Producing historical critical marketing studies: theory, method and politics

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper calls attention to the importance of historical research within “critical marketing studies”. It seeks to articulate a historical perspective based on the work of Michel Foucault.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper is based on a close reading of relevant Foucaultian primary and secondary texts.

Findings – Foucault’s scholarship provides a useful counterpoint to the calls for critical theory to form the central paradigm in critical marketing studies, revealing a complex constellation of power/knowledge relations underpinning marketing theory, thought and pedagogy.

Originality/value – This is a close reading and examination of a theoretically sophisticated, rigorous scholar who remains largely underexplored in relation to marketing theory and the history of marketing thought.

Keywords Critical marketing studies, Marketing history, History of marketing thought, Poststructuralism, Critical theory, Cold War, Marketing, Research work

Paper type Research paper

[...] recourse to history [...] is meaningful to the extent that history serves to show how that-which-is has not always been; i.e. that the things which seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, during the course of a precarious and fragile history (Foucault, 1988a, p. 37).

Introduction

Critical marketing studies is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of paradigms. It is usually presented as a response to the limitations posed by traditional logical empiricist and interpretive research which are associated with what Burrell and Morgan (1991) termed the “sociology of regulation”. Such approaches support the status quo politically for the reason that there are minimal attempts made to radically question the axiology that underpins marketing theory, practice and thought (see Tadajewski, 2010b). Generally speaking, the key theoretical lens adopted by those interested in critical marketing include Neo-Marxist Critical Theory, Poststructuralism, Feminist Perspectives, Queer Theory, and occasionally elements of Postmodernism (e.g. Bairstow and Skinner, 2007; Morgan, 1992, 2003; Maclaran et al., 2009; Tadajewski, 2010a, b).

While as much divides as unifies these various approaches, what feeds through the different paradigms, thought-styles and “attitudes” associated with critical marketing...
is a concern with questioning some aspect of marketing theory or practice at the levels of axiology, ontology, epistemology and methodology respectively (Benton, 1985; Catterall et al., 1999, 2002; Tadajewski and Brownlie, 2008). Numerous critical academics have, for example, argued that the concepts invoked in marketing textbooks are fundamentally problematic in some way (e.g. Saren, 2009; Tadajewski and Brownlie, 2008). From a feminist perspective, for instance, Fischer and Bristor (1994) worked their way through the different eras well known to marketing historians – production, sales, marketing and relationship marketing – highlighting the gendered nature of the discussions that accompanied each of them. Such papers serve a useful function in that they can contribute to rethinking the nature of marketing thought, challenging and changing the way we teach and the ways in which students understand marketing theory and practice.

The use of the critical social theory characteristic of critical marketing studies encourages us, as the paper by Fischer and Bristor makes clear, to pay attention to external influences on marketing theory like gender relations. While it is true that the history of marketing thought provided by Bartels (1988) has shown which perspectives were widely adopted at certain times, traditional representations of marketing thought tend to neglect to reveal the political suppression of ideas, concepts, schools of thought or paradigms by more institutionally powerful traditions for whatever reason (Firat and Dholakia, 1989). This leaves us with a decidedly unbalanced conception of the development of marketing thought. Firat and Dholakia (1989, p. 113) highlight this point well when they assert that “To assume that all historical knowledge is subsumed in the history of the winners ultimately paves the way for totalitarian conceptions of history”. They call for marketing scholars to rethink what we understand by marketing thought in an effort to comprehend why some approaches achieve a sustained intellectual “prominence” at the same time as paradigmatic competitors fall at the wayside.

Marketing would appear to be an ideal candidate for this type of research strategy. In his discussion of “Truth and Power”, for example, Foucault tells us to pay attention to the “dubious” sciences, the sciences with little epistemological consensus on key issues. He specifically lists psychiatry as his object of attention in this lecture, but in other places he more broadly refers to the “human sciences”, including biology and economics; the latter, of course, being closely related to marketing and forming, at least in part, the epistemological springboard for much marketing knowledge (Jones and Shaw, 2005). Moreover, he points out that his focus on “clinical discourse” was selected “because we are dealing with a very definite historical fact, and because one cannot refer its establishment back to some remote origin” (Foucault, 1996b, p. 45).

We could say the same of the emergence of marketing as a university course of instruction. In addition, he argues that these human sciences are likely to be tied to influential institutions such as the state or in the case of marketing, industry, making it more likely that “immediate economic exigencies, political urgencies and social regulations” will impact the discipline in some way (Foucault, 1980b, p. 109). Relationships of this kind are, he says, fairly simple to “grasp ‘intuitively’”, and thus present themselves as objects for detailed historical study (Foucault, 1996b, p. 45). Linking these ideas together, the study of marketing is potentially a fruitful analytic avenue for the Foucaultian-minded scholar, since it should be feasible to appreciate the close relationship between the universities, business schools, marketing education and
social, political and economic relations. In this case, the “intertwining of the effects of knowledge and power” should be pronounced and therefore “intelligible” (Foucault, 1980b, p. 109; 1988c, p. 101).

Nevertheless, despite this methodological preamble, it is surprising how little attention has been devoted to “transformations” in the “institutions”, “social and political relations” and other factors in the “non-discursive” (Foucault, 1996a) and “extra-discursive” domains (Foucault, 1996b) that can modify the way marketing is understood, theorised and performed (Cochoy, 1998; Kreshel, 1990; Scully, 1996; Tadajewski, 2006a). Yet, it is probably not unexpected that the production of knowledge and power relations are held at arms-length. On this issue, Foucault writes,

[...] intellectuals justify and mark out their identity by trying to establish an almost uncrossable line between the domain of knowledge, seen as that of truth and freedom, and the domain of the exercise of power. What struck me, in observing the human sciences, was that the development of all these branches of knowledge can in no way be disassociated from the exercise of power [...] But, generally speaking, the fact that societies can become the object of observation, that human behavior became, from a certain point on, a problem to be analyzed and resolved, all that is bound up, I believe, with mechanisms of power – which, at a given moment, indeed, analyzed that object (society, man, etc.) and presented it as a problem to be resolved. So the birth of the human sciences goes hand in hand with the installation of new mechanisms of power (Foucault, 1988c, p. 106).

The idea that the production of knowledge is influenced by power relations has been developed in the Critical Theory inspired work of Murray and Ozanne (1991). The point of historical research in this tradition is explicitly a counterpoint to the problems that Lowenthal (1987) associated with empirical research. Empirical research – that is, the tradition of research exemplified by most marketing scholars – assumes the practice or phenomena they study appears just at the point they focus their research technique on it, rather than viewing it as historical phenomena shaped by social structures that impact on the way we look at the world and act within it. However, while Critical Theory has much appeal, it would be somewhat limiting to confine critical marketing studies to one paradigm, whether Critical Theory, feminism or one of many others (e.g. Bradshaw and Firat, 2007).

As such, while there are a number of thinkers and ideas that influence the approach I bring to critical marketing, the account provided below draws particularly on Foucault and is – like Foucault’s work itself – not religiously tied to any method (e.g. Foucault, 2000c, p. 240). Since I have already stressed a desire not to crown Critical Theory as a dominant perspective, it is worth underscoring the difference between Critical Theory and Foucault further. In the first place, despite the call for historical research that we find in commentaries on Critical Theory (e.g. Murray and Ozanne, 1991), the primary texts of the Frankfurt School were criticised by Foucault for not having paid sufficient attention to history (Foucault, 2000c). On this matter, he questions the over-reliance of the Critical Theorists on accounts produced by other scholars[1].

In equal measure, Foucault finds the project of Enlightenment, the humanist emphasis and concept of emancipation as a function of un-ideological knowledge that characterises Critical Theory as questionable (Foucault, 2000c; Hoy, 1986). Enlightenment via the generation of new forms of knowledge does not necessarily lead to greater freedom for people, but potentially to the expansion of webs of power
that are better able to control and contain human agency, restructuring it in some directions and not others (e.g., Foucault, 1991, p. 222). In an important quotation worth repeating he notes:

We live in a society where the formation, circulation, and consumption of knowledge are something fundamental. If the accumulation of capital was one of the fundamental traits of our society, the same is true of the accumulation of knowledge. Furthermore, the exercise, production and accumulation of knowledge cannot be disassociated from the power mechanisms with which they maintain complex relationships that must be analysed. Since the sixteenth century, people have always considered the development of the forms and contents of knowledge to be one of the greatest guarantees of liberation for humanity. That’s one of the postulates of our civilization, one that has been extended throughout the world. Now it’s a fact already established by the Frankfurt School that the formation of the great systems of knowledge has also had the effects and functions of enslavement and domination. Which leads one to thoroughly re-examine the postulate according to which the development of knowledge constitutes a guarantee of liberation (Foucault, 2000c, p. 291).

The idea of emancipation that underwrites the work of the Frankfurt School nonetheless suggests that it will be possible to set people free from ideologically inflected thought patterns (e.g., Adorno and Horkheimer, 2010, pp. 45, 50, 61) and the behavioural control that accompanies the structuring of the social world (e.g., Murray and Ozanne, 1991, pp. 129, 131, 133). Adorno and Horkheimer (2010, p. 46) articulate this process in the following manner: “What we want are for people who read what we write to feel the scales falling from their eyes”.

“Emancipation” and “liberation” in the sense of resistance retains a presence in Foucault’s project, but it operates in a different register to that found in Frankfurt School scholarship (see Smart, 1986, p. 169). For Foucault, the task is one of thinking differently and radically by changing the relationship we have with the social world (e.g., Foucault, 2000c, p. 244). This radical emphasis is rarely noted (Jones, 2011), but he is emphatic in his calls for substantive ontological reflection (e.g., Foucault, 2000c, pp. 247-249; see Veyne, 2010, p. 123).

In this process of ontological reflection we will not escape power relations but Foucault denies that they are always negative in their effects. Contrasting his views with those of Herbert Marcuse, a prominent member of the Frankfurt School, he exclaims: I would […] distinguish myself from para-Marxists like Marcuse who give the notion of repression an exaggerated role – because power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress, if it worked through the mode of censorship, exclusion, blockage and repression, in the manner of a great Superego, exercising itself only in a negative way […] Far from preventing knowledge, power also produces it (Foucault, 1980d, p. 59; see also Foucault, 1998, p. 12). Developing these ideas further, he questions whether the process of critical self-reflection is a one-off experience, preferring to view the process as an on-going labour:

I insist that this change take the form neither of a sudden illumination that makes “the scales fall from the eyes” nor of an openness to every movement of the time. I would like it to be an elaboration of the self by the self, a studious transformation, a slow and arduous transformation through a constant care for the truth (Foucault, 1996g, p. 461).

Having now distinguished Foucault’s views from those of central figures associated with the Frankfurt School[2], this account will continue with a discussion of the key elements in Foucault’s thought: archaeology and genealogy. As a way forward in
articulating the use of history in Critical Marketing beyond the account provided by Murray and Ozanne (1991), this paper provides the necessary theoretical introduction to Foucault’s projects and the methodological “precautions” in his key works are outlined[3].

Archaeology
The archaeological studies focused on the “dubious” sciences, studying the history of the development of key concepts and traditions as a way of attempting to determine how these could take shape “as a possible object of knowledge” (Foucault, 1996g, p. 445). The human sciences are, for the archaeologist, subject to analysis to elucidate their constitution as disciplinary systems of knowledge. For Foucault, the term “discipline” signifies at least two things of note. It both reflects an academic “discipline” as well as forms of social control utilised in locations as diverse as religious communities, schools, factories and institutes of correction (e.g. Foucault, 1991, pp. 137, 142, 222; 2007, pp. 12, 44, 46).

The aim of archaeological investigation is the clarification of the rules of “discursive formation” that produce, maintain and order the “statements” made in these systems of knowledge (Foucault, 2002b, p. xii). In such works, the intentional subject, the person producing knowledge and pushing the boundaries of what is known is frequently difficult to discern (Foucault, 2002a; Power, 2011). As Power stresses, looking for this subject misses the point of Foucault’s emphasis in this period. His archaeological studies such as *Madness and Civilization* (Foucault, 2002a), *The Birth of the Clinic* (Foucault, 2003) and *The Order of Things* (Foucault, 2002b) had a different register entirely. They were attempts to provide insight into the “conditions of possibility” that provided the space from which only certain people were permitted to speak (Power, 2011, p. 38).

In seeking to understand the “facts” that constitute the discursive practices of, for example, psychopathology or even “multiple personality disorder” (Hacking, 1992), the focus of the archaeologist is on concrete disciplinary discourse; the “seeable and sayable” (Foucault, 2002a), the “usual codes” invoked when discussing or describing a given object (e.g. the multiple objects that are “madness”), discipline (e.g. psychology, psychiatry) or social practice (e.g. an “event” (see Foucault, 1984, p. 88) such as the “great confinement” and treatment of the mad).

With respect to marketing, archaeology could focus on the emergence of the discipline in the early twentieth century (see Foucault, 2002a, pp. 41, 44). This would proceed by relating the issue of the “seeable” (i.e. the visible (Kendall and Wickham, 1999)) to the “sayable” in our history, trying to unravel the complex relationships between these factors.

In the first instance, it was never a definite historical “fact” that marketing would appear (i.e. why “marketing”, not “commerce” or “distributive industries”); as a field of knowledge, then, its emergence was contingent on a series of factors that preceded the development and justification of marketing as an organised body of knowledge (Foucault, 2002a). These include, but are not limited to, interdisciplinary and reciprocal shifts in scholarly debate (Foucault, 2002a), changes in technology (Chandler, 1958), transportation, including the use of refrigerated carriages, the Homestead Act (1862), rising international competition, governmental and consulate interest in business education, the involvement of groups such as the American Bankers’ Association
In addition, there needed to be some kind of institutional framework for business and marketing education (i.e. what purposes did it serve, how did it relate to other disciplines, was it an “applied science”). This required intellectual support for early variants of marketing courses (Jones, forthcoming) which in themselves demanded resource provision, whether internally or externally sourced, or innovative strategies for negotiating a lack of provision on the behalf of faculty, students, relatives, or employers (e.g. correspondence education – see Tadajewski (forthcoming) – and other non-university based instruction, see Walker and Child (1979)). The question then becomes what influence did these resource structures have on the nature of scholarly and educational practice? This, of course, depends on the case concerned.

Certainly what we find when we read the various histories of the development of marketing education and thought – which, according to our Foucaultian logic we hold in intellectual abeyance, neither uncritically repeating, nor necessarily disavowing (e.g. Foucault, 2002a, p. 28) – is that a great deal of time was spent attending to the preconditions leading to marketing thought, that is, to the materiality of the marketplace. Early scholars had to gain access to the marketplace, key marketplace participants, their institutions (i.e. factories, retailing environments) and then negotiate with these individuals for their time, energy and availability (the latter in the sense of allowing on-site excursions for students) (Bartels, 1988; Jones, forthcoming; Maynard, 1941; Weld, 1941).

Because of the limited availability of teaching materials which, where they were accessible, were frequently found in obscure sources (Ashley, 1908), faculty spent time with publishers securing contracts for books. The question that follows is how did this involvement influence the materials produced and disseminated to students (i.e. did publishers influence subject matter, structuring the “statements” available in the “archive”, that is, the “historical a priori” that provides the rules guiding the formation of “systems of statements” and which is not, in Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge* at least, the empirical storeroom for all past and present statements. The “archive” “does not have the weight of tradition; and it does not constitute the library of all libraries” (Foucault, 2002a, p. 146)). And recalling the relationship between the seeable and sayable, a further question to be posed may entail reflecting on whether pedagogic content could be challenging due to small enrolments and limited classroom space.

The archaeologist then turns to examine the “repeatable materiality” of the statements that are produced and the “material medium” through which they occur (Foucault, 2002a, p. 112). Connected with this, we ideally need to determine the “substance, support […] place, and […] date” of each statement (Foucault, 2002a, p. 113; see pp. 122-3). Those worth exploration, for instance, may include the linkage of marketing and “exchange” as found in Simon Litman’s early work (e.g. Jones, forthcoming) or the way that references to the provision of a “standard of living” were used to justify marketing activities (e.g. Monieson, 1988). The meanings of each and every one of these statements are – to a degree – context sensitive and “finite” (e.g. Foucault, 2002a, pp. 117-118, 136); their meaning may alter if there is a radical shift in marketing discourse or if external social, economic, technological and political conditions change. Thus, at different points in time, marketing and advertising
practices have been equated with engineering activities (Jones and Tadajewski, forthcoming; Kreshel, 1990; Tadajewski and Jones, forthcoming), distributive justice (Jones, forthcoming), the problematic application of amoral technique (Moorman, 1987), as focused on products, rather than services (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Vargo and Morgan, 2005) and so on.

The statements being made at various junctures each possess their own “status”. This is a function of the intelligibility of the statement itself, the institutional warrant it possesses, the stature of the person uttering it, and the arena in which it is expressed, written or otherwise communicated. “Status”, in turn, is modified by the system(s) of statements with which they are related, so much so that it can be altered dramatically:

The identity of a statement is subjected to a...group of conditions and limits: those that are imposed by all the other statements among which it figures, by the domain in which it can be used or applied, by the role and functions that it can perform. The affirmation that the earth is round or that species evolve does not constitute the same statement before and after Copernicus, before and after Darwin; it is not, for such simple formulations, that the meaning of the words has changed; what changed was the relation of these affirmations to other propositions, their conditions of use and reinvestment, the field of experience, of possible verifications, of problems to be resolved, to which they referred” (Foucault, 2002a, p. 116; see also Foucault, 1984, p. 86).

The point is that we ask which statements gain currency and continue to be repeated by the academic community. We must register that these statements will change, shift, fail to speak to contemporary concerns, find themselves relegated to marginalia and ultimately in some cases be forgotten (Foucault, 2002a; Tadajewski and Saren, 2008). This is related to the notion of discourse. By discourse is meant the series of statements that circulate around a given domain of thought – in this case marketing thought. Other discourses outlined by Foucault include “clinical discourse, economic discourse, the discourse of natural history, psychiatric discourse” (Foucault, 2002a, p. 121). We can say that a discourse of marketing as an academic and practical exercise was only possible after an indeterminate period of time and itself framed by a partly restricted set of implicit and explicit rules for discursive activation that shape “the objects of which” it “speaks” (Foucault, 2002a, pp. 54, 130; see p. 82).

Discourse, to clarify further, can be considered the statements – “spoken or written” – about the subject of marketing that are constituted by those permitted to speak. That is, the expert pronouncements of people who have command of a lexicon to which others are willing to subscribe, along with the appropriate qualifications and institutional position (e.g. Foucault, 2002a, pp. 56, 75; Veyne, 2010, pp. 95-6).

The final question we can consider in this archaeological case relates to the “sayable” and its support: were there validation methods – what Gordon (1990a, p. 12) calls an “institutional epistemology” – both inside and outside the university or business school that ensured the repeatability of particular ways of describing, conceptualising and practicing marketing that gained prominence for whatever reason? Taking this point a little further and jumping to Foucault’s related works, did this lead to the formation of certain subject positions (Foucault, 2002a, p. 129), certain marketing “subjectivities” (Foucault, 1998, 1980a) within the teacher, student and practitioner groups exposed to these variants of educational delivery and performance certification? But, and this needs to be emphasised, the main aspect of the archaeological approach is that Foucault does not and would not focus his attention on
judging this material, but simply with describing (see Gordon, 1990a) the topics and practices he confronted (e.g. Foucault, 2002a, p. 123).

We can think of this approach in the following way. Where traditional historical research draws from a wide variety of material treating such documentation in terms of its authenticity, using this to reconstruct a “true” account of historical development (Foucault, 2002a, p. 6), Foucault refuses to treat documents merely as a record of a past event. Shifting focus he views documents as “monuments” to the past. He does not pose the question of authenticity. He asks what was subsequently done with texts, course outlines and so forth, after they appeared and where such material and ephemera came to be situated within the “discursive formation” (i.e. a “formation” made up of a regularity of statements).

The task of the archaeologist, then, is to examine discursive formations, i.e. those produced, exchanged, consumed and reproduced and from this generate the structure of a discipline. This is no easy task and the “archaeologist has to have read a great number of things that the others have not read” (Canguilhem, 1994, p. 82). In doing so, archaeological practice is meant to open up a space for research when the accepted order of discourse has become undeniable to the point of reification. This is achieved through the rewriting of the history of a discipline (or sub-discipline etc.), enabling us to paint an alternative picture of “scientific mutation” (Foucault, 1996b, p. 45; 2003, p. xii).

This type of investigation begins from the ground up, examining minute local events where disputes are enacted by players who do not necessarily know what the result of their actions will be. What I mean by this is that the processes involved are extremely complicated and unpredictable: “People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don’t know is what they do does” (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983, p. 187; see Sloterdijk, 1984). This is because intellectual disputes often develop “piecemeal” and it is difficult for those involved to understand how their work will affect the discipline, that is, whether it will be accepted as “knowledge” and “truth” (Foucault, 1984, p. 78).

In spite of a certain degree of similarity between his archaeological and genealogical studies, the archaeological representations of systems of thought lacked any extended consideration of the material arrangement and strategic use of power/knowledge relations which, in turn, led to a reorientation of analytic focus. While Foucault never abandoned the archaeological approach (Foucault, 1988a, p. 31), in that he remained interested in the complex of social and normative relations that define a particular object (e.g. madness, the abnormal individual), from the 1970s onwards, archaeology was subordinated to genealogy (Foucault, 1980a, b). We see this linguistic movement for the reason that “The word ‘archaeology’ [. . .] bothered Foucault in its connotations of a search for origins, or as an excavation of something concealed” (Deacon, 2000, p. 129).

The “descriptive” enterprise of archaeology now becomes the precondition for the genealogical explanation of epistemic change, i.e. the explication of power/knowledge relations that drive such mutation. In this move, the orientation taken so far shifts from documenting the presence of a very particular form of discourse, particular in the sense that all that could be said about a given discipline, topic or object were not and never are said (Foucault, 2002a) to a focus on the elements that block, delimit or subjugate certain streams of discourse. Here the somewhat positivist distancing of the
archaeologist (Foucault, 2002a, p. 141) from their object of inquiry is left behind. As we shall see, the genealogist is implicated in, and to a certain extent produced by (Veyne, 2010), the discursive and non-discursive practices that envelop their work (e.g. Foucault, 1996a, p. 23).

**Genealogy**

Genealogy can best be considered a widening of the scope of Foucault’s investigations (Davidson, 1986; Deacon, 2000), with much greater emphasis given to the operations of power (e.g. Foucault, 1988c, pp. 101-102; 1996a). As is obvious, his use of the term “genealogy” signals a debt to Nietzsche, especially the latter’s views on the nature of consciousness and the will-to-power (and domination) which he presents as underwriting all human activity including intellectual, social and sexual relations (Hoy, 1986).

Most clearly, the intellectual relationship between Foucault and Nietzsche is found in the former’s article “Nietzsche, genealogy, history” (Foucault, 1984). Studying history in the search for essential origins represents, for Nietzsche, an inherently flawed approach as it “assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the world of accident and succession” (Foucault, 1984, p. 78; see Foucault, 1991, p. 226). Foucault adopts a similar stance stressing that genealogy is an alternative to conventional historiography[4] because it “opposes itself to the search for “origins”” (Foucault, 1984, p. 77). It is this willingness to actually “listen to history” that reveals it to be “fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms” (Foucault, 1984, p. 78).

What this means for the genealogist is that they must adopt a realistic stance with respect to intellectual activities. They have to acknowledge that the “devotion to truth and the precision of scientific methods arose from the passion of scholars, their reciprocal hatred, their fanatical and unending discussions, and their spirit of competition” (Foucault, 1984, p. 78). This posture, in turn, indicates a central feature of the genealogical method, namely that of the fundamental inversion of the accidental over the historically inevitable and the denial of history as a form of detached and progressive inquiry.

History, Foucault (1984, p. 78) asserts, “was born in an altogether ‘reasonable’ fashion – from chance”. Instead of historical investigation being conceived in terms of revealing “the movements of accumulation and slow saturations” (Foucault, 2000a, p. 298), he maintains that such totalisation neglects historical complexity under the rubric of teleological determination, whereby the present is somehow more advanced than the past. Genealogy, by contrast, focuses on the self-evidences that fail to be subject to critical scrutiny (Hoy, 1998) without assuming a teleological impetus in the history of science or, we might add, marketing thought (Hoy, 1986).

Commensurate with this orientation, genealogical attention is directed toward rediscovering “supports, blockages, plays of force” that establish ideas, concepts, theoretical traditions and the disciplines we take-for-granted (Foucault, 2000b, pp. 226-7), so that those accidents, “the minute deviations-or-conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us” can be discerned (Foucault, 1984, p. 81). In place of the traditional historical focus on the discovery of “cause and effect” relationships, the genealogist traces the “haphazard” development of history: “its jolts, its surprises, its unsteady victories and unpalatable defeats … its conditions
of weakness and strength, its breakdowns and resistances” (Foucault, 1984, p. 80). Concomitantly, they must direct their attention to “local knowledges”, the “local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges” often consigned to footnotes, unpublished papers and excluded from textbooks (Foucault, 1980a, p. 83). By local knowledge, Foucault is making reference to “dissenting opinion” and theoretical perspectives that have been filtered and ordered “in the name of some true knowledge and some arbitrary idea of what constitutes a science” (Foucault, 1980a, p. 83).

There are two principal forms of marginalised, local knowledge(s). First, as discussed above, the “dissenting opinion” and secondly, knowledge that is disqualified from mainstream discourse as it is inadequate to the task at hand or “insufficiently elaborated” (Foucault, 1980a, p. 82). The genealogist has to reunite these by bringing together “erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles” (Foucault, 1980a, p. 83). It follows that the focus of a genealogical inquiry is largely on the particulars of the historical record, the disparate and marginalised accounts subjugated or forgotten within institutional memory. And the Nietzschean inspired concepts of “descent” and “emergence” have an important role to play here.

Key facets of the genealogical approach
In his attempt to clarify the relationship between the concepts of descent and emergence, the refusal of historical origins and the genealogical method, Foucault suggests that descent relates to the search for “myriad” “events” that contributed to the discursive formation of any debates as presently conceived (Foucault, 1984, p. 81). The emergence of a discourse is tied to power, “the hazardous play of dominations” that were or continue to be in operation among those contributing to the performance of a scientific discipline (Foucault, 1984, p. 83).

The descent of a discourse is differentiated from the search for the origin of a concept. Foucault relates the issue of descent to heritage and asserts that heritage should not be misunderstood as testament to a growing solidification of identity (Foucault, 1984, p. 82). Rather, descent and heritage both symbolise the illumination of lost detail and epistemological destabilisation: “it disturbs what was previously thought immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself” (Foucault, 1984, p. 82). This has implications for the way we describe any event in the history of marketing thought.

The more genealogical detail is provided, the more complex our narratives. Thus it becomes reductionist to use “meta-narratives” (Lyotard, 1999) such as “the spirit of the age” (Foucault, 2000a, p. 11; 1996b), the Enlightenment project, humanism, liberalism and so forth (Jenkins, 2003; Veyne, 2010) to describe the “nature” of a historical period. There are various reasons for this: such labels hide more than they explain and methodologically pervert the way we think about and produce historical accounts (Foucault, 2002a). They are, in a nutshell, ordering principles that require their own critique, rather than discursive fixtures that are unproblematic (e.g. Foucault, 2002a, p. 24).

Emergence, in conjunction with descent, questions the notion of a linear, progressive historical narrative and the claims of objectivity made by conventional historians. The progressive claims of science are questioned for the reason that disciplines do not develop solely by means of excising error (Foucault, 1971) or via
closer approximation to truth in a vacuum unencumbered by power relations (Foucault, 1996d). Even though scientific disciplines do assert “many things which are true” this does not exhaust their reasons for emergence (Foucault, 1996b, p. 45). Linked to this, error and myth persist in science and ideas, concepts and patterns of thought that are later considered “in the true” are ignored. The reverse of this is equally accurate; ideas that now seem unbelievable or quaint are accepted as a true reflection of reality (Veyne, 2010).

This is where Foucault’s (1987) term “games of truth” is useful. It reminds us that what counts as a valid contribution to a given discipline has to utilise the lexicon, methods and “procedures” that are consensually adopted as the way to produce truthful statements (see Brown, 1998). These methods of producing and determining the warrant of claims to truth are influenced by power relations. This does not, even so, necessarily undermine the validity of the disciplinary outputs implicated in these “games” (see Smart, 1986, p. 165). Taking a discipline with a high degree of epistemological consensus, Foucault (1987, p. 16) explains:

Let mathematics, for example, be linked [. . . ] to structures of power; it would be equally true, even if it were only in the way it is taught, the manner in which the consensus of mathematicians organizes itself, functions as a closed circuit, has its values, determines what is good (true) and evil (false) in mathematics and so on. That does not mean that mathematics is only a game of power but that the game of truth of mathematics is linked in a certain way and without impairing its validity, to games and to institutions of power [. . . ] In any case, one can in no way say that the games of truth are nothing else than games of power.

Given these related facets of scientific discourse, assumptions of historical progression function like a blinker and we need to appreciate how a concept takes the shape it does, not as the culmination of any “final [. . . ] historical development”, but simply as a result of factors with no necessarily inherent relationships: “they are merely current episodes in a series of subjugations” bound together by the exercise of power (Foucault, 1984, p. 83). Let us now turn to the issue of power in more detail.

Foucault’s views on power
Later in his career Foucault exerted considerable effort in an attempt to clarify his views on power relations in society and their effects on different groups, disciplines, economic and political systems. Although his earlier work may not have been quite as explicit in its orientation, the theme of power does thread throughout all his books (e.g. Foucault, 2002a, p. 136; 2000c, p. 283).

For the neophyte reader, Foucault’s conception of power in Discipline and Punish, in particular, is somewhat totalising, so that it seems almost impossible to extract oneself from power/knowledge relations (see Foucault, 1987, p. 13). This much is true. He does make the case that power permeates society. What he does not argue is that power is always repressive (see Gordon, 1990a, pp. 21-2); in its place he proposes that power can be productive, “positive”, pleasurable and “useful” (Foucault, 1991, pp. 24, 211; 1996d). Furthermore, despite the continued element of repression in certain instances (e.g. Foucault, 1991, pp. 57, 119; see Foucault, 2002a, p. 135), people can learn to operate more effectively within relations of power. In this way, such influences are met with resistance and strategic negotiation:
Every time one side does something, the other one responds by deploying a conduct, a behaviour that counter-invests it, tries to escape it, diverts it, turns the attack against itself... Thus nothing is ever stable in these relations of power (Foucault, 1996d, p. 144).

While power relations can be productive, they also structure what is said, allowing some issues to be debated, discussed and refined, at the same time as others are either not permitted or transgress the bounds of scientific or public acceptability. This has obvious implications for the production of knowledge:

I am supposing that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its power and dangers, to cope with chance events [...]. In a society such as our own we all know the rules of exclusion. The most obvious and familiar of these concerns what is prohibited. We know perfectly well that we are not free to say just anything, that we cannot speak of anything, when we like or where we like; not just anyone [...] can speak of just anything (Foucault, 1971, p. 8; emphases in original).

These power relations are more marked in certain areas – the history of sexuality being a prime example (Foucault, 1971) – and there are a number of ways in which discourse is structured in Foucault’s research that resonate with the historical pressures faced by marketing and consumer researchers.

Scholars can, to a degree, be innovative and creative in their research endeavours within the marketing academy. In the first instance, successful completion of the doctoral degree necessitates learning the vocabularies that enable a student to demonstrate their participation in the desired academic community. This demands that we learn the appropriate “rituals”, the lexicon, scholarly paraphernalia and shared assumption grounds regarding the domain of marketing, the main constituents for marketing research and appropriate ways of seeking knowledge (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Failing to speak and write in a way that is accepted will often mean that one is not permitted to speak at all, perhaps only later to figure prominently in intellectual discourse when the terrain has shifted. Foucault avers that this was the case with Mendel in biology (Foucault, 1971). We could largely claim the same of early forms of interpretive approaches in consumer research (Tadajewski, 2006b). Bearing in mind the importance of contingency in Foucault’s thought, this approach to seeking knowledge was marginalised in part (see Fullerton, 2011a) because it did not conform to the “scientific style” (Hirschman, 1985) of the day, logical empiricism. The latter was supported by institutional bodies who, among others, played a major part (discussed below) in determining the nature of science and the boundaries between what is considered an appropriate contribution to knowledge and what is not (Tadajewski, 2006a; Power, 2011).

What this example reminds us is that power relations reaffirm different kinds of knowledge and if we follow Foucault’s methodological injunction to be attentive to power, prohibition and the functions of institutions in enabling and circumscribing “discursive production” (Foucault, 1991), then we would expect to see “something like a system of exclusion (historical, modifiable, institutionally constraining)” operating across all elements involved in the “propagation of knowledge” (Foucault, 1991). Such power relations would be polymorphous in the sense that it is doubtful we can clearly identify one particular influence that structures discourse, even when it can be quite tempting to do so (Foucault, 1991).
To take an underdeveloped example, but one that is being explored at present, let us think through the case of early female contributors to marketing. We know that the biographical studies published in the *Journal of Marketing* were intended to honour the male figures of the academy (Tadajewski and Jones, 2008; Tadajewski and Saren, 2008). This point is effectively where we start to “problematise” the existing history of marketing thought in this area. By problematise I mean that we pose a question and begin to explore the institutional conditions and power relations that structure the topic. Our “problem” (Kendall and Wickham, 1999) coalesces around why female contributors are less present in our historical accounts than their male colleagues (Zuckerman and Carsky, 1990).

We cannot just attribute gender bias to the marketing community and the gatekeepers at the *Journal of Marketing*. Without appropriate research this would be the kind of “facile gesture” Foucault would find problematic and certainly not evidence of critical thinking (e.g. Foucault, 1988b, p. 155). We must look to exclusion to be sure (Foucault, 1991). We must equally appreciate the interconnection between long-term and short-term constraints on discourse (Rabinow, 1984) and the pressures of existing political-economic structures (Foucault, 1991). Beyond these complex issues, we should focus on additional pressures on marketing discourse. Thus we need to be attentive to the systems of cultural meaning circulating in society (Foucault, 1987), such as the convention that the home was the main location for women, while the work environment was the sphere of the male. Other related “codes” include religious protocols, legal and judicial decisions, as well as the “truths” contained in “scientific texts” that affirm or deny gender, race and other biases (Foucault, 1971; Veyne, 2010).

Notwithstanding the argument made above, with respect to the “absence” of female scholars we might plausibly speculate that their limited acknowledgment to date may indeed be a function of gender bias (Madden, 2002). This could act as the zero point for a research project which would be subject to revision where appropriate. After all, as Newton (1998) has written, the relationship between genders is a prime case of longstanding, structured social relations. These have influenced participation in employment and remuneration. Failing to gain access or the patronage needed to obtain a position in a university could have prevented otherwise academically qualified, productive scholars from fulfilling their potential (Dimand, 1999). On the other hand, perhaps early female scholars were writing and thinking about topics that were too far from the mainstream of marketing thought to fully gain scholarly certification (Dimand, 1999; Madden, 2002). Connected to this point, they may not have been writing in a “scientific style” (Hirschman, 1985) consistent with disciplinary discourse which led to their work failing to speak to gatekeepers. Alternatively, their contributions could just have been weaker than was sought after or they might have had other demands on their time not faced by male academics in terms of care-giving (Madden, 2002).

All of the above points are conceivably linked to issues of power/knowledge and Foucault offers us a more nuanced view of power than that provided by some political theorists (see Lukes, 1974). He refuses to think only of power as a form of constraint of the powerless (Foucault, 1991, p. 194; see also Osborne, 1999). Rather than this traditional Hobbesian view in which the sovereign exerts considerable power over their subjects, Foucault argues that the distribution of power throughout society exhibits less uniformity than we might expect, with more power flowing in one direction at one
In a gesture to a variety of social structures, he states: “[...] power relations [...] are multiple; they have different forms, they can be in play in family relations, or within an institution, or an administration – or between a dominating and dominated class” among others (Foucault, 1988a, p. 38). In place of stressing the ideological domination of a population by referring to an imposed false memory that is a function of power relations – a view somewhat consistent with that proffered by the first generation of the Frankfurt School – Foucault proposes that the role of the genealogist is not one of uncovering objective historical truth, repressed real interests or “implicit meaning” (Foucault, 1996b, p. 41; see Foucault, 1984, p. 95). Rather, a recovery of the shards of history is the task he has in mind. Thus tracing the emergence of a discourse serves to highlight the multiplicity of forces which direct, nullify or otherwise structure the vicissitudes of the social environment (Foucault, 1984, pp. 80-81).

These power relations are potentially reversible (Foucault, 1998). There is freedom for the subject, but this is dependent upon the resources they have at their disposal, their individual capacities and those available and attainable in society (Hoy, 1998). Here repression and resistance are not ontologically distinct features of everyday existence; they reflect different codetermining aspects of everyday and scientific life. These shifting relations of power, then, have to be recognised within critical and genealogical accounts. As he puts it:

[...] critical and genealogical descriptions are to alternate, support and complete each other. The critical side of the analysis deals with the systems enveloping discourse; attempting to mark out and distinguish the principles of ordering, exclusion and rarity in discourse. [...] The genealogical side of discourse, by contrast, deals with [the] [...] effective formation of discourse: it attempts to grasp it in its power of affirmation, by which I do not mean a power opposed to that of negation, but the power of constituting domains of objects in relation to which one can affirm or deny true or false propositions (Foucault, 1971, p. 27).

Epistemology, truth and Foucault
We have already seen how the production of knowledge is implicated within the “network of contingencies” (Foucault, 1988a) that underlie the emergence of a discourse (Foucault, 1987, 1988c, 1991, 1996a; Hoy, 1986). Epistemologically this means that there is no objective position outside of power and historical struggle. This does not, however, mean that Foucault’s histories are relativist (Osborne, 1999). He refuted charges that he thought “truth doesn’t exist” (Foucault, 1996g, p. 456). And calls for the genealogist to exhibit “a constant care for the truth” (Foucault, 1996g, p. 461) at the same time as registering that the distinction between “true” and “false” was often historically contingent (Foucault, 1971, p. 10). Nonetheless, this did not obviate the need for traditional epistemological support including “textual references, citation of authorities, drawing connections between texts and facts, suggesting schemes of intelligibility, offering different types of explanation [...] From this standpoint, what I say in my books can be verified or invalidated in the same way as any other book of history” (Foucault, 2000c, p. 242; see Gordon, 1990a, pp. 3, 14-15; b, p. 383).

What we do not get with Foucault’s histories are trans-historical claims of generalisability[5] and he conceives of his accounts as orientation devices founded upon the interpretative efforts of the genealogist (Foucault, 1971, 1984, p. 90) and their “aesthetic of perception” (Osborne, 1999). The latter is based upon the “discriminating
gaze” of the historian, their “experience” and “the items of significance [they draw] out of a mass of detail” (Osborne, 1999, p. 58). Through this ideographic, interpretative attention, the historian directs ontological attention toward the present (Foucault, 1971). This activity has a political edge. Reflecting on why he devotes so much time to his historical productions, Foucault (1996d, p. 139) states that:

What interests me [...] are those fragments of knowledge that you can bring back and give a current political meaning to. That can be used as weapons [...] what, finally, in the depth of our history, in the night of forgotten historical memories, can now be fished out, salvaged, brought into the light and used, now that’s what interests me.

Methodological guidance
As mentioned above, Foucault suggests that research might be most productive when it focuses on the “dubious” or “human sciences” (see also Foucault, 2002a, pp. 32-3). Other advice he provides highlights the value of examining social practices that have been subject to a great deal of regulation (Foucault, 1988c, p. 102). Choosing subjects on the basis of this guidance is, like all research, not guaranteed to lead to a fruitful project (Hoy, 1998). The genealogist will experience many wrong turns in their investigations. This said, extensive reading, foreign travel to cultural environments that perform a frame-breaking function (Foucault, 1996e, f), combined with high levels of patience will aid the diagnosis and determination of potentially interesting and insightful areas for study. The interest factor is an important one. Not being interested in a topic is likely to mean less attention is devoted to the meticulous work that accompanies genealogical exercises. It is likely to lead to the student of marketing thought failing to complete the task they set themselves (see Foucault, 1996g).

Throughout his writings Foucault provides the reader with methodological guidance, often juxtaposing his approach with that of “mainstream” historical research. To slightly repeat a point made above, the conventional historian, he says, focuses their attention upon a broad purview of history in an attempt to discover general principles that govern the development of an epoch (Foucault, 2002b). The problem is that this approach contributes to the elision of accidents and chance discoveries in favour of a linear narrative (Foucault, 2002a, b). This is worth further explanation. It is not an argument against the genealogist identifying historical “regularity”, he is just cautioning us that the search for unifying principles or focus on one relation – say, between base and superstructure in Marxist accounts of the development of Capitalist society – is likely to be an overly reductionist representation of the history of economic and market relations. Thus he cautions the student not to expect to find “causal links”, but to cultivate openness to events that can rupture patterns of thought (Foucault, 1971).

Against a “total history”, Foucault proposes that the genealogist undertake an “effective history”. An effective history is content to describe differences. It does not attempt to sanitize history, crafting neat lines of development and continuity (Foucault, 2002a, p. 9). Even so, whereas he oscillates in the way he describes his approach, occasionally leading commentators to emphasise his attention to unexpected ruptures in the development of biology, for example, he eschews the idea that his focus is solely on discontinuity. A more sophisticated understanding of Foucault’s scholarship must appreciate that he asks questions of discontinuous events. In other words, he tells us
not to assume that what appear to be discontinuous changes in understanding and representation really are discontinuous, merely to pose the question and then follow this with appropriate research.

In reference to his rich text, *The Order of Things*, Foucault dismisses the charge that he fails to clarify how disciplines shift, citing the fact that his archaeological studies had to account for the transformations he examined (see Merquior, 1990; Midelfort, 1990). This task is made more concrete and obvious in the sense that breaks in disciplines, concepts and theoretical traditions can be quite decisive, without being totally discontinuous (e.g. Hacking, 1982, p. 281). On the other hand, he does not express his approach in terms of pursuing lines of thought that always demonstrate continuity. Continuity and discontinuity are both “abstract and general” ways of thinking about histories of systems of thought (Foucault, 1996b). His purpose, therefore, is to:

[...]

show that discontinuity is not a monotonous and unthinkable void between events, a void which one must hasten to fill [...] with the dismal plenitude of the cause or by the supleness and agility of mind [i.e. a psychologically oriented explanation of the genius, the “great man” thesis and so on]; but that it is a play of specific transformations [...]. History is the [...] analysis and the theory of these transformations (Foucault, 1996b, p. 38).

The work of the Foucaultian scholar involves elucidating the nature of these changes, revealing what remains central to discourse, what is jettisoned and what is reactivated (Foucault, 1996b). With respect to marketing this form of question posing could lead us to scrutinise the changing nature of marketing theory, allowing us to “problematis” the idea that logical empiricist approaches provided the natural, apolitical basis for the development of marketing theory in the late 1950s – the period when marketing underwent the scientific “upgrading” that Bartels (1988) references.

What, we could ask, made the formation of “marketing science” along the lines that was proposed at this point possible? In the first place, we must not assume that it was possible to create the vision of marketing science along logical empiricist lines without there already being some basis in marketing theory and practice which shared a similar scientific “configuration” (Foucault, 1996b, p. 47). Debate about the appropriate paradigmatic basis of marketing had taken place previously (Jones and Monieson, 1990; Jones, forthcoming). Numerous scholars and practitioners had long been engaged in rigorous forms of research that had at least a “family resemblance” (Wittgenstein, 1958) to logical empiricist type approaches, frequently using a similar lexicon to describe the nature of scientific discovery and justification (Tadajewski and Jones, forthcoming).

Still, there remained questions over the scientific basis of marketing (Converse, 1945), a topic which merited much discussion in the mid twentieth century (Tadajewski, 2006a), at which time doubts about the rigour, replicability and extension of marketing theory, practice and pedagogy were increasingly expressed by institutions that had the power to shift the terrain of marketing discourse. Questions were posed about the vocational nature of business and marketing education (Simon, 1991), frequently with gestures made to the unreflexive conceptions of marketing knowledge in common currency (Kassarjian, 1989; Kassarjian and Goodstein, 2010). Teachers of marketing, likewise, were viewed as lacking appropriate research-based qualifications (i.e. the PhD degree). These criticisms were buttressed by the findings of the Ford and Carnegie reports into business education. More than this however,
business education was constituted as a problem by a variety of other factors coming into play at this point: namely the standoff between Cold War antagonists and the discourse of modernisation theory. This considered the promotion of certain market-forms and relations – a US image of comparatively unstructured (sic.) marketplace relations and democratic politics – to be highly desirable in former colonies.

Disseminating and encouraging subscription to this constellation of values required the production of knowledge that was thought to be universal in terms of its application. This, in turn, required groups of scholars ready and available to communicate this new way of producing and applying appropriate forms of knowledge to audiences around the world (Tadajewski, 2009b). Marketing theory and practice, by dint of the fact that it was apparently easily taught, generalisable and so on (Drucker, 1958) was a lynchpin in such endeavours. These factors, among many others, were one solution to the problem that faced America and its allies at this time, helping bring business and marketing education into the “domain of thought” in which it was critically reflected on (Foucault, 1996c, p. 421).

We could go further in arguing that the promotion of logical empiricism in marketing (i.e. as non-political, mathematical and statistically oriented when it did not have to take this form, see Tadajewski (2010b, c)), connected with the growth of the behavioural sciences. In addition these were a function of philanthropic support for the American economic and political system that the Ford Foundation had undertaken because of Congressional investigations into their activities. Their response was to support business education publicly which they did through some highly successful pedagogic practices that trained scholars whose impact on the discipline was wide-ranging (Tadajewski, 2006a). They buoyed these activities with interventions in the textbook market that promoted this vision of “marketing science” and education to those not research active enough to merit the skill upgrading that was in progress or who were otherwise located in far distant university or higher education institutions.

The logical empiricist type of analysis sedimented at the historical turning point of the Cold War continues to influence the production of knowledge (e.g. Tadajewski, 2006a, 2010a; Hackley, 2009). It is affirmed and supported by major journal outlets that demand hypothesis testing, the use of the symbolism of advanced mathematics, framed by a lexicon tuned to rationalist assumptions (O’Shaughnessy, 2009).

Obviously, this account is parsimonious and there is much nuance absent. This said, what we need to take from the brief history provided above is that the emergence and contestation that surrounds marketing discourses will be complex and overdetermined. In other words, any play of power relations that we focus on will have a variety of possible effects on the domain of knowledge we are dealing with. Clearly the genealogist must not make inferences in the absence of evidence, but instead focus on the fluctuations of discursive and non-discursive power in their concrete manifestations, i.e. by way of actual material debates and evidence present within the archive. This will require “patience and a knowledge of details” and “a vast accumulation of source material”, some of which is widely cited, but not carefully read, other material might be less well known and failing to figure in academic debate at all (Foucault, 1984, p. 76).

Foucault, as is apparent from a perusal of his literary output, did spend a great deal of time within the archives of university libraries finding insight in obscure texts and
this was central to his understanding of the mutation of a subject. He saw research projects such as his history of madness as an evolving historical formation that will not necessarily be revealed “by reading the final reports of the heroes of science, but rather by studying the vast terrain of discourse that includes tentative starts, wordy prolegomena, brief flysheets, and occasional journalism” (Hacking, 1979, p. 42). It can be these non-canonical sources that provide us with the greatest insight, for the reason that the margins represent the space in which patterns of knowledge are most frequently contested and will be amendable to juxtaposition against the “legitimated” centre, thereby highlighting power relations (e.g. Foucault, 1984, p. 84).

Attention, we can say, should be directed toward securing access to material that very few people have read or have acknowledged as important contributions to the field. This can include working papers, book reviews, out-of-print texts and periodical sources which may contain references to material that has later been displaced from official historical accounts. This is a time-consuming exercise but often extremely insightful. Having now discussed the theoretical, conceptual and methodological basis of a Foucaultian approach to the history of marketing thought, the next section turns to the political implications of this approach.

**Critical marketing studies, history and politics**

Throughout all the different accounts of Critical Marketing Studies (e.g. Catterall *et al.*, 1999, 2002; Murray and Ozanne, 1991; Tadajewski, 2010a, b) mention is often made of emancipation, liberation and politics. I have already made some reference to the fact that a genealogical study can serve a political function; it can be a weapon (Foucault, 1996d) and reactivate subjugated, disqualified knowledge (Smart, 1986). Critical analysis and genealogy, as described in this paper, thus represent an attempt at patient documentation, highlighting how “ways of thinking and behaving” adopted in a particular time and place “are still ours today and within which we are [largely] trapped” (Foucault, 1996e, p. 68). Consequently, this historical project serves to provide a “critique of our own time” (Foucault, 1996e, p. 68).

This venture cannot solely be conceived in terms of the “micro” or tentative projects for limited social, economic and political change that frequently accompanies Critical Management or Marketing discourse (Jones, 2011, pp. 81, 87). Foucault did indeed focus his energies on detailed historical analyses of apparently marginal areas of interest such as the treatment of madness. Nor was the point of his research to offer prescriptions about future changes in the organisation of the asylum or prison system (Foucault, 2000c; see Barham, 1990). But, nevertheless, his questioning of assumptions and received wisdom was meant to have far reaching effects among the political community.

His project and that of Critical Marketing Studies is intended to make reflection on whatever topics are exposed to scrutiny as thoughtful and considered as possible. This makes it far more difficult for scholars, practitioners or civil servants to fall back on trite opinion, established frameworks or use other shortcuts to thinking. This is achieved by posing “questions in an effective, genuine way, and to raise them with the greatest possible rigor” (Foucault, 2000c, p. 288). By acknowledging the “historical conditions” that have contributed to the constitution of marketing discourse (Foucault, 1996b, p. 48), we can call into question the prominent position that we accord certain strands of, and approaches to, marketing theory and pedagogy. In Foucault’s lexicon
this type of research can operate as a “counter-discourse” (Foucault, 1996d), bringing the power relations inherent in much marketing thought to our full attention. This, Foucault points out, is part and parcel of encouraging the “reversal of power and the initiation of new struggles” (Foucault, 1996d, p. 79). Beyond this, it reminds us that the historical events which have structured the ways we look at marketing are not something that will endure ad finitum; and this cleaves a space for intellectual and practical agency (Foucault, 1988c).

Developing these ideas further, this space can be achieved by revealing attempts to control the marketplace (Tadajewski, 2010b) or the highly gendered nature of marketing scholarship (Fischer and Bristor, 1994), contrasting these with the assumptions that currently undergird theory, thought and practice. Alternatively, these genealogical values can be implicit in the compilation of counter-discourses to traditional representations of marketing theory, practice and ethics. The latter strategy, for instance, motivated the production of the three-volume book set, Critical Marketing Studies (Tadajewski and Maclaran, 2009a, b, c).

Let us underscore once again that genealogical analysis in the manner described in this article is neither relativistic nor content in its own self-evidence. It is intended to be a “critical history” (Hoy, 1998). This approach “challenges us not to be arrogant about the superiority of the present over the past, or of our own point of view in contrast to competing contemporary points of view. Instead of stressing convergence of other viewpoints with our own, it holds open the difference between our viewpoint and other possible ones” (Hoy, 1998, p. 26). After all, “criticism of prejudices, of existing forms of knowledge, of dominant institutions, of current ways of doing things” (Foucault, 2011, p. 30) lies at the heart of Foucault’s work and critical marketing studies and this activity should never end.

**Conclusion**

This paper has highlighted the value of historical research for critical marketing studies. It has called for pluralism in the way we understand critical marketing, moving away from emplacing Critical Theory as the central paradigm in this domain. In place of such a restrictive focus, this paper was motivated by a pluralistic conception of Critical Marketing Studies which takes inspiration and insights from a wide range of theorists, since they can often analytically complement each other (e.g. Foucault, 2000c). And even if views differ, they can be the source of productive research, with scholars from dissimilar paradigms pursuing related topics “side by side, if in rather divergent directions” (Foucault, 2000c, p. 297). Accepting this, Foucault’s central analytic emphases, archaeology and genealogy, were outlined. These were connected to his utilization of the concepts of decent and emergence, followed by his discussion of power relations in society and epistemology. This account concluded with reference to the political ramifications of the use of history by those interested in producing historically rich critical marketing contributions to knowledge.

**Notes**

1. Foucault does use the historical research provided by others but, by and large, prefers to examine primary texts for himself. We should also acknowledge that he is not averse to using the materials published by scholars associated with the Frankfurt School (e.g. Foucault, 1991, p. 24).
2. I should add that prominent commentators on both the Frankfurt School and Foucault have suggested that there are continuities (Honneth, 1997), but also many important differences in their respective arguments (McCarthy, 1994). The task for future research, for McCarthy (1994), is to try to combine the genealogical approach of Foucault with the “universalist” theorising of the Critical Theorists (see also Biebricher, 2011).

3. There has been an attempt to introduce Foucault’s thought previously in a three page CHARM abstract by Karababa and Ger (2005). Skålén and his colleagues have also sought to engage with Foucault (e.g. Skålén et al., 2006, 2008), as have Denegri-Knott and Tadajewski (2010).

4. What we see here is obviously a straw-man to some extent (see Gordon, 1990b). It is Foucault’s argument, not my own. For a useful insight into the shifting nature of the use of history in marketing, readers might want to consult Savitt’s original Journal of Marketing paper and his more recent piece in this Journal (Savitt, 1980, 2009). Fullerton’s (2011b) paper in this issue adds further nuance to our understanding of the use of interpretation in history.

5. This is a contestable point. While he fully appreciates the value of a Foucaultian approach, Hacking (2004, p. 294) suggests that “Foucault’s archaeologies and genealogies [...] are not completely accurate historical analyses, and they tend to over-generalize on French examples” (see also McCarthy, 1994, pp. 445-7; Merquior, 1990, p. 39). Newton (1998, p. 435) and Power (2011, p. 41) make related arguments. These can, however, be critically questioned (Gordon, 1990a, p. 18). Foucault does note in reference to psychopathology (Foucault, 2002a) and the treatment of madness (Gordon, 1990a) that the emergence of theories, concepts and so on may not occur in the same way in “different societies, at different periods” (Foucault, 2002a, p. 45).

References


**Further reading**


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