Towards a history of critical marketing studies

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Abstract In this paper, I outline a history of critical marketing studies. The argument put forward that marketing lacks any substantive critical edge is questioned. In surveying our history and finding extensive engagement with a variety of critical perspectives, I connect these with appropriate literature from non-marketing sources to flesh out an account of our critical marketing heritage. I devote considerable attention to the period 1940 to 1990, as this is the historical range of critical marketing literature that most scholars will be unfamiliar with, linking this through citation and discussion to more recently published work. In this way, this paper provides a guide to sources of literature that may have passed marketing scholars by because they violate our disciplinary demands for ‘recency’ (Baker, 2001). As I document, critical marketing studies examines a variety of areas that represent consumer culture theory’s (CCT) ‘next frontier’ if we accept Arnould and Thompson’s (2005) diagnosis. In opposition to Arnould and Thompson’s assertion, CCT’s new frontier, this paper contends, is a frontier that has long been of interest to critical marketing scholars whose work might usefully be re-examined.

Keywords critical marketing; critical marketing studies; marketing management; critical management studies; consumer culture theory; postmodernism

Introduction

The quest for respectability, for academic standing, for recognition as having a scientific approach – these are the motivations which propel a field to the extremes of methodological and positivist rigor. Like scum and riffraff in a well-manicured suburban neighbourhood, critical, subjective, or unrigorous intellectual activity must be banished or pushed underground. Respectability must be defended from dangerous and unsightly encroachments of dissidence and subjectivity

N. Dholakia, 1988, p. 12

What are the new frontiers for CCT? One area conspicuously absent from this review . . . is broader analyses of the historical and institutional forces that have shaped the marketplace and the consumer as a social category

Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 876
As numerous commentators have argued, marketing is believed to be the least self-critical of all the business disciplines, preferring instead to reaffirm its commitment to consumerism and the technocratic management of society (Alvesson, 1994; Alvesson & Willmott, 1996; Willmott, 1999). Marketing, we are told, has ‘lagged . . . behind other management disciplines’ in incorporating a critical edge (Saren, 2007, p. 13; see also Bradshaw & Firat, 2007; Burton, 2001, 2002; Hodgson, 2002; McDonagh, 1995; Morgan, 1992, 2003; Skålén & Fougère, 2007). Since we know that marketing scholarship is largely ahistorical (Fullerton, 1988), I am reluctant to support this diagnosis uncritically, that is, without examining our history. By approaching this topic from a historical perspective, this paper responds to Schroeder’s (2007, p. 24) demand that our understanding of critical marketing ‘requires careful thought and assessment, combined with a clear understanding of its intellectual and political heritage’.

Clearly, there are multiple ways in which we could examine the marketing literature on the basis of determining its criticality. Critical research could be scholarship that scrutinises marketing theory and practice (e.g. the broadening debate\(^1\)). To be critical in this way does not mean that scholars use the critical social theory associated with ‘critical marketing’ (Brownlie, 2006, 2007). Another way of engaging in critique is offered by Firat and Tadajewski (2009) who advocate a systemic critique of marketing theory and practice (cf. N. Dholakia, 2009). These authors frame their analytic ‘focus’ by stressing that they are not trying to delineate ‘how to be critical’; instead, they offer pointers about what marketers should ‘be critical of’. In this respect, their criticism centres on the US influence on marketing thought.

Firat and Tadajewski do, however, gesture to one further approach to studying the critical orientation of the discipline that has not yet been undertaken. This approach focuses on a particular ‘perspective or school of thought . . . finding literature in the discipline that uses this specific perspective as its point of departure. Only work that has such an orientation would be the focus of the review. That is, the focus is how to be critical’ (Firat & Tadajewski, 2009). The problem with such an approach is that focusing on one school of thought – they point to work inspired by the Frankfurt School version of critical theory – is that critical marketing studies is not limited to this paradigm (see Burton, 2009; Catterall, Maclaran, & Stevens, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2005; Desmond, 1995; Hackley, 2009a; Jack, 2008; Maclaran & Stevens, 2008; Maclaran, Miller, Parsons, & Surman, 2009; Saren et al., 2007; Skålén, Fellessson, & Fougère, 2008).

As this is a generally accepted view found throughout the critical marketing literature, in producing this history of critical marketing studies, I have assumed that critical marketing scholarship will be characterised by the use of some form of critical social theory (Benton, 1985a, 1985b; Bradshaw & Firat, 2007; Burton, 2001; Saren, 2007; Saren et al., 2007; Tadajewski & Brownlie, 2008; Tadajewski & Maclaran, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c), whether this is drawn from the neo-Marxist critical theory tradition, some variant of humanism, feminism, or any of the others associated with

\(^1\)As the reader will notice, later in this paper a gesture is made to the broadening debate via Spratlen’s (1972) work. Spratlen is critical of the extent to which the broadening debate never really reflected on the nature of marketing and its influence on society (Higgins & Smith, 2002), and he used the work of Erich Fromm to do so; given my discussion of the critical focus of this paper that follows, reference to Spratlen, but not the broadening debate in detail, is entirely appropriate.
the material referenced in the omnibus citation above\(^2\) (Adler, Forbes, & Willmott, 2008). This is the guiding criterion for the present study.\(^3\)

It should be acknowledged at the outset that the studies I examine do not fit into a neat typology. Some are explicitly associated with critical theory or feminism; others do not display their intellectual credentials quite so openly. In an effort to connect similar studies, I will occasionally move backwards and forwards in this historical account, drawing upon the original works of critical scholars from outside the academy, in order to flesh out this history further.

Thus I begin by discussing the definition of critical marketing provided in 1981, and then move back to work of the 1930s, linking this with appropriate critical marketing research. This account continues through the humanistic marketing scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s, subsequently examining the work of Benton, Firat, Dholakia, Arndt, and other early critical marketing writers. I sketch out the interrelated themes discussed in the critical marketing literature, and suggest that each theme broadly revolves around the issue of marketplace power relations. The first major issue touched upon in the work of the aforementioned commentators relates to the topic of consumer needs and the structuring of needs by various external constituencies; then I turn to the issues of consumer manipulation and commodity fetishism. Finally, this analysis of the critical marketing literature explores neoliberal economic relations and distorted communication.

By way of a conclusion to my historical narrative, I attempt to outline the relations between critical marketing studies and postmodern marketing. I express my reservations about the level of criticality of the latter scholarship, while also acknowledging the valuable contribution that postmodern research has provided and can provide in future critical analyses of marketing and consumption phenomena. In the final two sections of this paper, I stress the importance of including critical marketing studies scholarship in a ‘balanced’ marketing curriculum (Benton, 1985a), documenting research that interested educators could study for sources of appropriate course content and inspiration. I register that incorporating this type of material demands considerable intellectual engagement on the part of both academics and students alike, but it would appear that there are benefits to all parties involved, especially our students in terms of educational and life skills.

\(^2\)One of the reviewers of this paper asked me to ‘declare’ my ‘allegiance to a particular form of criticality’. I am always reluctant to express commitment to one ‘paradigm’ (Kuhn, 1970) or ‘thought-style’ (Fleck, 1935/1979), especially given that Kuhn later stressed the ability of scholars to move between multiple paradigms. In addition, it seems like delimiting my intellectual interests and reminds me of Foucault’s (1972/2002, p. 19) comment: ‘Do not ask me who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order’. This said, I must say that I have the most affinity with ‘hopeful’ scholarship – in the context of this paper, that would be the work of Fromm and Marcuse – which adopts a kind of ‘dialectical imagination’, refusing to believe that this world is the best one possible, engages in a critical interrogation of the existing structures of society, and holds out hope for beneficial social change, however piecemeal (Ager, 1991; Fromm, 1956/2005). This stance has been characterised elsewhere as a ‘limit attitude’ (Tadajewski & Brownlie, 2008; see also Horster, Reijen, Habermas, & Smith, 1979, p. 33; Marcuse, 1964/1972, p. 89). While Dholakia (2009) differentiates critical and radical scholarship, claiming a more sweeping level of intellectual investigation of society by the latter, I do not see any difference between the two labels other than at the level of semantics – both are aware that the system as it currently (dys)functions needs rethinking, but this rethinking has to begin somewhere. We need a pluralistic engagement between all of those capable of offering insight into the problems the marketing system faces, from wherever they intellectually hail (see also Brownlie, 2006; Monieson, 1975; Saren, 2009; Shankar, 2009).

\(^3\)One reviewer was critical of the didactic nature of this paper. The purpose of this paper is, as noted above, to document a largely forgotten history, and this does require that I write in an instructive manner, carefully documenting key arguments. Although not intentional, I do wonder whether my style of writing is a subconscious response to the criticism of ‘critical’ research that Linda Scott (2007) discusses (see Brown, 1998).
Each time I discuss a topic, citation support will be used to direct the reader to appropriate contemporary studies, but these references should neither be taken as indicative of the entire range of literature available, nor necessarily imply a complete commensurability with the critical studies that are discussed.

**Critical marketing studies**

To begin with, I should stress that common to many of the ‘critical’ perspectives that are explored in this paper is a belief that marketing has devoted too much attention to refining itself as an instrumental science, with the corollary emphasis on the production of knowledge for the ‘marketing organisation’, not for wider stakeholders (Arndt, 1985a; Benton, 1985b; Firat, 1985b; Hansen, 1981).

Those who critique this one-dimensionality assert that marketing must ‘move beyond instrumental reason to critical reason’ (Benton, 1985b, p. 210). Benton’s proposal appears to be shared across the critical literature⁴ (e.g. Arndt, 1985a, 1985b; Monieson, 1988). By this, I mean literature that ranges from the critical theory Lazarsfeld (1941) discussed, the humanistic work of Spratlen (1972), Monieson’s (1988) humanism, Murray and Ozanne’s introduction of critical theory (Murray & Ozanne 1991; Murray, Ozanne, & Shapiro, 1994) to the problematisation approach put forward by Heede (1985). Before I reflect on the development of critical marketing thought, let us briefly review the emergence of the term itself.

**What is critical marketing?**

Somewhat surprisingly, the first use of the term ‘critical marketing’ in conjunction with critical social theory can be found in the work of Hansen (1981). Hansen makes the case that the work he documents as critical marketing emerged in response to the denigration of marketing and advertising in the late 1960s. Heede (1985) and Carson (1978) broadly agree with this argument, claiming that the critical scholars working in the 1980s ‘can be characterized as the children of 1968’ (Heede, 1985, p. 148; cf. Barksdale & Darden, 1972). These were responsible for responding to the criticisms of marketing made by neo-Marxist writers of the period.⁵

According to Hansen (1981), ‘Neo-Marxists claimed that marketing performs a function in society that helps maintain an uneven distribution of income . . . Other critics claimed that marketing does not serve the goals of consumers’ (p. 215). Much like Pollay (1986), Hansen notes that advertising was criticised on the basis that it ‘communicates values and triggers behaviors that are in conflict with an image of man [sic] as an intellectual self-controlled individual’ (p. 215). The marketing scholars of this

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⁴Clearly, not all commentators will necessarily agree with one another: the feminist critique of critical theory stands out here (Benhabib, 1985; Fraser, 1985).

⁵There were also moves to disassociate marketing from the ‘military-industrial complex’ at around the same time via the pursuit of non-managerial research, as well as public policy related studies (Kassarjian, 1994/2008, p. 307; Wilkie & Moore, 2003, p. 130). Non-managerially minded consumer research was institutionally supported by the founding of the Association for Consumer Research in 1969. Key scholars affiliated with this group have frequently made calls for the broadening of the paradigmatic and ethical basis of marketing (e.g. Belk, 1987; Dholakia, Firat, & Bagozzi, 1987; Hirschman, 1986). The reasons behind this shift are complex, but alongside the others documented in this paper, there were calls for a reengagement with developments in the philosophy of science, which had largely been ignored by marketing thinkers (Anderson, 1983). Furthermore, more critically minded consumer researchers espoused the expected commitment to a managerial approach in view of the perceived disjuncture between the interests of marketers and those of consumers (Wilkie & Moore, 2003, p. 132). Scholars also held the opinion that ‘a shift to [a focus on societal and] macro issues will necessitate post-logical-positivist techniques’ (Belk, 1987, p. 368).
generation were concerned, Heede (1985) points out, to study marketing – not in the interest of expanding the domain of marketing, as the social marketers sought (Arnold & Fischer, 1996) – but in order ‘to change the system from the inside by creating a marketing system suitable for the society they wanted, hoping at the same time that their research will demonstrate to the present system that there are alternatives more just than the present society has to offer’ (Heede, 1985, p. 148; cf. Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008).

While Hansen does cite working papers that might antedate his use of the term (see also Ingebrigtsen & Pettersson, 1981), he does seem to be the first scholar to refer to ‘critical marketing’ in a major journal outlet, and was followed by a variety of other researchers who used the term in various forms such as ‘critical consumer research’ (Belk, 1995; Denzin, 2001; N. Dholakia & Firat, 1980) or ‘critical macromarketing’ (Kilbourne, McDonagh, & Prothero, 1997) over the course of the next two decades (e.g. Benton, 1985a; Desmond, 1995; Firat & Dholakia, 1982; O’Reilly, 2006; Smith & Higgins, 2000).

If we forget about tying this analysis to the terms themselves, and instead focus on the use of critical social theory, then we can find echoes of the Frankfurt School version of critique in the literature of the 1930s and 1940s. Given that Bradshaw and Firat (2007, p. 41) state that they wish to remind ‘marketing scholars of the importance of establishing Critical Theory as a pillar in the construction of . . . critical marketing’, perhaps we should continue with an excursion into this area (see Murray & Ozanne, 1991; Wiggershaus, 1994/2007).

6These include works by Ingebrigtsen and Pettersson who criticise the positivistic basis of marketing and argue that marketing should take a humanistic turn – much like Spratlen (1972) and Monieson (1988) whose views are discussed in this paper. Hansen also documents other work that is long out of print. On the basis of the analysis presented above, the movement in the direction of humanist perspectives thus occurred earlier than Peñaloza and Venkatesh (2006) claim, when they link this with Hirschman’s (1986) work (the same could also be said of Shankar & Fitchett, 2002, if we so wanted).

7One reviewer asked why I did not include any prominent reference to early macromarketing scholarship that could be interpreted as taking a critical perspective. As the reviewer also said, there was much work that was critical of marketing, but not necessarily Critical (big C) in the sense of engaging in ideology critique. Reference has been made elsewhere to the changing nature of critique in marketing and how some early macromarketing work can indeed be interpreted as critical in that it was critical of the existing structure of the marketing system (see D.G.B. Jones, 1994; Tadajewski & Brownlie, 2008; Witkowski, 2003). Those scholars influenced by the German Historicist School should be singled out here, as they were concerned with ‘the fairest and most equal distribution of the rewards of labor’ (Dorfman, 1955, p. 18), as well as with ‘social engineering’ (Dorfman, 1955, p. 17) and ‘social activism’ (D.G.B. Jones, 1994), but whose ultimate influence on the development of marketing thought remained marginal (Jones & Shaw, 2005). However, much recent macromarketing scholarship is managerialist in tenor (see Witkowski, 2005) and deals with ‘scientific-positive’ questions (e.g. Fisk, 1981, p. 6), whereas the work of Rorty, Lynd, and others that I include as early ideology critiques of marketing go beyond acknowledging the benefits of the marketing system to radically question the arguments marshalled in support of extant economic relations in the fashion of raising a critical consciousness among consumers regarding the types of consumption being promoted. Nor do I mean to imply that marketing scholars were unwilling to take a critical glance at the marketing system after the decline of the German Historicist School. Converse and Huegy in 1946 for instance did just that: ‘If an operation is not in the interest of the consumers, it is not justified, no matter how profitable it may be to its owners’ (in Dixon, 2008, p. 69). But we must also place limits on this assertion: although there was a societal edge to a substantial range of marketing scholarship in the pre–World War II period, the aggregate number of marketing scholars working on this area reached a pinnacle at this point (see Wilkie & Moore, 2003, p. 132). Nevertheless, we should equally appreciate that ‘the managerial perspective’ diffusing in the 1950s ‘was not entirely a radical shift’ in marketing thought (Wilkie & Moore, 2003, p. 124; see also Shapiro, 2005, pp. 117–118). This slight digression aside, this is not to say that certain segments of macromarketing scholarship are not critical or uninfluenced by critical social theory in some respect (e.g. Dawson, 1980; Kilbourne et al., 1997). Moreover, Cliford Shultz (2007), the former editor of the Journal of Macromarketing, has argued that critical scholarship has much to contribute to the field of macromarketing. I therefore include appropriate gestures to this body of scholarship, especially to Monieson’s important work (see also McDonagh, 1997, 2002).
Critical theory and marketing

As a neo-Marxian perspective (Agger, 1976), broadly speaking research inspired by critical theory assumes that social reality is structured by socio-economic, cultural, and biological influences, together with power relations (Freundlieb, 2000; Fromm, 1942/2002; Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). Critique, for this diverse group of thinkers, functions in ‘unmasking’ inequalities in exchange relationships (Horkheimer, 1935/1972), as well as by questioning the privileging of ‘having’, that is, consuming, over ‘being’ and relatedness to the world (Fromm, 1942/2002, 1976/2007).

In his critique of a ‘having’ orientation, Fromm bemoaned the excessive attention given to the possessions that a person owned, rather than to human development and the cultivation of a relational connection with their fellow human beings, along with the natural environment (Agger, 1976; Fromm, 1946/2006, 1950/1978, 1955/2006; see also Kilbourne, 1991; Shankar & Fitchett, 2002). Linked to this, critical scholars scrutinised the role of marketing and advertising in the repression of individuality (Adorno, 1989; Fromm, 1947/2006; Horkheimer, 1993; Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002; Marcuse, 1964/1972) and highlighted the importance of advertising and marketing as socialisation agents (e.g. Harms & Kellner, 1991; Kline, 1995; Kline & Leiss, 1978; Leiss, 1983).

The critical theorists are also well known for their extensive analyses of positivist science, truth, and objectivity (Adorno, 1976; Agger, 1976; Habermas, 1968/1987, 1973, 1990; Horkheimer, 1947/2004; see also Smith & Higgins, 2000). They question the focus on ‘technically utilizable’ knowledge (Wellmer, 1971, p. 13), which is used to manipulate nature and human beings. This is not to imply that they dismiss the contribution of instrumental knowledge to society out of hand. Fromm (1947/2006), for instance, appreciated the role of reason and science in freeing mankind from material deprivation. And Habermas considered ‘technically utilizable’ knowledge as potentially ‘liberating’ (Wellmer, 1971). This view is itself a reflection of the Marxian position that human kind can only liberate itself after satisfying a basic minimum of economic affluence, provided that human beings are not then ‘crippled by... subservience to the economy’ (Fromm, 1962/2006, p. 18; see also Kilbourne, 1991).

So, like Marxism before it, critical theory is concerned with emancipation, freeing the individual from the control of the economic (work) realm (Fromm, 1956/2005), the production machine (Marcuse, 1964/1972), and thereby, it was thought, paving the way for the reconciliation of ‘man and man, and man and nature’ (Fromm, 1956/2005, p. 260). The ultimate goal of critique was consequently to fuel positive social transformation (Freundlieb, 2000; Hartmann & Honneth, 2006; Leiss, 1978; Marcuse, 1964/1972; Murray & Ozanne, 1991). Social transformation would be effected, Marcuse claimed, by helping the individual recognise the one-dimensional nature of the current ordering of society, whereby certain ‘false’ needs are promoted that serve the interests of industry (cf. Stern, Russell, & Russell, 2007), not the self-development of the individual (Fromm, 1956/2005). Indeed, Marcuse, like Fromm, posits that the existing organisation of society structures ‘not only socially needed occupations, skills, and attitudes, but also individual needs and aspirations’ (Marcuse 1964/1972, p. 13). From this perspective, people really are only ‘small’ cogs in a giant capitalist ‘machine’ (Fromm, 1962/2006, p. 127).

Although there have been a number of studies that aimed to utilise critical theory in marketing (Benton, 1985a, 1985b; Bradshaw & Firat, 2007; Burton, 2001, 2002; Denzin, 2001; Hetrick & Lozada, 1994, 1999; Kilbourne, 1987a, 1987b, 1992, 1995, 2004; Morgan, 1992, 2003; Murray & Ozanne, 1991; Rogers, 1987; Smith &
Higgins, 2000), it remains the case that this paradigm continues to be underutilised. This is despite Murray and Ozanne's (1991) operationalisation of critical theory as a ‘workbench’ approach via their ‘five-step’ programme that they later critiqued as too much of a methodological straitjacket (Murray et al., 1994). Even so, they still continue to demand that marketers engage in more critical theory inspired scholarship (Murray & Ozanne, 2006; Ozanne & Saarciglu, 2008).

Before we continue further, these ideas should be put into greater historical context. The types of comments that we have just discussed by way of the Frankfurt School were not the sole preserve of this group but were equally prevalent among writers in the United States throughout the twentieth century. As Tadajewski and Maclaran (2009a, 2009b, 2009c) have realised in their *Critical Marketing Studies* collection, other scholars commenting on the structuring of consumption include Thorstein Veblen (1919/2005, 1921/2006), James Rorty (1934/1976), and Robert Lynd (1936). Closer to the marketing discipline itself was the study published by Paul Lazarsfeld in 1941. Because these ideas are rarely commented upon, let us briefly discuss them.

*Early ideology critiques of marketing*

Normally the nod made to Veblen’s work in the marketing literature is directed to the *Theory of the Leisure Class* (Veblen, 1899/1934; cf. Adorno, 1967, pp. 75–94). His other important works are often ignored. Nevertheless, some of Veblen’s later research chimes with the arguments associated with the Frankfurt School (see Simich & Tilman, 1980, p. 636). Veblen (1919/2005) is critical of the relations between employers and employees, which he views as often inequitable, as well as the ownership of industry by a relatively small percentage of the population. Notably, he also acknowledges the role of ‘salesmanship, advertising and competitive management designed to increase sales’ (Veblen, 1919/2005, p. 64). Veblen regards such marketing related activities as unproductive, whilst at the same time remaining concerned that the owners and managers of large industrial plants deliberately manipulate production so as to restrict prices, thereby earning a premium on their investments (Veblen, 1921/2006), regardless of the impact of their actions on the local and national community.

By the 1930s, the number of critiques of the business and marketing system being put forward by scholars with socialist or Veblenesque positions began to accelerate. As the speculative bubble that underpinned the US economy burst and with the onset of the Great Depression, marketing and advertising practice were earmarked for critical scrutiny (Wood, 1963). Big business was widely believed to have contributed to the extremely difficult economic circumstances that people found themselves caught up in. Business was no longer viewed as necessarily contributing to social progress and rising standards of living. In this context, commentators began to examine the marketing system and found it wanting, with critical observers like James Rorty and Robert Lynd unpicking the assumptions that undergirded the legitimacy of business and marketing practice.

Lynd (1936), for instance, focuses on similar issues to McDonagh and Prothero (1997) where they gesture to the ‘beauty myth’ and the perpetuation of consumer

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8 Other key writers include Karl Marx, Stuart Chase, Vance Packard, and J.K. Galbraith among others (see Tadajewski, 2009c). For discussions of their work, see Tadajewski (2006b), Tadajewski and Maclaran (2009d), and Benton (1985a). In equal measure, William Kilbourne (1991, p. 450) details the linkages between Fromm, Marcel, Thoreau, and Emerson (see also Nelson, 2008, p. 114).

9 There are also clear points of divergence (Simich & Tilman, 1980). On the contribution of Veblen to marketing theory and consumer research, see Patsiaouras and Fitchett (2009).
insecurity (see also Stern, 1990, p. 333). Lynd’s arguments are equally commensurate with the ideas relating to ‘consumer choice’ that are discussed later in this paper. Throughout his publications, Lynd is careful to paint a realistic picture of the power relations between big business and the consumer (e.g. Lynd, 1932, p. 87, 1934, p. 6). He does appreciate the benefits that the economic and distribution system has provided in terms of the quantity and range of consumer goods that are available. At the same time, he stresses that:

the Realpolitik of business enterprise is ready at every exposed point to exploit his [the consumer’s] insecurities under the guise of proffered choices. During the past two decades the business of urging commercial products upon the public as substitutes for more subtle forms of adjustment to job insecurity, monotony, loneliness, and other situations of tension has advanced to a fine effective art. (Lynd, 1936, p. 489)

James Rorty, an avowed socialist in his youth, was equally influenced by Veblen’s ideas (Pope, 1988), developing these along a trajectory of his own, and he was a major critic of advertising in the 1930s. Rorty, like Lynd and Veblen, considers advertising a largely negative force in society, being used to benefit the business community and structure consumer choice. In terms that resonate with those of Horkheimer and Adorno when they discuss ‘pseudo-individualism’, Rorty exclaims that advertising manufactures a ‘pseudoculture’ (Rorty, 1934/1976, p. 67). He goes further and suggests that the consumer is treated as ‘the sucker’ (Rorty, 1934/1976, p. 34), and, in a refrain that is consistent with discussions about the ‘culture industries’ (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002), Rorty asserts that the ‘apparatus of advertising, conceived of as the total apparatus of daily and periodical publishing, the radio, and, in somewhat different quality and degree, the movie and formal education [system], is ramified, interlocking and collusive, but not unified’ (Rorty, 1934/1976, p. 34). Finally, he adds, this ‘apparatus of advertising’ forms a ‘super-government’ that delimits ‘the economic, social, ethical and cultural patterns of the population’, which are ‘shaped and controlled into serviceable conformity to the profit-motivated interests of business’ (Rorty, 1934/1976, p. 30). But again, like his compatriots writing around the same time, he does acknowledge the improvements in quality of life afforded by the growth of industry.

Our account now takes us even closer to those scholars usually affiliated with marketing, like Paul Lazarsfeld (see Fullerton, 1990; Tadajewski, 2006b), who was particularly interested in the contribution that critical theory offered to marketing related studies.10 In 1941, for example, Lazarsfeld explored the differences between administrative research and critical research. The former he closely associated with research conducted for ‘public or private’ bodies that usually attempted to solve some problem of a business nature. Influenced by Horkheimer’s distinction between

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10 It should also be noted that Paul Lazarsfeld used Marxism as a theoretical sensitizing device in the market-research studies conducted under his direction while at the University of Vienna from 1927 to 1933 (Fullerton, 1999). In what are early motivation research studies (Tadajewski, 2006b), scholars working with Lazarsfeld turned their ‘socialist beliefs’ and knowledge of Marxism on to the transcripts of market-research projects conducted on a range of topics. These ‘socialist beliefs, far from leading them into ritualistic denunciations of consumer society, seem to have helped them empathise unusually well with the mass of consumers trying to get through the day’ (Fullerton, 1999, p. 502). Mirroring the epistemological position of critical marketing studies more generally, these researchers were pluralistic in orientation – albeit while attempting to produce ‘applied marketing’ (Shankar, 2009) insights – as the following quote illustrates: ‘Reflecting the intellectual vitality of Vienna in the 1920s and early 1930s, the analysis drew upon social psychology, Marxism, Freud, behaviorism, introspection, statistics and psycholinguistics’ (Fullerton, 1999, p. 499).
traditional and critical theory, Lazarsfeld (1941) drew upon a number of research projects to highlight the problems associated with a ‘promotional culture’, which ‘jeopardiz[es] basic human values because people are kept from developing their own potentialities to the full’ (p. 10). It is critical research, he explains, that ‘develops a theory of the prevailing social trends of our times, general trends which yet require consideration in any concrete research problem; and it seems to imply basic human values according to which all actual or desired effects should be appraised’ (p. 9).

Lazarsfeld proposed that from a critical perspective ‘our times are engulfed by a multitude of promotional patterns . . . coupled with the feeling that human beings, as a result, behave more and more like pawns on a chessboard, losing the spontaneity and dignity which is the basic characteristic of human personality’ (p. 10). In outlining an example of the way in which the ‘promotional culture’ (Lazarsfeld, 1941), ‘consciousness industry’ (Kline & Leiss, 1978), ‘culture industries’ (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002), and ‘distraction factories’ (Kracauer, 1989) shape our perception, Lazarsfeld asks us to imagine that we

. . . find a large brewery [which] advertises its beer by showing a man disgustedly throwing aside a newspaper full of European war horrors while the caption says that in times like these the only place to find peace, strength, and courage is at your own fireside drinking beer. What will be the result if symbols referring to such basic human wants as that for peace become falsified into expressions of private comfort and are rendered habitual to millions of magazine readers as merchandising slogans? Why should people settle their social problems by action and sacrifice if they can serve the same ends by drinking a new brand of beer? To the casual observer the advertisement is nothing but a more or less clever sales trick. From the aspect of a more critical analysis, it becomes a dangerous sign of what a promotional culture might end up with. (p. 11)

In concluding this early paper, Lazarsfeld calls for studies that attempt to leverage the benefits of administrative and critical approaches, while also registering that the introduction of critical research might not meet with applause from all scholars.

Still, it is not really surprising that the period 1940 until the late 1960s did not see a growth in the use of critical perspectives. The postwar period was one of affluence and few marketing scholars felt the need to criticise rising standards of living (Marcuse, 1964/1972, pp. 17, 24; Monieson, 1988) or reflect in great detail on social and distributive justice (cf. Andreasen, 2005). Most notably, the wider diffusion of economic affluence had an important influence on critical reflection among US scholars in particular.11 ‘Thanks’, Parker (2005) claims, ‘to its tendency to spread its benefits wide, production [increases] had a dramatic effect on even the most vocal opponents of inequality’. ‘As a result, Galbraith noted, the goal of an expanding economy has also become deeply imbedded in the conventional wisdom of the American left’ (Parker, 2005, p. 287). This quiescence did of course change in the 1960s and 1970s, when the environmental and social consequences of marketing activities were subject to far greater scrutiny (see Andreasen, 2003; Fisk, 1974).

However, if we think through the critical lens provided by Horkheimer and Adorno, we can appreciate far better why adopting this style of thinking would have

11There is a notable exception to this in a marketing related area, namely David Caplovitz’s (1967) The Poor Pay More: Consumer Practices of Low Income Families. Though not a marketing academic, Caplovitz’s work was an influence on early critical marketing scholars (Firat & Tadajewski, 2009) and continues to be so today (Crockett & Wallendorf, 2004).
been severely problematic for a business-school academic in the wake of the Ford and Carnegie reports (Gordon & Howell, 1959; Pierson, 1959) and following the promotion of logical empiricism by the Ford Foundation (Tadajewski, 2006a, 2010; see also Varman & Saha, 2009). For one, the critical speculation that is praised by Adorno (1976) is not consistent with the pressures encouraging the adoption of the hypothetico-deductive method at the time. Support for industry and the politico-economic system was also a high priority (e.g. Tadajewski, 2006a, 2006b, 2009a).

So, it is difficult to conceive of marketing academics deliberately questioning entrenched business interests in a radical fashion (see Fromm, 1956/2005; cf. Andreasen, 2005). If we did find any such scholar adopting this posture, explicitly using radical social theory in doing so – which I did not, although non-marketing scholarship published during the mid-1960s did have a delayed effect on critical marketing – they would need to have examined present reality, indicating how industrial production did not necessarily serve the interests of the majority (Horkheimer 1935/1972; Marcuse, 1964/1972). This might thereby question the equality of exchange relationships that form the ideological basis of the marketing and capitalist system, illustrating how these serve the profit interests of a minority (see McDonagh & Prothero, 1997; Tawney, 1927; Veblen, 1919/2005; cf. Bradshaw, McDonagh, & Marshall, 2006).

Taking this point further via the prism provided by Horkheimer, the fact that marketers invoking the marketing concept justified their activities on the basis of serving the expressed desires of the consumer would not have been convincing from a critical theory perspective (Benton, 1987b; Schipper, 2002), as this argument can be interpreted as an ideological justification for producer interests (e.g. Marcuse, 1964/1972, p. 13; from a feminist perspective, see McDonagh & Prothero, 1997). That is, a rhetorical gesture to hide the fact that large business organisations needed to mass-produce consumer goods and stimulate mass consumption (Fromm, 1962/2006),

12 I should add here that by no means did the critical theorists just engage in theoretical speculation (cf. Agger, 1976). Fromm, for example, explicitly states his support for ‘blending empirical observation with speculation (much of the trouble with modern social science is that it often contains empirical observations without speculation). I have always tried to let my thinking be guided by the observation of facts and have striven to revise my theories when the observation seemed to warrant it’ (Fromm, 1962/2006, pp. 5–6; see also Marcuse, 1964/1972, p. 13).

13 This point is actually more complex than I can really give it credit here. There were some scholars who did make reference to ‘the continuing barrage of economic and social criticism’ (Grether, 1966, p. 113). Grether did observe that depending on which literature one consulted, it was possible to find a variety of different interpretations about whether there has been a deterioration in business ethics and practices during the past 150 or 100 or 10 years . . . There are some who believe that consumer sovereignty is a wasting or already wasted social asset, and that meaningful free choices have disappeared down the conjoined maws of group behaviorism and Madison Avenue. A visit to the Soviet Union and its satellite countries should be an illuminating experience to such persons. But one cannot and should not deny or attempt to cover up the weaknesses and abuses in American marketing and selling. (Grether, 1966, p. 113)

In view of the general quality of life experienced by Russian consumers (see Tadajewski, 2009a), it is difficult not to agree with Grether in this regard. Nor would Fromm disagree with the argument Grether is making (cf. Magala, 2006, p. 187). In The Sane Society, for example, Fromm draws attention to seriously problematic aspects of Russian society in terms of its authoritarianism, the ‘ruthless economic exploitation of workers for the sake of quicker accumulation of capital’ (Fromm 1956/2005, p. 99) and the continuing ‘inequality of income’ between groups, especially the peasantry and urban elite (Fromm, 1956/2005, pp. 270–271). As ever, Fromm stresses that we should refrain from falling back on ‘clichés’, ‘stereotyped alternatives of thinking’, especially those relating to ‘the lesser evil’ (Fromm, 1962/2006, p. 138); this requires continued reflection on the nature of the choices we make in terms of our own ways and styles of life. It is a self-imposed critical reflection, one which tries to avoid subscription to perspectives or ways of thinking imposed from the outside, whether via the church or through participation in industrial bureaucracy (Fromm, 1962/2006).
thereby benefitting those at the apex of industrial society in the process (see Firat, 1987; Goldman & Papson, 1991; Goldman & Wright, 1983; Hetrick & Lozada, 1994). Consumers, on this interpretation, are not the sovereign agent found in the marketing literature (cf. Dixon, 2008; Firat, 1987; Schipper, 2002).

As Benton (1987a, p. 349) opines, ‘the “consumer as sovereign” metaphor may be much less appropriate today than the “consumer as serf” metaphor’. In the words of Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), consumers are hemmed ‘in so tightly, in body and soul’ by the mechanics of the production and consumption process, as well as because of a lack of leisure time for critical reflection (Benton, 1987a), ‘that they unhesitatingly succumb to whatever is proffered to them’


Nevertheless, Fromm’s point about ‘commodity hunger’ is reiterated by Shankar and Fitchett (2002) in the pages of this journal. In line with his discussions of the excessive attention given to ‘having’ over ‘being’, Fromm remarked that ‘depressed individuals are often seized by a compelling desire to buy things and use new things, a hunger which he rationalizes as an expression of his wish for a better life’ (Fromm, 1962/2006, p. 126). In trying to buy into this better life, consumers do not craft themselves as individuals. From a critical theory perspective, whether or not we consciously perceive it, the consumption of mass-produced goods and the provision of ‘pseudo-truths’ and ‘pseudo-values’ courtesy of the culture industries (Firat, 1987; Goldman & Papson, 1991; Lippke, 1989) means that we drive, for example, a vehicle ‘that millions of others drive’ (Firat, 1987, p. 261). In what way can these mass-produced consumer goods provide us with a means to demonstrate our non-conformism, inasmuch as Levi jeans were meant to do so in the 1980s or Nike trainers in the present (Bick & Chipper, 2007)? In short, they do not, because they cannot (see Bick & Chipper, 2007; Goldman & Papson, 1991). Instead, we experience ‘pseudoidividuality’ (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002; Goldman & Wright, 1983; Goldman & Papson, 1991; cf. Cherrier, 2009; Hodgson, 2002).

But are all of the arguments made by scholars like Lazarsfeld, Adorno, Fromm, Lowenthal, and Marcuse really that pessimistic? It is possible to marshal quotes to demonstrate this argument (e.g. Adorno, 1989, p. 135; Fromm, 1956/2005, p. 132; Marcuse, 1964/1972, p. 32). This may lead us to assume that individual agency is non-existent (e.g. Denegri-Knott, Zwick, & Schoreder, 2006, p. 951; cf. Cherrier & Murray, 2007). Certainly, comments such as those made by Fromm can lead the reader to think that human agency is given short shrift by the critical theorists. After all, Fromm talks about the fact that ‘man is by origin a herd animal’ (Fromm, 1950/1978, p. 58). This assumption underpins Fromm’s discussions of the ‘marketing orientation’, whereby people develop and demonstrate those self characteristics most likely to enable
themselves to get ahead in the capitalistic, competitive world with the minimum of social friction (Fromm, 1950/1978, 1956/2005; cf. Boltanski, 2002). In this way, people turn themselves into commodities or objects (Fromm, 1950/1978, p. 75; cf. Bradshaw et al., 2006; Higgins & Smith, 2002; Honneth, 2008; O’Donohoe, 1994, p. 60).

In view of the theoretical sophistication of critical theory, we should be reluctant to accuse those associated with it of too readily dismissing agency, for Fromm is equally optimistic that by virtue of critical reason, an individual can make a conscious decision to avoid following any herd mentality (cf. Magala, 2006, p. 189):

His actions are determined by an instinctive impulse to follow the leader . . . Inasmuch as we are sheep, there is no greater threat to our existence than to lose this contact with the herd and be isolated. Right and wrong, true and false are determined by the herd. But we are not only sheep. We are also human; we are endowed with awareness of ourselves, endowed with reason which by its very nature is independent of the herd. Our actions can be determined by the results of our thinking regardless of whether or not the truth is shared by others.

Comments such as these pepper the work of Fromm, and consequently the pessimism that is attributed to the Frankfurt School does not sit well with my understanding of this scholarship.15 Thus where Hetrick and Lozada (1994) state that ‘the Frankfurt Circle version of a critical theory is inherently sad, because even if some notion of emancipation is achieved (which is doubtful), large numbers of people previous to this have needlessly suffered from the horrors of existence under capitalism’ (p. 554), I find their arguments unpersuasive. This is due to the various positive case studies that Fromm (1956/2005) identifies of groups living in ways he considered consistent with a ‘being’ orientation (cf. Moisander & Pesonen, 2002).

While Hetrick and Lozada (1994) do register that ‘there was no identifiable agent of . . . social change’ (p. 554) that Marx and Marcuse had originally sought in the proletariat (e.g. Fromm, 1956/2005; Marcuse, 1964/1972, 1979) or that other critical theorists looked for in the ‘student movement’ (Fromm, 1993), ‘new social movements’ (Habermas, 1981) or among the ‘rebel’ fringe of society (Hoffman, 1972), the fact that the proletariat or these other groups were unlikely to overthrow an oppressive system did not stop Marcuse from calling for a ‘Great Refusal’ (Marcuse, 1964/1972, p. 62) ‘against unnecessary repression’ (Kellner, 2000, p. 14; Fromm 1947/2006, p. 15; cf. Brewis & Wray-Bliss, 2008). In this way, Marcuse demanded that critically minded scholars engage in ‘resistance and opposition to all forms of domination’ (see also Fromm, 1962/2006). And critical theorists were called upon to be ‘suspicious of the . . . present order’ (Horkheimer, 1935/1972, p. 237; cf. Bouchet, 1994, p. 419). A similar standpoint is reflected in early critical marketing publications (for a Marcusian view, see Kilbourne, 1987a, 1987b). Articulating his interpretation of critical theory, Benton writes:

A critical stance focuses not only on the goals and rules of conduct imposed by existing ways of life but as well on people and all of their potentialities. The aim of Critical Theory is always the emancipation of people from their chains of illusion, from their self-imposed slavery. The concepts which emerge under the influence of the critical mind are critical of the present and tend toward a certain philosophical and futuristic character because they are always mindful of alternative possibilities. (Benton, 1985b, p. 202; cf. Fromm, 1962/2006, p. 9; Kilbourne, 1991)

15It should be acknowledged that Adorno is probably the exception here.
But there were, in general, relatively few critiques of marketing from a critical theory perspective, as I have said, in the period from 1940 until the late 1960s. Moving slightly away from the early work of Lazarsfeld, the late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed a turn towards humanist perspectives in marketing. It is appropriate to discuss this material now, as this is said to have been one of the intellectual precursors of a close relation of critical marketing – critical management studies (Adler et al., 2008). After this, attention is directed to the work of early critical marketing writers to examine the critiques they posed and the types of analyses they advocated.

The reconstructionist movement\textsuperscript{16} and humanist critique

During the 1960s, the ‘reconstructionist’ movement (Arnold & Fisher, 1996; Kotler & Levy, 1969) sought to critique marketing activities and core marketing values in light of ‘social concerns for the general welfare of society, the consequences of ecological ambivalence, [and] the [growing] awareness of [the] ethical dimensions of resource-use decisions’ (Arnold & Fisher, 1996, p. 130). It was this group that attempted to provide a ‘thoroughgoing critique or reconceptualization of the fundamental nature of marketing’, registering the charges that marketing promoted materialism and environmental despoliation.

In spite of this, the ‘reconstructionist’ movement did not actually advocate any substantive change in marketing’s relationship to society (cf. Dawson, 1969, p. 31; Dholakia et al., 1983, p. 27). For Spratlen (1972), this lack of radical change was problematic, as it indicated that marketing scholars and practitioners were not taking their role in society suitably seriously. As a first run through of the issues marketers needed to devote greater attention to, he included: ‘Social costs, externalities, conservation in the use of resources, and other “macro”, environmental and humanistic concerns’ (Spratlen, 1972, p. 405).

In line with a study by Dawson (1980; see also Dawson, 1969\textsuperscript{17}) that utilises the work of Fromm, Spratlen (1972) also takes intellectual sustenance from this ex-Frankfurt

\textsuperscript{16}In terms of the history of marketing, the continued refinement of the axiology underpinning social marketing at this historical juncture could indicate a further avenue of critical thought (Arnold & Fisher, 1996). Certainly a critique of conventional ‘for-profit’ marketing can be found in this body of work. Influential social and critical scholars have, moreover, lauded connecting the two ways of reflecting on marketing (e.g. Hastings & Saren, 2003). Social marketing is not critical in the sense that I am discussing critical marketing studies in this paper. There is no questioning of the ‘Dominant Social Paradigm’ (Kilbourne et al., 1997). This is not a surprise. Social marketing itself is closely affiliated with an economic regime (neoliberalism) that has brought considerable harm to populations of the planet (cf. Varman & Belk, 2009), whilst privileging other groups – especially the more powerful countries and governments. As James Pfeiffer (2004) has documented, the promotion of social marketing can be connected with the diffusion of neoliberal economic doctrines across the world by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. By signing up to neoliberal economic policies and in accessing structural adjustment funding, as part of the conditions that accompany the provision of such funds, governments are told to cut back on spending for public services. As these are rolled back, social marketing campaigns have filled the vacuum left by reductions in government funding (Pfeiffer, 2004). Such schemes are massively problematic for a whole range of reasons, not least because of their focus on cost efficiency when determining those behavioural change projects that will be undertaken; for a discussion of this point, see Dholakia (1984), Luthra (1991), Firat and Tadajewski (2009), Tadajewski and Brownlie (2008), and Tadajewski and Maclaran (2009d).

\textsuperscript{17}Dawson’s (1969) earlier study does not reference Fromm, but similar themes are found in this work and later developed further via Fromm.
According to Spratlen’s humanistic vision, marketing scholars should try to balance managerial interests with important social goals, including improving people’s lives, as well as accepting a certain degree of responsibility for the end result of marketing activities (see also Hirschman, 1986). Connected with this, Spratlen – like Arndt (1985a, 1985b), N. Dholakia (1988), Lutz (1989), Monieson (1981, 1988), Murray and Ozanne (1991), Ozanne and Saatcioglu (2008), Peter (1991), Rogers (1987), Sherry (1991), Zaltman and Bonoma (1979), as well as the AMA (1988) – made a plea for scholars to exhibit greater openness to alternative ways of seeking knowledge, in order to better understand marketing’s impact on society. The more radical paradigms like humanism and its close relation, the liberating paradigm\(^\text{20}\) (Arndt 1985a, 1985b; Seymour, 1985), were presented as a means to open up marketing to ‘examination, experimentation and change in order to gain new insights in [to] marketing thought and action’ (Spratlen, 1972, p. 408).

Spratlen, in particular, was concerned that affirmations of the marketing concept\(^\text{21}\), as well as subscription to traditional forms of developing knowledge that conform to Habermas’s (1971) technical knowledge (i.e. logical empiricism\(^\text{22}\)), provide us with a very skewed picture of the benefits of marketing in and on society (Arndt 1985a, 1985b). Looking through the marketing concept, we ignore social issues (Dawson, 1969, 1980). Via subscription to logical empiricism, our vision of the world is warped, because knowledge produced using this paradigm is usually developed for the purpose of improving the performativity of business activities, and this encourages us to ignore

\(^{18}\)In fact, Spratlen (1972, p. 405) indicates that he is using the work of ‘Eric Fromm’. I think it is fair to assume that this is a typo. The same point holds in relation to Raymond Benton (1985b) who also mentions ‘Eric Fromm’.

\(^{19}\)As Lilley (2008) highlights, there are a variety of critiques that can be levelled at humanism (see also Smith & Higgins, 2000).

\(^{20}\)This is also termed the interpretive paradigm (cf. Alvesson, 1994). There are a variety of problems associated with interpretive research that require critique from a critical marketing, critical race theory, or postcolonial marketing perspective (see Bettany & Woodruffe Burton, 2006; Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002; Bradshaw & Holbrook, 2008; Burton, 2009; Jack, 2008; Jack & Westwood, 2006). Notably, Bradshaw and Holbrook make a similar case to that of Jack and Westwood (2006) by questioning the research methods used in much interpretive research (i.e. interviews). The limitation of phenomenological interviewing relates to ‘the reliance on the reported experiences of individual agents [which] can obscure more critically concerned questions of what appears and why’ (Bradshaw & Holbrook, 2008, p. 38; cf. Brown, 1995/1997, p. 150; Burton, 2009, p. 177). Likewise, Jack and Westwood (2006, p. 486) argue that ‘interpretivist research can result in [the] mere ‘redescription’ of the status quo . . . rather than a critical inspection of it’ (cf. Denzin, 2001). Although this is not to say that the use of interpretive methods cannot have a profound effect on a researcher (Diversi, 2007) or their co-participants (Hirschman, 1986). On the politics of the reception of interpretive research, see Cote and Foxman (1987), Holt (1991), and Sherry (1987). For overviews of the paradigm, see Hudson and Ozanne (1988) and Shankar and Patterson (2001).

\(^{21}\)For critical examinations of the marketing concept and consumer sovereignty, the most important studies are: Benton (1987b), who critiques the alleged consumer orientation of marketing; Schudson (1981), who positions the marketing concept as a ‘social ideology’; and Brownlie and Saren (1992) who develop this line of argument further. Dixon (2008) and Craig Smith (1987) both concur in viewing the concept of consumer sovereignty as a ‘blatant ideology’ (Craig Smith, 1987, p. 9; see also Dholakia, 2009).

\(^{22}\)For the relevant critiques of logical empiricism, see Arndt (1985b) on the one-dimensionality of this approach and the neglect of the other Burrell and Morgan (1979/1992) and Morgan (1980) paradigms (cf. Alvesson, 1994). Moorman’s (1987) critique of logical empiricism runs as follows: ‘By adhering to logical empiricism, researchers approach human behavior searching for empirical support for theoretical generalizations. This paradigm suggests humans are merely instruments and science is not concerned with making value statements about their welfare or betterment’ (p. 199; see also Smith & Higgins, 2000). Subscription to this approach is still widespread (Arnould & Thompson, 2007; Hirschman, 1993; Tadajewski, 2008; cf. Tadajewski, 2010).

In attempting to reorient marketing, Spratlen thought that intellectual flexibility and openness were essential (see also Baker, 2001; Brownlie et al., 1999; Hirschman, 1986; Lutz, 1989; Price & Arnould, 1998; Rogers, 1987; Thompson, 2002; Tynan, 2002; Wilk, 2001):

In the context of this discussion it should be noted that conformity for the sake of conformity in marketing or in other areas of business activity has the same results as in other areas of society; it ‘inhibits both intellectual development and the sensitive social sense which tells the person of impending changes in the cultural pattern’. (Spratlen, 1972,\textsuperscript{24} p. 406n7; see Heede, 1981; Ingebrigtsen & Pettersson, 1981)

If we were proceeding in this paper on a linear historical trajectory, some reference to the seminal work found in N. Dholakia and Arndt’s (1985) edited collection should be made; however, I will bypass this for the moment, following Spratlen’s arguments with Monieson’s (1988) stinging critique of intellectualisation in macromarketing,\textsuperscript{25} given their shared basis in humanism.

**Intellectualisation**

Based on Weber, and somewhat Frommian in tenor (e.g. Fromm, 1962/2006, p. 115), Monieson’s (1988) discussion of intellectualisation was quite complex. It is therefore best to use his explanation of what is meant by the term ‘intellectualization’. He postulated that, ‘intellectualization is a conceit which dictates that no mysteries of the world are impervious to rationalization and calculation and that ultimately all dark continents can and will be conquered’ (p. 6; cf. Hetrick & Lozada, 1999; Witkowski, 2005). When we intellectualise the way we think about marketing, we seek to produce techniques and tools that enable us to manage and control consumer behaviour (or whatever), with the minimum of actual thought about what we are doing. Intellectualisation allows us to embed marketing decisions within the framework of cost–benefit analysis, which speaks to economics, rather than considerations such as consumer well-being and distributive justice.\textsuperscript{26}

A key feature of Monieson’s argument was his critique of social marketing, which, in a similar way to Moorman (1987), he saw as the further extension of marketing as a morally bereft technique. What I mean by this is that Monieson viewed the broadening movement as an exemplar of the valorisation of the transfer of skills from the economic

\textsuperscript{23}For a discussion that goes beyond the societal marketing concept, see Dawson (1969) on the human-marketing concept. Dawson argued that the business community should provide not only ‘material comforts’ – the proxy for social progress that Kline and Leiss (1978) critique – but harness ‘its energies to the efforts of mankind to achieve a way of life that fulfils the human yearning . . . for security, dignity, and spiritual solace’ (Dawson, 1969, p. 37; cf. Cherrier, 2009).

\textsuperscript{24}Spratlen is citing another text in this quote.

\textsuperscript{25}As critical scholars realise, some of the literature on macromarketing is ferociously critical (e.g. Burton, 2001; Hastings & Saren, 2003). This literature is nonetheless generally ignored.

\textsuperscript{26}Distributive justice is commonly ‘defined as addressing how a community treats its members in terms of the benefits and burdens [that are shared] according to some standard of fairness’ (Laczniak & Murphy, 2008, p. 5).
domain to areas where they did not belong, without any real reflection on the end result. Monieson (1988) was principally concerned with ‘how the intellectual excitement of the technique of marketing overruled any concerns about the debasement of institutions to which social marketing techniques were applied’ (N. Dholakia, 1988, p. 12; see R.R. Dholakia, 1984; Luthra, 1991; Pfeiffer, 2004).

For Monieson (1988), what had been previously ethical concerns that required us to engage our subjectivity in a process of concerted, thoughtful reasoning were, as a result of a ‘marketing logic’, rapidly reduced to means–end decisions that enabled us to apply our ‘conceptual range’ to whatever situation we faced (i.e. taking Americanised marketing theories and applying them to non-Western nations through social marketing). Thus ‘marketing logic, knowing no bounds, reifies to an irrepressible force, overwhelming all human relations into its mold’ (Monieson, 1988, p. 7; cf. O’Malley, Patterson, & Kelly-Holmes, 2008, p. 173). He continued, ‘marketing logic is reduced to an absurdity; in its distorted realm people can be products, [and] products can breathe life’ (Monieson, 1988, p. 7; see Higgins & Smith, 2002).

Much like Fromm’s concern about the dictates of the ‘market system’ (i.e. the reified concept of exchange) moving beyond the ‘sphere of commodities and labor’, so that ‘man transformed himself into a commodity’ (Fromm, 1998, p. 33; emphasis in original; cf. Higgins & Smith, 2002), Monieson (1988) thought that excessive scientism, especially the belief that marketing knowledge could be used to ‘engineer social life’, was turning ‘social relations’ into ‘thing-relations’ (p. 7). This left Monieson asserting in no uncertain terms that ‘the commercialization of social relations is wrong and should not be condoned . . . There is a domain of social activity which is noneconomic, and self-interest or utility should not set the goals of that domain’ (p. 7; cf. Saren, 2007; Higgins & Smith, 2002).

In a compelling argument, he demanded that marketing become a ‘human science’, governed by ethics, personal responsibility, and so forth. Marketing scholars, Monieson (1988) stated, must appreciate their human values when reflecting on the role that marketing should play in the world:

Human beings are responsible, using their collective sense of wisdom, ethics, morality, religion, and justice to guide them . . . Since the subject of distributive justice embraces not only the economic analysis of rights but also ethics, morality, and religion, then macromarketing can only be a science if science is defined in a manner to permit macromarketing to maintain the human values of its researchers. (p. 9)

Like Firat (1985a, 1985b), Dholakia et al. (1983), Benton (1985a, 1985b), Heede (1985), O’Shaughnessy and Holbrook (1988), Arnould and Fischer (1994), O’Shaughnessy (2008), and others, Monieson appreciated the contribution that a variety of paradigms including natural science (whose knowledge-constituting interest was, for Habermas (1987/2004) concerned with ‘controlling’ nature, as well as human beings, whilst spuriously adopting a posture of value neutrality), hermeneutics (concerned with the development of inter-subjective understanding about the past and present, but which is essentially ‘conservative’ in Habermas’ (1987/2004, 1990) opinion) and critical approaches can make to the emancipation and self-reflection of the subject (Crossley, 2005; Habermas, 1987/2004; Hansen, 1981; Ingebrigtsen & Pettersson, 1981; Monieson, 1988, 1989; Peter, 1991). We must acknowledge the value of multiple paradigms, as well as interdisciplinarity, these scholars claimed (Firat, 1987; cf. Lüdtke & Weeks, 1986, p. 109). To cite Monieson (1988), we:
... must know, understand, and be critical of the field if its output is to be of service to human beings. The positive science of macromarketing has to be transcended to incorporate distinctly human values. Dialectic thinking, verstehen, and critique have to enter our world if it is to be re-enchanted. De-reification must take place; intellectualization must stop. De-reification can only occur when our comfortable and assumed world disintegrates, 'bringing forth doubt and scepticism concerning everything that has previously been taken for granted. In such situations, roles are suddenly revealed as human actions and institutions as humanly produced montages for these actions' (Berger & Pullberg 1965, p. 209). A critical mode, dialectically induced, will lead to a crisis in macromarketing knowledge as 'one is confronted with alternative ways of perceiving the world and ordering one's life within it'. (p. 9)

**Social amelioration, responsibility, and distributive justice**

To some extent then, Spratlen's humanistic proposal is consistent with Monieson's (1988) research agenda. In order to determine the contribution of research in the latter's view, we should ask the following question: 'Does it promote social amelioration, social responsibility, and distributive justice' (N. Dholakia, 1988, p. 13). In a similar vein, Dawson called for the reorientation of marketing. Can we shift the existing 'paradigm' of the marketing concept, which essentially caters to 'selfish needs', so that marketing was better 'attuned to a society animated by [an] ethics of relationships, love and sharing', Dawson (1980, p. 77) asked. He thought it was perfectly possible, as did some of the other children of 1968.

Later commentators were somewhat less sanguine that marketing would ever undergo a radical axiological shift, but they remained interested in attempting to think about what marketing could look like when viewed through the lens of critical social theory. Notable is the work of Arndt (1985b), Firat (1985b), Heede (1985), and Benton (1985b), who, via their contributions to *Changing the Course of Marketing* (N. Dholakia & Arndt, 1985), provided diverse critiques of existing approaches, arguing that critique is valuable for the discipline (Firat, 1985a, 1985b). Extending this argument, the absence of critique makes marketing less scientific, Benton (1985b) claimed.

As noted above, Benton (1985b) provided a definition of his 'critical' view, which was widely shared. In an unusual move, he went beyond the 'traditional' and 'critical' dualism to articulate an 'ethical' approach to marketing activities that was intended to offer normative guidance to scholars and practitioners alike. Benton's ethical approach contrasts with the values underwriting 'micromarketing' (i.e. 'products

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27Heede (1985) undertakes something similar. Utilising a multi-theoretical approach combining structuralism, phenomenology, and Freudian psychology, Heede claimed that marketing can work as a 'controlling science ... aiming at enforcing given power structures in a society and serving the elite' (p. 156). More preferable is that marketing transforms into a 'liberating' science, 'not enforcing but revealing illegitimate, covert power structures in society' (p. 156). In the research programme he mentions, his work could contribute, on the one hand, to controlling consumers because advertisers were given important information about individual psychology that might enable them to develop more effective advertising; on the other hand, it could be used to liberate consumers. As he described the result:

In the aforementioned research project it was verified, in the phenomenological sense, that consumers are guided at the unconscious level by codes and values transmitted via the media of mass communication; when this was revealed to them, they understood, and were thereby able to liberate themselves from this illegitimate subliminal power in society. (p. 156)

The meaning of liberate here seems to be far removed from the 'liberatory consumption' discussed by postmodern marketing scholars (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995) or by exponents of CRM (Beckett & Nayak, 2008; see also Scott, 1993).
contribute to well-being’) and responds to the criticism that can be levelled at the humanistic perspectives discussed earlier, in terms of their inherent ‘speciesism’ – that is, the failure to recognise the legitimate claims of non-human members of the ecosystem (see Kavanagh, 1994; Low & Davenport, 2006; McDonagh, 1997; cf. Braidotti, 2006, pp. 197–198; Fromm, 1947/2006, pp. 8–9; Gane & Haraway, 2006; Lilley, 2008).

There is a good reason for this ethical critique: ‘If marketers are to ask should something be sold, it is implied that there exists some criteria, some ethical theory, regarding human and social well-being. Today any such theory must include, as well, the concept of nonhuman nature and its well-being’ (Benton 1985b, p. 211; see also Agger, 1976). In order to be able to develop this ethical approach, we must, contra postmodernism’s ‘perpetual present’ (Stephanson & Jameson, 1989), remember our history (Marcuse, 1964/1972), as this will provide us with:

... a critical social consciousness both as to where we are and as to how we got here. The place to begin may be with the criticism that is already on record and of which our libraries are full. These critical analyses must be considered not with a jaundiced eye aimed at denying them but with a critical eye aimed at accepting from them what is valuable’. (Benton, 1985b, p. 212)

After the first stage in his ethical research programme, marketing scholars then had to:

... begin formulating a theory to evaluate the suitability of commodities for our various and numerous needs. Suggested here is a program of study designed to illuminate the relationship between commodities and health, between commodities and human well-being, between commodities and social well-being. Even a program designed to formulate a critical analysis of consumers’ tastes would be a legitimate activity. (Benton, 1985b, p. 212)

Let us now put the Changing the Course material to one side. Having charted the development of critical marketing studies at a high level of paradigmatic abstraction, the remainder of this paper will move to a more microlevel of analysis by looking at important topical areas. Unsurprisingly, in the critical marketing studies literature reviewed so far, there was a general predilection for neo-Marxist related perspectives, although some scholars did still clearly appreciate the value of a whole range of approaches. There does, even so, appear to have been a consensus that one of the main foci of critical marketing studies was marketplace power relations. We can see this interest threaded through a number of main areas, some of which have had more research attention than others, and so the following sections will be slightly unbalanced. The most popular areas receive greater coverage; those that have received less attention will consequently receive less discussion here. It is worth briefly reviewing the debates and linkages between the relevant topics to frame the narrative that follows.

In the first place, there was a prominent stream of literature that aimed to contest whether key marketing concepts were truly reflective of industrial reality or, as Benton (1987b) put it, an obfuscation device that redirected consumer and public policy attention away from organisational agendas and the marketing of pseudoindividuality. This group of studies effectively directed attention to the relationships between consumer need, choice, and apparent choicelessness in the marketplace (cf. Buttle, 1989). Related to this is the issue of manipulation: were consumers effectively manipulated into consuming goods and services they neither wanted nor needed (see also Dyer, 1988; Haug, 1986).
Kilbourne (1987a, 1987b), for example, oriented his intellectual efforts around the distinction between ‘real’ and ‘false’ needs. Concurrently with this vein of literature, there was a limited examination of the concept of commodity fetishism. In a more sophisticated treatment of the issue of ‘real’ versus ‘false’ needs, it was too easy, some scholars argued, to propose that the consumer was manipulated by marketers. Perhaps instead, consumers were not actually manipulated but the marketplace was so suffused with products, many of which were ‘me-too’ goods, that it was difficult for consumers to actually select those products that met their requirements. Marketers could help consumers by providing adequate levels of information about their products, outlining what exactly distinguished them from existing competitors, and this would aid decision making. However, observers such as Kline, Leiss, and Jhally also appreciated that the marketing and advertising system was increasingly moving towards more symbolic forms of communication (cf. Pollay, 1985). This shift, together with the continued power of large organisations to ‘distort’ marketplace communication processes (cf. Haug, 1986), placed restrictions on consumer agency that were not, theorists claimed, consistent with key marketing ideas and concepts.

Central topics in critical marketing

The critical marketing studies literature is axiologically predicated on the issue of power relations, with scholars revealing how the market is structured in ways that deviate quite markedly from articulations of consumer sovereignty often found in discussions of the marketing concept. For example, Firat, initially in his doctoral dissertation of 1976 (Firat & Tadajewski, 2009) and later with co-authors including Dholakia and others, produced a substantial body of research that developed critical humanism in marketing still further. They dissected the structuring of consumption choices in a way that problematises Kasabov’s argument that ‘research on buyer behaviour and consumption has largely ignored the nature of power and disciplining in marketing’ (Kasabov, 2004, p. 3).

In an early paper, N. Dholakia et al. (1983) warned that the American context in which marketing theory and thought had been developed seriously biased the ‘analytic categories’ subsequently generated (see Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Fischer & Bristor, 1994; Hirschman, 1990). What they saw as particularly disconcerting was the overwhelming managerial emphasis of much research, as well as the overriding focus on issues of ‘brand choice rather than wider social interests (e.g. consumption pattern formation and transformation)’ (Dholakia et al., 1983, p. 27; see also Belk, 1987; Belk

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28 With the growing interest in the work of De Certeau (1988) and his discussion of the consumer sphinx, along with Foucault’s various archaeological, genealogical, and ethical studies, these are topics that will continue to receive widespread attention (e.g. Denegri-Knott et al., 2006; Giesler, 2008; Schroeder, 2002; Skålén, 2009; Skålén, Fellesson, & Fougère, 2006; Skålén et al., 2008). There is also a history of studying power relations in marketing, although this does not invoke critical social theory. As Gundlach, Phillips, and Desrochers (2002, p. 234) write: ‘Marketing possesses a long history of focus on and study of the nature of power in exchange, including sources of power, power as a concept, and the exercise of power and interdependence and their implications in exchange relations’. Specifically in reference to the inter-organisational structuring of marketplace power relations, they argue that much more research needs to be undertaken detailing ‘the potential impact of market power on a competitive marketplace’ (p. 234). While their interest is in relation to anti-trust violations, I would add that such research could quite usefully apply the insights of critical social theory.
Mirroring the earlier work of Firat and Dholakia (1977), Dholakia et al. (1983) write:

Marketing concepts have been predominantly micro concepts dealing with the buyer or the marketer. Very little work exists on marketing processes at a societal level . . . More disturbing, however, is the absence of any framework linking micro and macro concepts. Typically, marketing studies may focus on the effect of information load on choice behavior but not on social processes causing the information load, they may examine the relationship between personality and brand choice but not the formative aspects of personality or brand proliferation, they may investigate power relationships in a channel but not the wider power relationships in society of which they may be a part and so on. (p. 27; see also Firat & Dholakia, 1982; Firat, 1985a, 1987)

There is resonance between Dholakia et al.’s argument and that mounted against the motivation researchers by Theodor Adorno. Adorno (1969) did praise ‘motivation research for directing attention to the qualitative, subjective reactions of consumers; but he was also equally emphatic in his criticism of what he saw to be the excessive focus on the subjective reactions of consumers without equal attention being given to the extent to which these are conditioned by the cultural climate and societal structures’ (Tadajewski, 2006b, pp. 450–451; see also Markin, 1970; cf. Markin, 1979). The above scholars (Dholakia et al., 1983; Firat, 1985b, 1987; Firat & Dholakia, 1982) are more attentive to the structuring of consumption than the motivation researchers. And, in a series of related papers, these authors question the nature of ‘need’ and the illusion of choice – issues central to the work of critical theorists like Horkheimer and Adorno (2002).

### Need, choice, and choicelessness

Marketing scholars, Firat (1987) avers, readily utilise certain concepts in an uncritical fashion (see also Knights, Sturdy, & Morgan, 1994; Maclaran et al., 2009; Peñaloza & Venkatesh, 2006; Scott, 2007). As an example, Firat (1987) points out how much buyer-behaviour research begins by assuming that consumers would ordinarily have a prior desire for a product such as a television, and then proceeds to investigate brand-selection behaviour (cf. Cronin, 2008). By assuming the need for this product, no attempt was made to determine the social construction of particular consumption patterns – that is, it was assumed that consumers wanted a specific brand of television, rather than that some consumers might want to avoid purchasing a television at all (see also Ozanne & Murray, 1995).

The principal assumptions subjected to scrutiny in the critical literature include the concept of exchange, especially in relation to whether this constitutes an appropriate exchange.
axis for marketing given that certain needs can be met without entering into market exchanges (e.g. Firat, 1985b; cf. Arnould, 2007; Dobscha & Ozanne, 2008; Holt, 2002; Kozinets, 2002; Saren, 2007; Schor, 2007). Similarly, Bristor and Fischer (1993) have produced an influential critique of relationship marketing from a feminist perspective (see also Smith & Higgins, 2000). Critiques of consumer sovereignty have figured prominently in critical analyses (Brownlie & Saren, 1992; Craig Smith, 1987; Crockett & Wallendorf, 2004; Dixon, 2008; Ozanne, Corus, & Saatcioglu, 2009). Since the latter has been most extensively studied, it will be the focus of this section.

In a variety of extended critiques of marketing theory’s subscription to the innateness of consumer needs (Firat, 1985a) and consumer sovereignty (Craig Smith, 1987; Dixon, 2008), critical marketers have asked whether these notions really describe or mirror the reality of consumer choice processes in the US marketplace. The assumption of consumer sovereignty is problematic, Firat tells us (see Kellner, 1983). Connected to this, consumer choice is structured along a variety of dimensions, which, taken together, form a ‘political economy of social choice’ (Dholakia et al., 1983, p. 28) or a ‘structure of available alternatives for consumption’ (R.R. Dholakia, Dholakia, & Firat, 1983; Firat, 1987). Some of these dimensions are a function of neoliberal economic doctrines (Varman & Kipparath, 2008; Varman & Vikas, 2007a, 2007b; cf. Venkatesh, 1999, pp. 155, 158); others are regimented and redefined by a variety of political creeds (Crockett & Wallendorf, 2004; Varman & Belk, 2009; Zhao & Belk, 2008).

Consistent with the discussion of Benton’s work earlier, generally the argument found in this ‘structuring’ scholarship runs as follows: as there is a particular structure to consumption choices, all consumer behaviour must be viewed from a historical perspective, asking questions about how certain needs came to be framed as such, and whether these needs really are innate to the consumer or imposed from outside, such as

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31 Surprisingly, this is a common assumption in marketing thought (Firat, 1987; Jones & Monieson, 1990; Marion, 2006, p. 253; cf. Fullerton, 1999, p. 502, 2009, p. 96; Nelson, 2008, p. 118), but this begs the question: what is the function of marketing in society (O’Shaughnessy & O’Shaughnessy, 2002, 2007). Do marketers simply respond to consumer needs, producing products commensurate with consumer demands (cf. Beckett & Nayak, 2008; Laczniak & Murphy, 2006)? Clearly not, as needs are socially influenced (Buttle, 1989; Firat, 1985b; Markin, 1979; Monieson, 1973; Moorman, 1987; Ozanne & Murray, 1995). Thus marketing influences consumer needs (Borch, 1958), acts as a ‘facilitator of consumerism’, thereby creating felt needs (O’Shaughnessy & O’Shaughnessy, 2007), which it responds to assuming a given level of effective demand (Firat, 1987), while at the same time sometimes restricting consumption. On this process, see Starr (2007).

32 Related to this line of argument are some of the Foucauldian structuring of choice studies, power/knowledge relations, and surveillance (e.g. Beckett & Nayak, 2008; Humphreys, 2006; Kasabov, 2004). Ozanne and Murray’s (1995) discussion of the ‘reflexively defiant’ consumer and the ways in which this ‘insurgent consumer’ can ‘contest the role of the postmodern marketplace in fulfilling and defining their needs’ (Ozanne & Murray, 1995, p. 516; see also Denzin, 2001, p. 328) is also pertinent (cf. Adkins & Ozanne, 2005; Higgins & Smith, 2002).

33 In an interesting recent study, Crockett and Wallendorf (2004) outline the impact of various political belief systems on consumer behaviour that illustrates the interplay between structural factors (e.g. political belief systems, socio-economic inequality, gender relations, etc) and agency (i.e. reflexive consumer behaviour) (see also Lee et al., 1999; Varman & Belk, 2009; Zhao & Belk, 2008). They comment upon the fact that poor (black) consumers often face higher grocery bills as a result of poor distribution and limited access to large chain stores. This further compounds their already precarious economic position. In short, Crockett and Wallendorf (2004) manage to detail the importance of severe structural inequality, the impact of political beliefs in structuring, directing, and modifying behaviour, which, in turn, leads to refinements and rationalisations in the original political belief system held by consumers; all of which has the potential to sediment or restructure further the subject positions of the individuals concerned.
through advertising\textsuperscript{34} (Benton 1985a; Buttle, 1989; Firat, 1985a; Heede, 1985; Lippke, 1989).

These critical marketing scholars assert that consumer choice is not optimal in that ‘choice occurs under restraints’. And yet there remains an ‘unshakable faith’ in the belief ‘that . . . consumers, nevertheless make their minds up about what and how they will consume independently, given their own needs and priorities’ (Firat, 1987, p. 262). Firat documents how the dominant ‘consumption patterns’ in society are largely set by the powerful (at least for new products) (see Alwitt, 1995; Bradshaw & Holbrook, 2008; N. Dholakia & Dholakia, 1985; Dixon, 2008; cf. Lynd, 1932, 1934, 1936; Lyon, 1927; Tawney, 1927). And he explains what he means by the structuring of consumption choices by reflecting on the idea of what is a ‘need’, that is, an essential consumer product, using the example of transportation in the United States (see Firat & Dholakia, 1977; cf. Buttle, 1989, p. 207).

What he intends to question via this example is how ‘needs’ are not latent or innate human requirements as such (cf. Marion, 2006), but the result of ‘ecological, cultural and historical’ developments (Firat, 1988). He uses a sample of three communities in the United States to express his point. Commuting from each location, he suggests, reveals certain structural features that delimit possible life choices (see McDonagh & Prothero, 1997). Not wholly unexpectedly ‘public transportation is either nonexistent or thoroughly inadequate. Consequently, this consumer unit is left with little choice but to buy a car’ (Firat, 1988, p. 290). There may, of course, be a variety of other transportation options available to the consumer, but these carry certain ‘social, psychological and economic costs’ that are reduced via the use of private modes of transportation (Firat, 1988; cf. Cherrier, 2009; Cherrier & Murray, 2007; Connolly & Prothero, 2003; Peñaolaza, 1994).

Choice in this case may not actually revolve around the issue of ‘to buy a car, or not’ but is restricted to the selection of a particular brand (Firat, 1987). This leads him to ask whether the ownership of a car is a real, ‘authentic’ need or is it an ‘indulgence’ that does not really require satisfaction? We cannot say that it is irrational, Firat claims, as for the individual consumer it is rational to use a car in strict means–end terms. For society, it is irrational that private transportation replaces more ecologically friendly transport (cf. Markin, 1979, p. 331), and this is the result of interconnected decisions

\textsuperscript{34}Heede (1985) describes the socially situated nature of decision making in a somewhat deterministic fashion (see also Skålén & Fougère, 2007, p. 118; cf. Skålén, 2009, conclusion) claiming that ‘Through the socialization process the individual gains, without knowing it, the social structure of society within which he/she lives. He/she adopts its language and sign structure, its codes and values, without knowing why and especially who has decided that this structure is the most appropriate and why’ (Heede, 1985, p. 155). Other critical scholars take a slightly different stance and suggest in reference to advertising that the encoding–decoding process is ‘more like a dialogue’ (Goldman & Papson, 1991, p. 70; cf. Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002; Campbell, 2007, p. 13; Holbrook, 1987, p. 101). Furthermore, as Goldman and Wilson (1983) point out in relation to advertising and hegemony, hegemony does not work via a top-down, sovereign power (in Foucault’s sense), almost commanding consumers to think in certain predetermined and unchallengeable ways; rather, it works by willing compliance. In addition, much advertising is viewed with deep scepticism. This is not to say that advertising is ignored by consumers. On the contrary, it is used playfully by adolescents (O’Donohoe, 1994; Ritson & Elliott, 1999) and productively by Mexican consumers (Peñaolaza, 1994). Thus, on a related issue, Leiss (1978, p. 44) concludes: ‘it seems implausible to suggest that persons are “ruled” by whatever meanings are projected onto the world of commodities’. This leads him to critique the ‘theory of false needs’ and ‘false consciousness’, and postulate instead the ‘double symbolic’ constitution of utility, that is, marketers attempt to structure and define the symbolic components of their products (see Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002; O’Reilly, 2006; Svensson, 2007) and this meaning ascription process is then actively interpreted and resisted by consumers (e.g. Crockett & Wallendorf, 2004; Giesler, 2008, p. 746; Kline & Leiss, 1978, p. 13; Marion, 2006, p. 253; Peñaolaza, 1994, p. 51; Phillips, 1997; cf. Arvidsson, 2005; Bradshaw et al., 2006; Denzin, 2001, p. 323; Lippke, 1989; Shankar, Cherrier, & Canniford, 2006).
made at various levels in society over a prolonged period. As Dholakia et al. (1983, p. 28; emphasis in original) put it,

[The] transportation need in . . . American society has spawned a consumption pattern based on the private automobile and a system of highways. The emergence of specific consumption patterns is a social phenomena in which political and economic factors play key roles. The Political Economy of Social Choice would have to be examined in detail to understand why different societies exhibit specific consumption patterns at different stages.

This structuring has implications for the extent to which we attribute voluntarism to a given consumption choice (cf. Adkins & Ozanne, 2005; Cherrier, 2009; Markin, 1979; Ozanne et al., 2009, p. 36). Do consumers really choose on the basis of their own free will to buy particular products, or are they ‘alienated’ from their own consumption, that is, are the ‘rules of consumption . . . developed and dictated without the participation of the individual consumer’ (Firat, 1987, p. 253)? Firat (1987) and Dholakia and Dholakia (1985) indicated that there was evidence that ‘human beings are forced into contemporary CPs [consumption patterns] rather than freely select them’ (Firat, 1987, p. 261; cf. Denzin, 2001, p. 328).

Returning to the transportation example, Firat posits that ‘a major factor in the development of the automotive industry, highways, and electrical energy has been the consumption choices of . . . corporations as the major initial consumers of such products. Their lobbying activities in such areas have also had effects in the development of these products’ (Firat, 1987, p. 258). That this structure of consumption is no less important today, but without attributing so much power to large corporations, we might reflect on the history of the electric car in California (see Sachs, 2008). Nonetheless, Firat added that further research was needed that evaluated whether ‘need perceptions, wants, priorities, and preferences of consumers [could] be controlled and determined by sociopolitical and economic phenomena without any apparent coercion’ (Firat, 1987, p. 262).

**Manipulation?**

Likeminded views were articulated by Kilbourne (1987a, 1987b) who uses the work of Ewen (1974) and Marcuse (1964/1972) to propose that what ‘generally passes for heterodoxy in society is an acceptable level of difference of opinion regarding established beliefs. But the acceptable level is established by those with power and seldom brings into question the legitimacy of the system itself’ (Kilbourne 1987a, p. 313; cf. Boltanski, 2002; Prothero & Fitchett, 2000; Shultz & Holbrook, 1999).

Kilbourne follows Marcuse in arguing that we experience a dubious level of ‘freedom’ in society inasmuch as what we perceive as our ‘needs’ are not really our needs at all, in that they have not been consciously and reflexively selected by the individual. Marcuse differentiates ‘vital’ or ‘true’ from ‘false’ needs in an effort to explain what he means here (Marcuse, 1964/1972, p. 19):

We may distinguish both true and false needs. ‘False’ are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression . . . Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs.
'Vital' or 'real' needs, by contrast, represent 'nourishment, clothing, [and] lodging at the attainment level of culture' (Marcuse, 1964/1972, p. 19). Taking Marcuse’s analysis as his launch-pad, according to Kilbourne (1987a), we are far from using products in an agentic fashion to co-construct our self-image. Like Marcuse (1964/1972), Fromm (1976/2007), and others, Kilbourne asserts that our ‘manipulated consensus’, characteristic of the present status quo, influences the way we perceive and react to the world. This will impact on our consumption habits:

If, for example, an individual chooses a product for status purposes, then the product assumes the role of subject and the individual assumes the role of object in the relationship. This would not be self actualising consumption and would, in fact, be the antithesis of it. Yet this is precisely the form of therapeutic consumption frequently proffered as the prevailing reality. Therapeutic consumption, as defined by the status quo, would not lead to self actualisation since the ‘needs’ which it is designed to satisfy tend to be false needs, i.e., those inherent in the mode of production and not necessarily inherent in individual growth. (Kilbourne, 1987a, p. 314; emphasis in original; see also Kilbourne, 1991; cf. Cherrier, 2009; Ozanne et al., 2005)

It is ‘the system’ that ‘perpetuates a false consciousness that serves its own needs’, Kilbourne (1987a, p. 315) maintains. Despite the fact that these needs may indeed be false, in the sense that they are externally superimposed on the individual and serve the interests of powerful groups (cf. Marion, 2006; O’Reilly, 2006, p. 267), this does not mean that the individual will refuse to pursue the satisfaction of such needs. Attempting to satisfy false needs is satisfying, Marcuse admits. Capitalism, as an economic system, has provided steadily increasing levels of consumption, and this limits critical reflection on the nature of this gratification and way of organising society (i.e. that it is ultimately unsatisfying, contributes to rising levels of consumer debt and stress etc. – see also Shankar & Fitchett, 2002). Even those existing at the lower levels of an affluent society are unlikely to reflect on qualitative social change, Marcuse (1964/1972) posits: ‘for the other, less underprivileged people society takes care of the need for liberation by satisfying the needs which make servitude palatable and perhaps even unnoticeable’ (p. 32). This said, critical scholars are beginning to seriously consider that the least affluent may begin to question their present...
'underclass' (Bauman, 2007) or 'subaltern' (Varman & Belk, 2008) status, potentially leading to social upheaval (cf. Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005).

Moreover, Marcuse’s analysis can run into difficulty, as the problem with identifying ‘false needs’ is that there must be some way that we can evaluate what are real and what are false needs. As postmodern scholars (Firat & Venkatesh, 1996; Suerdem, 1996) and critical marketers (Murray & Ozanne, 2006) have recognised: ‘These terms are . . . acceptable only when there are standards against which an assessment is possible’ (Firat & Venkatesh, 1996, p. 257). When the critical theorists did attempt to determine these standards, they invariably reverted to values that reflected their personal preferences, namely those of cultivated intellectuals (Ingleby, 1991/2005; cf. Cherrier, 2009; Denzin, 2001; Hartmann & Honneth, 2006; Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008). Realising the elitism that may be inferred from such a position (e.g. Marcuse, 1964/1972, pp. 20, 46) and the problematic nature of the true versus false needs distinction (Agger, 1983; Hoffman, 1972), other scholars who examined critical marketing topics such as commodity fetishism were far more cautious in claiming to be able to determine true versus false needs or in making unwarranted assertions that the consumer was the dupe of powerful marketers.

**Commodity fetishism and the ‘den of deception’**

From the late 1970s onwards, there were a number of studies published that adopted Marxian concepts such as commodity fetishism to investigate how society was dominated by consumption, and how relations between people were increasingly mediated through commodities (e.g. Askegaard, 2006; Goldman & Wright, 1983; Goldman & Wilson, 1983; Jhally, Kline, & Leiss, 1985; Leiss, 1978; Leiss & Kline, 1978). Due to the visibility of advertising, this was considered a primary means through which a commodity consciousness (Goldman & Wright, 1983) was thought to be communicated. Related to this were historical changes in marketing communications with respect to the growing ambiguity of advertising messages that, in their own way, affected the ability of consumers to satisfy their own needs effectively (Jhally et al., 1985; Kline & Leiss, 1978).

Leiss (1978, p. 29), for instance, was interested in exploring how ‘needs and the objects of needs are structured by symbolic and cultural determinations’. While his earlier work formed the bedrock for his later studies, it is the joint research with Stephen Kline and Sut Jhally that is of most interest. In their work, Kline and Leiss (1978) present their objective to be a critique of commodity fetishism. In other words, they were not convinced that people are necessarily ‘mystified’ by the products they consume, or by the argument that...

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37 Other scholars have been slightly more tempered in their opinions. Desmond, McDonagh, and O’Donohoe (2001), Dobscha and Ozanne (2008), Ozanne and Murray (1995), and Starr (2007) see the potential for consumers to display agency in their marketplace decisions regardless of consumer ‘mystification’ (Ozanne & Murray, 1995; cf. Adkins & Ozanne, 2005; Craig Smith, 1987; Kilbourne et al., 1997; Murray, 2002; Ozanne et al., 2005; Smith & Higgins, 2000).

38 Linda Scott (2007) has said that she has worked from communications and related departments for most of her career. Given this, bringing the work of critical scholars working in such departments in to this narrative does not seem too much of a stretch, especially given their participation in marketing events like the biennial CHARM (Conference on Historical Analysis and Research in Marketing) conferences.


40 This is a point of contention in the literature. Pollay (1985), for instance, sees precisely the opposite phenomenon occurring in that his analysis indicated that advertisements have become increasingly product centred after 1950, revealing relevant information about price, attributes, and quality (Pollay 1985, pp. 32, 33). Despite this, the experiences of the young consumers interviewed by O’Donohoe (1994, p. 58; cf. p. 68) appears more consistent with the arguments found in the Kline et al. and Jhally et al. studies (see also Brown, 1995/1997, pp. 126, 138; Campbell, 2007, p. 13).
marketing communications can replace real, authentic needs with false needs that serve the interests of the capitalist machine (Jhally et al., 1985; cf. McDonagh, 1997).

In this spirit, they wished to avoid attributions of false consciousness, preferring instead to interrogate the nature of want satisfaction (Kline & Leiss, 1978; Leiss, 1974, 1978). They explain the problem as they see it: the increasingly abstract nature of advertisements in terms of the shift from the provision of ‘objective information’ (i.e. ‘performance specifications’, ‘size of the product’, etc.) to the growing use of abstract imagery was negatively influencing consumer decision making (cf. Ozanne & Murray, 1995; Wilkie & Moore, 2003, p. 120). With an array of products in the marketplace, many of which try to differentiate themselves on the basis of their symbolic properties and are marketed in a deliberately ambiguous way (cf. Peñaloza, 1994), it was and is difficult to determine those products that meet our requirements (see also Marion, 2006; cf. Phillips, 1997; Pollay, 1985). And Kline and Leiss (1978) ‘think it is safe to assume that . . . There is likely to be some feeling of satisfaction or success and simultaneously some feeling of dissatisfaction, the latter arising from the fact that so many other untried opportunities for possibly improving the degree of satisfaction still beckon’ (p. 15; emphases in original).

This dissatisfaction is not a result of individuals perceiving some discrepancy between the images offered by marketers and their real interests; they do not somehow achieve a state of critical consciousness that permits them to transcend ideologically interpolated beliefs. In much the same way as poststructuralist writers comment in reference to the decentring of the self, there is no set of ‘real needs . . . beneath the manipulations’ (Kline & Leiss, 1978, p. 26). In stronger terms, they propose that consumer culture should not be viewed as a ‘paradise of freedom, justice, and reason – but it is also no mere den of deception’ (p. 26). But this is not to say that the evaluation of the products we buy in trying to satisfy some need is easy, far from it (Adkins & Ozanne, 2005; Bouchet, 1994; Hackley, 2002; Hodgson, 2002; Markin, 1979; Ozanne et al., 2005; Pollay, 1987), and that is assuming we can actually access the products we so need (Light, 2007).

In some respects, Kline and Leiss are quite right to affirm the positive function of the marketplace for consumers (see Firat & Tadajewski, 2009) and at the same time to register the complex nature of need satisfaction (see Bouchet, 1994; Karlinsky, 1987). Like Ozanne and Murray (1995), Kline and Leiss (1978) appreciate that people will make errors in their product selection. We should not, however, rush to the conclusion that any failure to select the optimal product in trying to satisfy our requirements is necessarily a function of ideology (cf. Kilbourne, 1991; Lüdtke & Weeks, 1986). People, Heath (2000) believes, are not necessarily deluded by ideology (cf. Kilbourne, 1991). What may be happening is that they live their lives making ‘instrumental choices’ that can lead to the selection of products that perform any given function poorly (cf. Cherrier, 2009).

Like Firat (1987) and other critical marketing scholars (e.g. Benton, 1985b), Kline and Leiss (1978) called for further research that studied the structuring of consumption and attends ‘as precisely as possible, [to] the process of need-interpretation and need-satisfaction in consumer culture’ (p. 26; see Connolly & Prothero, 2003; Heath, 2000; Humphreys, 2006; Kilbourne, 1991). The purpose of understanding these processes is that it then enables a Habermasian-type discussion

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41 As Axel Honneth has pointed out, there are a variety of problems with Habermas’s work, especially his theory of communicative competence. See also Chantal Mouffe’s (1996, 2000, 2005) critique of consensus generation (cf. Habermas, 1975).
(Habermas, 1973, 1975). By Habermasian discussion, marketing theorists generally mean that all interested parties are able to enter into discourse – and by discourse, Habermas (1984/2008) is talking about communicative action that is as free from the exercise of constraint and coercion as possible – and that each participant is willing to engage in open, rational argumentation about whatever issues are being discussed. The very fact that individuals seek to enter into such discussion indicates, Habermas argues, that they think consensus generation is at least theoretically possible (see Varman & Belk, 2009).

The key paper that works with Habermas’s scholarship in this sense is Ozanne and Murray’s (1995) discussion of the ‘reflexively defiant’ consumer (see also Ozanne et al., 2009). As a counterpoint to the usual representation of the consumer adopted by public policy advocates who is assumed to make more responsible choices about their own consumption behaviour when provided with sufficient information, Ozanne and Murray question the limitations of this way of conceptualising consumer behaviour. They call for consumers to go beyond reflecting on the nature of their own choice behaviours based on what the market offers, as not doing so effectively supports the status quo. But people do not generally question the present market structure (cf. Crockett & Wallendorf, 2004, p. 525; Varman & Belk, 2009) and this is a result of distorted communication, Ozanne and Murray submit.

**Distorted communication and neoliberalism**

For Habermas, distorted communication occurs when certain ideas or interests are not permitted to be discussed or debated. In *Legitimation Crisis*, for example, he talks about the ‘fundamental contradiction’ between the ‘claims’ made by different classes. Distorted communication, Habermas (1973) declares, prevents us from even realising that such contradiction exists, by providing ‘ideological justification’ for class differences, differential access to resources, and so forth – witness the discursive construction of the ‘other’ at the heyday of the colonial period and with which marketing was thoroughly complicit (see Bonsu, 2009; Jack, 2008). As an example of what he means, Habermas makes reference to the role of the political system:

> The political system produces mass loyalty in both a positive and selective manner: positively through the prospect of making good on social-welfare programs, selectively through excluding themes and contributions from public discussion. This can be accomplished through the sociostructural filtering of access to the political public sphere, through a bureaucratic deformation of the structures of public communication, or through manipulative control of the flow of communication. (Habermas, 1989/2006, p. 346)

Distorted communication for Ozanne and Murray, much like the function of ideology for critical theorists reflecting ‘socially necessary illusions’ (Lüdtke & Weeks, 1986) that sustain the status quo, ensures that people fail to register their uncritical ‘adherence to tradition’ (see also Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002). The ‘reflexively defiant’ consumer, on the other hand, fully appreciates the fact that the market system is not the only way of structuring exchange relations, just the historically sedimented way of life in advanced industrial societies. Thus this consumer develops a different relationship to the marketplace in which they identify unquestioned assumptions and challenge the status of existing structures as natural. Through reflection, the consumer may choose to defy or resist traditional notions of
consumption, become more independent from acquisition and disposition systems, or define their own needs independent from the marketplace. (Ozanne & Murray, 1995, p. 522)

On the basis of their willingness to question the structure of the marketplace, consumers can thereby enter into communicative discourse about their needs and probable satisfaction (Nill, 2003; Nill & Shultz, 1997; Ozanne & Murray, 1995; Ozanne et al., 2009). Habermas, of course, still retains a preference for these discussions being led by the appropriate technocrats (cf. Gibson-Graham, 2003; Ozanne et al., 2009) who would be charged with engaging in extensive research to develop initial ‘policies for modifying’ the negative impact of the marketplace on consumer choice behaviour, which ‘can then be presented for public debate’ (Kline & Leiss, 1978, p. 26; cf. Denzin, 2001, p. 326). Kellner (1983) has undertaken some initial steps in sketching out a number of arguments for public deliberation. Provocatively, he asks us to discuss the proposal that we should ‘rarely buy products produced by the big corporations that engage in national advertising’ (p. 75); Lippke (1989) also articulates issues he considers worthy of public debate.

Let us not, all the same, ignore power relations (Markin, 1979). We would do well to recall that powerful interest groups do exert far more influence in such deliberative exercises than we may want to admit in the face of ‘postmodern social pluralism’ (Grafton-Small, 1993; Habermas, Lennox, & Lennox, 1974; Stephanson & Jameson, 1989). As Light (2007, p. 234) frames the issue: ‘the history of the globalization movement provides evidence that one of the aims was to reorder markets and trading rules to benefit corporations that were running out of markets’ (see also Harvey, 2007). It is for this reason that recent history is characterised by the ‘increasing global influence of the marketing concept’ (Shultz & Holbrook, 1999, p. 225), which itself further serves to elide organisational power politics (Benton, 1987).

Even though public debate is likely to be somewhat biased in favour of the interests of large corporations, who are in turn supported by government, the World Bank, World Trade Organization, and so on (see Böhm & Brei, 2008; Light, 2007), we should not refuse to engage in the kind of communicative dialogue that Fromm (1955/2006), Gibson-Graham (2003), Habermas (1989/2006), Habermas et al. (1974), and Ozanne et al. (2009) consider useful (see also Shultz & Holbrook, 1999). The fact that debate is still essential is confirmed by scholars who study the impact of neoliberalism on the structuring of consumption. Situating themselves in the critical marketing tradition, Varman, Vikas, and Kappiarath have focused on the interconnections between neoliberal economic doctrines and structural adjustment programmes advocated by the IMF and World Bank (see also Varman & Belk, 2009). These demand that governments cut back spending on public services and have negative implications for the least advantageously placed citizens in India (Varman & Kappiarath, 2008; Varman & Vikas, 2007a, 2007b; Vikas & Varman, 2007).

Like Bradshaw and Holbrook (2008) who highlight the relative powerlessness of consumers in the developed world, Varman and Vikas have elucidated how certain groups of consumers are acutely aware of the deleterious impact of the encroachment of the market on their economic well-being, specifically in terms of the gradual privatisation of health-care provision in India (cf. Wallendorf, 2001). Yet because these subaltern consumers are economically disadvantaged, they cannot

42Unless appropriate control mechanisms are in place (Ozanne et al., 2009).
always translate their knowledge of these problems into effective public policy challenges to the status quo (cf. Varman & Belk, 2009). Varman and Vikas (2007a), for instance, found that the poorest citizens were mistreated as a result of pharmaceutical companies forming close relations with medical practitioners through institutionalised bribery, who subsequently exploited the end consumer by spurious referrals for treatments and expensive drugs. These consumers then turned to ‘quacks’ who had minimal medical knowledge, and thereby endangered patients who had little choice given their finances and familial obligations to go elsewhere (Varman & Vikas, 2007a).

In documenting how some consumers do not face the liberating choice of adopting healthy, life-giving consumption patterns (cf. Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 871), Varman and Vikas and related critical scholars remind us that the task of critical marketing is to ‘be critical of the present’ (Benton, 1985b, p. 202). The scholarship discussed in this paper requires that we think about how we could organise the marketing system differently (Adkins & Ozanne, 2005; Bettany & Woodruffe Burton, 2006; Connolly & Prothero, 2003; Denzin, 2001; Heede, 1985; Ozanne et al., 2009; Spratlen, 1972; Tadajewski & Brownlie, 2008), thereby helping all people, whether ‘poor or rich, to make sense of the constraints and contradictions they face in their everyday lives’ (Brownlie, 2007, p. 666). This is very much in keeping with recent debates surrounding sustainable and ethical consumption (Connolly & Prothero, 2003; McDonagh, 1997, 2002), critical marketing education (Adkins & Ozanne, 2005; Benton, 1985a; Catterall et al., 1999, 2002; Ozanne et al., 2005; Tregear, Kuznesof, & Brennan, 2007), critical macromarketing (Kilbourne et al., 1997), and transformative consumer research (see Mari, 2008; Ozanne & Gravois, in progress; Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008; for a perceptive critique of a related field, see Brewis & Wray-Bliss, 2008).

This said, critical marketing studies is not completely commensurate with postmodern research, despite the close intellectual genealogy of the two perspectives in terms of various prominent early critical marketing academics later becoming key figures in promoting postmodern interpretations of marketing. This is not to say that I am dismissive of the value of postmodern marketing. Postmodern perspectives in marketing were important in problematising logical empiricism (Morgan, 2003) and in highlighting the usefulness of satire, parody, and irony (Brown, 1998; Maclaran et al., 2009; Nash, 2002). But a brief review of the literature that critically examines the contribution of postmodern inquiry across a range of social science disciplines, as well as specifically postmodern marketing work, indicates that postmodern scholarship seems to avoid any sustained engagement with the shifting structures of capitalism (Morgan, 2003) that are affecting some groups in profoundly unequal ways (Migone, 2007). What’s more, some of this scholarship overemphasises the ‘liberatory’ or ‘celebratory’ aspects of consumption (e.g. Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Firat & Dholakia, 2006; Venkatesh, 1999; Venkatesh, Sherry, & Firat, 1994), even when admitting that ‘we have to begin to address the issue of consumers as cultural and historical products constituted by institutional mechanisms and power relationships in which marketing actors and actions play a vital role’ (Venkatesh et al., 1994, p. 217; 43With respect to some of the early postmodern marketing work, especially that produced by Firat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh, their arguments often reflect a more critical stance than they are given credit for – they acknowledge the importance of the market in structuring social relations and do not necessarily assume that this contributes to emancipation (see Firat & Venkatesh, 1995, p. 245). And Cherrier and Murray (2002) document how some postmodern thought can be quite critical in terms of its reflection on questions of consumer agency.
see also Firat, Sherry, & Venkatesh, 1994, p. 314). There is also little acknowledgement of the negative influence of the postmodern self-concept (see Fromm, 1955/2005; Hartmann & Honneth, 2006; Moorman, 1987).

Of course, there may be individuals out in the world who do exhibit the characteristics of the postmodern consumer, but rarely are discussions of the protean self accompanied by much comment on the ‘psychic costs’ of this variant of ‘social action’ (Kilminster, 2008, p. 135; see also Cronin, 2008; Honneth, 2004; Miller, 2001; Murray, 2002; Rumbo, 2002). Nor should we underestimate the skewed distribution of these types of behaviours. As the work of McDonagh (2002), Varman and Vikas (2007a, 2007b), and Vikas and Varman (2007) has illustrated, a more critical examination of Western and developing economies still reveals serious structural inequality (Migone, 2007; Monieson, 1975; Nederveen Pieterse, 2006), with a subaltern population working to subsidise the lifestyles of the affluent (Hudson & Hudson, 2003).

From my perspective, a critique of postmodern marketing can be made in the following way. First, can we really say that the world is more postmodern when the ‘two basic organizing forces in modernity – capitalism and bureaucratic power – have hardly begun to dissolve’ (Calhoun, 1993, p. 77)? Second, postmodernism can be viewed as the ‘cultural arm’ of ‘multinational capitalism’ (Stephanson & Jameson, 1989) and as such can be exposed as a ‘conservative’ or ‘neo-conservative’ (see also Desmond, 1997; Honneth, 2004) affirmation of a form of social organisation that is not ecologically sustainable (Agger, 1991; Bouchet, 1994; McDonagh, 1998; Rumbo, 2002). It thereby requires a radical and progressive rethinking (see Brown, 1995/1997, pp. 68–69; Fleming, 2004; McDonagh & Prothero, 1997). Third, postmodern marketing does sensitise our attention to some changes in ‘affluent’ advanced industrial countries (Cova, 1996; cf. Bouchet, 1994; Desmond, 1998; Miles, 2000), at least among the financially well-endowed members of such nations (cf. Ehrenreich, 2002; Micheletti & Stolle, 2007; Wacquant, 2002), but it still limits our theoretical and empirical attention if we uncritically assume its global validity (see Radhakrishnan, 1994) without registering the fact that the ‘postmodernization of the world is extremely uneven’ (Therborn, 2007). To summarise my position then, I am not averse to using the theoretical and practical resources offered by postmodernism (see Cherrier & Murray, 2002; C. Jones, 2003; Linstead, 2005), but do think that greater reflection needs to take place than has been seen to date regarding the implications of postmodernism and its celebration of consumption.

Having now traced what is a largely forgotten history of critical marketing studies, along with differentiating critical marketing studies from postmodernism, in the final two sections, I want to reflect on critical marketing education, pedagogic pluralism, and marketing management.

Critical marketing education

As marketing educators, we are well positioned to encourage our students to think more critically about the impact of their activities on society. Research indicates that
issues beyond those proximate to firm-level activities are rarely considered by practitioners for a whole variety of reasons (see Drumwright & Murphy, 2004, 2009; Laczniak & Murphy, 2006). Key factors that limit critical reflexivity include the structures of capitalism (i.e. in terms of the rewards allocated to those companies who increase shareholder wealth, regardless of the societal cost) (Adler, 2002), our work environment (i.e. organisational culture) (Crane, 2000; Drumwright & Murphy, 2004, 2009), and our own cognitive and time limitations (Agger, 2009; Laczniak & Murphy, 2006; McDonagh & Prothero, 1997; Tadajewski & Saren, 2008).

Taking an affirmative stance, I find myself in agreement with Fromm when he writes that: ‘the task of impressing on people the guiding ideals and norms of our civilization is, first of all, that of education’ (Fromm, 1956/2005, p. 336). Continuing in this spirit Fromm (1962/2006, p. 135) suggests that ‘education means to acquit the young with the best heritage of the human race. But while much of this heritage is expressed in words, it is effective only if these words, become reality in the person of the teacher and in the practice and structure of society’ (see also Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 618; Maclaran et al., 2009). As educators, we have had the resources to introduce our students to the best of critical thought for some time – Benton outlined a critical curriculum more than two decades ago (1985a) and his call has been reiterated by Burton (2001, 2002, 2005) and Catterall et al. (1999, 2002).

More recently, we have had scholars bringing together critical collections that can inform course development. One of these texts resulted from the Critical Marketing ESRC seminar series (Saren et al., 2007); the other adopted a critical-historical perspective that refuses to support the idea a la Saren et al. (2007) that we can ever define the field of critical marketing, as to define a field means to close it down intellectually (Saren, 2009; Shankar, 2009; Tadajewski & Brownlie, 2008). These educational resources are further enhanced by the publication of a three-volume collection by Tadajewski and Maclaran (2009a, 2009b, 2009c), which reprints seminal critical marketing studies articles (e.g. Murray & Ozanne, 1991) and important critiques of social marketing (e.g. Luthra, 1991), to name just a small portion of the material. All of these resources have the potential to contribute to the ‘estrangement effect’ discussed by Marcuse.

To make marketing strange and thereby think about how we could organise society and the marketing system differently, we ‘must break the spectator’s identification with the events on stage’ (Marcuse, 1964/1972, p. 65). My interpretation of this point is that we must develop our students’ critical sensibilities, so that they do not rote learn marketing theories and principles uncritically (see also O’Reilly, 2006, p. 267). They must learn the basics of the field to be sure, but only because this forms a first step in critiquing them. And, as Brownlie (2006) argued, this is a process that has no terminal point (Marion, 2006); nor is it necessarily an easy task.

For example, a recent study (Tregear et al., 2007) that examined student perceptions of ‘being critical’ in relation to a one semester course that encouraged students to reflect critically and sceptically on a variety of topics from the marketing concept to social marketing revealed that while students do lament the ‘labour-intensive’ nature of such courses of instruction, with some seeing the courses as esoteric, many perceived important benefits (Tregear et al., 2007). These included learning transferable critical reading skills that could be used on other modules, as well as with respect to their everyday exposure to communications emanating from

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45This is a problematic term, but at present I can see no alternative. What is affirmative or not necessarily requires careful thought and debate.
influential sources, including those likely to be encountered in the work environment. In short, Tregear et al.’s exploratory study demonstrated that teaching a course of instruction that takes a critical stance can be beneficial with respect to student learning experiences and have wider ramifications in terms of student engagement with consumer culture and organisational life.

Critical marketing and marketing management

In the *Critical Marketing Studies* collection (Tadajewski & Maclaran, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c), there is engagement with marketing management. Much like critical management studies generally, the focus is not on producing knowledge for marketing management, although there are exceptions to this in the literature (e.g. Burton, 2002; Murray & Ozanne, 1991). Rather, as part of the political stance characteristic of critical marketing studies, the articles included look at what marketing or advertising managers actually do in their day-to-day organisational activities (Brownlie & Saren, 1992) and from this demonstrate the power relations that exist between marketers and their core constituents (e.g. Applbaum, 2000; Hackley, 2002; Svensson, 2007; see also Skålén & Fougère, 2007).

So where might critical marketing research and marketing management meet up? Critical marketing could function as part of an ‘unmasking critique’ (Adorno & Becker, 1999) or as ‘muckraking scholarship’ (Thompson, 2007) that targets marketing practices, whether these result from traditional for-profit marketing or not-for-profit activities, such as the various forms of social marketing (e.g. R.R. Dholakia, 1984; Higgins & Smith, 2002; Luthra, 1991; O’Shaughnessy, 1996; Pfeiffer, 2004). This kind of critique could then be used as the basis for effective real-world change (Brewis & Wray-Bliss, 2008; cf. Klein, 2001). Here also, we should recognise what is referred to as ‘the performativity of knowledge’ (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 614).

What Gibson-Graham mean by the ‘performativity of knowledge’ is the idea that a theory, concept, or label can literally drive the way the economic world is performed, as is the case with neoliberal economic doctrines. Translating this into practical terms for marketing scholars, the consequence of viewing all theoretical and empirical activities in this way is that we cannot cling to the detached positivistic view of scholarly practice that claims simply to document the world in ‘realist’ fashion (Gibson-Graham, 2008) or only to be involved with the production of ‘tools’ and thus eschew all responsibility for the way these tools are utilised (Brownlie, 2006). The implication of this performatve stance is that we become:

... increasingly conscious of the role of ... [our] work in creating or performing the ‘world’ we inhabit. The vision of the performativity of knowledge, its implication in what it purports to describe, its productive power of ‘making’, has placed new responsibility on the shoulders of scholars – to recognize their constitutive role in the worlds that exist, and their power to bring new worlds into being. Not single-handedly, of course, but alongside other world-makers, both inside and outside the academy. (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 614)

The view outlined by Gibson-Graham (2008) has much to recommend it, especially their emphasis on actually being willing to listen and try to understand the opinions of those whose interests are considered the diametric opposite to those of critical scholars more generally. The perspective of the marketing manager is one such case.
Yet, we should not go to the extreme of assuming that the structure of the marketing system is quite so contingent as an ‘anti-essentialist’, ‘performativ[e] view of knowledge’ such as that subscribed to by Gibson-Graham could lead us to suppose (Gane & Haraway, 2006). ‘Performing theory’, and consequently alternative marketing systems, does hold the potential to encourage scholars, practitioners, and other interested groups to view their actions and everyday lives through different prisms. But, such modifications in ways of thinking will still require a certain degree of institutional support, which may or may not be forthcoming.

As I have noted elsewhere, the Cold War played an important role in structuring the marketing academy (Tadajewski, 2006a), as well as marketing practice (Tadajewski, 2009), and views that are not in keeping with wider discourses in society are likely to be marginalised in much the same way as more radical paradigms were during the Cold War. This said, and notwithstanding considerable intellectual and practical difficulties, I very much agree with Gibson-Graham’s call for action when they assert that:

Our interest in building new [marketing] worlds involves making credible those diverse practices that satisfy needs, regulate consumption, generate surplus, and maintain and expand the commons, so that . . . interdependence between people and environments is ethically negotiated [and] can be recognized now and constructed in the future. (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 623)

Finally, there is also the issue that the academy and marketing practice still remain largely the preserves of older, white males46 (see Brewis & Wray-Bliss, 2008; Burton, 2009; Catterall et al., 2005; Drumwright & Murphy, 2009; Maclaran & Catterall, 2000; Maclaran et al., 2009; Peñaloza, 2000). With such a limited population researching marketing issues or involved with practice, it necessarily suggests that the paradigms and viewpoints used to examine marketing theory and practice in all its many forms will be delimited (Burton, 2002, 2009). This cannot be a desirable state of affairs. One way of offsetting the present managerial bias of the marketing academy at its highest institutional echelons would be to follow the lead of the accounting academy, notably the Association for Accountancy and Business Affairs, which has clear ‘emancipatory sensibilities’ (Brewis & Wray-Bliss, 2008: p. 16n6) and has sought to utilise the skills of critical researchers.

**Conclusion**

This paper was framed by an interesting quotation from Arnould and Thompson (2005, p. 876) who noted the lack of studies that have investigated the ‘historical and institutional forces that have shaped the marketplace and the consumer as a social category’ (see Peñaloza & Venkatesh, 2006). Coverage of this research was equally absent in many of the various discussions of critical theory in marketing (e.g. Burton, 2001). This said, after surveying the literature published from the mid to late 1970s and through the 1980s and that is continuing to be published today, it is fair to say that marketing thought does have a rich vein of critique threading through it that deals with exactly these issues.

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46 Clearly, I am a white male writing about a white male dominated academy. There is little I can do about my skin colour and ethnic origin. Striving to look at marketing through multiple intellectual paradigms is something that I can accomplish though (cf. Burton, 2009, pp. 174, 194).
I have highlighted the range of material that has dealt with topics that fall under the designation of ‘new frontiers’ in a recent survey of consumer culture theory (CCT) literature (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Ironically, this displays the ahistorical nature of marketing thought, since now that we are at the end of this paper, it appears that these represent the old frontiers of critical marketing. As we may expect, the literature examined above bore a distinct non-managerial emphasis. Such views continue to be espoused by scholars who demand that we should not only produce knowledge for marketing managers but for all stakeholders (e.g. Bazerman, 2001; Cherrier, 2009; Denzin, 2001; Dobscha & Ozanne, 2008; Lee, Ozanne, & Hill, 1999; Mari, 2008; Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008; Ozanne, Hill, & Wright, 1998; Peñaloza & Venkatesh, 2006).

Alongside such a de-emphasis of the ‘channel-captain’ perspective (Arndt, 1985b), the view of the consumer (Bradshaw & Holbrook, 2008; Hodgson, 2002; Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008; Schor, 2007; Varman & Vikas, 2007a, 2007b), or service employee (Lee et al., 1999; Skålén & Fougère, 2007) in critical marketing studies appears to be less voluntaristic than in interpretive or other forms of marketing scholarship (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002; Catterall et al., 2005). This, in effect, reflects the critical marketing view that we should be cautious in valorising agency – especially agency that is enacted through some sort of consumption (see Kilbourne, 1991; Peñaloza, 1994, p. 46–47). Even those aspects of consumption that seem to be beneficial to the consumer should be looked at sceptically; in other words, critical scholars require that we ask whose interests are served by particular consumption practices (see Bauman, 1983; Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002; Goldman & Wilson, 1977).

Certainly, from the literature consulted above, critical marketers seem to be unconvinced that the marketplace provides people with the opportunity to ‘self-actualize’ (Kilbourne, 1987a, 1987b) or ‘self-realize’ (Freundlieb, 2000). They are especially critical of the idea that the ‘market’ produces ‘certain kinds of consumer positions that consumers can choose to inhabit’ (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 871; cf. Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002; Cherrier, 2009). It is the ‘choice’ element here that is of concern. We simply need to gesture to the work of Adkins and Ozanne (2005), Bradshaw and Holbrook (2008), Lee et al. (1999), Ozanne et al. (2009), and Varman and Vikas (2007a, 2007b) to problematise the agency assumed by Arnould and Thompson (2005). Still, agency is not denied completely by critical marketing academics (e.g. Adkins & Ozanne, 2005; Craig Smith, 1987; Lee et al., 1999; Lim & Svensson, 2007; Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008; Ozanne et al., 2005; Ozanne et al., 2009; see also Crockett & Wallendorf, 2004; Varman & Belk, 2009).

The fact that critical marketing scholars continue to hold out hope that students and practitioners can be encouraged to think differently about the way they participate in the marketing system is supported by the continued interest in critical marketing education, as well as by studies that offer methodological guidance aimed to help interested academics produce work that has real-world impact on students, consumers, practitioners, and public policy. Combined with an interest in influencing the priorities of marketing institutions like the Marketing Science Institute, playing a role in articulating different ways of thinking about and theorising marketing and further scrutinising the impact of marketing on society,

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47I am probably being slightly unfair here. The authors of that study were told to consult material published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* and bypass research published elsewhere (Arnould, personal communication).
especially with respect to the need for regulation (or not), there appear to be numerous ways in which critical marketing studies can develop.

Some of this practical endeavour will require that critical scholars do more than just undertake the interdisciplinary reading that forms the bedrock of critical marketing scholarship. Of necessity, it also demands that critical marketing scholars actually engage with marketing practitioners themselves. Not necessarily from the traditional sceptical stance associated with critical theory that arguably attributes sometimes excessive power to affiliates of the culture industries, but by taking an ‘experimental’ (Gibson-Graham, 2008), ‘affective’ (Braidotti, 2006), and critical stance. Rather than a priori theorising that the impact of marketing on society will necessarily be negative or that marketing managers or cultural intermediaries are somehow morally bereft, viewing the activities of marketing managers from an ‘experimental’ perspective means our ‘research is characterized by an interest in learning rather than judging’ in the first instance (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 628). This stance involves being willing to learn from marketing managers how they perceive their role in society. Implicit here is the idea that we should register where practitioners self-understanding does and does not conform to the stereotype images found in certain strands of critical literature, in an effort to introduce a plurality to our understanding of what constitutes marketing management (Nash, 2002, p. 100; cf. Brownlie, 1997, 2002; Brownlie & Saren, 1997). For Gibson-Graham (2008, p. 618) this requires that we ‘adopt a different orientation to theory’ and this is where critical marketing studies can be critical and progressive:

What if we were to accept that the goal of theory is not [necessarily] to extend new knowledge by confirming what we already know, that the world is a place of domination and oppression? What if we asked theory instead to help us see openings, to provide a space of freedom and possibility? (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 619)

Intellectual cross-fertilisation across different paradigmatic perspectives, as well as between academics, practitioners, and activists, does appear to be a productive avenue for theory, conceptual development, and practical activity. Interested critical marketing observers could look to the work of The Real Utopias Project, the practice of non-governmental organisations (Burton, 2009), the practically-minded feminist rethinking of market relations undertaken by the geographers J.K. Gibson-Graham (2003, 2008), along with the variety of theoretically sophisticated social movements appearing across the globe, such as those associated with the World Social Forum, for inspiration.

What must be appreciated with equal acuity is that institutional support from universities, promotion committees, and a variety of funding bodies will play an important role in giving critical marketing academics the space to think through such forms of engagement (cf. Gould, 2008a, 2008b; Scott, 2007; Shankar, 2009). While I do have some sympathy for Wilkie and Moore’s (2003) argument that there has historically been some freedom for marketing academics to select the research areas in which they devote intellectual energy, they nevertheless overstate the point when they opine: ‘absent institutional strictures, marketing thinkers can choose to think

Critical marketing academics will need to be reflexive about the likely strictures placed on research supported using public funding. As O’Shaughnessy (1996) remarks with reference to social marketing, the financial support of government can lead to social marketers operating within conservative boundaries that affirm the status quo (see also Hackley, 2009b), rather than striking at the core of social problems.
about those issues that they believe are most important, interesting, or pressing, and can ignore others at the same time’ (Wilkie & Moore, 2003, p. 141). This is not totally convincing: not only do overt institutional strictures need to be absent, there equally needs to be institutional support for new ways of performing marketing, where sedimented ways of thinking about marketing can be contested and marketing itself can be transformed (cf. though Andreasen, 2005, pp. 133, 136). Oddly enough, Wilkie and Moore (2003) fully appreciate this, and yet elide it in the conclusion to their paper, when they note the importance of the Ford Foundation, Marketing Science Institute, and so forth in structuring the current academic playing field (Tadajewski, 2006a).

To conclude this paper, I am aware that many readers will disagree with my interpretation of postmodern marketing, as this is essentially one extension of much of the research I have examined, if only in terms of the fact that many of the contributors to critical marketing have been the pioneers and advocates of postmodern marketing. 49 This may indeed be the case, but this argument requires its own detailed study. This, I submit, is a task for other scholars in other places.

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49 The conceptual and theoretical lexicon of critical marketing and postmodern marketing also tends to overlap somewhat (e.g. Brown 1995/1997, p. 15; cf. p. 145).
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