When it comes to critical marketing, I think that there are some critical questions on which there may still be some serious contention: Does critical marketing exist? Can critical marketing exist? What are the criteria to indicate that critical marketing exists? Although these are significant questions for critical marketing, they may no longer need to be answered, because the time for critical marketing may already have passed. Times may be confronting us with a set of other significant questions.

When I arrived in the USA in 1972 as a doctoral student in marketing, there was a euphoric rush in the marketing academia to establish its (new) (broader) scope and implications for the world. "Broadening the Concept of Marketing" by Kotler and Levy had been published in 1969 and the ensuing brief debate on marketing's new horizons was about to be settled in favour of the broadening theme. This was by no means a critical reconceptualisation but an audacious declaration of the final victory of modern marketing as the prevailing culture of the times. Any success as any "business" (commercial, non-commercial, profit, non-profit, governmental, non-governmental, educational, medical, or otherwise) in modern market capitalist society would require a marketing sense and sensibility.

Unbeknownst to me and most others in the marketing discipline at that time, many philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists and historians who had recognised the cultural meaning and impact of marketing had begun to critically comment on its...
different aspects - advertising, credit practices, sales tactics - but also on marketing’s implications on society as a whole. Of these, a few had come to the attention of marketing academics. I remember reading Packard’s *The Hidden Persuaders* and Caplovitz’s *The Poor Pay More*, for example, while still in the doctoral program. An economist, Galbraith, had also made critical attributions to marketing’s implications in terms of management of demand in his then influential book *The New Industrial State*.

From within North American marketing, in the 1970s, I remember two books that came close to being considered critical. One was *Society and Marketing: An Unconventional View*, edited by Norman Kangun. In it a chapter by Thaddeus Spratlen declared that the broadening concept by Kotler and Levy broadened the operational domain of marketing, but not its philosophical domain. I remember this chapter making an impact on those of us taking the Marketing Theory seminar. The other book was one that also explored the societal effects of marketing, by George Fisk, titled *Marketing and the Ecological Crisis*.

Marxist thought whence the Critical Theory school emerged was practically absent from North American publications in marketing. There were, however, European scholars that we met who were unafraid to use Marxist insights. During my years in the doctoral program I met Søren Heede at a conference. He had presented and published Marxist critiques of marketing. Later, Johan Arndt, who wrote critical articles on marketing, visited the university where I was doing my doctoral studies. As a result of this visit, he edited a book with Nikhillesh Dholakia, titled *Changing the Course of Marketing*, in which there were several critical chapters and some were informed by Marxist thought. One must also mention *Philosophical and Radical Thought in Marketing*, a book with which I was involved as an editor. Yet Marxist theory, even if used only to be informed from, not necessarily to be adhered to, has been mostly taboo in North American marketing literature.

This is a pity, because Karl Marx probably presented the most comprehensive and best critique of modern capitalism from within modern thought. Using Marx’s insightful analyses and completing them with those of others, such as Georg Simmel, Karl Polanyi, Max Weber, Fernand Braudel, Zygmunt Bauman, and Herbert Marcuse among others, could provide the intellectual world with a successful understanding of modernity and its prominent order, capitalism, in terms of what it meant in and for modernity. This would also provide a sound basis for understanding modern marketing, a creature of modernity.

It was in the 1980s, after completing my doctoral studies, that I became familiar with works by scholars such as Stuart Ewen, William Leiss, Sut Jhally, and the historian Jackson Lears who made critical observations of marketing’s role in society and history. Also in the 1980s critical observations regarding consumption and consumerisation of society by sociologists, such as Colin Campbell, Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and Daniel Miller became heard by a few consumer researchers.

At the beginning of the Twenty-first Century, there has been a flurry of contributions for critical marketing. These have come from Europe, specifically from the British scholars. Most of these contributions do incorporate insights from Marx and others mentioned above. Possible reasons for the origin of these contributions were discussed in Firat and Tadajewski (2009). This new interest in critical marketing is heartening and will possibly have positive implications for the discipline’s contribution to humanity’s lot.

The vision of most of the contributors to critical marketing is still a modernist one. As such, this vision does not provide a break from envisioning the economic
- the domain of the material - as having the central role in modern society. This work critically analyses and denounces the market, as well as individual interest (private gain) that its principles operate on. Yet the idea that humanity’s welfare depends upon material economic growth and development has remained firmly embedded in discourses emerging from Marxist and later critical perspectives. The question, then, remains to be what form of an organisation of the economic will yield greater and more equitable, humane development. In socialist economies, planned economy instead of market capitalism became the alternative, and the contest between the two was about material feats - who will lead industrialisation, who will conquer space, who will build the larger, leading economy!

If critical, this critical analysis was not about the inconsistencies and meaning(lessness) of the modern project. It was about the contradictions of capitalism. Along these lines, critical marketing would be about marketing distributing the products of economic growth more evenly for wider consumer welfare. However, the questions of whether this is tenable and if human achievement can be completely tied to material economic accomplishments remain aloof mostly due to a fear of falling behind on the economic front and of searching for alternatives.

Yet, understanding capitalism or modern marketing from within modernity, and with an economistic perspective, we are now aware, is no longer sufficient to unravel the mysteries of the contemporary human condition. We are all appalled at the conditions that so many of our fellow human beings have to live with/in. In our hearts and our minds we feel and know the reasons why these conditions exist and are maintained. Rarely do we speak of them, however, and when we do we don’t seem to have the persuasive answers to the apologists who declare that anything else would be/is/was worse. This is akin to, as some indicate, throwing more technology at problems created by technologies. We know, deep down, that this cannot be the solution, but we can’t help doing it nevertheless. Today, we keep throwing more economics at problems created by the economy, and as long as, as critical marketing scholars, we see the economic as the “infrastructure” or the “base” that largely determines humanity’s lot, we are not escaping from the pit or the vicious cycle.

As I already mentioned, marketing, its practices, and its role in society have become central issues addressed and studied by scholars of all social science disciplines. Marketing scholars ought to be leading these discourses, since they should be the ones who have the best understanding of these phenomena. Yet, this has not been the case, partially because so many in the discipline see it as “business discipline”, geared to inform marketing practices, and more importantly because many have not come to see themselves as social scientists, which, if they did, would have required adopting more critical perspectives.

Today, we have to be critical beyond critical; we have to get radical. We need to shed the chains of modernism and begin to envision what is beyond. There is much that we can learn from others, such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-François Lyotard, Richard Rorty, Michel Foucault, E. Ann Kaplan, Jacques Derrida, Elizabeth Wilson, and Jean Baudrillard, among others. In particular, we have to free ourselves from the imposing idea that there can be/has to be one best system or order to be found and applied to all humanity. We have to acclimate ourselves to the possibility of living in an order of multiple orders, but this is a discussion for another paper!
REFERENCE


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