

BEWIDERING BOXES AND MYSTIC MATRICES: MARKETING TEXTBOOKS AND THE  
MISREPRESENTATION OF REALITY

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# **BEWIDERING BOXES AND MYSTIC MATRICES: MARKETING TEXTBOOKS AND THE MISREPRESENTATION OF REALITY**

## **Abstract**

*This paper argues that theories of marketing, as evident in a range of key textbooks represent a flawed view of the reality of the practitioner's world. It is suggested that marketing scholars desire to reduce real world activity to a series of over arching explanations has led to the simplification and impoverishment of theory. The latter as propounded in the textbooks has remained remarkably resilient to change despite receiving some trenchant criticisms. Marketing textbooks are to an extent highly similar, drawing as they do on an implicitly systems based paradigm where universal truths are indispensable modes of representational language. In contrast to an approach based on universalistic theory, this paper draws on some interpretative research findings into the nature of marketing practice. The findings from a series of phenomenological interview with managers show that marketing is a locally defined contingent activity, occupying a distinctive discursive space separate from that of conventional textbook theory. As a result of this, it is argued that marketing textbooks should embrace an approach based on detailed ethnographic insights into the diverse realities of marketing practice. The intention should be to move away from the 'one size fits all' theory to a situation where marketing is recognised as being about a socially mediated process comprised of many multifaceted approaches to strategy.*

## **Track:**

Qualitative Inquiry in Marketing

## **INTRODUCTION: THEORY, PRACTICE AND THE MARKETING TEXTBOOK**

Writers of marketing textbooks are good at developing universal overarching theories of the discipline and setting them up as a basis for action. As Hackley (2003) argues, there is an inbuilt assumption in the majority of texts that marketing can be learnt in the abstract. This approach is evident in many leading texts, typical of the ones used on undergraduate marketing courses; see for example Jobber (2007), Brassington and Pettitt (2005); Dibb and Simkin et al (2005). The theories referred to here are well rehearsed in the texts. Market segmentation variables exist as a priori truths. The product life cycle indicates the type of marketing response necessary at each of its stages. There is a normative communications planning model which emphasises a universal view of consumer behaviour. Marketing plans should adopt the same structure everywhere, irrespective of context or size of firm. These 'articles of faith' (Kent 1986), are informed by a hypothetic deductive approach rooted in a systems perspective. The assumption is that we start from an abstractly generated theory and then move into the real world (Tapp 2006). Marketing textbooks conform to this positivistic model of the world, where marketing action is seen as either being consistent with a theory or as an aberrant deviation from it. In contrast, praxis suggests that marketing theory as espoused in textbooks is rarely found (Edwards 2005). Yet still we continue to perpetuate these frameworks as being eminently useful. This paper argues that what is out there instead, is a range of disparate practices and marketing activities. The latter first and foremost conform to a local logic of action and not to some abstract system of marketing thought.

In order to examine marketing practice from an interpretative perspective, which attempts to highlight the discrepancies between the theory of textbooks and reality, an inquiry based on a phenomenological approach was adopted. Results are reported that suggest the textbook format currently in use needs a radical rethink, in order to incorporate the ethnography of the marketing practitioner. It is not one overarching positivistic theory with attendant models that we should be looking for, but many socially mediated theories. Most standard marketing texts appear to assume that all action is activated through technical theory (Dunne 1999), when in reality organisations are about a complex, interpreted social world. At the disposal of the interpretative researcher, are a range of emic techniques enabling us to better understand the vagaries of the practitioner's world. These methods, largely underutilised in the study of marketing management, include grounded theory, ethnography, the phenomenological interview and ethnomethodology (Goulding 2005; Ehigie and Ehigie 2005; Hassard 1990).

Simon (1994), points out that managers are valuable sources of information, where they are conveyors of an understanding that is rarely exploited in research into marketing. Apart from the selection of often terse case studies in texts by authors, there is little engagement with the narrative form as expressed in the words of actual marketing managers. Short vignettes are put side by side with passages on marketing theory. Rarely do we see marketing practice articulated from the perspective of those who implement it. As a consequence, whether or not marketing principles were actually employed becomes very difficult to determine. As Hackley (2003p1342) points out, "Marketing texts offer little ethnographic or other contextual information..." Evidence of the fact that marketing is largely about different local realities, rather than platitudinous generalisation, is provided by the research study reported on here. Tapp et al (2006) makes the important point that marketing is not amenable to study by an abstract and generalised method. It is a social construct almost impossible to externalise outside of dialogue and debate. Marketing

management is hence a complex and nebulous phenomenon. Tapp et al (2006) call for the applied academic, (who also usually writes textbooks), to get nearer to this type of knowledge that is trans-disciplinary, reflecting the messy world of the practitioner. The paper seeks to respond to this imperative. The next section outlines the research approach adopted in this study and then considers the findings and how they compare with standard textbook approaches to marketing. Relevant academic literature is also examined in this section. Finally, the conclusion offers some thoughts on how a revised perspective could be used to enhance and change the present structure of the marketing textbook.

## **THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH APPROACH**

Phenomenology emerged out of a developing discontent with a philosophy of science based on an account of measurable material things, which is the approach of positivism. Phenomenology takes into account the experiencing person and the connections between human consciousness and objects existing in the natural world. In phenomenology, perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge and is a source that cannot be doubted (Moustakas, 1994). The object of a conscious act or experience is inseparable from the meaning attached to it. Experience is then intentional and meaning is at the heart of phenomenological understanding. Phenomenology tries to understand the way a person lives, creates and relates to the world. The phenomenological process describes what is perceived, sensed and known in one's immediate awareness and experience. What is utilised by the researcher is only the data that is available to consciousness and understanding is developed through the totality of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological approach involves an understanding of experience in order to obtain a comprehensive description that provides the basis for a reflective structural analysis. This is usually obtained through the open-ended interview, which is a first person's report of life experiences (Marshall and Rossman 1999). These life experiences can often be articulated as narratives, further adding to the richness of the researcher's insights (Shankar and Goulding 2001).

A research study was undertaken then, using the phenomenological interview, which involved having conversations with senior marketing managers who could speak for marketing activity in their organisation. Over eighty different marketing managers were written to, using a standard letter, asking for interview access. In the end, twenty four interviews were completed with marketing managers representing a wide range of small, medium and large sized organisations. A key criteria in selecting organisational members to interview, was that respondents had responsibility for writing marketing plans. Interviewees came from printing, building contracting, book publishing, meat slicing equipment manufacture, financial services, retailing, computer hardware and software, professional services, public sector leisure, television, consultancy, and a charity. Also interviewed were marketing managers from manufacturers of beauty products, handbags, paint brushes, packaging equipment and small electrical motors. For the purpose of this paper, all respondents and their companies have been made anonymous, along with the particular area of the country in which the interviews took place. In all cases, fictitious names have been adopted.

## **FINDINGS: MARKETING AND THE POVERTY OF TRADITIONAL THEORY**

Firstly, it is worth noting here that virtually without exception all the managers interviewed

were familiar with the technical language of academic marketing, from the four Ps to various strategic planning models. Generally though, these frameworks never really seemed to occupy the thinking of, or form a major part of these marketers discourse, as will be illustrated. It can be argued that textbook marketing knowledge is, after all, relatively easily acquired, unlike the experientially mediated skills and understanding demanded by the complex work practices of the professionals in this study. Brown (1998) has pointed out that what exists in textbooks is no trivial matter however. He suggests that it can be argued they represent the very essence of the marketing discipline, a point endorsed by Gummesson (1993; 2002). It is argued in this paper that if false frameworks are being promulgated, then these need replacing or upgrading. One such framework is represented by the common definition of marketing used. In textbooks, standard definitions of marketing make little or no reference to context; see Brassington and Pettitt (2005). Marketing is defined universally, with little attention paid to the manner in which it might be interpreted by organisational members. This standard definition can be seen as potentiality invalidating other marketing meanings and actions, which do not conform to the same pre-determined measures (Kent, 1986). The issue here, confirmed by the research, is that practising managers have different perceptions of what marketing is compared to the dictates of normative theory. For most managers, marketing could not be defined in any abstract way outside of their own activity frame.

A specific organisationally focused definition of marketing, representative of the general findings is offered by Clive Terry the marketing and sales manager of Thor Engineering, a manufacturer of meat slicing equipment. He said that marketing is,

“Exploring the needs of manufacturers and gearing our design efforts to solve their problems.”

The general findings here indicate that the sense of any object is derived from its context, or is ‘indexed’ to a particular situation. (Heritage 1984). For organisational actors, it becomes difficult to make sense of what marketing is, if abstracted from its local context. In considering definitions and their impact on practice, Robson and Rowe (1997) point out that a phenomenological study would be of great assistance in assessing the true role of selling in marketing. They postulate that a significant number of marketing academics claim that selling is actually extraneous to marketing activity. As Brown (2006p221) has pointed out, marketing is first and foremost about ‘selling stuff’ a point that sometimes seems to be obscured in marketing textbooks which often attempt to make scientific sounding statements about market oriented companies being more profitable than ones with selling orientations. Judging by some of the comments from managers in this study, selling is seen as being a very significant aspect of marketing. Jason Hobart, Marketing Director of Stirling Publisher;

“...marketing is at the end of the day selling, and you sell more by having the right product at the right price and knowing who the right people are to sell it to.”

It can be argued then, that success is not just about basing business activity on a single, ‘right’ way (Murray et al 2002). Robbin’s (1991) in-depth case study analysis of a family company, found that although strategic marketing planning was absent, the company was prospering. Anecdotally, this type of situation is well recognised within the practitioner communities and might explain why the latter fail to take much notice of academic marketing research. The

evidence seems to be strong that academic research in marketing fails to make much of an impression on marketing practitioners. From a survey of marketing managers McKenzie et al (2002) concluded that none of them regularly read an academic journal, and that the awareness of academic marketing journals among marketing managers is very low, even for journals that claim to have practitioners among their target audience. A recent survey of marketing research practitioners established that they find sources of information other than academic journals, mainly professional magazines and web sites far more useful for professional purposes (Baines, et al 2006). It is interesting to note that marketing textbooks are nowhere mentioned in these studies as sources of prime information and assistance for practitioners.

Another central article of faith promulgated in textbooks is based on one which suggests the environment can be represented and analysed in an objective manner. In most marketing texts, there is a chapter which represents the environment and its constituent factors in a relatively straightforward and unambiguous fashion. Weick (1995) argues however, that the environment is subjectively perceived and constructed by organisational members as individual acts. Research conducted by Knibbs et al (1987), clearly highlighted how different managers within the same organisation construct significantly different organisational analyses, even though they are all supposedly describing the same external environments. If managers do not notice, or are not concerned by certain environmental events, then they will not be acted upon (Weick, 1995). Weick also points out that the rational model assumes a mass of data is collected on the business environment. This is not always the case in practice. One manager in the study spoke for many when he was asked if he completed an environmental analysis. He replied by saying "No, No...I just want to know how the opposition is disposed around me...." In this study, the business environment was not found to be a fixed objective entity, but embedded in the local rationality of marketing managers worlds. This is a result of the pragmatic acceptance of what is reasonable and achievable, by organisational members. Textbooks fail to capture this complexity and ambiguity.

An additional key article of the textbook faith is represented by the strategic planning tools. In most marketing textbooks, it seems obligatory for firms to carry out a portfolio analysis. (see Brassington and Pettitt 2005p399-404). These are ubiquitous in the modern marketing textbook, despite a critical crescendo as to their relevance. Morrison and Wensley (1991) argue it is an approach which 'boxes in' strategic thinking and is an outmoded orthodoxy. Additionally, the Boston matrix is criticised as being too narrow and difficult to work with. Whilst Brown (2001p93) has noted that the 'bloom is going off boxes' matrices are very resilient. For some of the managers in this study, it is clear that decisions are based on an alternative, intuitive, tacit approach, rather than on the use of boxes. At Vincent Duke, a major financial services company, the marketing manager indicated that strategic thinking does not primarily come from the planning tools.

"...most of us really do our marketing thinking by just imagining how we would feel as a customer, and that has given us an awful lot of what we need to know and understand, to move the company on."

There is little evidence that marketing textbooks even acknowledge this approach to decision making let alone discuss it. The case is that intuition and tacit knowledge often developed in local contexts do not sit well with overarching, explicit rationalist frameworks. For Jason Hobart of

Stirling Publisher, there is also a role for intuition, and experience in, for example, the new product development process. He makes the point that,

... at the end of the day, one of the many values of the publishing team...is they have a gut feel for what is going to work and what isn't going to work, and even at the micro level, looking at the cover of a book, they can sense whether it is going to work or not, so I believe there is a role for making those sort of judgement calls..."

Hackley (2000) in his study of work in an advertising agency, indicated how central tacit knowledge is to marketing decision making. Hackley (1999), states the tacit area of practical knowledge refers to action which is left out of abstracted theoretical descriptions, but on which the accomplishment of action depends. He contends that high level practical knowledge in this area is tacit. He goes on to point out that a person who is highly accomplished in strategic marketing decision making, is likely to be able to utilise sophisticated and experientially mediated concepts in coping with marketing issues. These implicit features of marketing knowledge are systematically ignored in textbooks, where the emphasis is still put on the four Ps of the marketing mix as frameworks for understanding, see for example Jobber (2007) and Brassington and Pettitt (2005). This is despite concerted argument which suggests the concept is increasingly moribund (Gronross 1994; Brownlie and Saren 1992). Managers in the study here often referred to the inadequacy of a four Ps approach. At Stirling Publisher, Jason Hobart, the marketing director, pointed out that,

"in the marketing plan you will not see the four Ps...it becomes a bit slavish.... I would rather talk about understanding markets, understanding how you reach end users, and understanding how you continue your business as usual; sales to those markets, how you get incremental sales to those markets, how you get loyalty, so during the year we have got a growing loyal base."

The notion of social reality as a constellation of pluralities, suggests that knowledge is often personal and subjective. A consequence of this is that each marketing manager here has a reservoir of wisdom which is embedded within the context of their own organisation. This may not be able to be codified into one overarching marketing reality, but into many. This is a point most textbooks ignore. From the study here, two managers explain why they do not use the analytical marketing tools. Lewis Stuart, which manufactures small industrial machines, has Trevor Cole responsible for marketing and sales. Trevor was asked if he used tools like the Boston matrix to help plan and execute marketing strategy.

" No, in practice we probably don't. We use more initiative, conversations. We do with the AVV external overseas distributors...we say, what do you actually think about your market currently? How do you see it? Forecast what you are going to order from us, and in fact we do use their forecast within our manufacturing build programmes."

Jerry Court of Morris Grout, a major building contractor, points to the key role of on going relationships in determining marketing actions. For him, the Boston matrix is,

"...good to talk about over the dinner table maybe, but I didn't really find there was proper use for it. I have been with the company twenty five years, I know what we can do and I hope I can pass that out to the people in my department, and it is a matter of getting out, finding out who to talk to, going to see them, building relationships, and you do that as much by personality as Boston

matrixes..."

Gummesson (2002) is critical of the way relationships and networks are dealt with in marketing textbooks. He argues that the area has still not made any substantial impact, with relationship marketing often appearing as an adjunct chapter at the end. This may be overstating the case. None of the following have a whole chapter devoted to relationship marketing; Brassington and Pettitt (2005), Dibb and Simkin et al (2006), Jobber (2007). Given Gummesson's point that business is primarily a network of relationships, the reductionist logic inherent in the marketing textbook is fundamentally wrong. For Gilmore et al. (2001), networks are an important way in which marketing decisions are made. Their study indicates that SME marketing decision making is built around spontaneity, reactivity, informality and looseness. As a result of the interviews carried out with the managers of this study, there is no reason to suggest that networks are not a major way in which marketing decisions are made in all types of businesses, not just small ones.

The case is that the conventional strategic planning models of the textbooks emphasise a simple systemic approach. They do not capture the complex nature of lived reality and the strategy-making process which exists within the network approach to marketing (Wensley 1995; Moller and Halinen 2000). Here, the emphasis is not on general prescription but, rather, on description and understanding, in an attempt to explain how institutions and individuals interact in inter-firm relationships (Ellis and Meyer, 2001). At Mitre Technics it is almost impossible just to base marketing on a simple general planning model, as each customer has to be dealt with individually. Relationships span documents and they also span years. Gordon Willis indicates that,

"...everything is sold to a different specification to every customer...a lot of long term contracts and you have to write very detailed customer plans and quality plans for a contract...we are currently writing contracts now, that will run for another eight or ten years..."

Arguably, a key relationship within the organisation is the internal market. Although the debate about this area has been present for some considerable time (see (Ahmed and Rafiq 2004; Piercy and Morgan 1994)), it has still not yet appeared as a mainstream topic in marketing textbooks, As Robin Cawley marketing director of a major financial services comments,

"...your own people, who at the end of the day are the make or break of your company, because that is who the customer and the retailer will touch....and if they don't agree with what the company is doing? ...internal marketing is incredibly important, that is counted as almost the thing that most marketing textbooks ignore."

As with relationship marketing generally, none of the textbooks examined gave it a separate chapter. The failure to deal with this topic fully, with its emphasis on people, their often diverse perceptions and motivations at work, means that textbook marketing isolates itself from the interdisciplinary nature of practice. Somehow, magically, employees fit easily into the configurations of the organisations marketing system. They disappear into a theoretical structure which views them as mere system functionaries, blindly carrying out tasks like puppets.

Another area of significant neglect in the study of marketing decision making in textbooks, which is linked to relationship and network activity, is the role of talk. This neglect occurs, despite the

fact that as early as 1973, Mintzberg showed that management decision making is characterised by brief encounters, with the emphasis on verbal interaction. As Boden (1994p52) points out, the main activity of managers in organisations is not planning, but talking. Managers,

"*talk* their way to solutions, *talk* themselves into working agreements, *talk* their coalitions into existence, *talk* their organisational agendas."

In the study here, talk was found to be a central aspect of marketing decision making. Vaara et al., (2004) note that much existing research into strategy ignores the discursive practices of individuals. King (2003), points out that in organisational theory, the role of text is dominant over that of talking. Hackley (2003), indicates that the enacted complexities of marketing are reduced to the endless reproduction of abstract principles in texts where the process of talk is ignored. Des Arkwright, director of leisure marketing at Newfound City Council, indicates that talk is intrinsic to his work.

"Mainly it is talking, I do a lot of that anyway, I suppose. Mainly for me it is internally and externally, there are an awful lot of meetings for example with members, colleagues, with employers. So an awful lot of talking internally, with various people and an awful lot with partners, potential partners and again I mean last week we had a company come down from Scotland who would like to build facilities, maybe in some of our parks, and there was a lot of talking to them...quite a bit of talking to communities..."

Explicit theories of marketing contained in textbooks, dealing with high level strategic development fail to engage with the notion of the socially mediated nature of knowledge. Decision making is linear, variables can be easily isolated and technical rationality dominates the process of understanding (Cunningham 1999). In contrast, for Weick (1995), the sense that managers make of their world is not rooted in theoretical models, but in reflexivity and the ongoing nature of events, where managers are always in the middle of things. Strategy becomes observed patterns in past decision behaviour and is not a future constructed now, and then subsequently implemented. Guy Martin of Media K a marketing and design consultancy goes on to suggest there is a key element of retrospect to decision making.

"If you are wandering along with your army, fighting your battles and all that, at some point you have got to go over the next hill and see what is there and look back and see how you are."

Significantly, what textbooks actually fail to do adequately is to capture the narratives through which marketers make sense of their world. An important body of research in organisations has been carried out, showing the extent of storytelling in organisations (see Boland and Tenkasi 1995; Hopkinson 2003; Skoldberg 1994). The textbooks emphasise normative marketing theory where people appear devoid of their interpretative, narrative based selves. As Patterson and Brown (2005) point out, telling tales is central to successful communication. The problem is that marketing academics seem to have forgotten this important fact when they come to write their textbooks. This study found that managers frequently resorted to stories when recounting their experiences. If managers think in story telling modes they why is this not reflected in texts? One of the managers in the study commented on how people go about making meaning in their organisation, using stories. It shows that the normative textbook theory, which makes ubiquitous

use of the bullet point, fails to capture the narrative basis of rhetorical practice within companies.

“People think narratively, we do not think in bullet points...what bullet points lack are the broader explanations which people need...in terms of my staff having to implement plans, people will say ‘I worked for so and so and this is how we did it, can we do something like that here’. People rarely say we must achieve this or that ratio or percentage rate, but people will tell each other stories about retention rates instead.”

Marketing is essentially about good communications and here there is a paradox if we think about the role of the textbook. Brands are built on good stories (Brown 2005). Are textbooks however, helping to develop the marketing storytellers of the future? The reliance in the textbooks on generalised, unimaginative theories, bewildering boxes and a variety of mystic matrices, are unlikely to provide budding marketers with the facility to provide the consumer with an inspiring vision of a company’s products and services. Textbooks not only fail to reflect reality, but they are also doing a disservice to those about to enter the field. As yet, few newer marketing textbooks, with some exceptions, (see Blythe 2006; Saren 2006; Palmer 2004), appear to be about attempts to pursue different agendas. The latter book for example, places relationships in much more of a pivotal position than many other established texts, while the first takes a critical perspective on some established aspects of prescriptive theory, through the use of ‘talking points’ throughout the text. Saren’s book represents a radical departure with an emphasis on marketing as a social process rather than as a set of instrumental management driven processes. In general though, it is clear that most marketing textbooks remain remarkably resilient to change.

## **CONCLUSION: PRACTICE INTO THEORY, TEXTS AND CONTEXT IN MARKETING**

In drawing together the findings from the research, a number of key issues emerge. Firstly, marketing was never defined as an abstract principle outside the activity frame of these managers. The study reflects the point made by Hackley (2001p94) that “...I have never heard of a marketing intervention that was that was designed and enacted guided by anything other than local experience...” Another key finding relates to selling. The latter is frequently relegated to a position of lesser importance in general marketing textbooks. In this study, it is seen by managers to be a central feature of their activity. Additionally, the business environment, which is usually subjected to a superfluity of analytical models, is not imbedded in these frameworks, but exists instead in the enacted complexities of managers’ day to day sensemaking experiences. For the marketers of this study, decision making boxes are often viewed as being peripheral, with judgements about marketing being based around the tacit and the intuitive. Allied to this, the basis for a considerable amount of decision making in marketing is relationships and networks, where strategy emerges from talk, interaction and the general flow of discontinuous events. Decisions come from observing patterns in past behaviour and acting on these patterns in a reflective, indexical manner. Internal relationships are also very significant. Marketing success is not based on a simple grasp of planning principles and processes, but on an understanding of how people as subjective actors work and think in the pursuit of often diverse personal objectives. The commitment of employees and their ability to be able to derive a sense of meaning from work is as central to the success of marketing as any rational decision tool. Finally, it is important to note that marketing success is perhaps predicated on no more than a good story told well, a point

missed by most of the standard marketing texts, with their emphasis on rational processes.

Reality is multifaceted and arguably, each marketing situation is unique. How can the richness of this marketing practice be better understood and communicated? It is argued that to understand this complexity, means that marketing scholars should first examine what goes on under the name of marketing in organisations, using an interpretative perspective. The resulting thick descriptions could be the basis of new and different theories of marketing which are rooted in the lived world of the practitioner and not in abstract theory. Scholars who write marketing textbooks should be unpicking the messy reality of marketing practice and attempting to understand it. We need to turn the inquiry posed by this year's conference theme on its head and talk not about theory into practice, but practice into theory. Some important implications stem then from examining the local contexts in which marketing operates. Central to this enterprise are language and the local logic of action. This study shows for example, that the marketing manager of Vincent Duke operates relatively successfully a marketing process that does not bear much resemblance to the dominant model. Why then can't the marketing textbook capture, in rich ethnographic detail, the exactitudes of the decision making process he uses and the ensuing practical action? Instead, we have emasculated case studies that demonstrate dubious notions of terse propositional knowledge, which always, but always, are linear and technically rational. In marked contrast, the business world is fraught with problems and fails to conform to textbook principles. Instead, fuller, richer descriptions of meaning and action should be presented in the textbooks, ones which reflect the ambiguity and paradoxes of reality. Terse theory can only ever be a superficial representation of events, presenting to learners a pristine, technically rational world that does not bear much relation to reality.

Managers in this study have provided some insights into their own personal views of marketing theory and practice and these could be further assembled and extended to provide marketing learners with deep contextual information about the management of marketing. As individuals in society we interpret and order our knowledge in different ways (Berger and Luckman 1966), so it is questionable to think that marketing knowledge should be represented any differently. It can be argued that the experiential knowledge base of marketing is in fact always tacit, contingent and tentative, rather than permanent, declarative and overarching. Gummesson (2002) argues that scholars are like Flying Dutchmen, doomed to travel, never being allowed to dock in a harbour. The search for and belief in a general theory of marketing is illusory, when confronted by the reality of marketing managers local experiences and knowledge. Textbooks must try to capture this aspect of reality, if they are to present marketing with integrity. The argument which states the role of textbooks is present sets of handy mnemonics to learners is a tired one. Textbooks need to reflect marketing reality more closely and more rigorously. The need is of course for this new knowledge to be captured and disseminated. This is perhaps a major challenge facing marketing orthodoxy today. Textbooks need reinvigorating to include rich ethnographic accounts of marketing as it is carried out in a variety of organisations. Here the discipline has to draw much more fully on the interpretative tradition. We are likely as a consequence, to end up with competing theories of what marketing is. This can only add value to the subject both as an academic endeavour and as an applied field. If this complicates marketing, making it more interdisciplinary and demanding for learners, then this is a challenge worth facing. As a result, a new ethnographically informed marketing will be based on the changing common sense practices of social actors and not within one static and reified theory.

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