics envy and scientific approach to management.

Second, in a different view of the same phenomenon, marketing has got to learn to be more porous, more susceptible to challenging new theories and ideas from outside, even if they threaten the status quo.

Consequently, marketing should embrace the new sciences of complexity, chaos and ubiquity, with their insistence on bottom-up thinking, distributed control not hierarchies, edge of chaos thinking, tipping points and emergence.

Third, whatever one's view of the science question, it is time to regard the art of marketing as what is most likely to fuel creativity and generate ideas of difference, value and longevity. Perhaps it is better to see marketing as a distinctly post-modern blend, a blurring of old science, new science and alchemy.

### **Some Steps Forward**

1. In scientific terms, we need to think more in Biological terms, and depend less on "Old" Physics: this means remembering that people are people, not consumers (can we eradicate this term once and for all, please?); that they have moods and emotions (like we do); that they are not subjects to be probed endlessly like Skinner's rats. The observation of "consumers" behind two-way mirrors still makes me feel a behaviouristic tingling down my spine, and think of going off to found a sort of Anti-Vivisectionist splinter group of the MRS. It means abandoning pretensions to omniscience, swapping Mathematician David Hilbert's arrogant "We must know. We will know", for screenwriter William Goldman's Socratic "Nobody knows anything". We must move from data-information-meaning more speedily and effectively, without falling prey to the lures of standardised, globalised, back-covering, Lowest-Common-Denominator arithmocracy. Let me repeat: the enemy, as I see it is not the specific techniques of (quantitative) evaluation or measurement, but the deification of accountability. Things are out of balance, the accountability prerogative and runaway measurement are hampering the development of creativity across the board.
2. Why do we expect "consumer" psychology to bear so little relationship to how we are as people? There seems now a (contrarian?) consensus that listening to people [i.e. much of conventional research] only gets you so far: memory and the self under the neuroscientific microscope are seen to be

unreliable and plastic, individuals are often not that but "many-mes" in one body, teeming with irrationality, feelings and desires that never get as far as the coalface of consciousness. We all practise deceit and self-deceit, and "act the part". The truth is it doesn't suit us/the company/the industry to credit people with too much autonomy, unpredictability or capriciousness as this fights against the precious tenets of scientific management that linger still. Boxing people into little compartments, all wrapped up in labelled parcels make them easy to understand, control and target (now there's a semantic giveaway. Ready. Aim. Fire!). Let us hope that a new paradigm (hard to avoid that word) is indeed emerging based on due recognition of emotions, low-involvement processing, patterns not essences, small differences that make a big difference, and collectivity and connectivity. The vestiges of scientific management need to be swept away, and replaced by systems which understand that companies are closely analogous to living organisms or "complex adaptive systems" seeking patterns that connect, commonly known as ideas, and liable to be unpredictable and uncontrollable.

3. We need to acknowledge that strategy as well as creativity is emergent. It does not arise from a linear process and isn't just something reserved for people with interesting accents and lots of crayons. It should be fully emancipated and democratised, brought earlier into the process from new product generation, to brief-writing to insight-gathering. The Creative briefing process should be considered as a metaphor or template for more of what we do in marketing and research terms, if originality is (genuinely) our goal. Simplicity should be restored to its rightful place in the pantheon of creative aids: Crick and Watson's paper unveiling their idea of the double helix was 900 words long.
4. As far as brand thinking goes, the language of complexity and emergence suggests small world networks lack an organisational centre, yet one gets global interactions, power laws and deep organizational principles without hierarchical control. The brand as a network of patterns, a hub, a relational field, an emergent property-these are all metaphors which I feel can add something to our understanding of this elusive concept, and which I hope to explore elsewhere.
5. Has evaluation overwhelmed experimentation? I remember a time when stages of strategic or creative development research would be conducted to worry around different approaches, points of view or ideas. We need to reinstate a view that tolerates failure and fruitful error, that downgrades "control" and that engenders disruption and risk; one that accepts that creativity best emerges at "the edge of chaos". Creativity, therefore, is to be embraced, not feared, minimised or ghettoised. If this means bringing a creative role within each company as The Research Business International

discussed in their paper last year (Kiddle and Williamson 2002), so much the better. We should turn back the tide of suffocating accountability and allow ourselves some more room for genuine innovation, accepting that risk and failure are all part of life. Looking at risk productively, we should expect research (and those who use it) to look out more for ideas, observations, insights that will lead to difference, whilst not always demanding standardised, lowest-common-denominator risk-aversion.

6. Following the methods of the sciences of complexity, chaos and ubiquity, we should elevate jumps, patterns and viruses over logic, boxes and sectors. Simple rules can lead to complex outcomes, and very often the shortest way from A to B (or wherever) is not by logic but by idea or virus. Perhaps, rather than dwell on individual psychology, we should follow the memes and place greater emphasis on the model of contagion than on conventional individual communication or response. This would require something of an overhaul of certain research techniques, however. Viral transmission is not something at present that the research industry is geared up to measure
7. To marketing in general I would advise a warmer embrace of chance, accident, chaos and the World Outside. Go out a bit more; read some books. See some movies (the Phoenix cinema in North London I can highly recommend). Loosen that collar. It's good to be an Outsider. Experience can sometimes be a barrier to understanding and intuition, and looking with an outsider's eye can generate radical new points of view. Freud, Marx, Picasso were all outsiders who learned the rules before breaking them; Hollywood was largely created by a small number of Jewish emigrants from Eastern Europe who built the Dream Factory. Or take another Jewish immigrant Irving Berlin who wrote both "Easter Parade" and "White Xmas" and helped codify the American Dream.
8. Names: in an ideal world, we would banish most of the labels we now have. Cheerio consumer. Bye-bye Planner (what actually do we plan, anyway? Consumers presumably and it reeks of control-freakery). Meaning Managers is what I think we truly are, but don't hold your breath waiting for that one. Oh, and "Creatives" may have to be demystified and rebranded if we seek to open up the creative process from its present niche.

### **The New Consensus**

In conclusion, I think there is a growing consensus of practitioners and academics who are beginning to shift the centre of theoretical gravity away from the heirs of positivist scientific management, transportation models, physics envy and reductionism. There are models grounded in the new sciences of complexity, chaos and ubiquity, with their insistence on bottom-up thinking, distributed control not hierarchies, edge of chaos thinking, tipping points.

To paraphrase Woody paraphrasing Groucho (source: Annie Hall), any club that has someone like Charles Handy, Lewin and Regine, David Freedman, Peter Senge, John Grant, Kevin Kelly, Tom Peters, Malcolm Gladwell, and The Swinging Swedes for members is one I would be glad to join.

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