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Theoretical and philosophical implications of postmodern debates: some challenges to modern marketing

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Abstract. *Buffeted by the twin forces of postmodern cultural shifts and momentous technological developments, the conceptual structure of marketing that had crystallized during the 1960s and 1970s is being strained. This article analyses the impact of postmodernism and of new information technologies on the conceptual foundations of marketing. Six main areas of challenge are identified. Cases that illustrate the technology-driven cultural shifts, affecting the very foundation of marketing, are presented.* **Key Words** ● *business process* ● *consumers* ● *globalization* ● *marketing organization* ● *markets* ● *modernity* ● *post-consumer* ● *postmodern*

Introduction

Two major forces are contributing to what may be epochal changes in contemporary human history: unprecedented developments in several technologies and watershed transformations in culture. The cultural transformations have often been characterized as a shift from the *modern* to the *postmodern.* Technology-driven electronic methods of communicating and transacting are aiding and accelerating these ongoing cultural transformations, as well as being affected by them.

Concepts of postmodern culture have continued to incite new perspectives and debates across social sciences, the humanities, and even the physical sciences (see, for example, Cilliers, 1998; Dickens and Fontana, 1994; Eco, 1986; Featherstone, 1991; Fekete, 1987; Gottdiener, 1995; Hassan, 1987; Kaplan, 1987; Jungerman and

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Cobb, 2000; Lash, 1990; Ross, 1988; Soja, 1997). Business disciplines – particularly organizational studies, marketing, and consumer research – have been influenced by these debates. Postmodern vernacular has seeped into the discourse of business disciplines, creating some challenges to traditional perspectives and injecting new ones (see, for example, Alvesson and Deetz, 1996; Boje and Dennehy, 1994; Calás and Smircich, 1999; Fırat et al., 1993/1994; Ogilvy, 1990). This article reconsiders these challenges and charts some possible new paths for marketing.

Modern marketing found its identity in the second half of the 20th century. Basic principles that came to define modern marketing and its role in society emerged during these decades. Drawing inspiration from the pioneering marketing theories of Alderson (1957, 1965), by the 1970s the *marketing concept* was formalized, crystallized, and enshrined at the heart of modern marketing (Bagozzi, 1975; Kotler, 1972). The marketing concept articulates the *place* of marketing in the modern order of things in human history. It prescribes the relationship that institutions are to have with their consumers and other stakeholders. This special type of relationship – market and customer orientation – has been extended to an ever-growing range of institutions: firms, non-profit entities, government agencies, the arts, and religion, among others (Kotler and Levy, 1969). The marketing concept has become the creed not just within the marketing discipline but also in the popular exhortation of modern culture as a whole: Know and Serve Thy Customer (Urban, 2005)! Marketing orientation now infuses the discourse of politics, the way people relate to their employers and colleagues; indeed, the very modes in which people think about themselves (Andrusia and Haskins, 2000). Modern marketing constitutes a cultural cornerstone of contemporary modern social existence.

The tremendous success of modern marketing cannot be overstated. Marketing has emerged as the principal mode of modern business relationships, and eventually as the mode of all relationships that all institutions have with their constituencies (or 'markets', as now widely used). In part, this success is due to the fact that the marketing concept captured the essence of modern culture and of democracy, possibly modern culture's most valued institution. The idea of the sovereign citizen, with institutions serving citizens' wishes, corresponds very well with the marketing concept. Modern marketing is, thus, the articulation of how modern institutions could fulfill the modern ideal: serving citizens (consumers in the marketing lexicon) in realizing their desires toward the betterment of human lives. It could be argued that modern marketing *is* modern culture par excellence. Its success in becoming – for all institutions – the principal mode of relating with their constituents is a testimony to the centrality of marketing in contemporary culture.

While some departures from the traditional logic of marketing have appeared recently, possibly most forcefully by Vargo and Lusch (2004), the central principles of modern marketing have never been challenged. Marketing is still viewed as a way of *provisioning* what consumers need – though now of services rather than of goods – in a fundamentally *economic* exchange framework (see, for example, Vargo and Lusch's abstract). Yet, as the discussions below indicate, it is exactly these central principles of modern marketing that are being challenged.

It is therefore also understandable why, when postmodern ideas challenge the central principles of modern marketing, it is important for marketing academics and practitioners to grasp what these challenges are, and whether and how to deal with them. This article provides a roadmap for such understanding. It is divided into four parts:

• First, for those not already very familiar with them, a very brief introduction is offered to postmodernism and the postmodern debates.
• Next, six theoretical and philosophical implications of the modern-postmodern debates are articulated in terms of how they 'problematize' the nature of marketing practice, marketing theory, marketing organizations, and marketing relationships.
• The emerging and potential responses of marketing to these challenges are considered next. In this section we present some new theoretical directions for marketing, along with support from practical cases. In particular, we discuss the increasingly important role of information technologies in the ongoing, postmodern reshaping of marketing.
• Finally, we pull together the arguments and evidence presented in the article into working conclusions and sketch out the key research needs for the future.

Figure 1 presents the overall schema of this article. The ensuing discussion proceeds from a general examination of postmodern cultural tendencies to specific exploration of six areas of 'problematization' of the philosophical underpinnings of marketing, and then to transformations of marketing via technology. The combined impact of the cultural and technological changes is an ongoing redefinition of marketing. While only visible at its edges at present, the impacts could be momentous in the coming years.

Postmodernism in a nutshell

New, emergent sensibilities

There are many dimensions to postmodernism and several contentions as to its character. The following is merely a sketch of a vast literature on this topic. Pertinent to this article, three aspects stand out in trying to define the postmodern. The postmodern entails:

1 Non-commitment to any single project, order, or way of being – thus, openness to difference;
2 Dawning of a sensibility that certain conditions – which were already always present in the modern, and even the premodern (but were suppressed or denied) – are acceptable and that it is okay to playfully and critically engage with these conditions; and
3 Concentration of attention on the present; rather than the past or the future.

Although relatively new, the subject of postmodernism has evoked some debate
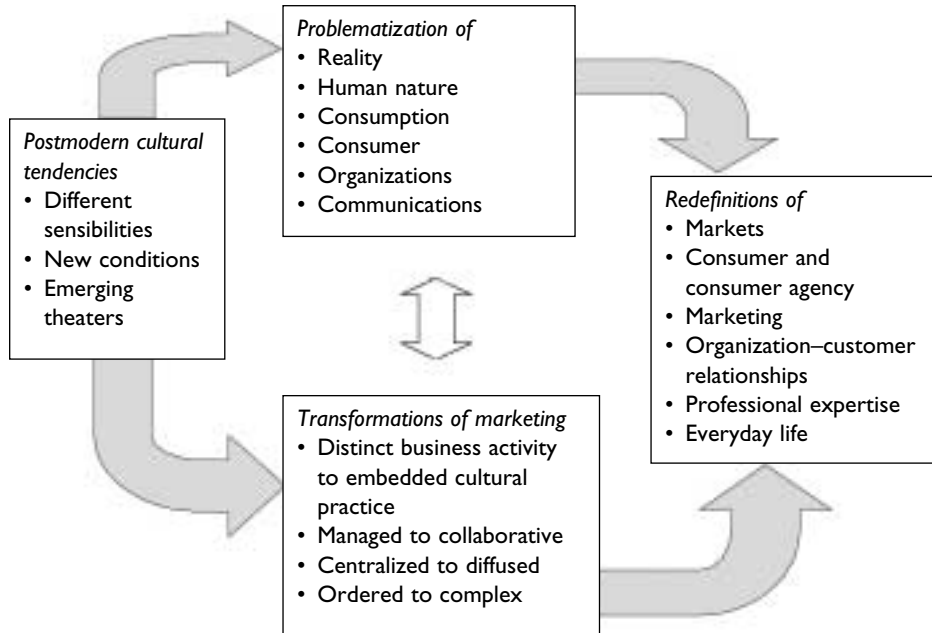
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Figure 1

Overall conceptual framework of the article

and discussion in marketing. For examples of earlier discussions of postmodernism in marketing, see Brown (1995); Fırat and Dholakia (1998); Fırat and Venkatesh (1995); Fırat et al. (1993/1994); Holbrook (1993); Ogilvy (1990) and Sherry (1991).

Vive la différence

By all accounts, the postmodern is first and foremost a cultural phenomenon. To begin with the first aspect listed above, postmodernism is a call to recognize the problematic nature of the single-tracked grand project of modernity – what Lyotard (1984) termed modernity's *metanarrative* – and to remove this metanarrative of progress from the lofty, privileged pedestal it has inhabited for the last few centuries. The call is to make each project simply one among a multiplicity of experiential states of being. In the postmodernist sensibility, the modern project of progress does not get a privileged pedestal as *the* best, only, unquestioned, or *the* rational project for humanity; nor is any other project given such priority. In postmodernism there is a clarion call *for* appreciation of difference and *against* framing difference in terms of superiority/inferiority. This has profound implications for the entrenched, seemingly monolithic, and privileged metanarrative of the marketing concept.

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Postmodernism's call to accept and appreciate difference has often been mis-interpreted as an invitation to 'anything goes', that there is or will be no prefer-ence for any position. This is not so, scholars of the postmodern argue. Postmodernism advocates tolerance, appreciation, and respect for difference; but does not eliminate preference (Best and Kellner, 1991; Featherstone, 1991; Gottdiener, 1995; Harvey, 1990; Kellner, 1989). It only recognizes that various communities will have preferences for different ways of being and living, and that these preferences will most likely be for a multiplicity of modes rather than for a single mode of being or living (Fırat and Dholakia, 1998). Postmodernism, in this sense, resonates well with the idea of highly segmented or fragmented markets.

The postmodernist sentiments just mentioned are diametrically different from modernist sentiments. Modernism displayed a distinct preference for delineating humanity's goals on the basis of clear norms of superiority and inferiority to arrive at *the best* choice in each case. The modern marketing concept – in requir-ing that consumers' needs and desires are and should be *the* reigning criterion – is a quintessential exemplar of such a clear, unambiguous, modern norm.

Playful engagements

Let us turn to the second aspect of postmodernism listed above. It lays bare the latent conditions that were sidestepped or suppressed in modern and premodern periods – and calls for playful yet critical engagement with such conditions. We elaborate on these conditions in the next section, and it becomes clear that the dictum of '*one best* choice in any circumstance' would not work under post-modern conditions. Rather, every choice is seen as a complex of favorable and disagreeable elements that can be differentially evaluated by various communities. In the postmodern sensibility, no possibility of consensus on any foundational or fundamental essentials representing 'a universal best' is foreseen.

Implosion into the present

As will also become evident in the ensuing discussion, the remaining aspect of postmodernism – the intense folding-in of the past and the future into the burgeoning here-and-now present – is a necessary concomitant of an era that lacks grand, singular, future-oriented projects. For many of us who have been educated in the modernist mode, much of postmodern sensibility may not be easy to accept, or even to contemplate. We must, however, try an understanding in order not to be crushed by – what may turn out to be – postmodernism's inevitable advance.

Postmodern conditions

The three overarching sensibilities that we just outlined have been building momentum and, to some observers, are triggering a cultural avalanche. Post-modern culture calls for engagement with numerous new conditions. Some

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oft-discussed conditions include *hyperreality*, *fragmentation*, *decentering of the subject*, *paradoxical juxtapositions of opposites*, and *tolerance for difference and multiplicity* (Baudrillard, 1993; Best and Kellner, 1991; Caputo, 1997; Featherstone, 1991; Foster, 1983; Jameson, 1991; Jencks, 1987a; Lyotard, 1984). To be very brief, these conditions represent a blurring of distinctions that were fundamental to the constitution of modernity: the distinctions between reality and fantasy, mind and body, subject and object, material and symbolic, production and consumption, order and chaos. Through these distinctions, modernity attempted to construct a normative order (Steuerman, 1992) for the realization of the modern project: building a grand future for humanity by controlling nature through scientific technologies (Angus, 1989). In modern marketing, the grand future of the field was characterized by a business and institutional structure that focused unequivocally on the customer.

Postmodernism envisions, at best, an ever-postponement of this 'grand future'. In effect, postmodernism posits that there will never be a possibility of reaching *one* grand future. Humanity will never be able to know with any confidence, or agree upon, what *a* grand future is or can be, whether it has been achieved or even approached. Consequently, the quest, the project for a grand future – and by implication the orientation to future per se – is abandoned in postmodern culture. In the culture of modernity, there was a deliberate shedding of the past – and all efforts, hopes, and commitments were pinned on the (achievement of a grand) future. In postmodernity, culture turns intensely to the present. Since the possibility of the grand future is no longer foreseen, hopes and efforts are turned to finding *meaning* and *substance* in the presently lived, intense here-and-now moments. The past, similarly, is folded into the present moment: historical concepts, events, and figures become pieces of the jigsaw puzzle that constitutes the intensifying present (Gitlin, 1989; Kellner, 1989).

The turn to the present is both a result and a reinforcement of the conditions of postmodern culture. Following is a very brief discussion of these conditions as found in the now vast literature on postmodern culture (see Table 1). Hyperreality has been discussed as being a condition where what we experience as our (social) reality is culturally constructed, not 'out there' and independent of human agency. '[H]yperreality is the becoming real of what was or is a simulation or . . . hype . . .' (Fırat and Venkatesh, 1993: 229; for more explorations see Baudrillard, 1983a; Eco, 1986). For simple examples of the condition of hyperreality, consider the urban reality of life in New York City, or the political reality of the power of the US presidency. In both cases it is clear that the reality we encounter today is constituted by (past) human agency. Hyperreality questions the strict distinction that the moderns made between reality and fantasy. We often say, for example, that the streets at Universal Studios or at Disneyland are fantasylands, whereas the streets of New York or Los Angeles are real. Yet, postmodernism interrogates: how much more real are the lush lawns, water parks, golf courses, and orange trees of Phoenix, a city crafted out of the arid Sonoran Desert, than the fantasy neighborhoods of Disneyland? And of course the neon-lit canyons of Times Square in New York are not too different from the hyperreal

Table 1

Postmodern conditions – elaboration of processes

Condition	Key attributes, processes, phenomena (from a marketing theory/practice perspective)
Hyperreality	• *Simulation*: Assuming a feigned appearance, an imitation – often to induce consumer delight; as in themed spaces in Disneyland or Las Vegas, or the chimerical rise of Dubai. • *Construction*: The process of combining ideas and symbols to achieve congruous meaning; as in constructing a 'youthful' brand personality for Pepsi. • *Signification*: Communicating by signs, to convey meanings in symbolic ways; as in Nike's pervasive and sometimes subtle use of the 'swoosh' to convey endurance and performance. • *Phantasmagoria*: A fantastic sequence of haphazardly associative and dream-like imagery; as for example in many music videos. • *Simulacra*: A semblance, a mock appearance that seems to mimic reality; as for example in shopping malls made to look like European streets and piazzas.
Fragmentation	• *Bricolage*: Something made or put together using whatever materials happen to be available; hence, metaphorically a convenient and practical assemblage of ideas, facts, etc. • *Complexity*: An intricate, entangled state – also sometimes called a rhizomatic state; as in complex, rhizomatic lifestyles and roles often depicted in commercials for 'household' calling plans of wireless service providers. • *Speed*: Swift motion or action, especially of imagery; as in music videos and movies such as the *Matrix* series of films. • *Navigation*: Traveling across disparate domains, usually with some degree of expertise in choosing the path; as in navigating various roles, subcultures, and cyberspace sites. • *Disjointedness*: Lacking order or coherence; as in the disjointed (clashing) character of some youth fashions. • *Enclavization*: Creation and promotion of spaces (physical or virtual) to intensify experiences and sensations; as for example in virtual reality simulators for skiing or car racing, or residential districts designed and built to feel like small-town America (for example, Disney's 'Celebration' near Orlando, Florida).
Decentering	• *Otherness*: Alterity – the quality of being different, often in strange and exotic ways; as in a karaoke bar or a role-play game, or creating 'avatars' in online games. • *Disorder*: A condition in which things are not in their expected places – a state of disarray; as in scrambled merchandizing in some high-end stores. • *Objectification*: To regard or present as an object; as in objectification of the female (occasionally male) body in ads for perfumes, cosmetics, clothing, and shoes.

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Table 1 (cont.)

Condition	Key attributes, processes, phenomena (from a marketing theory/practice perspective)
Decentering (*cont.*)	• *Multiplicity*: The state of being various or manifold; as in disparate architectural styles in a postmodern building or multiple roles that a wireless palmtop device holder can be in while using it. • *Reversal*: Especially of the Subject and the Object; as in Absolut vodka or Bacardi rum bottles possessing the power to act on and transform mundane people/settings into exotic ones.
Juxtapositions	• *Paradox*: Exhibiting inexplicable or self-contradictory aspects; as in filling a luxury sports car with discount off-brand gasoline. • *Opposition*: Coexistence and interrelationship of opposed entities; as in high-tech AT&T mobile phones being shown in crowded, impossible-to-navigate Third World bazaars. • *Complementarity*: Interrelation of reciprocity whereby one thing supplements or depends on the (opposite) other; as in the Apple TV ad wherein NBA giant Yao Ming uses the small 12-inch Powerbook on an airplane while his midget co-passenger uses the large 17-inch Powerbook. • *Non-commitment*: Lacking fixity of purpose, inability to bind to one course of action; as in fast-food TV ads showing indecisive waffling customers facing tempting choices, with impatient lines of other customers behind them.
Difference	• *Openness*: Willingness to uncover, reveal, disclose, and expose – as well as to accept; as evident in the wide endorsement received by the 'open', conversational ways of marketing portrayed in *The Cluetrain Manifesto* (Locke et al. 2000) • *Tolerance*: Willingness to recognize and respect the beliefs or practices of others; as in the popular TV show 'Queer Eye for the Straight Guy' where five hip gay men give dress, décor, food, wine and other style tips to a conventional straight guy. • *Deference*: Courteous regard for the feelings, wishes, opinions, and judgments of others; as in well-organized consumer brand communities (for IBM Thinkpad, for example) where members have deference for the opinions and judgments of other members. • *Plurality*: The state of being more than one; as in increasing number of ads showing people switching rapidly or blending work-pleasure roles, and in multiple cyber-identities of a person. • *Diversity*: Multiformity – the condition of being varied and diverse; as in the MTV show 'Real World Paris' with a hip cast that is diverse on many dimensions, including some biracial members.

Source: Authors' research.

'New York, New York' casino on the Las Vegas Strip. In Dubai, a city in the parched Arabian Desert, a colossal man-made island development, shaped like a palm tree and large enough to be seen from a spacecraft, is being built out into the gulf. More than doubling Dubai's beachfront, this (hyper)real oasis will eventu-

ally include 49 themed hotels, such as Balinese, Sicilian, and Mexican (Bennet, 2004). Postmodernist sensibility invites the (re)cognition that all social reality is constructed, and that the distinction between the real and the fantastic is more in the orientation one has towards one's surroundings than in the nature of those surroundings.

Closely connected to hyperreality is the condition of *fragmentation*. As reality becomes less a phenomenon that is 'out there', independent of and given to humans – thus possessing an order of its own, as many modern scientists envisioned – the chaos, the disjointedness, the disconnectedness of the elements and moments of life become increasingly noticeable. Indeed, many complain about the fact that their frenetic work lives and home lives pull them in multiple chaotic directions, and that it is difficult to find a common thread. Generally, this urge to find connections among disparate moments of existence, connections that coalesce into a single and uniform identity, is a modernist urge. Postmodernism frees the individual from such an obligation. Postmodernism, instead, calls for a playful, if critical, engagement with the potentials of experiencing different modes of being and finding meaning in the existence of the 'other' (Caputo, 1997), typically through participation in the construction of communities (Maffesoli, 1996).

This tendency of the postmodern is often misunderstood. When effects of the postmodern on the individual are discussed, often the inference is made that postmodernism has a tendency to over-individualize behavior (for examples in the marketing literature, see Fırat and Shultz, 1997; Holt, 2002; Thompson and Troester, 2002), and postmodernism gets admonished for this tendency. Quite the contrary, the postmodern is often the forceful return to/of community (Cova, 1999; Fırat and Dholakia, 1998; Maffesoli, 1996). The individual's quest for meaning and substance, and immersion into rich experiences that can afford these, are only possible through participation in and the active construction of communities. Multiplying communities spawn multiple cultures. That is, with the growth of the postmodern, the consumer transforms from someone who *belongs* to a culture, a society, or a lifestyle; to someone who actively *negotiates* one or more communities; a cultural constructor, and a *player* – in all senses of this last term (Bauman, 1996) – but always necessarily with(in) and as part of a community.

Another condition, *decentering of the subject*, resonates with fragmentation and hyperreality. This condition attests to the implausibility of the centrality of the human subject, assumed in modern thought. Postmodernism questions the supposed human control over human destiny, and over objects that surround humanity. Instead, postmodern discourse accentuates the control that the objects and constructed structures come to exert over the human subject (Baudrillard, 1983b; Foucault, 1973). In the end, there is confusion and confounding of the subject and the object. There is blurring of differences postulated between objects and the subjects in modernity. Specifically, the relationship between the subject and the object becomes complicated, rendering untenable the assumed superiority of the subject. Often, for example, objects exert power over the subjects as *objects of desire* (Baudrillard, 1990). Furthermore, examples of the objectification of human beings abound (Guilbert, 2002; Levine, 1998; Sacks, 1982). In post-

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modernist discourse, a playful engagement with the complexity (and frequent reversibility) of the object–subject relationship is suggested, rather than its simplification or repression into the modern duality of the superior subject versus the inferior object.

Such playful engagement with the complexity of the modernist opposition between subject and object is one example of the *paradoxical juxtaposition of opposites.* Postmodernism bristles with juxtapositions of all kinds: ideological oppositions, moral oppositions, and aesthetic oppositions. Postmodern architectural trends, such as abandoning the universalistic functionalism of modern architecture in favor of regionalist aesthetics (Frampton, 1983; Jencks, 1987b; Venturi et al., 1977), juxtapose architectural styles for playful aestheticism. Postmodern fashion juxtaposes clothing and grooming styles that were considered to be non-mixable in modernist sensibility (Kroker and Kroker, 1987). In effect, in postmodern culture there are no inviolable orders. Instead, experimentation with and tolerance for different, multiple orders are allowed and encouraged. Postmodernism promotes breaking free of the *representational* mode of confirming the received structures, orders, and norms of modernity. It engages instead in a *presentational* mode of suggesting the potentials and possibilities of including the 'other', the 'unrepresentable' and the unfamiliar (Caputo, 1997), in order to seek and explore the richness of substance and meaning that could be experienced in the present moments of life.

We agree with Fırat and Venkatesh (1995) that postmodern culture characterized by the conditions discussed is on the rise, but that we are experiencing a time of transformation with a waning modernity not yet defeated. The market is still very powerful and resilient, and while orders/theaters/cultures other than the market order are developing and in their infancy, the market exhibits great resourcefulness in co-opting elements of these attempts. We cannot say that postmodernity has blossomed before multiple orders – including the market order – are viable and experienced without being overwhelmed by the market. Orders – different organizations of life – continue to carry within their constituents modern and even pre-modern elements though often in revalorized forms. As Bouchet (1994) most eloquently expresses, the postmodern is not free of historical issues or disconcerting potentials; it only presents potentials of organizing life in modes free of a single emphasis, a single metanarrative.

The practice of marketing – especially in areas such as fashion, advertising, and entertainment – already revels in employing these postmodern sensibilities and conditions to grab attention, to shock, to amuse, to beguile, and to cajole. Our focus in this article is not on such practice, though we provide some examples of such practices (see Table 1).

Admittedly, the preceding description of postmodernism is painfully brief and necessarily inadequate. The reader is invited to explore and enjoy a vast literature to further understand the complex nature of this cultural turn. Significant works that provide entry into postmodernism are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Sources for further explorations of postmodern sensibilities

Condition or sensibility	Exemplar literature sources
Playful-critical engagement with new conditions	Kellner (1989); Kroker (1992); Ross (1988)
Folding-in of past and future into present	Barthes (1983); Harvey (1990); Kroker and Cook (1986); Vattimo (1992)
Abandonment of single grand project	de Certeau (1986); Lash (1990); Lyotard (1984 and 1992)
Hyperreality	Baudrillard (1983a); Deleuze and Guattari (1987); Eco (1986)
Fragmentation	Bauman (1995); Featherstone (1991); Jameson (1991); Newman (1986); Wilson (1989)
Decentering	Appadurai (1986); Derrida (1976); Fiske (1989); Hassan (1987); Kroker and Kroker (1987)
Juxtapositions	Foster (1985); Gottdiener (1995); Jencks (1987a); Kling et al. (1991); Soja (1997)
Difference	Caputo (1997); Derrida (1982); Nicholson (1990)

Note: In the interest of space, in this table we have limited the referencing to the most widely regarded main literature sources.

The metaphor of the theater

Postmodern culture, as discussed briefly above, presents challenges to the modern constitution of marketing, both in terms of theory and practice. The metaphor of the theater may enable us to further explore these challenges. Therefore, before going into specifics of postmodern challenges to modern marketing, we take a short digression into the metaphor of the theater.

The development of the modern theater offers interesting parallels to the development of the modern cultural order. Modern theater is a 'staging' of representational, artistic expressions of the human condition. It is a means of reflecting or representing the evocative aspects of humanity to 'spectators' for purposes of entertainment, education, reflection, or discussion. Modern theater is a detachment, a wrenching from pre-modern moments, of everyday life in which everyone participated. In modern theater, professionals came to re-present and reflect stylized moments of everyday contexts. The masses became an 'audience' rather than participants in the act. From the common ground that previously included everyone, an elevated 'stage' arose. The stage was accessible only to the professional actors and directed from the 'backstage', based on screenplays that became enduring through documentation. At its core, the institution of the modern market has a process that parallels the emergence of the modern theater.

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It is a process of converting common tradable and sharable objects into market-able 'products', and the *staging* of professional business and marketing practices through stylized, skilled acts of producing, packaging, communicating, and selling.

A steadily increasing range of activities in modern society has been thus staged, spawning and extending 'markets'. Specialized directors – the top managers – orchestrate from backstage. Professional, media-savvy actors perform on the commercial stage, excluding others from the stage. Like the spectators of modern theatrical plays, the masses can only become consumers/audience of the products of the stage. Their role is simply to cheer, buy, and vindicate what is produced and presented on the commercial stage; or to jeer, reject, and pan it. Such specializa-tion is justified via economic theory as well as other discourses. It is arguably a greater pleasure, and, at times more revealing and informative, to be exposed to talented 'actors' and 'playwrights' than it is to encounter the mediocre. Economically, it makes sense – the argument goes – for resources to be utilized efficiently by the trained, professional, 'productive' players.

Yet, sentiments of discontent grow with the relentless march of modernity (Bauman, 1997; Kaplan, 1988). Escalating modernity has led to expanding circles of exclusion, arguably to the detriment of the stage *as well as* the mass audience – the society as a whole – by creating increasing gaps in the (communicative) liter-acy of those who 'act' and the growing illiteracy of those who merely 'react'.[1] The producers and what is produced on the stage suffer due to the inability of the 'illiterate' to evaluate, involve, and challenge; thus, to provoke improvements towards excellence.[2] Eventually and ironically, even the professional, stage-managed productions become caricatures deploying vacuous 'MBA jargon' (Kellaway, 2005). The audience/consumers suffer by being denied the possibility of experiencing (being on) the stage. This denies them not only literacy, but also the richness of varied life experiences. In the marketing vernacular, marketers are impeded in the quest for a rising excellence of offerings, and the mass consumers are impeded from 'performing' creative acts.

Postmodernism seeks a better balance between the good of economic product-ivity and the richness of creative consumer literacy and life experience (Grossberg, 1992; Poster, 1990). Whether in arts or in business arenas such as marketing, post-modernism challenges the received logic of the stage. It seeks to enlarge the stage and make it inclusive. In marketing terms, postmodernism erodes the profes-sional layer of insulation between the corporation (the stage) and the marketplace (the audience). It spills the corporate decision process into public view and lets the consumers toggle – often via information technology – the stage props of market-ing tactics and act out their managerial and creative fantasies. Creators of virtual communities such as Friendster and Tribe.net, and to some extent *There* (see Box 3, p. 45), are letting their consumers chart their business models and their corporate destinies.

This development constitutes a challenge to the modern marketing model, wherein the marketing organization, charged with discovering and satisfying con-sumer needs, is seen to be very connected to – yet procedurally insulated from –

its consumers/customers. The postmodern impulse to enlarge the stage and include the participant consumer in organizational operations signals a substantive, often radical, transformation. This impulse is joined by specific challenges to the modern philosophy of marketing, six of which are discussed below.

Philosophical challenges to modern marketing

As the new sensibilities, emergent conditions, and the participative theaters of postmodernism come to permeate our existence and our frameworks of discourse and understanding, they will inevitably 'problematize' the core aspects of modern marketing that were invented and ensconced in the second half of the 20th century. Six 'problematized' areas deserve attention.

The nature of reality is problematized

The concept of hyperreality clearly presents a challenge to modern, structuralist conceptions of what is reality or truth. Modernity constituted a period in human history when social reality came to be *constructed*, at hitherto unprecedented levels. Yet, modern thought held tightly to the notion that reality was basically outside and independent of human action. A logical extension of this premise was that reality was unique, universal, and common to all. There were alternative philosophies of science that deviated from this premise, including hermeneutics, phenomenology, relativism, and pragmatism. These alternative ontologies were largely subdued in the heyday of modern culture by philosophies of science – such as positivism and falsificationism – that were more in tune with the modernist premise. It is quite recently that alternative philosophies have begun to make a comeback.

Postmodernism is a cultural movement that is most akin to a poststructuralist philosophy of science. This is a philosophy that does not problematize the existence of a shared or common reality or truth, but problematizes its construction. In poststructuralist terms, the truth we share is constructed on the basis of powerfully and effectively communicated images and imaginations, at times expressed as hype, simulation, or the imaginary. The structures of the reality we commonly share are built as a result of this imaginary, by permeating the conventions and perspectives through which communities view the world and their conditions within it, thus guiding and largely determining their actions. When large majorities act and think as if these structures (of law, society, technology, economy, politics, etc.) indeed exist, then they do come to 'exist', and members of the community are all subject to them. In this sense, the 'marketing concept' became a reality through the actions of leading corporations (Pillsbury, General Electric), later endorsed and codified by powerful academic thought.

In modern structuralist ontologies, structures that human beings encounter as their reality are given and can change only in accordance with the 'laws' inherent to the structures. Poststructuralism, on the other hand, posits that the structures

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of the encountered reality are culturally constructed and transformed. While some have tended to equate the poststructuralist orientation and relativism (see, for example, Hirschman and Holbrook, 1992; Rosenau, 1992), relativism (in a cultural sense) was already acknowledged in late structuralism. Poststructuralism goes beyond this – it rejects the structuralist epistemic quest for stable patterns in observed phenomena.

This distinction between the modern and postmodern-poststructuralist conceptions of reality or truth will inevitably have implications for how marketing is conceptualized and practiced. For example, consider the long-standing dispute about marketing's role in society: does marketing respond to the needs of the consumers who constitute the market, or does it shape these needs? Modern marketing's answer to this question has emphatically been that it responds to needs – or, at least in a teleological sense, it should. This emphatic answer is rooted in the structuralist-modern premise that human needs are given by the structure of human reality or nature. Therefore, any 'shaping' by marketing – or any other human activity for that matter – would constitute a violation of the truth or true nature of human needs. Marketing's role is simply to liberate or realize the needs. The postmodern sensibility removes this part of the guilt or incrimination since it is understood that much of this 'truth' about needs is constructed, following Foucault (1976/1990, 1988), who articulated that forms of subjectivity are culturally produced, not liberated or repressed. Rather, the issue becomes one of the nature and qualification of the role and responsibility of marketing in this construction.

A postmodern orientation to marketing, by placing the consumer directly on the stage, requires a change in the relationship between the marketing organization and its consumers. Instead of separate entities bound by exchange relationships, managers and consumers become partner-players in constructing needs, wants and desires, visions of and for human life, and life meanings. In this partnership, marketing could not be distanced or detached from the consumer – it is no longer a somewhat occult art accessible only to marketing professionals to *satisfy* consumer needs. It becomes a process available to consumers in order to *empower* and *enable* them to construct the realities they intend to experience through the construction of communities. *Consumer satisfaction* was the goal in modern marketing. With the new conditions, marketing would have to reorient its goal toward *consumer empowerment*; that is, marketing would become a tool of consumer communities to enable them further in constructing their particular modes of life or ways of organizing and experiencing life.

The nature of the human being is problematized

Modern discourse – in its political, social, psychological, and other dimensions – underscored the human individual's agency and autonomy. As the most intelligent, creative, and reasoned creatures on Earth, the humans were accorded a privileged status. Most important is the human ability to act according to one's own reasoning, on one's own behalf, based on autonomous volition independent

of other human beings. Others – sentient beings or inanimate things – are acted upon. That is, the human being, endowed with the ability to act on the basis of scientific knowledge and with reasoned deliberation, is a subject. This has been the essence of the modern individual's claim to freedom.[3] Others, the ones acted upon, are objects.

It is this aspect of modernity, specifically through its discourses of democracy and human agency, which inflamed the desire of the human individual to act, to demand to take part in shaping one's life and destiny. As a result, the contemporary individual seeks the realization of this promise, to be on the stage, to take part in the performances that shape life's experiences. There are, however, substantial obstacles to this quest in contemporary life.

Postmodern debates call into question this sacred and privileged, modern nature of the human being. Two essential assumptions that constitute the basis of all modern formulations of the human individual – the distinct separability of the subject and the object, and the distinct separability of the individual and the social – are questioned and in dispute (Giddens, 1991). Convincing arguments indicate that objects, mostly produced by humans, frequently take control of human lives, acting upon the subjects. Who or what is the subject and who or what the object thus often become blurred. Furthermore, human beings are often objectified by others or by social systems. Modern advertising and modern marketing have been frequently blamed for objectifying people (Ewen, 1988; Jhally, 1990; Kilbourne, 1997). As humans are dislodged from the privileged 'subject' pedestal, a more complex nature of being human emerges, one that does not fit easily into neatly discernible and clear categories. The construct of a reasoned and independent decision maker, which underlies much modern consumer research and marketing theory, is replaced by a reflexive yet connected being that incorporates a culturally constructed *complex of desire* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983; Gergen, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Lacan, 1977; Miller, 1993; Ricoeur, 1992).

Postmodern discourse regarding the complex of desire articulates the tension between the two modalities of human existence: the human being as the subject and the object. In the complex web of desiring and being desired (as the object of desire), controlling and acting upon others while being controlled and acted upon, the individual is constantly required to play this tension. For the most part, the consumer is 'subjected' to the desires that s/he encounters in the complex – positioned in this complex as an *object* of desires (Baudrillard, 1990; Deleuze and Guattari, 1983; Lacan, 1977). Via creative graphics and copy, perfume and liquor ads often take this to the extreme, with the human – almost always a woman – transmogrified into the intensely desired object, the perfume or the liquor.

The modern 'marketing orientation' and the 'marketing concept' insist that the consumer is eternally the *subject*, to be surrounded and served by offerings of *objects*. New postmodern perspectives of marketing need to acknowledge that marketing cannot be separated from the construction of the subject and her/his desires. Neither the subject nor her/his desires are independent of marketing. In effect, marketing is a 'co-conspirator' with consumer communities, both in the construction of the complex of desire and in the construction of the consumers'

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consciousness as subjects. In postmodern terms, marketing has the possibility of becoming a moment that empowers the consumer in constructing communities in and through which s/he is enabled to enhance meaning and substance in life. In this constructive mode of consumption is the birth of the *post-consumer*.

As we briefly mentioned earlier, the postmodern desire to construct and experience different forms of existence necessitates that the post-consumer be community or collective oriented. It is only through a collective that a mode of life, an order, or a textured and textual culture to be experienced can be constituted. A single individual cannot constitute a culture.

The nature of consumption is problematized

In modern thought, production constituted the activities where value was created, and consumption the activities where value was devoured and depleted. In postmodern consciousness such clear distinction of these two categories is seen as problematic and untenable. It is evident that meanings, identities, and experiences are *produced* in consumption. More importantly, even *economic value* is created only because of the production of signs and acts of signification in consumption (Baudrillard, 1975, 1981). The distinction between consumption and production – thought to be clear in modern discourse[4] – is now largely questioned. Postmodern debates have pointed to the condition that all human activity is *performative*, and needs to be considered as a moment in a perpetual cycle of production. Postmodernist arguments dispute an 'economistic' definition of value that privileges only certain outcomes of human activity – specifically, those factory, farm, and firm activities that produce 'products' that command exchange value in the market.

Consumers, therefore, may no longer be perceived as 'end users', located at the 'end' of value chains. They are producers as well – linked to each other and to firms in value-producing and value-transferring networks. If marketing is to be successful in its attempts to relate to consumers in a postmodern culture, 'marketers' (in the modern sense) have to rethink their conceptions and definitions of the consumer and consumption. Marketing has to be reconceptualized as a facilitator of processes for the consumers rather a supplier of finished products (Fırat et al., 1995).

It could be argued that no product offered to the consumer was ever a finished product, that consumption has always been a process of transforming the product from the very moment that a consumer takes possession of the product. Consider, as an example, a consumer taking possession of a new car. Almost immediately, s/he begins to redesign the product by not only (re)arranging the seats, the glove compartment, the radio channels and trunk contents, but also by adding accessories such as sunglass holders, fuzzy dice, sun shades, cell phone jacks, steering covers, seatbelt sleeves, bumper stickers, and infant seats. In modern marketing, however, this *consumer's processing of the automobile* is considered 'outside' of the marketer's domain, and only minor attention paid to what is considered a separate auto-accessories market. With the changing orientation toward

consumption, and the transformation of the consumer to post-consumer (discussed next), this 'designing one's consumption' impulse of the consumer will strengthen. The already popular 'built-to-order' techniques (e.g. Dell computers) are likely to pave the way for 'design-to-order' and even 'invent-to-order' methods. Marketing organizations, therefore, will have to involve post-consumers increasingly in the design of products at earlier and earlier stages of their development – not simply as researched subjects, but as active participants (See Box 1, 'Playground of the Post-Consumer: eBay'). Trends observed toward what has been termed mass customization (Pine, 1999) can be considered steps that already move us in this direction.

Box 1

Playground of the post-consumer: eBay

One of the most popular and profitable e-commerce sites is eBay. In many respects, eBay is the quintessential playground of the empowered post-consumer, a postmodern arena where the buyer-seller roles are in constant flux and the participants are seizing the marketing processes through a variety of communities:

- 'With a $23-billion market, eBay is now worth more than Kmart, Toys R Us, Nordstrom, and Saks combined. eBay is so effective because its owners understand postmodern culture . . . eBay may just be the closest experience of small-town America available to postmoderns. Where else can they find people with similar interests (whale oil lamps, in my case)? Where else can they be drawn into community around a single purpose? Where else can they tell the stories most central to who they are and find people eager to hear them? Where else can they participate so fully and have their lives changed by the experience?' (Sweet, 1999)
- 'Via . . . eBay, SAG, e-Books, and Napster . . . not only are consumers able to access many genres of art free from the barriers of time and space, but they are also able to both produce and edit using digital media tools. Moreover, they are then able to become part of the flow of creation and consumption in a cumulative feedback loop' (Robinson and Halle, 2002).
- 'When [Meg Whitman, eBay CEO] was asked [at a forum in mid-1999] how eBay plans to use all the invaluable market information they have about their 3.8 million customers – buying patterns, special interests, etc. – she answered that they don't plan to use it at all. Doing so would conflict with eBay's primary mission – which appears to be to trust the customer, to empower the customer, to treat the customer with absolute courtesy and respect, and to earn the customer's loyalty and trust by always, always doing what the customer would want them to do' (Ferguson, 1999).

Of course, eBay is not all roses all the way. There have been problems of fraud, fake goods, payments not being sent, censoring of content, and so on. But despite some minor setbacks, this postmodern cybernetic flea market, this huge somewhat chaotic electronic agora, continues to thrive. In fact, eBay is the largest and most profitable of all e-commerce companies – and it hardly does any form of traditional media advertising. eBay essentially thrives because of the actions of its millions of members – the post-consumers who buy, sell, bid, rate, comment on, and watch the goings-on on eBay.

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The nature of the consumer is problematized

With reconsideration of the nature of the human being and the nature of consumption, it is logical that the nature of the consumer is also problematized. As mentioned, with the consumer no longer simply a devourer of value, but – especially as a member of a consumption community – a producer of meanings, life experiences, identities, and value, marketing theory needs to rethink the orientation and purpose of the consumer. The modern consumers, consistent with modern definitions of affluence and the good life, sought to amass and surround themselves with material goods. The consumer's relationship to these goods was from a detached perspective. From such a perspective, one could reason and judge whether these products were needed and/or if they enhanced one's affluence, provided greater control over the impositions of nature, improved comfort, and enhanced the conditions of life and happiness. It is clear that at times this reasoned consumer lost control through emotions (Belk, 1987). This, however, was usually considered an aberration, sometimes criticized, but mostly humored. The ideal modern consumer was considered to be one who maximized his/her material consumption through a dispassionate, detached reasoning about the value of his/her acquisitions.

The postmodern consumer (post-consumer), on the other hand, is emerging to be less concerned about the material values and more interested in the experiential values of activities. The postmodern sensibility seems to induce an interest in the substance and meaning of *present* experiences, rather than in the material affluence afforded by acquisitions and their promised value toward the realization of a grand *future* (Kozinets, 2002).

As such, the post-consumer seeks immersion into textual and textured experiences. Cultural themes are often best at providing the complex text and texture that allow impressive immersion into experience. Such themes and the resulting experiences, therefore, are much sought. Invocation of a cultural theme requires the presence of a community of participants; it cannot be evoked individually nor can it be an individual experience. Consequently, post-consumers are active constructive participants in and seekers of community, be they face-to-face or virtual (Fırat and Dholakia, 1998; Kozinets, 2002). Immersion in these thematic experiences enables the full range of sensory perception, giving the consumer a chance to extract rich meaning and evoke substance. Furthermore, post-consumers tend to become players in meaning construction, either through involvement in (interpretive) consumer communities (Fish, 1980) or through their own deconstruction of consumption texts (Stern, 1998). The goal of the post-consumer is not to get caught in any one culture or mode of existence, but to *navigate* different ones – to explore and discover possible alternative meaningful ways of being, thus enriching the process of living. Arrival at a singular end is not the postmodern way; there is no one single project to be completed as was the case in modernity. Instead, to keep enriching the sum of experiences and the production of meaning(s), continual motion is sought. For the post-consumer, therefore, *motion* and *speed* – seen in modernity as the

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means to arrive at an end – seem to have become ends in themselves (Fırat, 2001).

These qualitative transformations – in which growing numbers of consumers seek – signal substantive changes in the nature of the consumer. These changes portend major implications for marketing theory and practice. For example, an immediately obvious implication relates to marketing not as a provider of products, but as a partner in constructing community cultures (McAlexander et al., 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Some marketing trends and practices already foreshadow the future. Consider the Benetton experiment where the organization markets not only clothing that its customers seek, but also a set of philosophical orientations. Benetton's oft-controversial advertising campaigns portray values and issues that Benetton owners think its customers wish to uphold or experience (Ganesan, 2002). In a very loose sense, these orientations foster a culture that people of the 'Benetton community' share and, at times, actively engage in. In the contemporary environment of modern marketing-led experiences, this approach may seem as far as an organization can go. The consumer, in this case, has little chance to be active orchestrator of marketing decisions. Yet, the post-consumer communities will demand such active engagement in the designing of the culture's symbols and meanings, as well as in the designing of products that are part of this construction. Marketing will need to become a process of partnership in this quest, rather than a staged performance of tasks in the name of the consumers. Evolving information technologies will play an important role in this reformation of marketing. Peer-to-peer technologies – shunned, reviled, persecuted, and as a last resort co-opted by large corporations – offer a glimpse into the types of technologies that communities of post-consumers are likely to embrace (see Box 2, 'Toolkit of the Post-Consumer: P2P Technologies').

In the academic literature in marketing, and especially its sister discipline, consumer research, the topics of consumer's position in the market and human agency have recently received some attention, following some critical theory work (Fırat et al., 1987; Murray and Ozanne, 1991) and work that critically assesses postmodern trends (Cova, 1999; Fırat and Dholakia, 1998; Fırat and Venkatesh, 1995; Holbrook, 1993), as well as more postmodern perspectives (Brown, 1995). There are a number of publications that report empirical studies regarding the condition of consumers as human agents in market societies (Holt, 2002; Kozinets, 2001, 2002; Thompson and Arsel, 2004; Thompson and Troester, 2002). In some of these theoretical and empirical works, Thompson observes a tendency to see the consumer agent identity as an 'inside or outside the marketplace' (Thompson, 2004: 172) issue. Instead, he advocates a Foucauldian view of power and resistance to provide more accurate insights into the complex and multiple forms of resistance and agency. Yet, Thompson's article itself highlights further problems that generally plague contemporary research and thinking on the issues of agency and the market. Typically, this research is done with a focus on individual consumers, and a clear conceptual distinction between the individual and the social – a contentious distinction at best – is assumed. Furthermore, these consumers are assumed to inhabit a single order – the market order – within which, then, their actions and thoughts are investigated. Consequently, such

Box 2

Toolkit of the post-consumer: P2P technologies

P2P technologies refer to a class of computerized applications that takes advantage of decentralized resources operating in an environment of unstable connectivity and unpredictable network addresses. To operate in such a manner, P2P nodes must have significant or total autonomy from centralized computers or 'servers' (Shirky, 2000).

P2P technologies came into prominence with Napster, the peer-to-peer (P2P) music sharing technology invented by a teenager that took the Internet by storm. It elicited a massive wave of retaliation from the entrenched music marketers (represented by RIAA, Recording Industry Association of America). Napster was vanquished in courts, and its assets acquired by the European media giant Bertelsmann. But the P2P genie unleashed by Napster cannot be bottled up again.

In the words of one young partisan of P2P technologies (Shaw, 2003):

We are the digital generation. Computer technology has empowered us . . . . We evolve and grow in this matrix of information, shifting . . . to the postmodern perception of a liquid architecture experienced like music.

Napster is no coincidence. Napster was not a false alarm. Napster was not an anomalous phenomenon. The peer-to-peer networking model is the next generation of information immersion technology. In one fell swoop, Napster managed not only to redefine the media and technology industries, but to also begin redefining media perception.

Established corporate marketers do not always take an adversarial position vis-à-vis P2P. When Apple Computers launched its iPod digital music recorder-player, it exhorted consumers to 'rip, mix, burn', i.e., to copy music (rip), blend it with other digital content (mix), and publish the reformatted music (burn) for self-consumption and sharing (Lessig, 2001). Of course, the very same Apple Computers designs its equipment to block any 'rip, mix, burn' processes for Hollywood movies, many of which use Apple-developed technologies to prevent unauthorized copying (Bowrey and Rimmer, 2002; Lessig, 2001). P2P technologies such as Grokster and Morpheus became so popular and began encroaching on mainstream markets that a major legal challenge was filed against them by 28 music and movie producing companies. In 2005 U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the movie and music majors, and against the company that made Grokster and Morpheus. This was expected to set the stage – at least for some period – for capitalist modern markets to jump on the P2P bandwagon and provide fee-based rather than free community-shared content – as also revenue-generating devices, software, and file sharing mechanisms.

research falls short in recognizing the cultural and social implications of studied phenomena. Yet, thinking within the confines of *an* order inevitably results in emphasizing either the dominant elements of this order or the pockets of resistance and difference in it. What is missed in these theoretical discourses and empirical studies are the trends toward the development of multiple orders in

contemporary globalization: issues of agency have to be re-thought with this realization. Within each order there are bound to be institutionalized disparities of power, no matter how diffused and complex the distribution of power is, and a set of privileged ways of thinking and acting will prevail, thus constituting *an order*; and resistance to hegemonic elements can only be exceptional and momentary until the order is transformed. Therefore, any potential of greater – although never complete – human agency lies in the construction and navigation of multiple orders, a feat that is only collectively possible.

The nature of organizations and business is problematized

Changing consumers and consumption in turn problematizes the nature of organizations and business. In modern conceptualizations, there is a distinct separation of the organizational entity from its consumers/customers. An organization exists to provide for the needs of its consumers (its market). Modern social, political, and legal structures drew the boundaries of and afforded certain rights to these organizational entities. In return, the organizations were expected to satisfy an array of human needs, thus serving a societal purpose. The business firm was an organizational entity with a legal, almost anthropomorphic character; separate with clear boundaries from others in society.

The changing nature of the consumer and the concomitant restructuring of relations between the organization and its consumers will force us to reexamine the modern concept of an organization and its distinct, bounded form. As they become producers of their identities, experiences, and life meanings, consumers increasingly demand an active role in the determination of the attributes and features of the products with which they must interact to accomplish such symbolic and experiential production. Thus, they increasingly demand to be a part of the processes that construct these products, rather than acting as choice-makers among the finished products that organizations proffer. Where do 'organizations' end and 'consumers' begin if the consumers have access to critical organizational processes? Are consumers who have control of the processes and operations of the organization (all the way up to business definition and R&D), and are active players in the determination of the products that the organization will produce, merely 'consumers'? With such relationships, boundaries no longer exist, and the nature of organizations is transformed. Organizations are not in business to satisfy consumers, but consumers are 'in business' – through the resources and processes corralled by the organizations.

The consumers' quest for new life experiences and identities further impels organizations to change. New kinds of organizations are required to create the new or alternative modes of life, experiences, and identities that consumers seek to navigate. Organizations have to become agile to provide the constant motion and speed that increasingly become the ends, all for the production of richer meanings and substance that consumers want in their lives. The postmodern organization has to allow for constructions of the modes of life that can be experimented with, sampled, and dropped – either permanently or transiently – with

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open possibilities for periodic revisits if consumers so desire. It is, therefore, no longer possible to simply think of the sequential, linear marketing process wherein: (1) organizations *first* gather information about consumers' needs and wants, and (2) *then* try to produce offerings to satisfy these. Increasingly, organizations will have to become real-time partners of and facilitators for consumers in the consumers' quest to construct and present new and alternative needs and wants. In this sense, organizations will become not providers but co-constructors – in 'business with' the post-consumers.

Specifically, with the transformation of the consumer to post-consumer, the modes of information exchange between an organization and its 'customers' are likely to transform. In terms of marketing research, for example, organizations are likely to take on a facilitator role in research rather than the role of an observer. Rather than organizations having research teams that go out to discover what consumers want and need, what their attitudes are, how they decode and/or interpret symbols, etc., market researchers will increasingly act as facilitators for post-consumers. More likely, post-consumer communities would construct and experiment with potential modes of living and being, potential cultures – to be sampled and molded by these communities – by using ideas, resources (including space and time), environments, and processes that are provided jointly by organizations and consumers. Initial examples already exist, as in the case of the Electronic Café – where technology firms provide prototype products to consumers who, in the Electronic Café, 'play' with and develop the products and their preferred uses, thus constructing emergent modes of living (Galloway and Rabinowitz, 1989) – and online gaming communities (see Box 3, 'Online Games: Collaborative Terrain, Contested Rights'). Box 3 provides a flavor of the highly problematized character of the organization and the community when questions about who 'owns' user-created content come up.

The nature of communication is problematized

We are all aware of the importance of communication in modernity, and, especially, its momentous impact on contemporary culture through the new information and communications technologies. Transformations in the nature of communication and its role in (post)modern society are more substantive than merely the technological novelties encountered daily. In modern culture, communications served two crucial – that is, crucial to modernity – purposes: *information*, which assured improvements in production, and *entertainment* (Dholakia et al., 1996).

Despite some emphasis on feedback loops, modern communication was essentially unidirectional. That is, the communicator encoded a message that was intended for transmittal by putting together a predetermined set of signs to be sent through a predetermined set of media. Feedback meant that the receiver of this communication would, then, perform similar tasks – following the decoding of the received message. The concept was that communicators sent messages to audiences, the encoder of the message controlling – or attempting to control – its

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Box 3

Online games: collaborative terrain, contested rights

At the present juncture, certain Multi-person Online Role-playing Games (MORGs) portend the shape of postmodern marketing patterns where organizations and post-consumers jointly produce things of value. Early versions of MORGs were noncommercial Internet sites, known as Multi-User Domains (MUDs) or MOO (MUD Object Oriented). Computer-savvy students often ran these game sites from university-based servers.

MUDs and MOOs are virtual reality environments that foster synchronous communication and allow for creative building of virtual spaces. Every MUD has its own name, special theme, ambiance, and set of rules. Participants present themselves to others by adopting or creating virtual personae or 'avatars' when they join or log in to a MUD.

Many such game environments have now become commercialized. Sony operates EverQuest, one of the largest such games, and Microsoft has a MORG called *Asher's Call* (Taylor, 2002).

These games are richly crafted virtual spaces – in fact, lifeworlds in which users spend a substantial part of their lives. Users (consumers) come together in such virtual spaces and invest enormous time and effort in terms of developing their 'avatars' (virtual onscreen characters), endowing each avatar with not just a name and a 'look' (dress, armor, weaponry) but also a history, a personality, geography, speech patterns, connections, and relationships.

Disputes and legal battles have arisen about who owns the rich virtual content – not just of individual avatars but of the community and culture resulting from the interactions of avatars and the gaming environment. Thus far, corporations like Sony have been quite successful in imposing their will – indeed; EverQuest has employed the tag line 'You're in Our World Now'. Sony has also prevailed upon eBay to close down auctions whereby users sell their well-developed avatars (in effect, a player account) and other digital content to others for cash. But, like the file swapping in the field of music, such auctions and trades continue in somewhat covert ways.

As of now, while MORGs and similar virtual environments do represent postmodern marketspaces where organizations and game users (post-consumers) jointly produce things of value, corporate marketers are fighting hard to prevent the players and their communities from 'owning' the rights to their digital creations (Taylor, 2002). Game developers, however, are often young software rebels who share the culture of game players. In the very near future, virtual environments – where players and their communities have rights to their digital creations – are expected to hit the gaming market.

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meaning, to convey as precisely as possible what one intended to communicate. The originator and author of the communication had, in theory, the responsibility and the power to determine the meaning of the message. Feedback was sought for the purposes of encoding the message with excellent knowledge and insight about the receiver (the decoder), so that the result of the decoding would convey exactly what the author wished to convey.

Postmodernist discourse suggests that this modern communication model may be illusory, in theory and in practice (Christensen, 1997). Communication is revealed to be not simply a means of conveying messages to others, but a process of constructing and recognizing the self. It is further revealed that the meaning of the communicated message is always a matter of negotiation and contention among the author, the reader (the receiver), and the culture. Thus, communication needs to be understood as the mutual construction of symbolic meaning(s), a process of partnership between the marketer and the consumer. The transformation in the nature of the consumer, from a choice-maker among available products to a producer actively involved in production, transforms what is to be communicated. Such a post-consumer becomes integral to the production of symbolic meanings, not only in terms of constructing meanings of identity and life experiences but also – in and through these meanings – registering and recognizing the value of the products of 'production'. Marketing communications, under such conditions, are produced as much on Main Street as they are on Madison Avenue. Brand equity becomes a shared asset, between the organization and the post-consumers (see Box 3). In the field of political marketing, this is already evident in the creation and constant adaptation of the presidential candidate brands. Electronic bulletin boards, electronic fund raising, and electronically coordinated 'flash' crowds actively shape political candidacies and campaigns.

In postmodern sensibility, communication is not separate from the experience of life. Communication is not a detached 'function' or 'act' of relating information, upon which consumers act and have experiences that produce meaning and substance. In every instance, communication is an integral and inseparable part of the life experience. Under conventional modern framing, for example, advertising communicates information about a product. This is separate from whether the consumer purchases and consumes the product. If the consumer does not consume the product, the advertising has not been effective. If the consumer does consume the product, s/he has experiences with the product, at least partially because of the information s/he received from advertising. These experiences with the product, however, are in the moment of consumption, separate from the moment of communication(s) about the product through advertising. There are two distinct moments: the advertising moment and the consumption moment. In this conventional sense, watching, reading, or listening to an advertisement is one thing; and consumption of the product is another. While each may be partially influenced by the other, they are their own separate spheres.

Discussions of informational versus transformational advertising (Puto and Wells, 1984) have already challenged this conventional logic. In many cases advertising is transformational in the sense that the experience with the product is transformed or different because of the exposure to advertising – from what it would have been had there been no exposure to advertising. That is, advertising influences not only whether the consumer does or does not consume the product, but also how s/he consumes the product, the actual experience of consuming the product, and the emotions and meanings that are produced in the moment of consumption.

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Postmodern sensibility takes this integration of the communication act with consumption of the product a step further and embeds both within the cultural experience. Both advertising and product consumption are integral parts of the cultural experience, which produces – for the navigators of this culture – a textual and textured sense of living and being. Even advertising, the form of communication most singled out and often vilified by its modernist critics as an intrusive and manipulative 'business activity', is not a separable activity. Advertising is a part of the total experience of a mode of life. All meanings and communicative elements – negative or positive, manipulative or supportive – are embedded in the cultural experience that is co-produced by marketers and the post-consumer navigators of that cultural community. Marketing communication, therefore, in the postmodern, cannot be imagined as an organization's effort to relay information to its consumers; it has to be construed as a matter of joint production with the post-consumer communities.

As the discussion above shows, each 'problematization' induced by postmodern conditions poses transformational challenges to marketing theory and practice. The need is for not just simple adjustments or modifications in how the modern marketing concept (Bagozzi, 1975; Kotler, 1972) is defined or practiced, but for some radical reconstruction of the concept of marketing. Because of the evolving character of postmodern conditions, such reconstruction is difficult to imagine fully or elaborate all at once. It is nonetheless possible to identify some major aspects of this reconstruction. To remain relevant in a new cultural order, it is becoming imperative for the field of marketing to consider such potential reconstruction. This is taken up in the following section.

Some new directions for marketing

Those areas of marketing practice that have strong cultural features are already responding to, and may indeed be reveling in, the emerging postmodern conditions (see Table 1). While acknowledging these practical trends, we want to turn our attention to the theoretical reshaping of marketing that is called for by the six postmodern challenges listed in the previous section.

A radical reconstruction of marketing means that the core marketing concept, which ultimately determines its practice, is reconstituted. Two issues have dominated the discussions of the modern marketing concept: *exchange* and *consumer centeredness* (Bagozzi, 1975; Kotler, 1972). We shall discuss the various implications of the challenges we see in terms of how these two aspects of the modern marketing concept will likely be affected. These implications are framed in terms of four portending transitions that marketing theory is likely to experience.

From distinct business activity to embedded cultural practice

The postmodern challenges discussed above portend the recognition that marketing (was and always) will (continue to) be a human practice embedded in the

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culture of the mode of life experienced by communities. This may possibly signal the most substantive transformation in the meaning of marketing. The corollary of this recognition is, to say the least, unsettling. Conceptualizing marketing as the activity of finding out what consumers need, organizing resources, designing a product that fits the image of the need, communicating its presence, and making it available to the consumers – these have most likely reached their end. That is, the modern marketing concept would no longer be a viable idea. Instead, the concept of *embedded marketing* has to emerge, where the firm is part of the community to facilitate the efforts of consumer communities to mutually construct their desires and the products. These products are to help realize the cultures that enable enrichment of meaning and substance, thus, enchantment of lives.

In effect, what may be transpiring is the dissolving of the organization, its blurring due to the melting away of its boundaries as discussed earlier. Rather than a professional business practice controlled by managers to serve its consumers and stakeholders, marketing develops into an openly accessible practice of the post-consumer communities.[5] The concept of business is in flux. It is also changing from a distinct form of activity by 'incorporated' entities to everyday practices by all entities.

In the modern order that demarcated markets and corporations, marketing and marketers largely performed a boundary task. In informing the organization of the needs of the consumers and informing consumers about the products of the organization, marketing constituted the 'membrane' linking the organ(ization) to the larger body (market). The very existence of this specialized membrane confirmed and affirmed the organ(ization)'s separate existence. In the transformation to the postmodern, this membrane is seen to be expanding, rupturing, dissolving, and fusing with both sides: the organ(ization) and the market. With the dissolving membrane, post-consumer communities are emerging as the new conjoined, conglomerate entities of the postmodern era. Thus, in its very dissolution, marketing is becoming the most pronounced moment in everyday life. The dissolving membrane is flavoring both sides – organizations and the post-consumer communities.

Recognition of this occurrence is not simply a marketer's indulgence in self-importance. The modern marketing impulse, as partially exposed in Hirschman (1983), may not fully be able to respond to all dimensions of the human existence. In effect, an extension of the discussion by Hirschman reveals some essential paradoxes in the nature of modern marketing. As many non-marketing scholars recognize (see, for example, Jameson, 1991; Jhally, 1990; Morley and Robins, 1995; Wang et al., 2000), in late modernity marketing has already taken center stage, largely replacing democracy; just as the consumer has replaced the citizen (Moyers, 1989). The modern marketing concept has, indeed, become the logic and the justification of/for contemporary representational democracy. Marketing has moved way beyond the pale of marketers. The 'success' of market economies, the growing size of the populations of democratic societies, and the professionalization of politics all point to the silent triumph of modern marketing. These have all contributed to the popularization of the idea that the most efficient form of

democracy is when a government undertakes fulfillment of its constituencies' needs in the style of a marketing (business) organization. This is the infusion of business and marketing perspectives into politics and democracy. We also observe its infusion into education, for example, where students are conceived as 'customers'. Be they on the politicians' or the deans' marketing teams, the roles of pollsters and polls (and rating services) are growing. In this displacement of democracy by marketing and citizen by consumer, a key difference between the two may often get lost. Democracy has necessarily been a process of citizen agency; that is, the citizenry acting on its visions and ideals for a meaningful life. Marketing on the other hand, as a *modern* business practice, consists of organizations catering to consumers and acting on the consumers' behalf, but focused on the organization's (economic) success as much as, if not more than, on the satisfaction of the consumers' desires. When democracy is reconceptualized in the *modern* marketing mode, it reduces the citizen (consumer) from a constructor producing the alternatives to a choice-maker among alternatives offered in her/his name. In such marketing-laced 'poll-itics', there is found an individualization of the desires and acts of the citizen (consumer). Whereas the active citizen-constructor requires a community to produce a cultural/political experience, the citizen-consumer needs a television set and a clicking device to make choices.

The advent of the post-consumer and of *embedded* marketing hold the prospect of re-empowering the consumer as well as the citizen, but in ways that would transcend the modern experience of democracy, thus, without its limitations inherent in the representational form. In embedded marketing shaped by post-modern sensibilities, marketing would reemerge as the empowering 'tool' of the post-consumer. Rather than in a democracy-diluting, consumerizing form, post-consumers and embedded marketing would tend to reestablish democracy in a form that is viable – based on the constitution of new orders/theaters/cultures by post-consumer communities or tribes (Cova, 1999; Fırat and Dholakia, 1998; Maffesoli, 1996).[6]

Indeed, the rhetoric of 'free markets' and 'consumer democracies' currently much in vogue proves impracticable. Democracy is not viable simply on the basis of voting – at the ballot box or through market choice – among alternatives faced. Despite indications that consumers are expressing political ideology through consumption (Crockett and Wallendorf, 2004), democracy can only be had if the choices people make are not based only on reactions to alternatives, but on well reflected upon, generated, argued and counter-argued idea(l)s that entail listening to and reflecting upon all – especially the minority – points of view. Without such discourse and consideration, voting and free elections can only deliver a 'tyranny of the majority', not democracy. It is in this sense that empowerment of post-consumer communities can be envisioned; embedded marketing's role is to support such communities construct, consider, experiment with and reflect upon new orders that can enrich life experiences, and thereby meaning and substance of life. Yet, postmodernity's success in delivering this promise is neither certain nor automatic (Fırat et al., 1994), and mishaps along the postmodern turn are possible (Bouchet, 1994).

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From managed to collaborative marketing

Modern marketing, in its organization-centered form, reinforced the advent of management. Efficiency, in catering to consumers' needs – as defined in modern economic terms – while assuring the organization's economic success, was a tightrope act. It required a rational, ordered, and systematic running (i.e. management) of tasks and people, rather than a freehanded and chaotic delegation of decisions and actions to each task performer. This orientation, of course, was very much in accord with modernity's impulse for order; an order that would enable the realization of modernity's project: construction of a grand future for humanity. The early 20th century witnessed the entrenchment of the management era. Keynesianism was the management of the economy by governments, Fordism and Taylorism represented the management of the labor force and the production line. For marketing, the entrenchment of management came much later – beginning in the 1950s and 1960s – but with cogent sophistication (Kotler, 1967; McCarthy, 1960). The marketing acts, on the center stage, had to be provided with scripts and direction from the backstage (management) to make such acts effective, visible, comprehensible (i.e. understood and easily followed), and likable by the audience (the market). Haphazard, unscripted, and chaotic acts would result in inefficient use of time and other resources on the stage, as well as in the audience losing interest and walking away from the performance.

To the modern, ordered sensibility, the necessity of management – by those capable and professionally trained – seemed logical; and still does. This is not a loss of democracy; it is efficient 'management'. For modern marketing, this is not a divorcing of the consumers from their abilities to create and construct. Rather, well-managed marketing processes are a way of freeing consumers from burdensome tasks of construction – tasks that they could not effectively or efficiently perform anyway – by providing what consumers would have constructed in the first place. Postmodern sensibility refutes this seemingly logical conclusion. Postmodern thinking finds the idea of professionally managed marketing acts as illusory as representing the consumers. Postmodernism expresses skepticism about the notion that consumers can still maintain effective control of the stage while not being deeply involved in the performance.

To heed the call of the postmodern, marketing would have to develop a collaborative rather than a managerial mode. That is, marketing would need to collaborate, as a partner, with post-consumer communities in constructing their modes of life. Marketing's role would be facilitating and coordinating the efforts of the community's members. This is a co-performer, not a provider role. The shape of such collaborative marketing is just emerging, particularly in technology-aided arenas – in multiperson online games (Box 3), friends-of-friends electronically aided networks (such as Friendster and MySpace), some forms of 'reality TV', virtual market-oriented communities, 'flash' meeting tools such as Meetup.com, certain types of 'blogs', and so on. Research attention is needed on these collaborative formats as they evolve.

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From centralized to diffused marketing

Postmodern marketing becomes increasingly a domain of post-consumer communities, rather than that of organizations. Increasingly, the membrane stretches but also dissolves; there is growing interchange between the marketers and the post-consumer communities, to the point that the two blend into one. Osmosis turns into intermingling. Marketing becomes everyone's activity, and the post-consumer is a marketer, constantly involved in the imagination, creation, and performance of desires to be experienced as modes of living. Marketing is emancipated from being the somewhat occult practice of professionally anointed managerial cadres, organized and ensconced in 'firms', to become an omnipresent essence of transactional and exchange-oriented human activity. Such a change, as it unfolds, would be no less dramatic than the impact of the Gutenberg press, which moved cloistered knowledge into public spaces.

From ordered to complex marketing

A diffused marketing increasingly moves away from a hierarchically ordered form, and, eventually, away from any form in which *an* order can be detected. Rather, marketing is likely to exhibit the form of a complex system with fluidity of orders, resembling a neural network that constantly re(de)constructs itself. As different post-consumer communities (re)(de)construct their modes of being, marketing will have to exhibit a fluid resilience in adapting to these changing modes.

The role of technology, especially infotainment technologies, in enabling these transformations, is paramount. We have already pointed to the incipient effects of electronic communities of buyers-sellers (Box 1), content swapping technologies (Box 2), and game playing environments (Box 3) in challenging or dismantling long-held notions of modern marketing. Other technologies, such as mobile communications and networked appliances, are also transforming various 'consumption' arenas – homes, vehicles, shopping centers, parks, streets – into arenas where post-consumers can, if they so desire, engage in various acts of researching, designing, engineering, producing, and communicating. Peer-to-peer and virtual community technologies will continue to usurp nicely ordered marketplace hierarchies. Marketers – to the extent such an appellation could still be applicable to professionally managed organizational entities (rather than to all 'literate' post-consumer communities) – who corral and make accessible relevant resources and facilitate conjoint processes involving post-consumers, would be the 'winners' in the postmodern games.

Altogether, the above imply that marketing's role will increasingly be to facilitate the means for the playful (co-)construction of theaters, textual and textured cultures to be made, and remade, to allow post-consumers to have a performative engagement with life.

Conclusions and future research needs

If the postmodern conditions we have portended become an encompassing reality, marketing as we know it today would no longer exist. In that sense, we would have an end of marketing. Yet, embedded marketing – the process whereby *human (post-consumer) communities imagine, construct, and experience meaningful and substantive modes of life* – would burgeon and thrive. These new processes would affect not just material life but, as already mentioned, also merge with and reconstitute the very processes of democracy.

Our explorations into the challenges that postmodern discourses and culture invoke for modern marketing have produced several insights into potential transformations in concept and practice. Of these, two conceptual developments may be most central: (1) the shift in orientation from consumer satisfaction to consumer empowerment, and (2) the replacement of the marketing concept by embedded marketing. Both constitute difficult transformations, seemingly incompatible with entrenched modern business theory and practice. Such shifts entail rupture-causing reconceptualizations and actions (performances).

Both of the shifts mentioned in the above paragraph mean that marketing can be expected to diffuse out of the cloistered realm of professional 'organizations' and become an integral part of everyone's everyday life. Specifically with the development of organizations without boundaries, embedded marketing will be an activity that everyone performs. In effect, we can expect a de-professionalization of marketing; in the sense that everyone becomes a marketing professional, everyone is required or expected to become informed in marketing know-how. Embedded marketing is everyone's domain. It can be expected to become part of general education, where all are required to be educated in the understanding and practice of processes 'whereby human (post-consumer) communities imagine, construct, and experience meaningful and substantive modes of life'. Just as in modern education all are instructed in social topics, language and grammar, geography, and mathematics, they would also be instructed in embedded marketing – which, eventually may come to be called something else; it is the performative construction of life meanings. To some extent, such a shift in education is already occurring: marketing-like courses and projects are being injected in K-12 curricula, as well as in college courses *outside* the business schools in universities.

This performative construction will be especially intensified when anyone consciously initiates, facilitates and organizes discourses and performances for the construction of community(ies) and experience(s) for the production of desires toward constitution of meaning and substance. This may give rise to the question of what the transformations discussed mean for marketing practitioners and marketing scholars. On the one hand, everyone becomes a marketing practitioner; thus, no one is particularly a marketing practitioner. On the other hand, similar to all other activities shared by everyone – such as shopping, cooking, and driving – some people may have a special interest in marketing and spending more time in activities of initiating, facilitating and organizing marketing discourses and performances. Everyday 'gourmets' and 'experts' of marketing will appear on the

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scene, demystifying the arcane aspects of marketing. They may, as a result, develop some talent and knowledge of marketing beyond others and take on community responsibilities similar to politicians or social activists.

One major difference in this marketing 'de/re-professionalization' from the modern marketing profession would be that such 'practitioners' would be responsible to their communities, not to organizations in the modern sense. Just as lawyers can be found in settings as diverse as multinational corporations and community action groups, (postmodern) 'professional' marketers would work in myriad and diverse settings. For marketing scholars and researchers, the audience would not just be 'business' organizations but the society in general, making them social scientists rather than 'business' academics.

Also important may be the necessary recognition that whatever talents and knowledge the new marketing practitioners develop, they are not likely to follow any unified set of principles and/or criteria of efficiency or success. The presence of different communities constructing varied life modes and cultures is likely to mean that there will be multiple orders of principle and efficiency. In effect, post-consumers will encounter not an order that dominates and betters all others, but an *order of multiple orders*.

These are not unfathomable transformations. Nor are they fantasies – evidence of such changes surrounds us. While aware of the risk of simplifying, we summarize the transformations in philosophical orientations and the concomitant transformation in marketing in Table 3. Because of their pragmatic orientation, business firms at leading edges of practice are already undergoing such shifts (Table 1). The challenge is to start discussing such changes in the academic marketing discipline. These shifts do require a clear change of paradigm. Our current world and conditions of existence may already be reaching the precipice where serious thinking about such paradigm change is not an option but a necessity.

Notes

1 Literacy and illiteracy, as they are used here, pertain to more than the ability to read and write (see, for example, Fırat, 1996).
2 American and French restaurant diners are often contrasted in this regard. In the modern American sensibility, the job of restaurant cooking and critiquing is left to the professionals – the diners merely enjoy the products and 'vote' by revisiting or avoiding restaurants. In France, while professional chefs and critics are extremely important, it is also common practice for the diners to engage in spirited and detailed critique of the foods, often in direct conversation with the chef. The 'stage' is not closed to the 'audience'.
3 In the film *Planet of the Apes*, when Charlton Heston, the human captured in a cage on the ape-ruled planet, attempts to write something on the ground with a stick, the ape guarding the cage grabs and takes away the stick and erases the writing. Accepting the human's ability to reason and express would have made his confinement in the cage untenable.
4 Although some early economists encountered difficulties in making the consump-

Table 3

Modern and postmodern orientations in marketing

	Modern orientation	Postmodern orientation
Reality/Truth	*Philosophical shifts*	
	• There is reality/truth 'out there', independent of human agency	• The reality/truth 'out there' has been constructed through cultural processes of hype, simulation, imaginary
	• Structures are given and can only be changed through 'laws' inherent in these structures	• Structures are constructed and they transform with changes in culturally constructed conventions and perspectives
	• Reality/truth is fundamental	• Reality/truth is contingent
	Marketing implications	
	• The nature of human needs is given	• Human needs are constructed (informed by current notions of biology)
	• Marketing must/should serve given needs	• Marketing is part of the process of constructing needs
	• Marketing satisfies needs	• Marketing enables construction of life meanings
Being Human	*Philosophical shifts*	
	• The human being is the 'knowing subject', central and acting upon all others, enabled by science	• The subject-hood of the human being is ambiguous
	• The subject and object are distinct and separable	• The subject and object are often indistinguishable and exchangeable
	• The subject controls and acts upon the object	• The subject and object act upon each other
	• The individual and the social are distinct and separable	• The individual and the social are overlapping and inseparable
	Marketing implications	
	• Marketing provides objects that will satisfy the needs of the 'knowing subject'	• Marketing partners with the human being to co-construct the 'complex of desire'
	• Marketing serves the subject	• Marketing is an enabler of communities of human beings in constructing life experiences
	• Marketing is a business practice	• Marketing is a moment in the cultural process of constructing meaning and substance in life
Consumption/Consumer Marketing	*Philosophical shifts*	
	• Consumption is the opposite of production; it is depletion of value created in production	• Consumption is a moment in the continuous cycle of production
	• Consumption is a process of replenishing energies to be used in 'productive' tasks	• Consumption is production of identity, image, meaning, value, and experiences
	• Consumption is the end	• Consumption is a means for creation of meaning and substance in life
	• Consumption is an economic necessity	• Consumption is purposeful action
	Marketing implications	
	• Consumer marketing is provision of products for 'end use'	• Consumer marketing is aiding in the production of identities and meanings
	• Consumer marketing enables the appropriation and use of values created in productive activities	• Consumer marketing helps the human being in producing symbolic values
	• Consumer marketing is a process of enabling consumption	• Consumer marketing is a process of enabling (symbolic/other) production

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Table 3 (cont.)

Modern orientation	Postmodern orientation
Philosophical shifts	
• Purpose of the consumer is to replenish energies and amass material possessions	• Purpose of the post-consumer/performer is to produce life experiences and meanings
• The consumer is a chooser among alternatives that are available in the market	• The post-consumer/performer is a constructor of alternatives
• Consumers express themselves through their consumption	• The post-consumers/performers produce their identities in the process
• The consumer is a 'customer'	• The post-consumer/performer is a 'marketer'
Marketing implications	
• Marketing discovers customer needs and provides alternative products to satisfy these needs	• Marketing provides processes to the post-consumers/performers, empowering them to construct alternative experiences
• Marketing is an activity to satisfy consumer needs	• Marketing is a partnership with the post-consumers/performers to enable them to construct meanings and experiences

Consumer (row label, left margin)

Modern orientation	Postmodern orientation
Philosophical shifts	
• Organization has boundaries that distinguish it from its customers	• Organization and post-consumers/ performers relate without boundaries
• Organization is an entity distinct from 'others'	• Organization is a network of relationships indistinct from 'others'
• Organization exists to provide for society's needs	• Organization is a network of/for society's desires
Marketing implications	
• Marketing is a process of researching and satisfying consumer needs	• Marketing is a process of constructing networks that enable human beings to create and navigate meaningful experiences
• Marketing enables organizations to communicate with and provide for consumers	• Marketing enables human beings to construct communication and provision networks

Organization (row label, left margin)

Modern orientation	Postmodern orientation
Philosophical shifts	
• Communication is informational or entertaining and persuasive	• Communication is transformational and constructive
• Communication is a composed set of signs to be transmitted to others	• Communication is a process of co-producing symbolic meanings
• The author (encoder) determines the meaning of the message	• The author (encoder) and the receiver (decoder) of the message co-construct its meaning
• Communication is an act separable from other acts	• Communication is inseparable from other acts; all acts communicate
Marketing implications	
• Marketing communicates to inform the market about products that the market needs	• Marketing communication is a part of the cultural process that constructs desires that necessitate the products
• Marketing communication shapes its message to correspond to the market's characteristics	• Marketing communication takes part in the constitution of the characteristics of extant and emergent cultures in the market
• Marketing communication is a separate but coordinated element of the marketing campaign	• Marketing communication is an inherent and inseparable part of all acts in human society

Marketing Communications (row label, left margin)

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tion-production distinction (Mill, 1929; Say, 1964), their difficulties were swept aside by the rising tide of industrialization.

5 One clear indicator of this is the burgeoning number of courses focusing on marketing-like issues offered by the humanities departments of universities, as well as in evening extension programs open to the general public. Although often taught from perspectives that are critical of business, such courses nonetheless 'open up' the cultural practice of marketing to a large audience of university students, not just the chosen coterie of professional business students.

6 The term 'tribe', so premodern and primitive in its original connotation, is reemerging and getting revalorized in technology-infused postmodern settings. Japanese teenagers who constantly thumb their mobile phones to exchange text messages have been dubbed 'thumb tribes'. Popular FOF – friends-of-friends – electronic networks such as Friendster either use tribe metaphors, or even have names such as Tribe.net (Fitzgerald, 2003).

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