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H2E CATALOG TITLE: European management journal
ARTICLE TITLE: The Spectre of Kotlerism: A Literary Appreciation.
ARTICLE AUTHOR: Brown, Stephen
VOLUME: 20
ISSUE: 2
MONTH: 2002-04-01
PAGES: 128-146
ISSN: 0263-2373
OCLC #: [TN:432423][ODYSSEY:128.123.44.152/IRU]
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The Spectre of Kotlerism: A Literary Appreciation

STEPHEN BROWN, Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University

It is forty years since Philip Kotler published his first academic paper. In that time, he has done more than anyone to disseminate the marketing message. Yet, despite Kotler’s powers of proselytization and persuasion, there have been very few studies of these powers. This article, therefore, takes a literary approach to the literary works of Philip Kotler.

More specifically, it employs Marxian precepts to penetrate the surface appearance and expose the scholarly essence of Kotler’s corpus.

Written in the extended essay format that characterizes works of literary appreciation, it argues that Philip Kotler and Karl Marx are indistinguishable in terms of both conceptual content and rhetorical form. This paper moreover, maintains that just as Marx aspired to the dictatorship of the proletariat, so too Kotler has pursued the goal of the dictatorship of the marketariat.

Keywords: Philip Kotler, Marketing, Karl Marx, Utopianism

A spectre is stalking Europe, the spectre of Kotlerism. — A. Smithee (1998), after Marx and Engels.

The academic discipline of marketing is approximately one hundred years old (Hunt and Goolsby, 1988; Jones and Monieson, 1990) and, in that time, many eminent thinkers have bespored the scholarly stage (Bartels 1988: Sheth, Gardner and Garrett 1988). Comparisons, of course, are invidious, since Butler, Putlin, Alderson, Levitt et al. performed their cerebral somersaults in very different ways. But if forced to identify the greatest of them all, Philip Kotler would not only be part of the line up, he’d probably be topping the bill.

The evidence speaks for itself. Recently ranked 10th in a list of leading management visionaries, alongside Nelson Mandela, Alan Greenspan and Bill Gates (Chung, 2001), Philip Kotler is one of only two marketing academicians included in the American Management Association’s Ultimate Book of Business Gurus (Graham, 1998). He was voted the first Leader in Marketing Thought by members of the American Marketing Association and is the recipient of the Paul D. Converse Award, the Steuart Henderson Britt Award, the Distinguished Marketing Educator Award, the Charles Coolidge Parlin Marketing Award and the Marketing Educator of the Year Award, amongst many others. He holds seven honorary doctorates; he defined “Marketing and Merchandising” for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; he has written seventeen multiple-edition, multiple-language textbooks, including the best-sellers *Marketing Management*, *Principles of Marketing* and *Kotler on Marketing*; and, to cap it all, he is the only three times winner of the annual Alpha Kappa Psi Award for the best article published in the *Journal of Marketing*, the field’s premier academic outlet. Philip Kotler “is the world’s leading authority on marketing,” according to Carol Kennedy’s (1998, p.109) *Guide to the Management Gurus*, and few would disagree with her assessment.

As the leading light of a long-established academic discipline, one might imagine that there would be numerous published analyses of Kotler’s literary works and an intellectual biography or two. Such is the case, after all, in adjacent scholarly specialisms like sociology, anthropology and geography (e.g. Geertz, 1988; Kasperian, 2000; Paterson, 1984). However, this is not the case with Kotlerism. His ideas, of course, have been much debated down the years, the landmark “broadening” controversy in particular. His body of work, what is more, has doubtless formed the basis of countless student seminars, essays and examination papers. Indeed, as the author of the world’s top-selling marketing textbooks, his published writings are the most widely read on the planet. But published writings on his published writings remain few and far between (Mamber and Venkatesh 1995).

This neglect of Kotlerism is not only unfortunate, it is difficult to understand. It cannot be explained by the “immaturity” of the discipline, since marketing is an intellectual OAP and much younger fields, like Cultural Studies, are not reluctant to fetes their figureheads (Gane, 2000; Helmling, 2001; Leslie, 2000). It cannot be attributed to marketing’s unfamiliarity
with literary criticism, since such techniques have been applied to all manner of marketing phenomena, the academic literature included (e.g. Scott 1994a,b; Stern 1989, 1995, 1996, 1998). It cannot be due to the natural modesty of management types, since the business sections of most bookstores bulge with bombastic biographies and role model folderols (Beatty, 1999; Crainer, 1999; Crainer, 2001; Heller, 2000). It cannot, finally, be blamed on marketing’s hard science, number-crunching, model-building mindset and the attendant hostility to literary analysis, which some regard as navel gazing at best and outright onanism at worst. If that were the case, then there’d be an awful lot of onanists in economics, psychology and the physical sciences, where literary analyses and mass-market popularizations are two-a-penny. There are a lot of onanists in economics, come to think of it...

In these circumstances, perhaps the most plausible reason for the paucity of publications on the publications of Philip Kotler is that his work isn’t considered worthy of serious consideration. Whereas Cultural Studies, for example, is blessed with a profusion of “deep” thinkers who have to be “made simple” for the great unwashed, Kotler’s corpus is transparent, self-explanatory, introductory level stuff and, therefore, hardly worth thinking about, let alone analyzing in detail. Since it speaks for itself, so to speak, there is no real need to give any thought to the thought of his thought.

Such an attitude, to be sure, is somewhat condescending and one assumes that it isn’t widely held. Kotler is one of the foremost—arguably the foremost—figures in our field and, for that reason alone, his body of work is well worth investigating. Indeed, if there is one thing that literary appreciation teaches us, it is that even the most “innocent” texts, be they fairy tales, nursery rhymes or comic strips, are the repository of deep meanings (Berger, 1996; Lurie, 1990; Zipes, 2001). Meanings, moreover, that are open to multiple interpretations and that can be uncovered from a variety of theoretically-informed positions (Bertens, 2001; Bonnycastle, 1991; Eagleton, 1996a). Thus, feminist literary critics seek to expose androcentrism in the texts they study (Robbins, 2000); post-colonialists do likewise with western cultural imperialism (Boehmer, 1995); and deconstructionists show how texts inevitably contradict themselves and thereby undermine the very arguments they are seeking to advance (Norris, 1982).

The purpose of this paper, then, is to interrogate the published works of Philip Kotler from a marxian literary perspective (Eagleton and Milne, 1996; Mulhern, 1992; Williams, 1977). It argues, in effect, that Philip Kotler and Karl Marx are indistinguishable. Such a suggestion, admittedly, may strike many readers as utterly preposterous, not to say laughably absurd. Apart from the one hundred year gap between the publication of Das Kapital (1867) and Marketing Management (1967), marxism and marketing are inherently, incorrigibly, indefatigably antithetical (Eagleton, 1996b; Haslett, 2000; Jameson, 1998). Antithesis, however, is an integral part of marxian analysis and the very fact that marxism and marketing are deemed antithetical is prima facie evidence that a marxian interpretation of the Kotlerite corpus may prove worthwhile, preposterous though it appears.

Preposterousness, indeed, is not necessarily a bad thing from a literary studies standpoint. Whereas marketing research in the “scientific” tradition is preoccupied with rigor, reliability, rectitude and rationality, the liberal arts in general and literary theory in particular are predicated on the idiosyncratic, the idiosyncratic, the implausibly imaginative. The aim of marxian literary analyses, according to leading left-leaning critic Fredric Jameson (1991), is to induce moments of “dialectic shock,” where readers are forced into a new perception by the surprising juxtapositions or iconoclastic inversions of the essayist. The most successful of these, he goes on, stimulate a “sense of breathlessness, of admiration for the brilliance of the performance, but yet bewilderment, at the conclusion of the essay, from which one seems to emerge with empty hands—without ideas and interpretations to carry away with us” (Jameson, 1991, p. 188). Style, in other words, is just as important as content, possibly more so.

Karl Marx, Marketing Man

Karl Marx (1818-1883) is renowned for many things—revolutionary fervor, dialectical materialism, scientific socialism, irreligious religiosity etc. — but contributions to the marketing cause are not among them (Eagleton, 1999; Wheen, 2000). On the contrary, as the bête noir of the bourgeoisie, he had nothing but disdain for hucksters, barkers and parasitic middlemen of all kinds. True, he was not averse to dabbling on the London Stock Exchange and he had several capitalist skeletons in the extended family cupboard (an uncle helped establish the Phillips electrical empire). In the main, however, he regarded marketing intermediaries as little more than blood-sucking leeches, as did his copious intellectual epigones. So marked was their anathema for the “vampire-like” trading classes that some maintain marketing and marxism are intellectually irreconcilable polar opposites (Deshpande, 1999; Hunt, 1983, 1990, 1992). They are the chalk and cheese, night and day, East and West, communist and capitalist of a conceptual Cold War. Marxian precepts have of course been successfully
introduced into marketing thought by a number of admirably ecumenical thinkers, especially in the aesthetized neo-marxian forms associated with postmodernism, feminism and critical theory (Burton, 2001; Firat and Dholakia, 1998; Hirschman, 1993, 1998; Murray and Ozanne, 1991, 1994; Stern, 1993). The burgeoning sociological, anthropological and cultural studies literature on marketplace phenomena also employs marxism as its principal point of departure (Baudrillard, 1998; Burrows and Marsh, 1982; Fid, 1999; Fine and Leopold, 1993; Slater and Tonkiss, 2001). But compared to its penetration in cognate disciplines like history, politics, economics or even organizational behavior, marketing must be regarded as a marxian free zone.

And rightly so, many might say. Aside from the anti-marketing rhetoric of the hirsute one’s fellow travelers, who continue to portray marketers as exploitative blood suckers when it is well known that marketing has the customer’s interest at heart, marxism itself has been weighed in the balance and found wanting (Aronos, 1993; Berman, 1999; Sakwa, 1999). The dramatic collapse of “actually existing” communist regimes in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, effectively undermined what little intellectual standing marxism previously enjoyed (Furet, 1999). A marxian critique of the marketing system or the literary juxtaposition of Karl and Kotler may have had some curiosity value fifteen or twenty years ago. However, the triumph of capitalism, as ostentatiously announced by Francis Fukuyama (1992) in The End of History, has rendered redundant any such investigation.

Or not, as the case might be (Meamber, 1999; Sampath, 1999). Although the implosion of the Soviet Empire dealt a severe blow to the scholarly cachet of “tenured radicals” (Wolfe, 2000), it would be rash to conclude that communism has been consigned to the trashcan of history. The counter-capitalist riots of recent years are proof positive that the spectre of communism still haunts the marketing mansion (Cockburn et al., 2000). Not only are the protests intellectually underpinned by the so-called Das Kapital of the 21st century, No Logo (Klein, 2000) but the marketing activities of mega-brand corporations, like Nike, McDonald’s and Starbucks, are one of the principal causes of contemporary anti-capitalist confrontations and the riot act is performed, as often as not, in the vicinity of their flagship stores.

More to the point perhaps, Marx has been recuperated by the very bourgeois apparatchiks he once railed against and, of all things, finally revealed as a pre-modern marketing man (Diski, 1999; Harvey, 1999; Wheen, 2000). From the attention-grabbing misdemeanors of his rambunctious youth to the shameless promotional stunts that surrounded the publication of Capital (he penned anonymous newspaper reviews of his masterpiece and “persuaded” Engels to do likewise), there is more than a touch of P.T. Barnum about Karl Marx (Brown, 2000). According to his most recent biographer, he cunningly exploited the curiosity of the public and the cavils of his competitors to promote a brand of anti-capitalism that still enjoys a substantial market share more than one hundred and fifty years after its launch, in China and Cuba especially (Wheen, 2000). Indeed, in the fateful winter of 1852, four years after publishing The Communist Manifesto, the penurious prophet seriously considered going into the hardware business, by acquiring the rights to a new and improved furniture polish. Regrettably, his Marx and Stains Remover never made it past the drawing board.

**Philip Kotler, Marxist Agitator**

Just as Karl Marx can be considered a marketing man avant la lettre, so too Philip Kotler (1931–) is moved by the spirit of marxism. In more ways than one. The first and perhaps most obvious point to make is that Kotler was – and is – directly influenced by marxian dogma. As the eldest son of a penurious Russian immigrant, who was raised during the Great Depression, Philip Kotler is a life-long socialist and proud of it (Personal Communication, 2001). He studied sociology, under David Riesman, at the University of Chicago. His PhD dissertation dealt with labor productivity in the developing world. And Marx is specifically cited in a couple of his early, reputation-establishing publications, most notably the famous four-category shopper typology, where he notes Thorstein Veblen’s indebtedness to Highgate Cemetery’s finest (Kotler, 1965a).²

To be sure, youthful infatuation with the socialist values of Karl Marx is not unusual and, in this regard, Kotler is little different from many other liberal intellectuals. What’s more, as an assistant professor in the sixties, when radical chic was at its height, he could hardly have avoided being affected by the communistic mindset of his flower-powered peers and pupils (Arnold and Fisher, 1996). Kotler, however, maintained his interest in Marx even when remembering not remembering the sixties was something most people preferred to forget. In a 1998 anthology, co-edited by two of marketing’s foremost marxian aficionados, former students Puat Firat and Nihkilesh Dholakia (Firat and Dholakia, 1998), he posited what can only be described as a communist vision of commercial life where all traces of
explosive materialism are eradicated and peace and harmony reign (Kotler, 1987). Granted, he
doesn’t actually refer to Marx in that particular piece but several editions of Marketing Management specifically cite the Teutonic titan with approval (Kotler, 1967, 1971a, 1984, 1991). More recently, The Marketing of Nations goes out of its way to laud marxian lines of thought (Kotler et al., 1997) and even his current best-seller, Kotler on Marketing, notes that “Technology is the ultimate shaper not only of the material substructure of society but also of human thought patterns” (Kotler, 1999, p.4). This statement is about as close as one can get to Karl Marx without the use of quotation marks.

Above and beyond Kotler’s direct reliance on Marx, there are several intriguing parallels in their overall intellectual undertakings. Both devoted their lives to describing the big picture about big business and wrote voluminously to that effect. Both based their arguments in firmly established economic principles but adapted the abstruse theories of their academic brethren to pressing practical problems. Both were brilliantly persuasive popularizers of extant ideas rather than original thinkers, as they both openly admitted. Both were blessed with unfailingly creative collaborators – for Friedrich Engels read Sidney Levy, Gerald Zaltman and others – though they were equally eminently capable of virtuoso solo performances.

Both were committed to a cause, a communist vision of society in Marx’s case, a social vision of commerce in Kotler’s case, which they pursued with assiduous enthusiasm despite the denigration of doubters, detractors and debunkers. Both became embroiled in bitter internecine wrangling and were not reluctant to castigate their intellectual antagonists when the occasion called for it, as it often did. Both were grossly misrepresented by their manifold opponents and grotesquely defied by over-enthusiastic supporters. Both were remarkably prescient – Marx anticipated the 1848 revolutions and Paris Commune of 1871, whereas Kotler was demarcating in a socially conscious manner before the 1973 Oil Crisis – albeit their reputations as runes readers may have had more to do with good fortune than good foresight.

Both were activists in a class struggle, be it Marx’s putative “dictatorship of the proletariat” or Kotler’s counter-revolutionary vision of marketing-dominated organizations and a managerially-oriented academic discipline. The “dictatorship of the marketariat,” as it were. 

Although both thinkers were determined, in Marx’s famous formulation, to change the world, not merely understand it, there is more to the Karl Marx/Philip Kotler analogy than prodigious productivity, biographical parallels, breadth of vision, will to power and a penchant for praxis. The conceptual content and rhetorical form of their published writings also reveal a number of striking similarities.

Conceptual Content

The collected works of Karl Marx run to approximately 100 voluminous volumes; commentaries on and extrapolations of these writings are almost beyond number; and an entire science of marxology, with all the attendant academic apparatus, developed in the erstwhile communist regimes of eastern Europe and elsewhere (Singer, 2000). A scholarly exegesis of the extant literature is humanly impossible but, for the appreciative purposes of the present essay, seven key Kotler-Marxian conceptual congruities can be tentatively identified.

The first of these is the Mode of Production. As is well known, Karl Marx (1978 [1859]) identified five successive modes of production, from the Asiatic in the dim and distant past, to the Communist in the very near future. These socio-economic configurations are made up of two elements, the relations of production and the forces of production (Johnson, 1995a). The latter refers, in the main, to the prevailing technology (water wheels, steam engines, and analogous means of production), as well as the raw materials and labor power that form part of the production process. The former recognizes that production of any kind is an unavoidably social process, involving various types of economic and non-economic relationships between individual human beings and their associated institutions (e.g. employer and employee, serf and nobleman, tenant and landowner). According to Marx, competition-driven changes in the forces of production precipitate crises, conflict and eventual change in the relations of production – one social class rises as another social class falls – all of which lead, inevitably, to the emergence of a new and improved mode of production. These evolutionary mechanisms, of course, have been endlessly debated by marxian scholars (Himmelweit, 1983), but the essential point is that just as capitalism usurped feudalism in the aftermath of the agricultural and industrial revolutions, so too the inherent contradictions of capitalism would eventually bring it down, a communist mode of production would obtain, and “with this social development, the prehistory of society ends.”

At no point in Philip Kotler’s compendious corpus does he dissect relations, forces or modes of production. What he does do, however, is provide a detailed description of the contemporary Mode of Consumption. That is to say, he itemizes the various means of consumption (such as department stores, supermarkets and credit cards), outlines the tools and techniques that engineer consumption (the 4Ps, STP, SWOT analyses etc.) and highlights the labor power that underpins the forces of consumption (salespersons, market researchers, strategic planners et al). What’s more, he opines at great length on the relations of consumption (with suppliers, customers, stockholders, the media and so on), as well as the
Amongst cognoscenti of the marketing concept, Philip Kotler is celebrated for many reasons, from his early advocacy of mathematical models to his recent analysis of networked organizations (Kotler, 1963; Achrol and Kotler, 1999). However, he is best known – by his own admission – for herding the concept of marketing. Kotler’s principal scholarly achievement involved extending the scope of marketing from its base in business organizations to the superstructure of non-business, not-for-profit institutions in the fields of government, education, politics, charities, museums and the performing arts. Indeed, it is not unreasonable to argue that the bulk of his academic career has been devoted to cashing out the ideas contained in his classic broadening paper (Kotler and Levy, 1969). The ensuing torrent of full-length texts (he only had one book to his name in 1969, remember) has been almost entirely concerned with the superstructural domains identified in his first Alpha Kappa Psi winning article – hospitals, churches, places, professional services, academic institutions and so on (Kotler and Bloom, 1984; Kotler and Clarke, 1987; Kotler and Fox, 1985; Kotler et al., 1993). As in Marx’s case, moreover, the theoretical building blocks are the same from context to context – the forces, relations and means of consumption – but their systematic application to a very diverse range of non-business sectors is a truly astonishing achievement, one that may never be surpassed, let alone equaled.  

Kotler’s magisterial application of basal concepts to superstructural institutions inevitably brings up the intractable marxian matter of Mediation (Mészáros, 1983). Marx’s insistence that the superstructure somehow reflects the base proved extremely controversial. So much so that it has been discussed, dissected and, as often as not, dismissed by generations of western marxist intellectuals, such as Adorno, Althusser and Lukács, who largely devoted their scholarly attention to aesthetic issues and cultural concerns (Anderson, 1979). Rejecting the reductionism of the master’s original formulation, which essentially argues that the base determines the superstructure and thereby precludes the eminently plausible possibility of a reverse flow, Marx’s philosophical progeny scoured the schriften to extract the notion of mediation. This accepts that the economic base and cultural superstructure are interrelated but the influence is neither direct nor one-way. On the contrary, it is mediated by the entire social formation. That is to say, the superstructure and base are situated within and refracted through a broader social milieu of mores, meanings, beliefs, assumptions and ideas. Each sphere of socio-economic activity is separate from, yet affected by, the others and it is the interactions between them that contain create “conditions of possibility” for change.

Just as Marx’s base-superstructure framework stimulated a great deal of scholarly discussion, so too Kotler’s broadened concept of marketing was mercilessly
attacked for ill-advised ambition, for going too far, for applying the marketing model in contexts, such as religion, education or the arts, where it was totally inappropriate (see Rook, 1999). And, as just the marxian found a mediating mechanism, in the shape of social formations, so too Kotler came up with the social marketing concept. The second of Kotler's great Alpha Kappa Psi winning articles, social marketing is specifically presented as a mediator, "a bridging mechanism," between scientific knowledge of human behavior and its socially useful implementation (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971, p.12). This may be so, but by suggesting that marketing is applicable to ideas, beliefs and causes, the social concept spans the business/non-business divide, blurs the base/superstructure boundary, and helps reduce the reductionism of the broadened concept. Ideas and causes, after all, are promulgated by profit and non-profit organizations alike. The former, in fact, may dispatch a non-pecuniary message, as in the case of an automobile manufacturer advocating safe driving, whereas the latter can help further the purchasing process, as when AIDS charities champion the case for condoms. Thus by shifting the focus from organization to idea, Kotler found a way of mediating between economic base and cultural superstructure. In so doing, he made the intellectual case for—and helped realize—his socialist vision of the marketing discipline.6

Interestingly, Kotler's seminal social marketing article commences with a discussion of politicians and this application of the marketing concept to human beings raises the spectre of Reification (Johnson, 1995b). Within the marxian canon, reification (Versachlichung) is usually regarded as a special form of alienation, the existential experience of dehumanized, disempowered desperation that characterizes all societies at all times but is especially strongly marked under the capitalist mode of production. More specifically, reification refers to the transformation of human beings into thing-like entities, which act according to the dictates of the marketplace rather than in a recognizably human way. Under capitalism, labor is exchanged for a subsistence wage; it is bought and sold like any other commodity; and, as a consequence, working people are estranged from the fruits of their labor, whilst the bourgeoisie reap the financial rewards. According to Lukács (1971 [1923]), indeed, reification is the defining feature of contemporary capitalist society, where every conceivable sphere of human activity is objectified, commodified, marketized and perverted. For Marx, however, the real perversion is that in addition to reifying human activity, capitalism endows inanimate objects with person-like qualities. Versachlichung begets Personifizierung, as his celebrated discussion of commodity fetishism in the first chapter of Capital eloquently attests (Marx, 1992 [1867]).

Now, no-one would consider accusing Philip Kotler of perversion, let alone fetishism, but there is no doubt that he has a penchant for personification. The corporations, concepts, products, places, institutions and ideas that punctuate his corpus are unfailing portrayed as living beings, quasi-human entities animated by the life force of marketing. As he famously points out in his classic broadening paper, "Everything about an organization talks" (Kotler and Levy, 1969). At the same time, Kotler is equally partial to reification. In High Visibility, for example, he and his co-authors contend that the principles of marketing are as applicable to individual human beings as they are to detergents, deodorants, dog foods and diet colas (Rein et al., 1987). If fame and fortune are one's ultimate objective—and everyone, surely, is entitled to their fifteen minutes' worth—then the tools and techniques of marketing science, such as market research, targeting, segmentation and positioning, strategic planning and competitor analysis, are readily available and easily adaptable to every imaginable high visibility scenario. From a traditional marxian perspective, admittedly, this celebrity creation process is a grotesque travesty of human relations; the reductio ad absurdum of reification, but for Kotler and Co. it is only a foretaste of things to come, when the random "discovery" model of high celebrity is replaced with deliberate "breeding." Marketing has the technology to transform "unknown aspirants into high visibles in much the same way that Sumo wrestlers are grown in Japan, or ballerinas built in the Soviet Union" (Rein et al., 1987, p. 23).

Nowadays, of course, self-marketing is widely regarded as perfectly normal. There are any number of personal development texts, such as Tom Peters' (1990) The Brand You, which exhort everyone—academicians included—to treat themselves as brands, whilst dispensing advice on how best to manage, develop, and capitalize on "own" brand equity, as well as differentiate one's brand in the crowded marketplace of ambitious individuals (Gagger, 1998). Such is the nature of Ideology, the fifth key marxian concept that has significant parallels in Kotler's body of work. Ideology refers to the social or interest group based system of beliefs, ideas and assumptions that influence how people understand the world and affect how they act on a daily basis, yet are rendered invisible by their natural, self-evident, seemingly "common-sense" character (Eagleton, 1991, 1994; Hawkes, 1996). The idea of ideology did not originate with Marx and, in actual fact, he employed the term in at least six different ways (Barrett, 1991), but it is indissolubly associated with marxian thought. In The German Ideology, he treated it as an inverted, topsy-turvy, contradictory worldview that blinds the
oppressed to the oppression of their oppressors (Marx, 1983 [1845]). By presenting their ideas as universal, rational, objective and shared by society as a whole, the dominant class is able to pursue its own interests, perpetuate its position and persuade the dominated class to accept, as incontestable or inevitable, actions that are not in its best interest. As Gramsci (1971 [1929-35]) subsequently noted, the hegemony of the ruling class is insidiously achieved through a combination of coercion and consent, where the dominant ideology is internalized and the conditioned collude in their own conditioning.

Few would deny that marketing is the dominant ideology of our time. Thanks in no small measure to Kotler's contention that the marketing is applicable in every conceivable situation in every imaginable sphere of human activity, marketing is well nigh hegemonic. What's more, it is Kotler's managerial, exchange-based, customer-centric model of marketing science that holds irrevocable sway. Not only is it perpetuated through consent and coercion (textbooks, curricula, professional associations, journal review processes etc.), but in keeping with Marx's original formulation, it also involved a classic "inversion" from non-market facing to market-facing organizations. True, many empirical studies have shown that the marketing function is held in comparatively low esteem by CEOs (Brownlie and Saren, 1992; Kotler, 1999), but the marketing philosophy itself – the idea of customer orientation – is all but unassailable. Patients, pupils, visitors, voters, audiences, admirers, donors, distributors, clients, congregations and many, many more have all been transformed into "customers" and treated accordingly, in principle if not in practice. Even the artistic superstructure, which for many western Marxists represented a site of ideological unveiling and resistance, has succumbed to the Kotlerite message articulated in Standing Room Only, Museum Strategies and Marketing and several others (Kotler and Scheff, 1997). Thus, Seabrook (2000) asserts that the highbrow/lowlbrow divide has been eviscerated and only marketability matters anymore. Many cutting-edge artists like Koons, Hirst and Emin, moreover, openly boast of their marketing prowess (Brown and Patterson, 2000). Art for mart's sake is the order of the day. Or so it seems.

To be sure, the hegemony of marketing did not transpire instantaneously. On the contrary, it has been a long, slow process of accumulation, a process encapsulated in that Historicist stalwart of introductory textbooks, the "three eras schema" (Brown, 1996). Although it was Keith (1960) not Kotler who formulated the production-era, sales-era, marketing-era model, the latter has not been reluctant to recycle it. The very first chapter of the first edition of Marketing Management (Kotler, 1967) refers to the Dark Ages

when the false consciousness of production-orientation and sales-orientation held sway. Kotler, however, does not rest on his temporal laurels by claiming that the current era – the marketing era – represents the culmination of this evolutionary process and that (marketing) history has ended. His teleological consummation, rather, is positioned at a point in the near future. It has been positioned there, furthermore, throughout Kotler's academic career. In his works, a new marketing dawn is constantly breaking, though the terminology he uses to describe this perpetually impending epoch has changed considerably down the decades. In 1967, it was a new marketing era, pure and simple; in 1971 it was a societal marketing milieu of socially responsible behavior; and in 2001, it is yet another "new marketing" era predicated on the customer emancipating potential of information technology (Kotler, 2001). Copious variations of this schema punctuate Kotler's corpus but they all posit the present as a threshold to a new and improved marketing dispensation.

In this regard, of course, Kotler is aping Karl Marx's (1978 [1859]) classic model of historical materialism. Subsequently described by Engels (1983 [1883]) as one of the Teutonic titan's two great scientific discoveries, historical materialism posits five stages in the evolution of modes of production: primitive communism, slave state, feudal state, capitalist system and, eventually, socialist or communist society. Marx's model, admittedly, has a couple of "extra" stages, though the first two aren't actually discussed, and stage type schemata long predated the great revolutionary, though few have had more influence or generated more debate (Manuel, 1995). The important point, however, is that both prophets predict the dawning of a new day and, by implication, that they and they alone hold the key to Tomorrowland. To be sure, such teleological trajectories are anathema to many traditionally minded historians, who cleave to the view that there are no discernible patterns, trends or cycles in history (Nevett, 1991). Karl Popper (1957), in particular, launched a ferocious attack on historicist models of development and inadvertently impugned an established research procedure that traded under the same name (Fullerton, 1987). But the cavils of idio grammically-minded historians notwithstanding, stage type models are a permanent feature of the social sciences and few are more influential than Marx's and Kotler's (Burke, 1992; Graham, 1997).

The other scientific discovery alluded to in Engels' famous graveside oration appertains to Value, our final Kotler-Marxian conceptual parallel (Johnson, 1995c). Although the labor theory of value has not stood the test of time – even as Marx was developing it, he was being marginalized by the marginalists –
it generated and continues to generate a prodigious amount of scholarly discussion (Harvey, 1999; Reiss, 1997; Singler, 2000). The theory, in essence, attempts to explain why the capitalist mode of production leads not to the progressive improvement of the laborer’s lot, as the astonishing achievements of the Industrial Revolution might lead one to expect, but to inexorably increasing immiseration and alienation. To this end, Marx argues that labor is a commodity, like any other, which is bought and sold on the marketplace. Every commodity has a use value, the function performed for its possessor (coats keep us warm, beer imparts conviviality) and an exchange value (the amount of money or equivalent goods that the commodity can command on the open market). As a commodity, labor is exchanged for its market value – a subsistence wage – and, as a commodity, it is exploited by the capitalist, who swears the asset, extracts the maximum amount of output for the minimum outlay and expropriates any surplus value thereby obtained. Workers, in other words, add value to the goods they produce but only receive a small proportion of that value in return. The rest is appropriated by the owner.

Although Kotler (1984) alludes to the labor theory of value on one – and only one – occasion, he doesn’t actually discuss it at length. As before, however, the spectre of marxian thought hovers over his ample analyses of exchange and value. Indeed, if there is one point that Kotler has consistently stressed throughout his entire academic career, it is that exchange is central to the marketing concept and that marketing delivers value to organizations, their customers and society at large. Neither Philip Kotler nor Karl Marx, admittedly, was the first to grapple with these constructs. Adam Smith and David Ricardo got there long beforehand (Bagozzi, 1975; Slater and Tonkiss, 2001). Nor do the dilatory duo employ the terms in the same way, or even in a consistent manner. Nevertheless, it is arguable that Kotler’s single greatest achievement, as a conceptual capitalist, has been to extract surplus value from existing notions of exchange and value. By extending their ambit far beyond physical exchange (to ideas, causes, beliefs, attitudes etc.) and monetary values (such as charitable feelings, aesthetic uplift, social responsibility), he increased their use value to marketers and academicians, who were able to apply marketing principles to ever wider spheres of activity and thereby accelerate the circulation of conceptual capital. In Kotler on Marketing, moreover, he pulls off the ultimate meta-marxian trick of demonstrating that the exchange value of use value exceeds the use value of exchange value (Kotler, 1999, p.40). And with this marketing development, the prehistory of marxism ends.

Rhetorical Form

Striking as they are, the conceptual parallels between Marx and Kotler are a mere bagatelle compared to their stylistic similarities. Superficially, of course, there are vast differences between the two, insofar as the actual textual contents – the examples, the organizations, the people, the technology, the countries, the socio-economic circumstances and so on – pertain to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries respectively. Surface appearances, however, belie underlying essences, as both Marx and Kotler are at pains to point out, and when the sub-textual structures of their bodies of work are examined, all manner of intriguing analogies arise, spectre-like, from their compendious corpuses.

The first of these is their truly astonishing literary talents. Simply put, they are great writers and it is arguable that their reputations owe as much to outright writing ability as they do to almost anything else. True, neither Kotler nor Marx is ordinarily regarded as a literary type, though the fact that they successfully passed themselves off as “scientists” says much for their powers of persuasion. To the contrary, their weighty tomes are often considered heavy sledding at best and well nigh unreadable at worst (Hamel, 1997; Strabhorn, 2001). Marx himself recommended that readers skip the methodological chapters of Capital, all twenty-six of them, while the USP of Marketing Management’s “Millennium Edition” is that it has “fewer chapters” than previous versions (Kotler, 2000, p.xxvii) It is necessary to appreciate, however, that “weightiness” itself performs an important rhetorical function, especially when a work aspires to definitive status. Few writers, furthermore, are capable of sustaining the reader’s interest over 700 pages, at least not without recourse to melodramatic plot twists or gratuitous sex and violence, both of which are sadly absent from mainstream marketing textbooks and the secondary literature on marxism.

Yet for all the heavy sledding, particularly in Capital and Marketing Decision Making, Marx and Kotler are as one in their ability to craft an aphorism that encapsulates and energizes simultaneously. Marx, in particular, composed a crouch of catchphrases that call down the years like none other: “Workers of the World Unite!”, “The Opium of the people”, “A spectre is stalking Europe, the spectre of Communism”, “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs,” “History repeats itself… the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce,” “Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it,” “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles,” etc., etc., etc.

Kotler, similarly, is no slouch with soundbites and snappy one-liners: “Marketing takes a day to learn.
and a lifetime to master”, “Good companies meet needs, great companies create markets,” “The answers of yesterday lead to the errors of today,” “Without a top line there will be no bottom line,” “If you are not talking customers, you are not talking,” “The chief cause of problems is solutions,” “Advertising is what you pay for, public relations is what you pray for,” “Pick apples not lemons,” “There are riches in niches,” “Markets are pitiless” and many, many more. Most of the latter, admittedly, have yet to be inducted into dictionaries of dicta, anthologies of aphorisms and encyclopedias of epigrams, but surely it is only a matter of time before Kotler joins the quip-coining immortals, the pantheon of phrase-makers, the proverbial Hall of Fame.

More epigrammatic yet is their terminological capacity. That is to say, Marx and Kotler’s shared ability to concoct terms, words, phrases, expressions or neologisms that take on a life of their own, as it were, and become the focus of subsequent attention, discussion and scholarly investigation. “False consciousness,” “classless society,” “commodity fetishism,” “dialectical materialism,” “revolutionary socialism,” “petty bourgeois,” “mode of production,” and “class struggle” are just some of Karl’s lexical creations, while locutions like “alienation,” “capitalist,” “communism,” “proletariat,” “expropriation,” and, not least, “exchange” were invigorated under his auspices (Strathern, 2001).

In a similar vein, Kotler has minted a wealth of conceptual coinages (“metamarketing,” “megamarketing,” “demarketing,” “turbo-marketing,” “neardethal marketing” et al.), and codified countless others (“social marketing,” “societal marketing,” “reverse marketing,” “new marketing”). That said, many of his neologisms have failed to stand the test of time. Who now employs “synchronomarketing,” “counter-marketing,” “remarketing,” “prosumers,” “metamediations,” “birth-dearness,” “forwarding,” “decisimsoning,” “upselling,” or, for that matter, remembers the “memory channel”? However, no one would gainsay Philip Kotler’s prodigious New Phrase Development facility. For some people, of course, this catchword creating capacity is undeniably cute, unquestionably clever, but ultimately inconsequential. For other people, such as the marxist literary critic Walter Benjamin, naming is of paramount philosophical importance (Wolin, 1982). As our understanding of the world can only be expressed in language or similar symbolic systems, word making is world creating. Where, after all, would marxian thought be without “hegemony,” “praxis,” “accumulation” or “emancipation”? Where would business and management be without grisly gerundives like “downsizing”, “de-layering,” “re-engineering” or “customizing”? In the beginning was the word.

In addition to their maxim manufacturing acumen and phrase producing prowess, Marx and Kotler are masters of metaphor. As might be expected, the former makes repeated use of railroads, telegraphs, steam engines, cameras obscura and similar examples of nineteenth-century industrial technology, to say nothing of standard architectural tropes such as base/superstructure, military metaphors pertaining to the impending proletarian revolution, and commonplace biological conceits like evolution, survival of the fittest and so forth. Thus, in the Economico-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, he memorably describes low paid workers as “a mere appendage of flesh on a machine of iron.” In the Communist Manifesto they are “privates of the industrial army...enslaved by the machine...instruments of labor...training to act as a machine”. And in Capital the entire social system is “a pump-out of surplus labor and exploiter of labor power.”

Kotler too is not averse to biological, architectural, martial, and technological allusions. Hence, he variously describes marketing as a jungle, a garden and a life or death struggle (Kotler, 1994, 2001); he explicates all sorts of militaristic maneuvers in The New Competition and elsewhere (Kotler et al., 1985; Kotler and Singh, 1981; he includes countless figures of building blocks in his lavishly illustrated textbooks; and, at one time or another, compares marketing to a computer, a toolkit, an automobile, the atom bomb, a space ship, satellite navigation equipment, and a “gigantic apparatus” of cogwheels, crankshafts, dials, gears and ratchets (Kotler, 1967, 1999). In “Broadening the Concept,” to cite but a single celebrated example, he avers that marketing is “customer satisfaction engineering,” and sets out to itemize the “multitude of tools” in the marketer’s lavishly appointed conceptual knapsack (Kotler and Levy, 1969).

Technological tropes, to be sure, are fairly common figures of speech, though few use them with felicity. The same is true of architectural conceits, biological similes and military metaphors. Where Marx and Kotler stand out from the figurative crowd, however, is in their passion for the paranormal and similar symbols of the supernatural. Such an analogical predilection might seem somewhat strange coming from self-professed “scientists”, but it is no less evident for all that. Marx, of course, is well known for his spectres, ghosts and apparitions, as the recent book by poststructuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida (1994) almost makes clear (Sprinker, 1999). Indeed, the repertoire of his otherworldly allusions is quite staggering. These include:

Witchcraft, animism, tribal religions, spiritualism, magic, monsters, ghosts, wizardry and the cabala, mysterious hieroglyphics, werewolves, the soul, alchemists and alchemy, death, unnatural metamorphoses, raising of the dead,
The spectres of Kotlerism

metempsychosis and transmigration of souls, creation ex nihilo, miracles, conjuring tricks, levitation and perpetual motion machines...God the Father, God the Son, the Lamb of God, the Garden of Eden, the Holy Grail, the beast of the apocalypse, the whore of Babylon, the incarnation, baptism, transubstantiation...phenomena that are invisible, concealed or veiled, that are symbols, secrets, fantasies, enigmas, illusions or riddles, that are mysterious and in need of deciphering...Marx’s vision of capitalism is a kind of unholy Chartres Cathedral where Christian iconography mingle with nightmarish creatures and pagan iconoclasts. (Carver, 1998, pp 15–16)

Philip Kotler is equally partial to the paranormal, albeit in a less overt, more ethereal, somewhat shadowy manner. Granted, he specifically refers to “spectres” on several occasions – the Bomb, the Japanese, the new economy, natural resource depletion, “product overpopulation” and more besides. He gives space to spectral, bump-in-the-night behaviors, as well as “scarifications,” “presences,” “uncontrollable forces,” and “chills down the spine” of executives. He reports sufficient “visions,” “spirits,” “miracles,” “icons,” “images,” “signs and wonders,” “Days of Judgment,” and “pacts with the Devil” to put the sainthood to shame. He mentions magic, mysticism, mythology, soothsaying, foretelling, rebirth, pyramids, alchemy, time travel, good luck charms and maintains a “seething cauldron” of magical elixirs, potions and panaceas. He refers to all sorts of otherworldly figures including trolls, leprechauns, giants, ghosts, ogres, aliens and missing links. Indeed, the geographical ghouls that hovers between life and death in the opening pages of Marketing Places is not the sort of spatial specter you would want to meet in a dark alley, late at night, with only the 4Ps for protection (Kotler et al., 1993). He also exhibits a conspiracy culture-immersed interest in brain washing, mind control, subliminal messages and secret societies, which is the twentieth century equivalent of the nineteenth century’s fascination with the occult, the esoteric and the unknown. Likewise, his virtual obsession with three-somes – the first edition of Marketing Management contains 135 triadic classifications, typologies and explications of marketplace phenomena and he has concocted countless conceptual three-ers since – has its ultimate origins in the orphic, cabalistic, hermetic side of western civilization, a shadowy side that scientific rationality has sought unsuccessfully to suppress (Brown, 1996).

For the most part, however, the spectres that stalk Kotler’s pages are unmentioned, unobtrusive, invisible, intangible. They are the spectres of failure, of bankruptcy, of technological change, of foreign competition, of unplanned strategies, of uncoordinated activities, of dysfunctional supplier relationships, of outdated market intelligence, of wasted advertising dollars, of pointless promotional stunts, of dubious distribution channels, of inadequate control systems, of mistaken mix manipulation, of irresponsible executives, of old-fashioned thinking, of standing still despite the rapidity of change, of what will happen if managers refuse to act right away. They are the ghosts of marketing past, the boogy men of production- and sales-orientation, the eternal demons of customer disquiet, dismay, dissatisfaction. They are the spectres, in short, of consumerism.

Metaphors are the precious stones of literary endeavor, the diamonds, rubies and emeralds that catch the reader’s eye. But the setting is no less important, as is the craftsmanship that goes into its construction. In addition to their remarkable metaphor cutting facility, both Marx and Kotler are blessed with very distinctive writing styles and strikingly similar modes of expression. They both impart an air of urgency by means of emphatic rhetorical devices like italicization, capitalization, overstatement, understatement, exclamation points, adjectival accumulation and incessant use of normative imperatives, superlatives and gerundives (“must,” “ought,” “essential,” “vital,” “increasingly,” “accelerating,” “unprecedented,” “rapidly advancing”). This sense of semi-apocalyptic drama is heightened by eschewing the past tense, passive voice of standard scholarly prose and relying on the active voice, present tense beloved by revolutionaries, demagogues and tabloid newspaper editors (the future tense figures prominently as well). However, they take care not to alienate the masses unnecessarily by frequently employing the first person plural (“we,” “us,” “our”), which is less imperious than the first person singular (“I,” “me,” “my”) and conveys a sense of conspiratorial solidarity between implied writer and reader, despite vast real world differences in professional, educational and socio-economic circumstances. This egalitarian ethos is underpinned with appropriately demotic expressions (there is an astonishing amount of slang in Kotler and Marx alike), amenable adverbs (“clearly,” “obviously,” “naturally,”) and congenial conjunctions (“thus,” “therefore,” “hence”), which combine to communicate self-evident straightforwardness – almost irrefutability – to what might otherwise be deemed decidedly dubious assertions.

Another rhetorical stratagem that helps them stand out from the crowd is repetition, anaphora and antithetica in particular. Anaphora is the technical term for starting several successive sentences, clauses or paragraphs with the same word or words, and both Marx and Kotler employ it repeatedly. In the Communist Manifesto, for instance, Marx commences twelve sequential paragraphs with those anti-capitalist swearwords “The bourgeoisie” and he is no slouch at intra-paragraph anaphora either:

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the family ties that bound man to his “natural superiors,” and has left no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment.” It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of
philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconvincing freedom - Free Trade. (Marx and Engels, 1983 [1848], p. 206)

Few writers can compare with such orgastic anaphoric acumen and Philip Kotler is no exception. Anaphora, however, is one of his most frequent rhetorical maneuvers and what he lacks in anaphoric power - three sentence sequences are the norm, though it can rise to seven or more - he makes up for in frequency:

There is often sentiment about the former heavyweight products which have passed their prime. There is a valid concern about the effect of dropping products on internal organizational morale and external customer and supplier relations. There is uncertainty about whether the product is chronically weak or only pausing before the next sales spurt. There is confusion about the right standards to apply in choosing products for deletion. There is a lack of predictable models and precedents for conducting periodic product reviews. (Kotler, 1969b, p. 118)

Every organization must perform a financial function insofar as money must be raised, managed, and budgeted according to sound business principles. Every organization must perform a production function in that it must conceive of the best way of arranging inputs to produce the outputs of the organization. Every organization must perform a personnel function in that people must be hired, trained, assigned, and promoted in the course of the organization's work. Every organization must perform a purchasing function in that it must acquire materials in an efficient way through comparing and selecting sources of supply. (Kotler and Levy, 1969, p. 11)

Smart marketing companies are improving their customer knowledge, customer connection technologies, and understanding of customer economics. They are inviting customers to co-design the product. They are ready to make flexible market offerings. They are using more targeted media and integrating their marketing communications to deliver a consistent message through every customer contact. They are utilizing more technologies such as video conferencing, sales automation, software, Internet web pages, and Intranets and Extranets. They are reachable seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day at their 1-800 customer telephone number or by e-mail. They are better able to identify the more profitable customers and set up different levels of service. They see their distribution channels as being partners, not adversaries. (Kotler, 1999, p.12)

If Philip Kotler's oeuvre is epitomized by anaphora, Karl Marx is antitmetable-mind set. Antitmetable is similar to anaphora, inasmuch as it involves repetition, usually within the same sentence. However, the grammatical sequence is reversed, as in John F. Kennedy's famous aphorism, "ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." In critical circles, Marx is justifiably celebrated for his antitmetable ability. "The weapon of criticism cannot replace the criticism of weapons," "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but their being that determines their consciousness," "The serious buffoon who no longer sees world history as a comedy but takes his comedy for world history," and "Philosophy can only be realized by the abolition of the proletariat, and the proletariat can only be abolished by the realization of philosophy" are just a few of his many arresting antitmetables. Their meaning, admittedly, is sometimes vague - clearly they're done for rhetorical effect rather than clarity of expression - nevertheless they are copybook examples of the literary form.

Kotler is no less amenable to antitmetabol, occasionally in its classic variant where the grammatical sequence is reversed ("If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail"). In the main, however, he appears to prefer chiasmus, a slightly "looser" form of antitmetable, which also involves intra-sentence inversion but not necessarily in the same grammatical sequence. For example: "The sales department isn't the whole company, but the whole company better be the sales department"; "The question is not whether to go into e-business, but rather how soon and with what sequence of steps"; "If they spend too little on advertising, they may be spending too much"; "It is production for the sake of consumption, not consumption for the sake of production"; and, of course, the classic concluding sentences of "Broadening the Concept," "The choice facing those who manage non-business organizations is not whether to market or not to market, for no organization can avoid marketing. The choice is whether to do it well or poorly, and on this necessity the case for organizational marketing is basically founded" (Kotler and Levy, 1969, p. 15).

Reversal is central to two final rhetorical devices that are common to both Kotler and Marx. The first of these is human, which famously works by upending the audience's expectations (Berger, 1998, 1995). Marx wrote an (unpublished) comic novel in the picaresque manner of Lawrence Stern and sarcasm was his middle name, as innumerable incandescent passages in his pyrotechnic pamphlets, philippics and newspaper articles attest (Wheen, 2000). The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte still drips with ironic inventive one hundred and fifty years after its composition (Marx, 1983 [1852]). It has even been suggested, in all seriousness, that the first 25 chapters of Capital were written ironically, as a parodic comment on the theory and methods of economics (La Capra, 1983). Some cynics have said the same thing about Kotler's literary corpus (Brown, 1995), though this is to overlook his fondness for one-liners, wry anecdotes, endearing self-deprecation and, in some early volumes, heavy-handed humor of the funny-foreigners-honey-I'm-home variety, most of which would be unacceptable today. Irony also figures prominently, as in the fictional case of the Arno Shoe Company, which allows the author to indulge in all sorts of straight-faced, footwear-related wordplay (Kotler, 1967), and the latter-day critique of one-line formulae flagged by get-rich-quick consultants, which is a bit rich coming from a master manufacturer of one-liners (Kotler, 1999)! In the main, however, Kotler relies on
the back-slapping, boiler room bonhomie of the smile-and-a-shoeshine super-salesperson.\textsuperscript{5}

Only one Frenchman out of three brushes his teeth, and only one German out of five changes his shirt more than once a week. Clearly, the markets for dental products and laundry detergents, respectively, are not as good as the size and incomes of the respective populations in these countries would indicate. (Kotler, 1967, p. 25)

How do you make love to a porcupine? Very carefully! (Kotler, 1975, p.190)

Banks used to be open from nine to three and closed all weekend. Banks followed the 3-6-3 rule: borrow money at 3 percent, loan it out at 6 percent, and get to the golf course by 3 p.m. (Kotler, 1999, p. 150)

Set against their humorous asides, both Marx and Kotler are inclined to proceed by negation. That is to say, they typically articulate a position, only to show that it is incorrect or, more usually, contradictory. Such an approach, to be sure, is an integral aspect of dialectical materialism (Bhaskar, 1993), Marx’s adaptation of Hegel’s idealist philosophical procedures (thesis/antithesis/synthesis) to real world, materialist concerns (the class struggle). However, it completely permeates his writing. Not only does he spend an inordinate amount of time explaining the error of his antagonists’ ways, most notably in The Communist Manifesto, Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, and Critique of the Gotha Program, but even his aforementioned fondness for anaphora and antimetabolé is a micro-level manifestation of this macro-level maneuver.

The more the worker produces, the less he has to consume; the more values he creates, the less value, the less dignity, he has; the better shaped his product, the more mis-shapen the worker; the more civilized the object, the more barbaric the worker; the more powerful the work, the more powerless the worker; the more intelligent the work, the more witless the worker, the more he becomes a slave of nature. (Marx, 1883 [1844], p. 135)

Negation is equally integral to Kotler’s corpus (consider the congeries of coinages with “de,” “dis,” “un,” “anti,” and “counter” prefixes). In many ways, indeed, it is his signature rhetorical stratagem, inasmuch as he incessantly posits positions and then proceeds to refute them. These positions, moreover, are often expressed negatively prior to his negation of the negation, as in this powerful antimetabolite anaphora:

\begin{quote}
Karl Marx may not have been a Marxist, as he once made perfectly clear, but everyone else is, Kotler included.
\end{quote}

The ad cannot adapt the message to the particular buyer; the salesman can. The ad cannot go into much detail; the salesman can. The ad cannot close the sale; the salesman can. The ad cannot give the company any feedback; the salesman can. The ad may not be noticed; the salesman will be. (Kotler, 1967, p. 453)

In a similar vein, he repeatedly rails against mistaken beliefs about marketing, whether it be the general public’s perception that marketing is exploitative (not so), top management’s conception that marketing is advertising (wrong again), or academicians’ erroneous assumption that his broadened concept of marketing is adversely affecting the discipline (quite the reverse). He is no less fond of rhetorical constructions of the “it-seems-to-be-but-it-is-not-so variety.” And, although much of this propensity is attributable to his hypothesis-testing training in economics, Kotler’s innate feel for dialectical-style negation is evinced by his emphasis on the contradictions that inhere in the opponent’s position. In the fact, for example, that not-for-profit organizations already use marketing tools, though they don’t use them effectively; in the fact that opponents of his position are engaged in the very activity they are attacking, such as the luckless David Luck, who was severely chastised on several occasions; and, in the fact that Japan’s triumph in the marketplace is based on the self-same ideas that US managers have failed to embrace. The Kotlerite marketing concept, to be exact. Oh ye of little faith!

Are You Now, or Have You Ever Been, a Kotlerite?

It is clear, then, that Kotler’s corpus is indebted to, or rather draws indirect sustenance from, all manner of marxian precepts. Like Marx’s dialectical materialism, Kotler’s exchange-based model of marketing (dialectical mercantilism, perhaps?) sucks everything in, leaves nothing out, and forges connections between ostensibly antithetical elements (profit and not-for-profit, practice and philosophy, universal and local, art and science). So much so, that Kamenka’s (1983, p.xxxii-iii) apt description of the marxian project could just as easily be applied to the Kotlerian corpus: “The outstanding thing about his career as a thinker was the powerful logical thrust lying at the center of his work, the way in which he expanded his views, assimilating the most diverse materials and remolding them to suit his system and his purposes.”

Now, many EMJ readers might be tempted to dismiss the foregoing Philip Kotler/Karl Marx comparison or wonder whether it serves any useful scholarly purpose. Most educated people, after all, have been influenced by Karl Marx to some degree, whether they’re aware of it or not. His concepts, like those of Freud, are part of the pedagogic furniture, so to speak. Karl Marx may not have been a Marxist, as he once made perfectly clear, but everyone else is, Kotler included. This counter-argument, of course, is uncontestable. As Manuel (1995, p.138) observes about Marx’s theory of historical materialism:

\begin{quote}
In a similar vein, he repeatedly rails against mistaken beliefs about marketing, whether it be the general public’s perception that marketing is exploitative (not so), top management’s conception that marketing is advertising (wrong again), or academicians’ erroneous assumption that his broadened concept of marketing is adversely affecting the discipline (quite the reverse). He is no less fond of rhetorical constructions of the "it-seems-to-be-but-it-is-not-so variety." And, although much of this propensity is attributable to his hypothesis-testing training in economics, Kotler’s innate feel for dialectical-style negation is evinced by his emphasis on the contradictions that inhere in the opponent’s position. In the fact, for example, that not-for-profit organizations already use marketing tools, though they don’t use them effectively; in the fact that opponents of his position are engaged in the very activity they are attacking, such as the luckless David Luck, who was severely chastised on several occasions; and, in the fact that Japan’s triumph in the marketplace is based on the self-same ideas that US managers have failed to embrace. The Kotlerite marketing concept, to be exact. Oh ye of little faith!
\end{quote}
"Viewed in retrospect, his tableau of world history has come to occupy a place alongside the Four Monarchies doctrine...and Concorde's ten-stage outline of rational progress, as one of the three most influential frames within which Western man has attempted to encompass historical experience. Of all Marx's theories, this historical schema has been the most enthralling; the Western mind has hardly begun to awaken from its narcotic effects."

However, as Manuel also points out, it is easy to forget that we are all Marxists, after a fashion. This is especially so in an academic discipline like marketing, which has not exactly worn its Marx campaign ribbons with pride, notwithstanding the heroic efforts of Firat (1988), Hirschman (1998), Rogers (1977) and others. Sometimes, therefore, it is necessary to pause and take stock of our marxian heritage. It is a heritage that is identifiable in the most ostensibly unlikely places, as the Kotler oeuvre indicates, and, given the widespread assumption that marketers are apologists for multi-national capital (Lasn, 1999, The Economist, 2001), it is a heritage to be proud of, rather than hidden away. True, some skeptics may challenge the specific Marx/Kotler comparisons made in the present paper. For every biographical parallel, a counter-example could be cited (Marx was ignored in his time, Kotler has been feted; Marx was a great committee man, Kotler has avoided organizational entanglements). For every conceptual analogy, a non-analogous issue can be identified (Marx wrote at length about suicide, but not even the broadest interpreters of our field consider suicide a form of consumer behavior). For every rhetorical equivalent, a contrasting stylistic quirk is clearly discernible (Marx rarely employs alliteration, whereas Kotler is full of it and variations thereof, such as acronyms and acrostics). For every plausible plus, in other words, an implausible minus might be mobilized. 10

But, to dismiss the present paper as "unproven" or "unscientific" is to miss the point completely. The purpose of literary appreciation is not to prove or disprove a point or to come to an incontestable scientific conclusion. Textual evidence can always be interpreted in another way or tackled from an alternative theoretical perspective. A feminist reading of Kotler's oeuvre would be very different from the marxian analysis reported herein, as would an approach based on, say, new historicism or narratology, or reader-response theory, or psychoanalytical criticism or the myth-based models of Northrop Frye (Hirschman, 1998; Stern, 1989). When it comes to literary criticism, there is no right or wrong, just greater or lesser degrees of insight, inventiveness and imagination. Literary analysis attempts to rub texts together to see if they catch fire (Brown, 1999).

Some mainstream marketing scientists, to be sure, may be unsettled by such a situation. Steeped in the tradition of hypothesis testing, where rigor, reliability and replication are of paramount importance, they are temperamentally inclined to be dismissive of an approach that is so "soft" it makes ethnography seem rock solid. However, it is important to remember, as Stern (1989), Holbrook (1995) and others repeatedly make clear, that literary appreciation stems from a non-scientific scholarly tradition. Its intention is not to prove but to provoke. It cares less about causality than creativity. It is opposed to axioms and aims for astonishment. It eschews double-blind experiments for double-dip experiences. It seeks the suspension of disbelief rather than demonstrations of statistical inference. It is indifferent to efficiency but deeply moved by effrontery. It pours scorn on effectiveness and pays a premium for effervescence. It attempts to make the most implausible ideas seem plausible, if only for a moment. It tries to attain Fredric Jameson's scholarly nirvana of empty-handed bewilderment.

Although bewilderment is not unknown amongst readers of top tier marketing journals, empty-handedness is another matter entirely. Academic articles, no matter how arcane, are ordinarily expected to contain a take-away or two (as the "managerial implications" section of most papers bears eloquent witness). Fortunately, the foregoing literary comparison of Marx and Kotler provides food for scholarly thought, even if it doesn't quite attain Fredric Jameson's exacting standards of taste. The first important point pertains to the intensely literary character of marketing research. Marketing academicians are writers, first and foremost, professionals who are judged, rewarded and promoted on the basis of their literary endeavors. Granted, these literary endeavors unfailingly require a great deal of preparatory work involving interviews, experiments, data mining, statistical analyses et al. What's more, the ways in which the findings are presented frequently utilize all sorts of symbolic systems beside, or in addition to, the written word (formulae, figures, photographs, videography etc.). Nevertheless, the principal means of scholarly communication remains words on the page, ideally in the right order (Stern, 1998).

That being the case, marketing researchers can learn much from masters of the literary craft. There are some truly excellent writers in marketing and, in the interest of disciplinary progress, it behoves all of us - the less gifted majority - to carefully scrutinize the textual accomplishments of the marketing literati, as other academic disciplines have done (Gane and Metcalfe, 1996; Geertz, 1988; McGloody, 1998). Philip Kotler is a very talented writer, who owes at least some of his eminence to a wonderfully inventive, endlessly creative and unfailingly felicitous phrase-making facility. For that reason alone, his written works are worth studying in detail. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the tools and techniques of literary criticism are regularly applied to television, radio and newspaper commercials, to say nothing of analogous "texts" like shopping centers and service encounters, but researchers remain somewhat reluctant to apply them to the marketing literature itself.

A second lesson can be derived from the study of
Karl Marx. Aside from the curiosity value of his pre-modern marketing activities, his thought contains much of contemporary relevance to our field. It undergirds the anti-capitalist street protests that have beset the western world in recent years and, despite marketers’ declarations of undying love for their customers, it inheres in the anti-marketing mindset that is increasingly manifest in manifold forms of consumer resistance (Klein, 2000; The Economist, 2001). As Strathern (2001, pp. 68–9) cogently notes:

“We are at the beginning of a century where the division between the first and third worlds continues to deepen, where even in the first world the division between rich and poor grows disruptively wide... The people who brought Seattle to a standstill during the first World Trade Organization meeting of the new millennium were not for the most part Marxist extremists or the American poor. No matter their conduct or the incitement ideas they expressed; what drove them was a sense of injustice. Others in the world, powerless and less fortunate than the protesters, were getting a raw deal. As Marx in his own way showed, we ignore this fact at our peril.”

With some significant exceptions, marketing academics have been leery of marxian precepts and this is understandable given the hostility of its carriers. Marketplace phenomena are attracting the marx-mediated attention of scholars from contiguous academic disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and geography (e.g. Gotttdiener, 2000; Harvey, 1989; Ritzer, 1999, 2001). However, as Peñalosa (2000) points out, they pay very little attention to marketing researchers – our publications are rarely cited with approval – and the antipathy appears to be mutual. At best, the sociologists and suchlike are politely attended to by mainstream marketing academicians, at worst they are dismissed as interfering ignoramuses, who know nothing about the true, consumer-oriented nature of the marketing concept. Thus they, and their B-school based brethren, can be safely ignored. What marketing’s silent majority can’t ignore, however, is evidence that the APIC paradigm itself has feet of marxian clay. When someone of Kotler’s standing is exposed as a fellow traveler, then the marketing academy has to face up to the fact. The critiques of “outsiders” and self-styled marketing “heretics” can be conveniently overlooked, but the idea of Philip Kotler Marxist Activist can’t be set aside so easily. Indeed, from the standpoint of critical theory, exposing the contradictions at the center of marketing is potentially much more emancipatory than any number of tangential, easily deflected attacks on the modern marketing paradigm. Dialectics may succeed where diatribe has failed.

Appropriately, given the triadic propensities of both thinkers, there is a third important issue arising from this study in Marxian and Kotterite co-variation. It concerns what these two great scholars share, above and beyond the biographical, the conceptual, the rhetorical. Despite their ceaseless assertions of scientific detachment, scholarly propriety and, on occasion, artisanal indifference, both thinkers are extraordinarily passionate about their work, which they pursue with unrelenting zeal. The sheer volume of their output is testimony to this impressively evangelical ethos. As a result, both thinkers are extremely persuasive. They truly believe in the credo they’re promulgating, whether it be revolutionary socialism or marketing orientation, and it is this belief that imbues their writings with such plausibility, such potency, such power. Both men, moreover, believe in exactly the same thing; namely, the desirability, possibility and indeed inevitability of progress. True, their ideas of what constitutes progress are very different, virtually antithetical. But both firmly believe that progress is attainable, given sufficient will, total commitment and fierce determination. As Kotler says:

“I operate on the assumption that ‘progress’ is possible, even in the face of much contradictory evidence. I prefer to believe that human beings can improve their condition by applying collective intelligence to solving shared problems” (quoted in Kennedy, 1998, p.114).

In this regard, of course, both men can be dismissed as hopeless utopians, as true believers in and eloquent spokespersons for an impossibly perfect world, a communist and consumerist paradise respectively. Marx and Kotler, to be sure, might take exception to this suggestion. The former frequently denounced utopianism (as derogatory epithets go, “utopia” is the “myopia” of marxism) and the latter generally avoids firm predictions about the shape of things to come (though Kotler, like Marx, occasionally indulges in time-traveling thought experiments). The fact of the matter, however, is that they are utopians. They do believe in paradise and there’s nothing wrong with that. As Manuel and Manuel (1979) make clear, utopianism is a recurring and deep-seated feature of human thought, a vitally necessary fiction. Marketing is and always has been utopian (Brown and Maclaran, 1996) and our discipline is fortunate to be blessed with a Passionate, Persuasive, Progressive Paradigm of Philip Kotler’s stature.

In 1985, Kotler was awarded the inaugural A.M.A. Distinguished Marketing Educator Award. On accepting the honor, he sagely observed, in a paradigmatic passage that encapsulates many of his thematic preoccupations and stylistic quirks:

“Marketing is not the art of finding clever ways to dispose of what you make. Marketing is the art of creating genuine customer value. Marketing is the art of helping your customers become better off. The marketer’s watchwords are quality, service and value. Can you imagine what the world would be like if the marketing concept became a universal principle?” (quoted in Kennedy, 1998, p.111).

Philip Kotler, perhaps more than anyone, has articulated this paradigmatic possibility for us. While the details of his marketing vision may – indeed should – be challenged, his visionary ability is unquestionable, it is unsurpassed, it is uncanny. The ultimate issue,
than, is not whether Kotlerism is a spectre or not a spectre, for the spectre of Kotlerism cannot be avoided. The issue is whether it is a good spectre or a bad spectre and on this necessity the case for Kotlerism is basically founded.

Notes

1. As Anderson (1979, p. 26) notes “Lukács was the son of a banker, Benjamin of an art dealer; Adorno of a wine merchant; [and] Horkheimer of a textile-manufacturer.” The famous Frankfurt School, furthermore, was funded by a fabulously wealthy grain merchant (Jay, 1975).

2. Although Van Maanen’s book has been remembered today for his 1989 classic Theory of the Leisure Class, his scholarly reputation was established with a devastating critique of Marx’s labor theory of value (Diggins, 1999).

3. It has often been said that Marx founded a new religion, notwithstanding its disdain for religiosity (Strathern, 2001). Kotler’s book has been described as a much less egregious manner. Marketing Management, for example, is regularly described as the “Bible” of our discipline (Grainer, 1998; Kennedy, 1998). In Kellogg Graduate School of Management, what is more, there is a mural depicting the great and good of the past and present Marketing Departments, with the most Sitting on a cloud, is none other than Saint Philip himself.

4. In Marketing for Non-Profit Organizations, for instance, he identifies sixteen separate relationships that are integral to the marketing of a university (Kotler, 1975) and those that obtain in today’s networked economy are more elaborate still (Achrol and Kotler, 1999; Sawhney and Kotler, 2001).

5. However, it is interesting to note that having exhausted the cultural superstructure, Kotler is increasingly turning his attention to the economic base at a time of rapid technological change (see Kotler and Simon, forthcoming).

6. The societal concept goes even further, of course. In some respects, indeed, its socially responsible stance – the notion that marketing should serve the long term interests of society – is analogous to Engels’ assertion that the superstructure is determined by the base “in the final instance.” An instance, as Althusser observed, that never actually transpires.

7. The upshot of this extension is the commodification of the marketing concept itself, its reduction to a formulaic 4Ps framework, which serves to disguise the true nature of marketplace relations. (Consider the inherent contradiction of Nike-wearing protesters attacking NikeTown, Seattle.) Worse still, just as the capitalist is compelled by competitive pressures to squeeze every ounce of surplus value from the workforce, thereby increasing its immiseration and propensity to revolt, so too the Kotlerite model of marketing is compelled to expand into ever-widening domains, no matter how inappropriate or tangential they appear. It will only be stopped when the immiseration of the professions proletariat is complete, a crisis of conceptual accumulation transpires, and the expropriator of “exchange” and “value” is expropriated.

8. The wryly ironic side of Kotler is neatly illustrated in the following excerpt from Marketing Places: “The city of Wichita Falls, Texas, having lost its waterfalls in a flood in the 1800s, replaced them almost a hundred years later to stimulate tourism. The artificial falls have reigned city pride and have given residents a place to take friends and visitors, but the tidal wave of tourists has yet to appear” (Kotler et al., 1993, p. 122).

9. Consider, for example, the very first paragraph in the very first edition of Marketing Management: “Surely among the most difficult business decisions are those that have to do with marketing. The variables in a marketing problem do not generally exhibit the neat quantitative proper-

Europian Management Journal Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 129-146, April 2002
THE SPECTRE OF KOTLERISM


STEPHEN BROWN
School of Management, Ulster University, Jordanstown, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim, BT37 0QB.
E-mail: profsfbrown@aol.com.

Stephen Brown is Professor of Marketing Research at the University of Ulster and Visiting Professor at the Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University. He has authored many articles in leading journals and written or co-edited 12 books including Postmodern Marketing, Imagining Marketing and Marketing the Retro Revolution.