**We Are All Customers Now . . .' Rhetorical Strategy and Ideological Control in Marketing Management Texts**

Chris Hackley

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically appraises the rhetoric of marketing management texts. Its interpretive frame is informed respectively by critical management and discourse analytic theoretical traditions. Its main data set is drawn from popular textbooks written for taught university courses but it also draws attention to similar rhetorical strategies in leading academic marketing journals. In addition, parallels are drawn with other popular management and consulting fields. In this way the paper attempts to mark out an initial topology of the ideological influence that is enabled and mobilized by marketing's rhetorical strategies. Marketing rhetoric often escapes

critical attention precisely because it is platitudinous. Marketing management axioms have become slogans and the slogans have become cliches regularly employed in organizational, educational and political settings. But the prevalence of platitudinous rhetoric in management consulting schemes does not necessarily hinder their popularity or inhibit the deployment of their rhetorical/ideological strategies in other settings. Popular marketing management rhetoric is a special case because it positions

itself not only as a prescriptive management-consulting framework but also as a legitimate academic fleld. It is in the latter guise that the success of managerial marketing's rhetorical/ideological strategies has proved most striking.

INTRODUCTION

Brown (1999) points out that, since marketing scholarship consists primarily of

published texts, it seems more than appropriate to subject marketing writing to a critical literary appraisal. It is nonetheless quite unusual to find such work among scholarship designated as 'marketing'. Part of the reason for this may be the insistence of many leading authors that the ruling purpose of scholarship in the field should be to advance the 'science and practice' of marketing (e.g. Kerin, 1996; cited in Brown, 1999, p. 2). This ethos is reproduced in marketing management texts that situate the practice, and the practitioners of marketing in the rhetorical foreground of their textual landscape.

In Kotler et al. (1999), 'Marketers manage demand and build profitable customer relationships' (p. 4). Yet the marketing manager is, in spite of more than 30 proselytizing years of marketing rhetoric, a marginalized figure in many organizations (Willmott, 1993, p. 213; quoted in Brown, 1995, p. 54). Marketing professionals are seldom rewarded with a seat on the main board, at least in the UK. Yet in Kotler et al. (1999) he or she is presented in a heroic light as the conductor of a willing orchestra of consumption. In Baker (2000a) the 'essence' of marketing is the 'establishment of mutually satisfying exchange relationships' (p. 1). Here, all exchanges (and perhaps all relationships) are re-cast in marketing's image. Other texts invoke the rhetoric of relevance to work up textual authority. In Dibb et al. (1994), '. . . the study of marketing has always been relevant. . .' (p. xxix) and in Jobber (1998), 'Most students . . . find it relevant and interesting' (p. xvii). Even books positioned as anti-mainstream and ostensibly aimed at post-experience

students deploy a similar textual stratagem. Piercy's (2002) text on 'market-led management' is '. . . aimed squarely at people of practice . . .' (p. vii).

But asserted claims of practical relevance ignore difficult questions such as how relevance is to be judged and who benefits. Indeed, the assertion of practical relevance rhetorically silences these very questions. In this paper I will argue that managerial marketing rhetoric can be understood in terms of Eagleton's (1991) typology of ideological strategies. For example, it is common for marketing management texts to universalize their claims to present marketing as an activity that is practised by all (through 'mutually satisfying exchange relationships') even if many people may not recognize their activity as 'marketing'. In many leading texts marketing activity is presented as the sole source of human happiness. In Brassington and Pettit (1997) marketing includes '. . . absolutely essential business activities that bring you the products you do want, when you want them, where you want them, but at prices you can afford . . .' (p. 3). For Dibb et al. (1994) marketing is essential to '. . . our economy, our lifestyles, and our physical well being . . .' (p. xxxii). In addition to the universalization strategy marketing texts also impose an instrumental value system: exchange value is prior to all others and happiness is, by implication, defined in terms of material welfare. A third ideological strategy in marketing rhetoric is normalization. Whatever

is done in the name of marketing is presented as benign and beyond question. The potential for conflicts of interest and imbalances of power between multinational corporations and individual consumers is not acknowledged within the 'mutually satisfying relationship' between reader (usually an aspirant manager) and marketing management text.

The bluster of militant pro-marketing rhetoric leaves little room for reflexive

comment or critique and marketing is rhetorically produced as a normal, universal and unproblematic thing:

“Marketing . . . is more than a business function - it is a philosophy that guides

the entire organisation . . . the goal of marketing is to create customer satisfaction profitably. . . Marketing is all around us. We are all customers now. . . from the supply and consumption of education and health care to the queue in the post office and the ride on express trains and in every financial transaction from the buying of biscuits to the purchase of a shroud . . . lawyers, accountants and doctors use marketing . . . so do hospitals, museums and arts groups . . . no politician can get the needed votes and no resort the needed tourists, without marketing. (Kotler et al., 1999, p. xv)

To critically inclined readers such a passage may appear all-too-typical of the pulpit-pounding style of many marketing management texts. Yet the fact that such rhetoric passes largely unremarked upon is itself striking in an academic context. The hectoring prose of mainstream marketing management texts has become a thoroughly taken-for-granted mode of discourse in the business school curriculum. Marketing management texts work up a managerial world devoid of discordance and awash with manufactured consensus. These texts are, self evidently, literary artefacts. But in their popular manifestations they articulate a world of practice as if that world is unmediated by text. They rhetorically work up an experiential marketing realm that serves all parties in a textual representation that denies its own representational character.

**Ideology and the Reach of Marketing Rhetoric**

This paper explores the, often extravagant, marketing rhetoric that is common in mainstream texts not to develop a purely literary analysis but to attempt a form of 'ideology critique' (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). Marketing discourse in general has been noted for its ideological character by many authors. Seen from a critical management studies perspective marketing is said to constitute its objects, consumers, workers and managers, and in so doing reproduces broader social relations of power and authority (Brownlie et al., 1999; Morgan, 1992). Firat Fuat (1985) noted a decade and a half ago that marketing research's mimicry of natural science by 'accepting temporal/contextual facts and truths as universal and eternal truths' (p. 143) made the field ideal for exploitation as an ideological vehicle. Aspects of marketed consumption have been exposed to ideological analysis.

For example, Fischer and Britor (1994) explored the rhetoric of marketing relationships from a feminist poststructuralist perspective and found that marketing rhetoric reproduces notions of patriarchy and seduction. Hirschman (1993) analysed articles in the *Journal of Consumer Research* to demonstrate 'the dominance of masculine ideology in consumer research' (p. 537). This paper focuses not on marketing activities but on the very idea of marketing as it is produced and sustained in numerous texts. It adopts a similar usage of the term 'ideology' as in Hirschman (1993). This usage refers to the ways in which a 'world-view or value and- belief system of a particular class or group of people' (Eagleton, 1991; cited in Hirschman, 1993, p. 538) is reproduced through particular kinds of representational strategy.

The term 'ideology' does not imply that people reproduce particular values in

a consciously self-serving manner. Rather, ideology represents implicit belief

systems and values that are woven within the normal social and linguistic

practices of groups. This paper seeks to draw attention to marketing rhetoric that preserves, and sets beyond dispute, deeply assumed values and beliefs about the character of managerial marketing work, research, theory and thought and about the social role and value of marketing and marketers. Ideology is, in this paper, seen as manifest in forms of rhetorical strategy. All texts have a rhetorical character but the particular rhetorical purposes and strategies differ in different genres. In analysing discourse, attention is paid to the rhetorical organization of social texts and talk in order to consider what potential or real alternative version it could be designed to counter (Edwards and Potter, 1992, p. 28; citing Billig, 1987; McCloskey, 1985; Simons, 1989). Rhetoric, as a form of persuasion, is seen as one broad literary category that can enable and mobilize ideology by promoting a particular world-view. One aim of this paper will be to show that rhetoric in marketing management texts can be seen as overtly ideological.

Much management and marketing writing is, admittedly, a populist enterprise that has emerged in a populist era. The proletarianization of mass media has, no doubt, produced a general receptivity to certain modes of visual and textual rhetoric. It is hardly surprising if this mentality is exploited by the money-driven worlds of business education and management consulting. Marketing, as a publishing and educational enterprise, has been a huge popular success (Brown, 1995; Brownlie and Saren, 1997). In its scale and scope, managerial marketing as a popular manifestation of the broader managerial discourse is a significant cultural and educational influence. The social and linguistic practices of marketing have frequently been invoked as a major cultural influence in our time (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). The rhetoric of markets is being used in advanced capitalist societies to justify many kinds of change (Willmott, 1999, p. 206; citing Gummesson, 1991, p. 55). Few in developed economies can evade the reach of marketing discourse as consumers and organizational workers. Discourses of marketization and commodification are increasingly intruding into new realms of life such as relationships, politics and family. Marketing management aspires to provide the definitive discourse of organizational work since the 'broadened' marketing concept (Kotler and Levy, 1969) was put forward (and, in

eagerly embraced) as a rhetoric of change in non-commercial as well as commercial settings. Marketing has, perhaps, 'come of age as a discipline, a practice and an ideology' (Brownlie et al., 1999, p. 6; citing Whittington and Whipp, 1992).

The 'boom' in marketing education noted by Saunders (1993) has gathered pace in the intervening years. Arguably, marketing has been in the vanguard of the broader popularization of business and management studies. As the commercial logic of the marketplace has become the governing discourse of political and organizational life in developed economies marketing writing has tapped into this legitimacy while simultaneously producing and reproducing it. But if the 'masses' have indeed been 'converted to the marketing concept' (Baker, 1999a, p. 211) no little rhetorical skill has been deployed in this evangelical enterprise. Marketing writing can itself be seen as a form of marketing, catering for the market 'needs' of students,

and teachers, of management. Baker's early (1974) text was written to 'fill

a gap in the marketing literature' and sought to 'satisfy everyone's needs' (p. 13). Kotler et al. (1999) is a response to 'extensive market research throughout Europe' (p. xvi) '. . . to meet the needs of the user' (p. xvii). As in marketing activity more generally, the rhetoric of need satisfaction, used in this assertive way, masks the power imbalance between producer and user and throws a veil over the interests served by such a particular construction of 'need'. In Baker (2000b)'. . . it is fashionable to question the validity of the mix concept, and especially the notion of the four P's (product, price, place and promotion). . . We believe that it offers a robust and useful technique . . .' (p. xxiii). Customers can have any colour then, so long as it's black.

DATA SET AND THEORETICAL STANCE

**Data Set**

A huge publishing empire in the name of marketing straddles the management education and consulting world. Just two publishers, Pearson Education and Macmillan, have between them over 200 marketing management titles in their year 2000 UK catalogues. This hints at the popularity of marketing courses. According to the UK Chartered Institute of Marketing there are over 600,000 students studying a course with marketing in it at any one time. The CIM tends to regard marketing in its managerial guise - if those studying marketing phenomena from consumer, media and cultural studies perspectives is included, the number of students is likely to run to over a million (Hackley, 2001 a). Marketing has a substantial infrastructure of professional and academic associations. The CIM itself has 28,000 members with another 1000 academics in the affiliated Academy of Marketing. The US American Marketing Association has a large membership. It sponsors a range of influential academic journals (including the *Journal of Marketing With* a circulation of ten thousand; Stewart, 1999) and professional courses. Any specific claim about such a large field can be met with numerous

counter-examples. However, it is clear that there are networks within the professional and educational marketing management world that potentially exercise influence over curricular norms, textbook content and publishers' agenda.

A selective data set is appropriate because ideological influence in marketing is not open to a solely quantitative content analysis but is evident in particularly influential sites. Furusten (1999) suggested in a study of ideology in popular management books that a 'centre of influence' (citing Gramsci, 1971) could be discerned. The most popular and influential 'manifestations' of management seemed to be connected with a relatively small number of management gurus who have a connection with Harvard Business School or with the many international consulting firms in Boston, USA (Fursuten, 1999, pp. 50-1). It was therefore thought appropriate to evaluate a small number of influential books. The present paper includes examples of ideological rhetoric from some of the best selling marketing management texts but, since these exploit the popularity of marketing rhetoric rather than set its terms of reference, it will also be useful to explore sites of particular influence. Two authors might serve this purpose. Professor Michael J. Baker is a prolific author of marketing texts in the UK and is also an influential figure in UK academic marketing networks. Professor Philip Kotler in the USA is widely acknowledged as the author who first took the various normative ideas emerging in marketing and management writing in the 1950s and 1960s and crafted them into in the (still) quintessential marketing management text (first published in 1967). Kotler's influence over the field, supplemented by numerous academic journal articles, remains unmatched (Brown, 1999). Baker and Kotler have each studied and/or taught at Harvard Business School. Some of the various texts quoted below are best sellers, some not. Some are more popular on first year undergraduate courses, others on final year or MBA courses. The assumption of this paper is that while such books are ostensibly differentiated, they all deploy rhetorical/ideological strategies that have striking similarities.

**Theoretical Stance: Ideology, Discourse and Rhetoric**

This paper focuses on the ideological rhetoric instantiated in marketing management texts through a theoretical lense informed by critical theory, founded on a social constructionist standpoint and operationalized through a discourse analytic methodological perspective. Ideology critique in a post-Marxist vein focuses on 'workers' self-understanding of experience' (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000, p. 83; citing Willmott, 1990; Gramsci, 1971; and Burawoy, 1979). Popular management academics and consultant/authors hold a powerful role in framing this self understanding through the construction of 'educational' texts. Such texts offer 'official' rhetorical strategies for justifying managerial positions and warranting behaviour in organizations. As Alvesson and Deetz (2000) note,

“Academics, particularly those in management studies, are often viewed as

ideologists. They serve dominant groups through socialisation in business

schools, support managers with ideas and vocabularies for cultural ideological control at the workplace level, and provide the aura of science to support the introduction and use of managerial domination techniques” (p. 84)

In ideology critique, then, prevailing 'vocabularies' for ideological control are

exposed to critique and opened up to alternative readings. Alvesson and Deetz (2000) suggest that ideological control is manifest through four recurring themes. These are naturalization, universalization, instrumentalism, and hegemony (p. 84). For Eagleton (1991) (mentioned above) there are six similar strategies (p. 5). For example, such strategies might entail reiterating preconceived values and relations as if they are normal, everyday and universally appropriate ('We are all customers now'). The governing rationale of ideological discourse is instrumental. There is an underlying purpose that serves narrow interests as opposed to interests that are idealistic and emancipatory in spirit. In marketing these interests might be traced

to the financial interest a relatively small group of business consultants, publishers, text authors, and some business schools have in a populist vision of marketing management. Ideological discourse also works to promote one set of values by silencing or denigrating alternatives ('Marketing has no need for Jeremiahs and still less for fatalists!' (Baker, 1974, p. 30): '. . . marketing is still being resisted in many quarters' (Koder, 1988, p. 25). Much marketing rhetoric is, evidently, designed to counter resistance.

In this paper the terms ideology, discourse and rhetoric are used in different but related senses. 'Discourse' can be defined as a set of statements that construct an object (Parker, 1992, p. 5; cited in Burr, 1995, p. 48). Social constructionist versions of discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) hold that discourse and, more specifically, language, constitute social reality. That is, language is not merely a window to a reality that is set apart from language. 'Marketing' and 'marketing management' are not considered as things to which texts point: rather, they are seen as social constructions worked up through text. Social texts actively constitute social reality (Fairclough, 1995) in that they construct the objects to which they allude. Discourses are not merely bound up with personal and institutional

interest but are historically situated in terms of broader social relations of power and domination. Fairclough (1995) suggests that a set of discourse 'conventions' (such as the conventions of medical consultation, media reporting or, indeed, of marketing management education/consulting) embodies certain 'ideologies' which become 'naturalized' and 'commonsensical' (p. 94). Ideologies consist of particular beliefs and subject roles and relations.

For Furusten (1999), the consulting gurus who write popular management books assume the role of 'fact builders' and thereby hold an influential place in the formation of popular management discourse. Marketing management texts rhetorically sustain the keystone 'facts' of the discipline. For example, marketing management texts rhetorically work up a sense of practical authority. Their discourse presupposes certain relations and 'facts' through which they position marketing as a socially and ethically neutral activity that reflects naturally occurring human needs and wants. They carry assumptions that marketing has a battery of techniques (or 'concepts') that are important to organizational success, that marketing texts seek to facilitate marketing management practice, that marketing management skills can be learned in the abstract. . . and so on and so forth. The discourse

is mobilized and normalized through the field's rhetorical strategies.

**THE RHETORICAL BINARY OF THEORY/PRACTICE IN MARKETING**

The reconciliation of theory and practice that is accomplished in marketing texts is essential to their rhetorical positioning. As we have seen, many marketing texts claim to be 'practical'. Yet if these texts claim that practice is all they are about it raises the question of bow they justify their presence in a university and professional qualifications framework. You don't need an MBA to understand the TV guide. There has to be more to it than just practical advice. The frequent invocation of 'theory' as a discursive resource is their somewhat contradictory response to this dilemma.

'Theory' in marketing is both aggrandized and despised. Jobber (1998) offers a book that '. . . summarizes core marketing theory . . .' (p. xv). Marketing is, it is claimed, a '. . . major social science . . .' (p. xvi). But students also need 40 cases to help them understand '. . . real-life marketing. . . because marketing requires both principles and practice' (p. xv). In Mercer (1996), 'theory' is '. . . no more than a useful framework . . . this book will offer the various theories only as tools' (p. 3). Dibb et al. (1994) offer '. . . a theoretical and practical understanding of marketing decision-making' (p. xxxii). Marketing, according to Brassington and Petitt (1997) '. . . cannot be approached as a purely theoretical course of study . . .' (p. xv). That these examples of rhetoric will have an intuitive plausibility for many marketing academics is a measure of their ideological impact. Why would such books seek to conflate the ideas of theory and practice unless to counter the accusation that they offer neither?

For Brassington and Pettit (1997) the marketing field has, 'in academic terms

. . . reached a sophisticated level of development. . . theories. . . are becoming increasingly complex . . .' (p. xv). Marketing '. . . is a discipline which was once at the leading edge of management theory' (Mercer, 1996, p. 3). In Dickson (1997) a thousand page book proclaims that'. . . the prospect of marketing management developing its own theory is quite promising' (p. 12). But theory is also despised. Practical experience, it is alleged, can be 'codified' (Mercer, 1996, p. 8) and conveyed as 'rules of thumb . . . that can be understood immediately and put into practice . . .' (p. 4). Marketing's rhetorical wiles dissolve the space between text and

experience. Nothing mediates.

The flexibility of marketing management rhetoric is such that texts can be

tweaked towards MBA, executive or undergraduate audiences while still recycling the same verities. Piercy's (2002) text deploys marketing's rhetorical/ideological strategies expertly to this effect. 'Mainstream' marketing management texts are '. . . idealistic, ivory-tower . . . not reality . . .' (Piercy, 2002, p. 4). Piercy (2002) has '. . . no patience with academic views. . .' and seeks to provide students and managers with '. . . tools and ideas for achieving superior performance in the market place' (p. vii). Marketing texts embarrassed by the Theory word often use words like 'tool', 'framework' or 'concept' to imply that marketing owns a special theory that is not a theory. This theory that dare not speak its name is sometimes labelled 'normative' theory (e.g. Baker, 2000b) and hence absolved from critical interrogation.

In Piercy (2002) the 'ivory tower' academics who carp on about the need for

'more' theory in marketing education (e.g. Piercy et al., 1982) need a 'reality check'. They need to understand that marketing is not a mere business function, it is a business philosophy that permeates the whole organization (Drucker (1954) made a similar point). They need to read books that break new ground by explaining how to develop 'a customer focused market strategy based on offering value . . .' (p. 5) and so on and so forth. Baker (2000b) attempts to explain marketing's normative tendency in terms of

the Harvard Business School precept of 'currently useful generalisations' (p. 47). 'In reality, theory (or at least normative theory) should reflect our understanding of real-world relationships and so enable us to predict bow events will turn out in the future . . . knowledge, from which theory is derived, represents distilled experience . . .'. But this (suspiciously Baconian) position is too difficult for practitioners to worry their heads about. 'The practitioner would be best advised to use the "theory", "concept", "paradigm" or whatever to its best advantage and leave it to the academics to argue over. . . the meaning of these terms' (p. 47). Many students might be grateful to leave the thinking to the academics. To others. Baker's 'Trust me: I'm a marketing academic' plea might be considerably less than reassuring.

Contardo and Wensley (1999) point out that the HBS philosophy of practical

management education originally entailed primary research by students into the cases they were studying. This participant observation research was then discussed in the classroom in a process of dialectic designed to refine understanding of practical business problems. Kotler's innovative text

took a short-cut through this principle by adopting a kind of a-theoretical

practice-language of normative 'tools' and 'concepts' to directly convey managerial experience and organizational reality to the reader. Marketing text authors seek to engage readers by rhetorically collapsing managerial reality into text. But they must also claim some intellectual authority to legitimize the academic marketing text enterprise, hence the need to invoke 'theory' as a discursive resource while also rhetorically privileging practice over theory.

Marketing's contradictory position on theory is maintained through the rhetorical strategy of self-denigration. Its theory is regularly declared 'weak' (e.g. Baker, 1999a; Hunt, 1991; Kotler et al., 1999). Marketing 'science' falls far short of being scientific (Kavanagh, 1994; Saren, 1999) (though it 'ought to be'; Baker, 1974, p. 21). The logical coherence and practical utility of marketing's axioms and concepts is frequently questioned (e.g. Piercy, 1998; Thomas, 1996). The managerial relevance of marketing's 'theory' and research is considered dubious (AMA Task Force, 1988; Wensley, 1997, 1998). Marketing's foremost academic journals often carry pleas for 'more' and 'better' marketing tbeory (Day and Montgomery, 1999; Deshpande, 1999). As Brown (1995) points out, decrying the state of theory is itself a rhetorical ploy in marketing, producing a crisis that makes the rhetorical space for more of the same with a new-ish spin.

Marketing discourse has evolved as a hybrid of consulting and academic styles. The deeply ambiguous position towards 'theory' can be explained in terms of discourse analytic theory as an 'ideological dilemma' (Biilig, 1987, 1991; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). An ideological dilemma occurs where speakers must deal with a logical contradiction which, if acknowledged as such, would rhetorically undermine the speaker's own position and claims. Therefore the contradiction has to be reconciled in a way which is superficially persuasive even if, on closer inspection, it may be intellectually unsatisfactory. Ambitious marketing textbook writers cannot write 'this book/article/course is an eclectic collection of aphorisms, tautologies

and platitudes artfully crafted into normative precepts because this

would fracture their rhetorical effect.

Marketing texts do offer some of the rhetorical trappings of theoretical discourse. There are frequent citations of 'seminal' marketing articles, mainly by US authors. Quotes are often mutually supportive: gurus are wheeled on as celebrity endorsers bearing testimony to the author's epigrammatic genius. Quote marks are wielded for their halo effect. In Jobber (1998), '. . . the goal of marketing is long-term satisfaction, not short-term deception. This theme is reinforced by the writings of top management consultant Peter Drucker who stated . . .' (p. 4). In Baker (2000b), 'Writing in the Spring 1983 issue of *the Journal of Marketing* two well-known American Professors of marketing, Yoram Wind and Thomas S. Robertson, offered the opinion that marketing. . .' (p. 3); 'In their seminal text i*ndustrial Market Structure and Economic Performance,* Scherer and Ross (1990). . .' (p.18). Seminality is conferred upon marketing authors with an alacrity hard to match in lesser fields.

Another frequently used rhetorical device is the 'show concession' in which a

concession is apparently made to a powerful counter-argument that could potentially undermine the speaker's entire position. However, it subsequently emerges that the concession is only apparent. In Baker (2000a) there is a concession that it is a 'truism that all successful businesses are marketing orientated — if they were not meeting and satisfying customers needs profitably they would not be successful' (p. 19). In spite of this admission the text later asserts that there is a 'body of knowledge and practice of marketing' and that there is a 'core proposition . . . marketing is concerned with the identification, creation and maintenance of mutually satisfying exchange relationships' (p. 19). This, as explained in Baker (2000b)

implies 'normative theory' based on 'core concepts'. In the writing of Baker (1974, 2000a, 2000b) the 'show concession' is frequently invoked prior to a doctrinal reassertion of something that is 'fundamental', 'core' or 'simple' about marketing (examples also in Day and Montgomery, 1999; Deshpande, 1999).

As previously noted, Baker's texts breathlessly confer guru-ism on many US authors. Yet there is also a notable tendency to denigrate US marketing management texts by implying that they are less than intellectually rigorous. Baker (2000a) approvingly cites Gummesson (1993) and refers to a 'surrender' to US marketing gurus and a 'colonization' of marketing thought achieved by US marketing textbooks (p. 13). Another approved citation (Marion, 1993) is offered in support: 'Marion's critique strikes at the very heart of the marketing management school promoted by Americans. . .' (p. 12). Baker's texts tend to make more play of marketing's role as a development of microeconomic theory than do those of Kotler (1988), the obvious target of this denigration. Yet, as we have seen, the superficially different positioning of Baker's UK marketing texts from US ones does not imply that UK texts eschew self-contradiction or dogmatism any more than US ones. Indeed, the distancing work done in Baker's texts reflects a pragmatic need to create a market niche away from the 'massive, overshadowing influence throughout the field' of Philip Kotler (Brown, 1999, p. 4; citing Meamber and Venkatesh, 1995). The respective rhetorical strategies of marketing texts of UK and US origin produce exactly the same effect. That is, the promotion of an unreflexive, normative, management consulting style of marketing management discourse based on 'core' concepts and constructed for easy consumption in education and training settings.

Marketing management texts, then, invoke representations of 'theory' to rhetorically assert an a-theoretical normative managerial model for marketing. This managerial imperative is, in turn, instantiated through a set of 'core' beliefs and precepts with universal applicability. Marketing management texts (whether UK or US produced) promulgate these core beliefs and precepts and rhetorically silence views, and indeed, theories, that might undermine them. 'Silencing' need not be thought of in an active sense. One of the important features of rhetorical analysis concerns what is not said (Billig, 1991). Rhetoric, which, in popular management books, is often merely 'platitudinous' (Furusten, 1999) takes up space and asserts an implicit viewpoint. As Brown (1999) notes (citing Agger, 1989) academic texts acquire meaning in relation to those that have gone before and hence what they do not say is significant, perhaps more significant, than what they do say. Popular marketing texts, arguably, do not say anything but recycle stale ideas. That they do so on such a huge scale creates a vast absence of critique and reflexivity throughout the marketing field.

**POPULIST RHETORIC IN MARKETING, BPR AND MANAGEMENT CONSULTING**

Marketing is an enigma in management education because it is rhetorically styled as a consulting discourse yet, while its credibility as a branch of management consulting waned long ago, it has 'boomed' in educational settings. It might be instructive to look sideways at other management consulting fields for comparison. In his study of popular management books Furusten (1999) notes that there are management gurus whose business it is to commodify 'manifestations' of managerial knowledge. These manifestations (such as prescriptive management philosophies or frameworks) are then packaged as seminars, books, consulting frameworks, videos, courses and distributed to teachers, students, managers, colleagues, readers and listeners. Professional or informal carriers of 'managerial manifestations' transfer them across boundaries of media, culture and genre having read the

books, studied the courses or listened to the gurus. Textual managerial manifestations may be re-interpreted but they are written as if they do not expect their version of the facts to be re-negotiated (Furusten, 1999, p. 50; citing Latour, 1987, pp. 136-44) in order to work up a didactic authority.

Leading from this,” . . . knowledge in the field [of management] and manifestations thereof, can be understood as processes of interpretations and textualisations of observations of reality, where rhetoric is the 'method' of communication. In this regard the rhetoric used by the 'producer' of a managerial manifestation is important for whether it is to be accepted as knowledge or not. . . (Furusten, 1999, p. 57)

Rhetoric, then, is the vehicle through which popular management ideas are peddled and they are judged according to the '. . . credibility attached to them by their audience . . .' (p. 57). The marketing management 'paradigm' can be seen as a prescriptive scheme that has proved especially enduring and influential because of the rhetorical skill with which it’s leading gurus have exploited prevailing sensibilities in different settings.

Marketing rhetoric shares some features with the rhetoric of business process

re-engineering (analysed by Case, 1999; Grint and Case, 1998). For example, each uses richly metaphoric language to work up a doctrine of organizational, and therefore managerial, purgation and salvation. In Levitt (1960) those who reject the previous eras of sales and product orientation (Keith, 1960) and embrace the new doctrine of 'marketing orientation' will be saved. The (apocryphal) historical division of business practice into three successive eras of managerial orientation (production, sales then marketing orientation) has a particular rhetorical resonance, even when it is adapted into a more complex four-part era-ization thesis as in Fullerton (1988; cited in Baker, 2000a, p. 10). For Kotler (1988) '. . . the marketing concept is a business philosophy that arose to challenge the previous concepts . . . although it has a long history, its central tenets did not fully crystallise until the mid-1950's' (Kotler, 1988, p. 17). In Dibb et al. (1994), 'The philosophy of the marketing concept emerged in the third major era in the history of business . . .' (p. 12). In these texts, the assertion that the marketing concept has 'emerged' and 'crystallized' is the cue for an entirely a-historical exposition of managerial marketing techniques. The three eras myth taps into the rhetorical

power of trinitarianism (Brown, 1996) to produce a pure, fundamentalist marketing as the victor in some kind of battle of the buzz-words. Fullerton's (1988) four eras seems to rhetorically produce the same modernist effect.

BPR rhetoric is richly eschatological (Case, 1999, p. 432). Organizational salvation is attainable by following the true path but this entails a pilgrim's progress of tribulations. To attain salvation through BPR the organization must be re-born: BPR means '. . . starting all over, starting from scratch' (Hammer and Champy, 1993, p. 2; quoted in Grint and Case, 1998, p. 561). This entails 'suffering' and 'pain' (and dissenters will be 'shot') (Hammer and Champy, 1993; quoting from various works, pp. 561—2). Marketing rhetoric often works up a similar sense of urgency through its hectoring message of victory against the odds. Many texts draw on the imagery of violence and conflict. In Lambin (2000) marketing has 'detractors' and 'proponents' and entails the 'conquest' of markets (p. 4). Dibb et al. (1994) write of Coca-Cola's 'fight' in the soft drinks 'war' (p. 3). Others invoke 'Darwinian' (Jobber, 1998, p. 6) market conditions to produce the marketing discipline as a fox-hole of safety from the fearful other-ness of competition. Marketing rhetoric often produces the struggle for managerial ideas as a zero-sum battle that can only have one winner.

Populist marketing writing lures the uncritical reader into a cultish sense of

exclusivity made all the more exclusive by the fact that hardly anybody actually seems to be able to do it successfully for long enough to make it to the first reprint.

Nameless organizations are subject to wrist slapping admonishment for their

tardiness in adopting the marketing 'philosophy'. Dibb et al. (1994) lament that, 'Surprisingly, nearly forty years after the marketing era began, many business still have not adopted the marketing concept' (p. 12). Dibb et al. (1994) unwisely offer up the moderately successful Henry Ford as an example of marketing apostasy (p. 12). But in a Platonic spirit marketing texts tell us that apostates, even the fabulously wealthy ones, are not bad, just wrong. Marketing principles are widely misunderstood (King, 1985; cited in Baker, 1999b, p. 9). Market segmentation is, it is claimed, 'obvious' but difficult to implement (MacDonald, in Cranfield School of Management, 2000, p. 81). So, the gurus tell us, marketing precepts don't work because managers are daft. BPR, in contrast, may have been the leading management buzz-phrase for a decade but it can boast a relatively successful failure rate of a mere 70 per cent (Grint and Case, 1998, p. 561). The panacea-theory of marketing is played up in the more desperate mainstream texts (such as the desperately huge-selling multiple editions of Dibb et al.). Others take a more moderate position on the super-effectiveness of the marketing philosophy/concept (such as Jobber, 1998). But this moderation does not go so far as to rhetorically undermine the normative thrust of the text. BPR, management

consulting and marketing texts alike are rhetorically structured to

promote themselves as forms of management ideology. Some marketing authors acknowledge the ideological character of their calling and offer it as a virtue (such as Deshpande, 1999; Jobber, 1998).

**MARKETING'S RHETORICAL/IDEOLOGICAL STRATEGIES**

**Bogus Reflexivity**

While marketing texts employ the rhetorical binary of theory/practice as a major discursive theme they also use many subsidiary ideological/rhetorical strategies to support this. One such strategy is a variation of the 'show concession' touched upon already. Marketing texts that are positioned as 'mainstream' (i.e. popular) often exhibit bogus reflexivity in order to mimic academic discourse. For example, the shortcomings of the popular marketing textual genre are sometimes noted by marketing academics in critical papers (e.g. in O'Mally and Patterson, 1998; citing Gronroos, 1994; Holbrook, 1995; Robson and Rowe, 1997). However, where such critique is acknowledged in textbooks it is framed within ideological norms. Bogus

reflexivity sets up a re-asserted definitive stance. For example. Baker (1999a) avers that marketing was 'seriously flawed' for the past 30 years (p. 211). But the flaw in question was that it was 'concerned with assisting sellers to do things to their customer rather than for them' (p. 211). To many, rhetorical strategies such as this might seem crude, even laughable. Yet such

devices are not confined to introductory texts and appear to be part of a commonly accepted discourse that employs varieties of 'show concession' without a blush. Day and Montgomery (1999) suggest that marketing researchers are dissuaded from cross-disciplinary work by a narrow disciplinary mentality that obtains in the field (p. 3). They write that 'serious doubts have been raised' (p. 4) about marketing's 'foundational' normative concepts such as the product life cycle, positioning and segmentation. Yet by page 6 'robust fundamental issues help keep the field of marketing centred on its essentials and lessen susceptibility to distraction'.

In Hooley et al. (1998) there is a defensive acknowledgement that there have

been '. . . challenges to the function of marketing . . . from theorists of a purport-edly "postmodern" persuasion . . . We shall evaluate the credibility of these challenges in chapter 18 . . .' (p. 3). Yet Chapter 18 engages with no postmodern (or any other) theory. Hooley et al. (1998) conclude that marketing 'must change', 'To focus on the process of going to market... to enhance the role of the customer as a driving force . . . to finally achieve . . . the goal... as *the* function of business . . .' (p. 444). Even critical self-reflection is used rhetorically to reproduce an ideological stance that asserts a dogmatic normative order for marketing thinking. Critique is framed within terms of managerial efficacy and bogus reflexivity resorts, inevitably, to marketing's core ideology to claim a didactic authority for the text. In passing, Case (1999) noted a similar rhetorical strategy in BPR in that practitioner scepticism was often expressed in terms of a 'contrived reflexivity' that stopped short of undermining the whole project (p. 434). Dissenting positions are acknowledged only to provide the rhetorical counterpoint for marketing

ideologists to defy fashion, to counter conventional wisdom, to resist resistance and to reassert a true path.

Within designated marketing writing there is a small critical tradition that generally stands outside the recommended reading lists of managerial marketing courses. Managerial marketing's unreflexive tone and concomitant resistance to penetrating critique has been noted (for example, Willmott, 1999, p. 212). Brown's (1995) postmodern critical stance referred to many textual cliches of mainstream marketing such as the ubiquitous graphical epigram of the two-by-two matrix (ably employed in Hackley, 2001b). He has, in other pieces, described the cut'n paste approach of its texts as 'pastiche' (Brown, 1993) and a 'textual cacophany' (Brown, 1997) while giving detailed attention to the rhetorical skills of marketing superguru Theodore Levitt in Brown (1999). Yet the rhetorical strategy of bogus reflexivity disarms such telling critique, at least for those students of marketing management who have succumbed to the evangelical sales pitch and now read without blinking.

**The Definitional Fervour of Marketing Management Authors**

Along with bogus reflexivity, a passion for definition tends to characterize popular marketing texts. Texts aimed at university courses are especially littered with definitive aphorisms that, together, produce a nebulous sense of disciplinary authority. In Baker (1974) there are two pages of definitions (pp. 19-20) but by Baker (2000a) we are no nearer the 'clear and concise definition' (p. 1) the author seeks. Dibb et al. (1994) offer a section on 'marketing defined' (p. 4) as do Brassington and Petitt (1997, p. 5), and Hooley et al. (1988, pp. 6-8). As the interminable definitive wrangling slows the reader's blink-rate and slackens the jaw the author feints again to define but instead slips in a knockout assertion. We are reminded, again, that

marketing organizations are committed to '. . . the philosophy of mutually satisfying exchange relationships . . . through the professional practice and management of the marketing function' (Baker, 2000a, p. 21). In Kotler et al. (1999) Chapter One, the poor reader is set a task, on completion of the chapter, to 'define marketing and discuss its core concepts' (p. 4). The reader could be forgiven for slipping gently to the canvass in supine submission.

Marketing management writing's repeated invocation of the rhetoric of is-ness seems designed to produce a sense of authority and knowledge. Marketing orientation *is* 'a philosophical approach to doing business that puts the customer at the heart of business matters' and marketing *is* the 'the integral force that empowers, expresses and enables overall business strategy' (Cranfield School of Management, 2000, pp. 287-8). The passion for definition also produces marketing as a socially benign enterprise as in '[marketing is] . . . a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others' (Kotler et al., 1999, p. 10). Invoking unities of interest and shared points of reference in definitional assertions can be seen in terms of an ideological strategy of naturalization by which the managerialist marketing agenda is rendered normal, universal, everyday and unproblematic. Assertion masquerades as definition normalized by repetition. For Jobber (1998), 'The modern marketing concept can be expressed

as: the achievement of corporate goals through meeting and exceeding customer needs better than the opposition' (p. 4). Marketing is talked up as *the* way of meeting corporate goals and the rhetoric of need satisfaction is invoked to render benign all done in the name of marketing. The fact that the definitions do diverge and err on the side of woolly-ness only adds to their rhetorical force. Definitions are still definitions even if they're conjured up like advertising catch phrases.

Some have even surveyed definitions of marketing in search of a super-definition. A UK survey found that, over time, definitions of marketing had 'broadened' and 'softened'. This demonstrated that 'marketing and its guardians continue to foster its open and innovative culture' and yet 'this latitude has allowed ambiguity to creep into its definition . . . definitional clarity is essential in the future' (Gibson et al., 1993; quoted in Baker, 2000a, p. 18). Even the absurd takes on an authoritative tone when definition is used to produce an ideological effect, as it so often is in marketing (Heilbrun, 1996, p. 114). Definitions carry silent but constitutive assumptions (Derrida, 1979) and assert the textual authority of the definer. Marketing definitions are invoked because ambiguity is Bad. Clarity is Good. Definitions are (by definition) clarifying. The ambiguity of clarity, and the clarity of ambiguity, are not acknowledged as conceptual possibilities. Definitions can, of course, be passed off as pedagogic strategy for introductory students. But Baker

(2000a) is a book about marketing theory for 'advanced' marketing students.

Cibson et al. (1993) is a conference paper presented at the major UK academic marketing conference.

As we have seen, the marketing 'philosophy' of business is ritually defined in

practically every introductory marketing text (examples and discussion in Brown, 1995, pp. 32-6). Day and Montgomery (1999) write about the 'fundamental issues that define the terrain of marketing' (p. 12). It is not important to their rhetorical effect that there is no coherence in marketing's definitional canon. The rhetorical force lies not so much in definition as in re-definition as when Deshpande (1999) reinvents marketing's customer orientation ethos as 'customercentricity' or Piercy (2002) re-casts marketing management as 'market-led' management. Reinvention is part of marketing's ideological/rhetorical armoury. The marketing concept has to be 'rediscovered' (Baker, 2000b, p. 3) periodically while its attendant tools,

frameworks and definitions need to be refreshed for jaded readers.

Marketing can be defined in decidedly non-managerial terms as a 'social construction' (Hirschman, 1986a) that is, like advertising and consumption, '. . .

inseparable from the discursive practices played out in text' (Stern, 1996, p. 137). It may be no more or less than what people like me say it is (Carson and Brown, 1994). As a discourse of exchange and consumption marketing has been declared 'the ultimate social practice of postmodern consumer culture' (Firat and Venkatesh, 1993). Critical studies of marketing have defined it as a vast engine of signification constituting identities and experiences (Brownlie et al., 1999). Marketing can be defined as a discursive force 'de-linguistifying' managerial domains (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992) and reproducing orders of power as if they are taken-for-granted and beyond dispute (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Morgan, 1992). Ideologically driven marketing management texts use the rhetoric of definition like a club to beat the reader over the head. The inconsistency of the various definitions is a rhetorical mainstay of the project itself: the 'need' for greater clarity is cited to justify yet another outbreak of definitional fervour.

**The Rhetoric of 'Reality' and the Allure of Managerial 'Relevance'**

While the marketing field is large and diverse the interests, priorities and language of managers tends to be invoked as a governing principle for marketing studies more frequently than any other set of interests or priorities. Marketing thought, theory, teaching and writing is, hence, dominated by the 'managerial' school of marketing (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996; Sheth et al., 1988). Yet, while the conventional wisdom of popular marketing texts is that marketing is 'about' management practice, an alternative view can be offered. That is, that much popular and mainstream marketing writing invokes managerial and organizational reality as a rhetorical strategem to legitimize marketing management as a textual project.

'Marketing' is often invoked as an essential reality, a fixed point of certainty

around which the 'turbulent' and 'unpredictable' managerial universe turns. In

Baker (2000b) it is asserted that technological, demographic and economic changes since the 1950s have created a 'much more complex and competitive marketplace . . . survival, let alone success . . . calls for a new philosophy of business . . . the marketing concept' (p. 3). As we have seen the 'newness' of the marketing concept is not temporal. Like Dorian Cray's portrait, it simply never ages, even as mainstream marketing subjects itself to yet another rhetorical face-lift. But although marketing is set against a changing world as a counterpoint it is also invested with power. Marketing is an 'integral force' 'driving' organizational success against the mystical forces of 'turbulence' (Cranfield School of Management, 2000, p. 283).

In their preface Dibb et al. (1994) offer a list of major political events of the

1980s such as the re-unification of Germany, the Persian Gulf war and the breakup of the former Soviet Union to set up the punchline: 'There is no question that we live in an increasingly complex and changing world . . .'. They then humbly offer their book as a source of '. . . insights into marketing in such a changing environment . . .' (p. xxix). Marketing, then, is not only rendered 'relevant' by textual juxtaposition with undeniably real events. The association also implies that enthusiastic adoption of marketing might even strike a blow for peace and national security. It is not uncommon for marketing writing to clear textual space for its contribution by informing the reader that 'the only certainty is that things will change' (Cranfield School of Management, 2000, p. 283; Hooley et al., 1998, p. 422; Jobber, 1998, p. 106). The 'hey, it's a jungle out there' rhetoric that positions marketing as a bastion of sanity and order by contrast provides a course title for the UK's largest provider of MBA graduates, the Open University Business School. 'Marketing in a Complex World' is the title of the marketing module on the OU MBA (2001 OU publicity brochure). Platitudinous rhetoric is not, then, merely a refuge for marketing authors padding out a marketing textbook to the requisite fatness. It has become the very brand identity of marketing.

Case vignettes of business success are also regularly invoked as part of marketing's reality rhetoric. Marketing precepts are universalized across these vignettes. In Kotler et al. (1999) there are no less than 51 case vignettes, in Jobber (1998) there are over 40. In Dickson (1997) there are profiles of US marketing entrepreneurs like De Witt Wallace *(Reader's Digest),* Ray Croc (MacDonald's) and IBM's Tom Watson. These profiles and vignettes are invoked as exemplars of marketing principles in action and placed in highlighted text boxes suggestively juxtaposed with passages on abstract marketing principles. Marketing texts offer little ethnographic or other contextual information in their case vignettes. It is then impossible to ascertain whether, in fact, marketing concepts were used at all in the activities of the exemplary organization. Packing popular texts with spurious examples of business success can be seen as a rhetorical strategy to connect the

marketing cause with the business effect by textual association. Yet marketing skill and technique is far from respected in the organizational world, according to the UK Chartered Institute of Marketing (Matthews, 2000). In fact, it is hard to think of any global corporate entrepreneurs who have admitted to any formal marketing education. One is led to the somewhat cynical feeling that marketing texts need case exemplars of business success rather more than they needed marketing texts.

The rhetoric of relevance is invoked in a different way in academic journals.

Leading journals invoke suppositions about managerial thinking and action to

imply that marketing provides a psychology of managerial expertise and, hence, is 'relevant' to managers. Day and Montgomery (1999) suggest that marketing managers act according to 'mental models' (p. 12) and need statistically significant empirical generalizations on which to base managerial action. The suggestion that marketing managers act on such generalizations rhetorically justifies the empirical research project that seeks to measure the efficacy of marketing slogans and precepts. This implied psychology of managerial action is asserted without any reference to research in managers' mental models (e.g. Eden, 1992) and without any acknowledgement of the deeply problematic issue of the tacit dimension of organizational

management action (Baumard, 1999; Hackley, 1999). There is, similarly,

no discussion of one of popular marketing's central philosophical difficulties, the matter of inferring normative marketing precepts from positive empirical premises (Hackley, 1998). Such philosophical fare might be too heady for introductory texts but, even if one agrees that normative consulting precepts are proper material for university management courses, the rhetorical uses of an unspecified account of management action are undeniably considerable.

Both the reality rhetoric and the suppositions about the ways in which marketing managers allegedly think and act can be seen as expressions of a 'performance of relevance' in marketing (Wensley, 1997). Relevance in marketing research and theory has become something of a shibboleth that defines marketing's terms of engagement with its subject matter. The nomothetic research agenda promoted by marketing's most prestigious academic journals coheres with the management action model expressed by Day and Montgomery (1999). More importantly (as Firat Fuat acknowledged in 1985) it cannot offer any critical material that might

undermine the project. Quantitative research can be passed off as science and the rhetoric of science signifies marketing's 'relevance'. Marketing research has been criticized for not being scientific enough (Pierson, 1959). But sciency sounding language is often invoked to legitimize marketing's 'scientistic' (Willmott, 1999) mainstream research agenda. An order of self-surveilance by marketing academics has become an institutionalized requirement for publication in the leading journals. They must rhetorically position their case against a set of implicit assumptions about relevance. The performative assumes priority as mainstream writers perform a sort of ritual bumblebee dance to signify managerial relevance in terms of marketing's own ideological stance. As part of this performance the absolute 'reality' of managerial work is invoked to rhetorically deflect attention from the

constructed reality of marketing writing.

**MARKETING'S CONCEPTUAL KLEPTOMANIA**

A rhetoric of extra-disciplinary legitimization is yet another common feature of

mainstream marketing management writing. Many textual expositions of managerial marketing commence with a reference to 'sources' of marketing theory in, for example, economics, law, mathematics (e.g. in Baker, 1974, p. 21). The 'aura of science' necessary to legitimize marketing as an intellectual field is provided by other social science subjects. But this does not necessarily signify a scholarly spirit of inter-disciplinarity, at least not in popular marketing texts. Marketing's borrowing of concepts and research approaches from economics, psychology, statistics, anthropology, sociology and other fields is presented as a virtue (in Deshpande, 1999) and as a necessary pre-paradigm, pre-scientific stage in marketing's evolution (by Baker, e.g. 1999a). But more detailed analyses concede that marketing's borrowing tendency amounts not to a spirit of academic ecumenism but to 'illicit grafting with dysfunctional consequences' (O'Shaughnessy, 1997, abstract). Sociological concepts such as the family life-cycle, roles, status, culture, social systems, norms, groups, sub-culture, networks and relationships have all been

press-ganged into marketing texts without a consideration of their disciplinary

context or theoretical assumptions (Cronhaug, 2000). Foxall (2000) alludes to marketing's use of psychological concepts such as decision-making, information processing, learning, behaviour, perception, attitude, needs, wants, segments, lifestyle, motivation, problem solving, personality, dissonance and preference. Popular marketing texts rarely cite references from these literatures but assimilate these concepts seamlessly into a normative managerial scheme, conferring upon it a sense of quasi-scientific plausibility.

This can be passed off as fair, though mischievous, pedagogic play for introductory level marketing texts in the battle for the business school student. In any case, marketing thinkers have had their ovm concepts assimilated into other management fields without so much as a by-line. The field of strategic management is particularly indicted by Day (1992), Hunt (1994) and Biggadike (1981) for employing the concepts of positioning, targeting and diffusion (of new products) without due acknowledgement to marketing researchers. But it is interesting to speculate what alternatives this rhetorical strategy in popular texts is designed to counter. The adoption

of nomothetic research designs in marketing and the 'illicit grafting' of extra-marketing concepts can, paradoxically, be seen as a way of insulating marketing from a genuine engagement with other social scientific fields of inquiry.

**Textual Inter-penetration in Marketing**

Marketing's platitudinous rhetoric mobilizes its ideology at every level to preserve its normative agenda from critique. The internationally ranked UK journal, the *European Journal of Marketing.,* summarized a survey of 'some leading professors in marketing' on the state of the discipline (Burrows, 2000; cited in Carson and Gilmore, 2001). The reported comments are patched into an editorial. The 'scope of marketing' was thought by some to be 'too broad and needs some focus' (p. 1181). The marketing field here is, then, an undisciplined discipline which requires disciplining. 'The discipline is continuing to broaden, arguably to the detriment of substantial theory' (p. 1182). Here, a rhetorical binary is invoked that that polarizes 'theory' and 'breadth'. Later, the 'wealth' of knowledge in the discipline is presented as a virtue rather than its depth (p. 1182). But, notwithstanding the dangers of breadth, or the virtues of wealth, there is also a need for '. . . relevant theories and examples of practice to be inherent in the marketing curriculum . . .' (p. 1182).

As we have seen, marketing management text authors often rhetorically privilege practice by both aggrandizing and debasing 'theory'. In the above example theory and practice are one and the same in the phrase 'relevant theories'. 'Theory' can, in marketing writing, receive no higher compliment.

Marketing management texts and courses are designed to have an experiential appeal: 'Topicality is also important in course design in terms of being of interest to students and in contributing to . . . employability. . .'. The employability imperative is satisfied by the use of '. . . "business panels" whereby businesses have a direct input into the curriculum . . . with relevance in terms of the real world' (p. 1183). The uncompromised virtue of 'real world relevance' is presented here as the unproblematic result of a marketing curriculum that reflects what students and business people say they want. Economic instrumentalism is embraced as an educational virtue but there should (also) be a focus on the 'depth of knowledge' (p. 1182). Depth, breadth, wealth, relevance, theory, and reality are, then, invoked

to rhetorically produce an effect of intellectual discourse that preserves from

scrutiny the ideologically imposed values and relations of managerial marketing.

**Authorial Anxiety in Marketing Writing**

Like any dominant ideology, managerial marketing has a well-developed field of apologetics. Many ad hoc arguments deflect critical attention from its artful paradoxes and plausible tautologies. One bluff response to critique employs the rhetoric of 'so what?' There are plenty of highly experienced marketing academics (such as Deshpande, 1999; Jobber, 1998, p. 11) who are entirely comfortable as ideologists in a university setting. After all, one man's hegemony is another man's emancipation. No longer do universities treat students of commerce as flies in the intellectual ointment. Managerialist marketing rhetoric has been central to turning this class-based cultural worm. Read as tracts of militant managerialism it is hardly surprising that marketing management texts heave with contradiction and sophistry. They are, performatively, nothing but an endlessly repeated cry of assertion. Is it not churlish to point a critical finger at a discourse that has played its part in drawing unprecedented numbers of managers and students within a professional and academic framework?

In any case, it might be patronising or far-fetched to suggest that such a blatantly self-propagandizing field is exercising control over people. Marketing academics and students are not dumb in the face of the text: they employ strategies of re-interpretation and, even, resistance. Marketing's platitudinous texts grant considerable pedagogic license to the imaginative teacher. These texts might, moreover, be forgiven their intellectual flaws on the grounds that they are crafted to ease students into the deeper waters of management studies, though the presence of the same rhetorical strategies at every level might be thought suspicious. Such arguments are understandable. Indeed, it would be more surprising if ideology critique in marketing did not generate such responses. Marketing rhetoric exerts its ideological force by acting constitutively through discourse and language.

The influence that inheres through rhetorical/ideological strategies both resists

dissent and is realized through dissent. Rhetorical strategies in popular marketing texts work to counter opposing positions and to re-assert deeply assumed values and priorities. Ideology critique attempts to reveal discursive structures and to pick apart modes of representation with the aim of promoting reflexivity and critical awareness. Marketing authors and academics work in good faith but the field is starkly lacking in critique and reflexivity in comparison to the flood of ideological literature that dominates marketing management texts.

Marketing authors suffer the anxiety of the influence of previous writers

(Brown, 1999) in that they must find a space for their contribution among the

countless 'seminal' offerings of marketing's pantheon of gurus. Marketing management texts maintain a resoundingly progressivist ethos (p. 12, citing Bartels, 1988; Kerin, 1996; Malhotra, 1996) by assimilating ever more developments within the mainstream. Every challenge to the 'core concepts' that conceivably can be is re-interpreted as a resounding endorsement of marketing's fundamental rightness. Marketing's tendency to recycle its own myths and to canonize more and more defunct professors into guru-ism makes it increasingly difficult for tyro gurus to create a space for a 'new' contribution. So perhaps it is understandable that popular marketing management texts reflect a literary craft of platitudinous re-invention, re-cycling and re-animation. Nonetheless, if this is so, it is a literary craft that denies its own representational character and therefore constitutes a prime site for critical attention.

**CONCLUDING COMMENT**

This paper reflects the author's personal interest in the ways in which discourse, power and subjectivity inter-penetrate each other in various social, managerial and organizational settings. It has explored marketing management texts because of the influence their ideological/rhetorical strategies may have on academic and managerial work, and, arguably, on wider constituencies of consumption and citizenship. In this regard the paper attempts to contribute to a broader critique of managerialism by focusing on the way subjective accounts of management are framed by managerialist modes of discourse. Marketing management texts, seen through a critical discourse analytic interpretive frame, appear to be potent sites of managerialist ideology.

The interests marketing management rhetoric might serve are difficult to disentangle. Marketing rhetoric and discourse impinges on many groups. For example, as a class, managers' interests are ostensibly mobilized by having universities endorse their aims and values with approved high-level courses. On the other hand, universities use these courses to meet recruitment and revenue-generation targets. Courses based on platitudinous rhetoric are relatively easy to provide and staff. Marketing management texts confer authority on anybody who is sanctioned to examine the course. They depersonalize the field by casting it as a technical managerial discipline yet, as we have seen, these texts are infinitely re-interpretable. Academics are empowered by owning the conceptual technology (i.e. the rhetoric) of marketing. Managers may not be the prime beneficiaries.

More broadly, large corporations might benefit from the propagation of marketing's ideological rhetoric through the promotion of an uncritical acceptance of activities that are justified in the name of markets, customers and profit. On the other hand, corporate interests might be confounded if marketing's platitudinous rhetoric promotes an intellectually moribund curriculum that, in turn, produces managers more comfortable with plausible jargon than with critical, original or strategic thinking. Marketing management rhetoric seems to serve a fairly small number of writers, publishers and consultants who sell texts and managerial ideas of a particular hue.

The marketing management genre is not merely a set of conventions for writing texts: it is also a set of conventions for reading them. The solution to the 'problem' posed is never more than a sentence away. Given this tradition it might be expected that this paper now offer a solution, a non-rhetorical marketing as a paradigm busting alternative to the pseudo-theoretical populist texts and also to the tub-thumping post-experience gurus. Indeed, it seems entirely plausible that one of these gurus could be working on a book called *'Marketing: Beyond Rhetoric'.* The book will disparage the populist rhetoricians and it will claim to mainline *real* marketing management reality directly into the reader with a practical text that distils essence-of-guru without any theory, rhetoric or even conceptual models. Marketing, it will allege, can be known only by (textually mediated) revelation, not by intellect. It might draw on an old mainstay, the alliterative epigram, to re-envision the Four P's of mainstream texts as Preposterous, Platitudinous, Panegyric, Panaceas. This paper, in contrast, has tried to build on a critical turn of thought in marketing and management studies that turns rhetorical strategies back on themselves to question the motives, interests and deep assumptions inherent in the 'so what' subjectivity of the popular marketing management genre.

NOTES

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[1] A report in the *Independent* newspaper (Matthews, 2000) quoted the Chairman of the UK Chartered Institute of Marketing bemoaning this fact.

[2] Information posted on the website of the *Journal of Marketing Management.*

[3] The UK CIM offers exemptions from its practitioner Diploma and Certificate in marketing if students' degree courses have approved content.

[4] In Furusten's (1999) study the books chosen as especially influential were those by US management gurus Tom Peters and Robert Waterman, and by Swedish management guru, Richard Norman.

[5] Baker founded, owned and edited the UK marketing journal *[Journal of Marketing Management)* that is sponsored by the UK Acdemy of Marketing. He has also held many official roles in UKacademic marketing, recently relinquishing the chair of the Academic Senate' of the Chartered

Institute of Marketing (to Professor John Saunders).

[6] Marketing's normative ideas were particularly promoted by authors such as Theodore Levitt and Peter Drueker and by the papers in the *Harvard Business Review.*

[7] Although Baker (1974) does concede that '. . . from a negative point of view. . . marketing is just a hotchpotch of ideas "borrowed" from other disciplines' (p. 21).

[8] There are countless examples of the rhetoric of citation in marketing management. Both cited and citing are bathed in a warm glow of mutual approval. In Kotler et al. (1999) As Professor Stephen Burnett says: "In a truly great marketing organisation, you can't tell who's in the marketing

department. . . We are all customers now" notes the author Peter Mullen' (p. xv). In Kotler (1988)' "Marketing is too important to be left to the marketing department" states David Packard of Hewlett Packard . . . William Davidow observed: "While great devices are invented in the laboratory, great products are invented in the Marketing Department"' (p. xvii); 'Tom Peters and Bob Waterman interviewed forty-three high performing companies . . . Half of

what they found relates to what marketers call the "marketing concept"' (p. 1).

[9] The rhetoric of economics-derivation found, for example, in Baker (1974, 22-30), in the editor's chapter in Baker (2000a, 4-6), and in Baker (2000b, Chapter 2).

[10] Baker's frequent envious allusions to the 'colonization of thought' achieved by US marketing texts may be those of an ephebe doffing a literary cap to a precursor (Brown (1999) discusses the nature of this literary phenomenon in marketing).

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