FROM OCCUPY WALL STREET TO OCCUPYING THE ACADEMY: THREE INTERVENTIONS FROM ONE DEMONSTRATION

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ABSTRACT

This primary purpose of this project was to further understand and theorize the meaning of Occupy Wall Street. Beyond that, the goal was to advance extant theorizations of the nature of economic justice movements more broadly.

In order to achieve these goals, the theoretical lens of political philosophy is adopted. The dissertation starts with a brief introduction, which explains the rationale behind this choice, and begins the work of contextualizing the movement.

The next chapter is a conceptual piece, which explains the utility of political philosophy in greater depth. Here, the discussion is framed in terms of the consumer culture theory literature, but the framework offered has relevance far beyond this discipline. Here, Badiou's work on the event and subjectivity are employed, and it is argued that this provides an excellent theorization of how consumer culture operates—as well as resistance to consumer culture.

The third chapter starts with a review of past discussions of consumer activism, and explains how the current framework can productively advance knowledge in the field. A Badiouian critical discourse analysis provides a great deal of insight into how individuals become committed to activist movements; how it changes their ethics; how it influences their choice of strategies; and how activism could lead to sustained social change.

The final chapter critically interrogates the idea that marketing tactics should be used by social movements. Occupy Wall Street provides an ideal context for testing the limits of this argument, as it is simultaneously anti-marketing, as well as a movement where some protestors adhere to this idea that movements should be marketed. This chapter raises serious questions about the applicability of marketing techniques not only in this context, but also in many non-profit, social, governmental, and even for-profit contexts.

In the end, it is my hope that this project provides a better understanding of politics and social movements not only for academics, but also for activists. The study presents important findings about the nature of consumer culture, and consequently the nature of strategies that are necessary for those who contest it.

DEDICATION

To all those who Occupy

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I should begin by stating that I will be forever grateful to my family—both biological and chosen—for being with me on this ride. It has been a long road, and I am so very appreciative of your support.

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Looking forward, I am very grateful for the unwavering encouragement of my new colleagues at the University of Leicester, and throughout the European critical marketing community. I feel very welcome in this new academic home.

Last, but certainly not least, I must acknowledge a deep debt of gratitude to my fellow Occupiers—in New York, and everywhere else. Keep fighting!

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Introduction

This dissertation initially began as an empirical study of Occupy Wall Street. In the time since, however, it has ultimately become a study of politics more generally. In the introduction provided here, I chart the evolution of this project, explaining how my studies of political philosophy shaped the empirical studies I conducted, and then how these considerations of politics affected the conclusions I drew from this work. I then discuss the limitations introduced by this perspective, and as a result of other choices made in the process of the project. Next, this introduction addresses directions for future research, both in the abstract, as well as in terms of concrete next steps I envision for my research stream. Finally, the chapter concludes with a preview of the main contributions of the overall dissertation.

Political philosophy for our field

In my attempts to understand and theorize the meaning of the occupation, Detlev Zwick recommended that I read the work of political philosopher Alain Badiou. For that I am eternally grateful, as it has changed the nature of my study entirely. Again, while the original intent of the study was simply to contextualize Occupy Wall Street within the consumer activism literature, I realized that much more was at stake, when one considers the movement within the theoretical frame of political philosophy. Considering Badiou's oeuvre, in conjunction with the work of other contemporary political philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben, Judith Butler, Jacques Rancière, and Slavoj Žižek, it became apparent that a major change was happening within cultural theory—a sort of "political turn," if you will. My sense that the tides were changing was only further confirmed as

relevant works of social research I encountered, from Jo Littler's work on activism (2005) to Cass Sunstein's groundbreaking work on social media (2000, 2009), were increasingly using various forms of political philosophy as a starting point. Finally, this sense was also reinforced by my four years of editorial experience at Duke University Press, which immediately preceded my graduate studies. During my time at Duke University Press, political philosophy had been appearing more and more frequently in works of sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, gender studies, and art history that we had been curating, and in time we started to understand and acknowledge the magnitude of this "turn" that we were witnessing.

With this in mind, I sought to make interventions similar in nature to those made by Fuat Fırat in his work on postmodernism (with Nikhilesh Dholakia, 2006, 1998; with Alladi Venkatesh, 1995). In these cases, as well as in the current case, it became apparent that social theory was moving in a new direction, and the consumer research literature was not necessarily following. Moreover, in these cases as well as my own, consumption and marketing are central phenomena, with implications not just for scholars within our field, but throughout academia. In these works of political philosophy, as well as applied works I encountered at Duke University Press and elsewhere, there seemed to be a renewed interest in marketing as an institution, a locus of power, and an engine that produces us as consumer subjects. I also see it as having a kinship with Fuat Fırat's work in that it is very invested in the ***possibility*** of change—even as change remains improbable. In the various intellectual currents I recount above, all seemed to be a response to the de-politicization and subsequent decline of postmodern theory; the need

for more work on late modernity and hegemony; and the possibility of becoming something other than a consumer subject.

My sense that it was 'time' for such interventions was only heightened by Askegaard and Linnet's (2011) call for macro-level epistemologies that could re-integrate questions of structure, power, and politics into our field. Such perspectives, they hoped, would help us theorise and contextualize the role of marketing in society, and better identify the "agents who construct meaning" (2011, p. 387). A desire for this type of theorizing was further expressed through the CCT 2012 panel on 'advancing theory', and the *Marketing Theory* special issue that resulted from this (June 2013, 13(2)).

Within the wide literature of contemporary political philosophy, which I review in Essays 1 and 2, Badiou's work stood out as one of the most robust frameworks for either of these sets of imperatives, as it a) accounts for the co-constitution of meaning across all levels of social analysis, and b) is also deeply committed to the search for possible alternatives. While many other contemporary political philosophers had notions of the status quo or event (major social change), for example, none were as capable of connecting it to subjectivity, knowledge, social conditions, ethics, and action. Indeed, as noted by Askegaard and Linnet (2011), theorists in many fields (not just our own) have been grappling with the challenge of integrating knowledge across individual (mental), collective (cultural), and "contexts." This is problematic, because knowledge is inherently constituted across these levels of analysis, and hence meaning cannot be fully understood without recourse to all levels. Put differently, how can we say that there is such a thing as "individual phenomenological experience," when an individual's knowledge and thoughts are so strongly shaped by cultural and social forces? Askegaard

and Linnet (2011) contend that while researchers do not intend to reify any level of analysis, our disciplinary foci, methodologies, methods, and the "contexts" they implore us to study in turn produce such artefacts within our research.

In Essay 1, I answer Askegaard and Linnet's call (2011), arguing that political philosophy as a theory base, and the work of Badiou in particular, has the potential to integrate knowledge across these three levels of "context." In short, Badiou's work is a radical reassessment not just of epistemology but ontology and methodology. Tacitly drawing upon Foucault (1980, 1975), Badiou foregrounds power as an analytical category. Drawing as well from critical theory traditions, Badiou argues that power structures sociohistorical conditions. As politics can be defined as the power structures that exist within any social system (Dahl, 1970), such a statement is inherently political. From here, Badiou argues that these politically-formed social conditions in turn affect knowledge structures; in due course impacting how our subjectivity is constituted; and finally, shaping the ethical positions we hold and the actions in which we engage (Badiou 2006, 1993, 1982).

Epistemologically speaking, this means that an understanding of power is essential for disciplines concerned with history, society, subjectivity, ethics, and behavior. In terms of ontology, the idea that who we are is defined first and foremost by power relations raises serious considerations—once again questioning the very idea that we can are "individuals" or "subjects" in any "meaningful" way. Finally, such a political perspective means that knowledge production can never be politically neutral. In any research exercise, the subjects of study exist within a broader sociohistorical milieu, defined by particular power relations. The position we take, in regard to these politically-

charged phenomena, is consequently never neutral. Rather than accept that politics is an "untouchable" topic (Bradshaw and Dholakia, with Fırat, 2012), this perspective argues that politics "touches" everything, and hence cannot be ignored in any discipline, context of study, or journal. With this in mind, we see the resurgence of the critical theory imperative to critique the very operations of power itself, inherently working in the interests of the relatively disempowered (Fairclough, 2010; Murray and Ozanne, 1991; Horkheimer, 1947), raising serious questions about the ethics of academic research, particularly within institutions such as business schools.

The implications of these epistemological, ontological, and methodological shifts for any field of social inquiry are massive. The work of unpacking these principles, in the many fields that have lost sight of them, is nascent, current, and ongoing. Given the nature and scope of my doctoral education and onward employment, and the fact that almost no mention of Badiou had been made in our literature, I decided my project should be to consider the consequences of these radical imperatives within my fields of study—consumer culture theory, consumer research, and marketing—as well as in the specific context of Occupy Wall Street.

For each of these disciplines, I wanted to focus on the mainstream, hegemonic discourses that attempt to define the parameters of the field, and the scope of research to be done. This is because I have been so thoroughly convinced, through the work of Badiou, that politics is a matter of ontology, and not axiology. Working from this view that politics is central to any research endeavour—not just "political" or "politicized" research—I wanted to critically intervene in disciplines where politics has historically been "untouchable" (Bradshaw and Dholakia, 2012).

The first essay begins with the youngest field, consumer culture theory. After considering the implications of political philosophy and the work of Badiou more generally, as I recounted in depth above, I then reconsidered the history of consumer culture theory in terms of this framework. The essay concludes with ontological, epistemological, and brief methodological implications for future research in the field of consumer culture theory.

The second essay seeks to extend this work in several crucial ways. First, I was interested in using the Badiouian framework in a specific consumer culture theory context—Occupy Wall Street. Second, I was also interested in expanding the methodological considerations that I began in the previous essay, so here I consider the implications of the Badiouian framework for ongoing philosophy of science debates within the *Journal of Consumer Research*, both in general (as outlined by MacInnis and Folkes, 2010), and also focusing particularly on the critical theory tradition (Murray, 2002; Denzin, 2001; Hetrick and Lozada, 1994; Murray and Ozanne, 1991). Third, I work to develop methods that are appropriate for such a framework, and for consumption-related fields of study. In the case of Occupy Wall Street, I argue that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as outlined by Fairclough (2010, 1999) and employing a Badiouian perspective, has the potential to advance knowledge within the field. In the end, I find that Badiouian philosophy and critical discourse analysis can provide new insights within the specific study of consumer activism, and for consumer research more generally.

The final essay considers the implications of political philosophy for the field of marketing. To do this work, I adopted two approaches. First, I wanted to perform a

critical literature review of definitional debates within the *Journal of Marketing*, so as to elucidate and theorize the politics of marketing. Historically, such discussions of the "ethics" and "politics" of marketing have often been relegated to sources such as the *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, or within the canon of the critical marketing literature. Again, starting from the political philosophy notion that politics is a central category of analysis, and hence ***nothing*** is "politically-neutral," I wanted to question this marginalization of "political" research, and explain why politics is necessarily at the heart of marketing phenomena. In the process, I wanted to have a wide berth of political philosophy concepts to choose from, and in the end I decided that a simple, political-science based understanding of power was the best way forward. Here, I found that even "social," "broadened," and "progressive" definitions of the marketing concept are grounded in the ideology of competitive market capitalism.

Building on this, I wanted to experiment with a second method that is appropriate for research inspired by political philosophy, namely political analysis. I found this to be quite compatible with traditional market analysis techniques, which are used to assess the "success" or "failure" of both for-profit and non-profit marketing campaigns (Lee and Kotler 2011). Consequently, I used basic political analysis, from political science and also from the marketing literature itself, to examine the implications of such logic. Here, I deployed the context of Occupy Wall Street as a test case, drawing from "official narratives" and sociohistoric documents as well as interviews. As a result of this market analysis, I raise serious questions about the utility of "social marketing" tools for activists and non-profits. In short, if marketing is largely effective by harnessing power and resources to create sustainable comparative advantage, how could not-for-profits ever

"compete" in "the marketplace for ideas?" An alternative example I consider in the discussion is the competition between tobacco companies and smoking cessation organisations (e.g. NGOs and government health authorities). How can the latter, with measly and inconsistent sources of funding and resources, ever compete with Big Tobacco, given that they have a permanent revenue stream (i.e. cigarette sales)? Ultimately, the essay critically interrogates the idea of a "marketplace for ideas" within contemporary societies, and argues that true change is only likely to happen with the involvement (or divestment, in cases of corporate bastardization of the democratic process) of powerful agents within government. Put differently, waging an advertising war between tobacco companies and public health authorities is unlikely to work, but using strategies from other political domains (e.g. strongly regulating the industry) could actually make a difference. The essay concludes with a refined definition of marketing, which clarifies the stakes for profit-oriented businesses, non-profits, academics, and activists alike.

The importance of context

Despite the centrality of political philosophy to the project, the importance of Occupy Wall Street to the project cannot be understated. In short, the empirical experience of Occupy Wall Street, combined with readings in political philosophy, make it apparent that sociohistoric conditions powerfully shape how knowledge is produced at a particular point in time, with consequences for both social inquiry and everyday life. In Essay 2, I examine how Occupy Wall Street occurred when it was believed that the "status quo" of American consumer culture had changed, creating a rupture whereby Americans could

consider major questions of political economy once again—as they advocated for true public health care, military divestment, and foreclosure prevention, to name just a few domains in which they sought interventions. Occupy Wall Street is widely acknowledged to have "changed the conversation" on many of these issues within American politics (Graeber, 2013; Chomsky, 2012; Mitchell, 2012), and that is a tremendous intervention in and of itself. The scope of these social changes, as detailed in this essay, remind us that knowledge of Occupy is relevant not just to scholars of social movements, but all those who study economics and politics more broadly.

In the accounts of Occupiers I analysed, I saw how people came to question the dominant ideology of consumer culture as a result of these deteriorating social conditions, instead becoming "faithful" to the intersubjective "truth" that things needed to change. Some who had previously had no interested in activism became "subjectivated," in Badiouian terms—heavily committed to the movement. Many left their jobs, families, and homes indefinitely in order to participate in what they saw as a rare opportunity to question and change the social order. Even after the loss of the park, one of the movement's best resources, the activists with whom I talked identified strongly with the movement, and were committed to spreading knowledge of the defunct status quo—based on both their own subjective experiences of the recession, as well as the collective knowledge that emerged from the movement. This ethic translated to a wide variety of actions and strategies, which I catalogue in depth in Essay 2.

In Essay 3, I look specifically to the subset of "social marketing" strategies employed by some Occupiers, questioning whether or not they can be effective within a competitive marketplace of ideas. I find that while Occupy had some successes in

marketing terms, the "competition" nevertheless had greater resources and influence, ultimately critiquing the idea that activism is best conducted through marketing means. That said, I also find that while the Occupy movement did not "achieve all of its goals," it was nevertheless a productive "laboratory" for activist strategies, which in turn taught valuable lessons about actions that can have effectively challenge powerful members of society, and those that do not work so well. Principal among these would be lessons learned in "living together" and creating community, which numerous theorists (Graeber, 2013; Sennett, 2013; Habermas, 1962) argue is not just the means but also the end of democratic activity. Badiou is also sympathetic to this idea, which he saw as central to the successes of the May 1968 movements in Paris (2010).

While many might continue to question the relevance of Occupy as "the occupations have shut down," I argue that the changes to identity the activists experienced, and their new knowledge of strategies and politics, can have a lasting impact on society. For example, one only needs to look at a movement like fast food unionism, which has emerged just recently in the United States against all odds, to see the lasting impact of Occupy Wall Street (Greenhouse, 2012). Moreover, as noted by Badiou (2006, 2001, 1982), social movements are always destined to fail, so long as the status quo remains in power. Building on Gramscian notions of cultural hegemony, the status quo is always hostile towards resistance, and uses all tools at its disposal to overturn revolutionary movements. As I note in Essay 3, one simply cannot compete against the competitive capitalist market system, at least not on its own terms. Without successfully questioning the singularity and hegemony of the capitalist "order" (as described by Fırat, in Bradshaw and Dholakia, 2012), change cannot occur. While many would say this is a

bleak analysis, I argue instead that this is a positive, hopeful development: it reminds us of what needs to happen, for major social change to occur. Through a focus on what is "meaningful," what is "different," and what "matters" in contemporary society, we can begin to imagine other "orders," and their structures of meaning. Ultimately, in the words of Costas Douzinas (2013), we should be left with a sense of strategic optimism, rather than a leftist melancholy.

Limitations and future directions

As with any research enterprise, I have necessarily had to make decisions that limited the scope of my study. First of all, I made a conscious decision to focus my argumentation on mainstream discourse in consumer culture theory, consumer research, and marketing. Again, I did this because I was committed to the idea that the study of power and politics should be central to any academic enterprise, and I wanted to intervene in these sites where considerations of politics are frequently secondary or totally non-existent. While constructing these interventions, I necessarily had to limit the scope of literature included, but it goes without saying that this project owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to earlier generations of critical, radical, and "heretical" scholars both within our field, and outside of it. As such, an important next step will be to contribute back to this literature, without which this project would not have been possible. In future projects, I hope to better elucidate the implications of political philosophy for critical and radical scholars of marketing and consumption, and further theorize the continuities between my work and these traditions.

Second, the scope of the data collection was limited out of necessity. The movement appeared so quickly in the fall of 2011 that it was not possible to receive ethics clearance to do a full ethnography before the encampment was shut down by the police. I was lucky enough to have "occupied" personally, giving me autoethnographic insights into the phenomenon, and providing an opportunity for overt, non-participant observation as well as the collection of sociohistorical materials (e.g. documents). By the time clearance to do interviews was granted, the movement had already moved underground, and participants were difficult to find. Moreover, the Occupy community was particularly skeptical of researchers. One could only be "trusted" after displaying a significant commitment to the movement, and membership in the Occupy community. Indeed, doing observational, sociohistoric, and interview research of any sort at Occupy Wall Street was an incredibly rare opportunity, and I will be grateful to the community for the rest of my life.

As a result, the final number of interviews is quite small. While this is problematic by some standards of qualitative analysis, such as grounded theory (where more data is believed to provide ever-higher levels of theoretical saturation), the interviews I obtained provided more than enough material for the methods used (critical discourse analysis and political analysis). This is especially true when combined with analysis of other discursive materials ("official" narrative accounts, documents, and both photographs and text posted on public websites). The lower final number of interviews was appropriate for a Badiouian critical discourse analysis, which requires in-depth attention to narratives that evolved within each interview; comparison between interviews; and iteration between theoretical texts and the transcripts. In the end, while it

would have been interesting to see what could have been done with more interviews, or with full ethnographic materials, or by collaborating with others to do a comparative study with other "occupations," I am satisfied that the data collection methods used were appropriate for the study conducted, and for the scope of a dissertation.

Third, the choice of writing for these three disciplines has limited the audience and relevance for my work on both Occupy Wall Street and political philosophy. In future research, I would like to rectify this. One project that I have in mind is to expand upon one of the most interesting "stories" of the occupation, relating to the rejection of social media amongst those who camped during the occupation of Zuccotti Park. Electricity was not available at the park, and consequently the vast majority of protestors were forced off of social media platforms. This had many positive consequences for community-building and activist dedication, which in turn has important implications for the study of social media and democracy. This will be a massive undertaking, as media studies is not a field in which I have extensive expertise, but it is something I look forward to doing in my capacity as a faculty member.

Finally, there are many other implications of the field of political philosophy for studies of marketing and consumption, and it would have been impossible to engage in comprehensive empirical investigations of these phenomena within the course of a dissertation. Indeed, this is a life's work, or even the responsibility of the entire research community. Nevertheless, I plan to address this limitation in some of my future projects. Here, I think the biggest elision is that this work focused exclusively on resistance, rather than interrogating what Badiou would call the "status quo" of consumer culture. As such,

future work in my research stream largely compensates for this by focusing on the status quo.

First, and building on the previous study, I am interested in the politics of social media consumption more broadly. To begin work on this subject, I have started to look at how the space of the museum, both in person and as it is represented in social media, has become commercialized, in turn affecting the reception of political art within such marketized spaces. In other words, how has the fact that we've been taught to "consume" art affected our experience of art's politics?

Second, I plan to apply Badiou's interest in the critique of dominant ideologies to look at the "ideology wars" within pro- and anti-breastfeeding camps In this case, each side believes that they have "the truth" while the other side is promoting "the ideology." Through a Badiouian analysis, I hope to untangle the various subject positions, forms of knowledge, and power relations that structure this field of competition. Thus far, it appears that while pro-breastfeeding advocates are challenging the old status quo which demanded mothers bottle-feed for the benefit of consumer goods firms and employers, they fail to question the role of the current capitalist status quo as it limits breastfeeding. Rather than advocate for political change, they argue that mothers should "take it upon themselves" to make breastfeeding work—at all costs, and in the face of tremendous obstruction by structural forces. This individualist, neoliberal discourse denies the role of social structures in affecting choice, and implicitly argues that mothers are solely responsible for their success or failure in breastfeeding, rather than question those who have the power to make things easy or unbearable for mothers.

Third, largely inspired by the work of Michael Parenti (2011) and Immanuel Wallerstein (1979), I have begun a study that applies political philosophy to the field of international marketing. In the course of teaching international marketing as a subject, I became aware of several pernicious assumptions within the mainstream literature of the field. For example, textbooks for such a course frequently put the reader in the subject position of the manager of a large, American multi-national corporation. This tacitly biases students toward one particular business model. In the process, "international markets" are treated as monolithic entities. In order to understand and theorize such findings, I have been reading the extant historical and theoretical literature on imperialism, in turn finding that imperialist assumptions continue to have a palpable influence on our ideas of international marketing strategy.

Finally, my most advanced project on the ideology of the status quo is a set of studies on recession-era television. Here, I look to the three most popular fictional depictions of the recession—*Hung*, *2 Broke Girls*, and *Breaking Bad*—to determine what sorts of narratives they tell about the recession. I find that each of these three shows promotes a neoliberal ideological position, arguing that one should find a way out of the recession through entrepreneurialism and good marketing–of either legal or illegal products—rather than political advocacy or reliance on government programs. Importantly, these narratives are told across racial lines: all the protagonists as white, and casts of dehumanized, racialized "Others" serve as a moral cautionary tale of what one's life could be like, if one does not engage in a class-appropriate way of escaping the recession. In the end, each of the shows is focused on restoring proper consumer subjectivity, rather than producing any sort of activist subjectivity.

Conclusions

In the end, I believe the most important contribution of this dissertation is the development of a new theoretical frame that is of use in consumer culture theory, consumer research, marketing, and eventually other disciplines. I feel that I have a project that is not only relevant to scholars of consumer activism, but to scholars in our fields more generally, with applicability to a wide range of domains. Again, I have been greatly influenced and inspired by Badiou's lucid arguments for why power (and hence politics) is the central category through which the social is constituted, and I hope that I can convince you, the reader, of the robustness and importance of this intervention in the essays that follow. I was surprised to find a theory base that could so ably fulfil Askegaard and Linnet's (2011) call for epistemologies that can span internal, cultural, and societal levels of analysis. Moreover, the ontological intervention that many of the "identities" and ways of being that interest us so much within consumer research may not even be "meaningful," in a political sense of the term, is nothing short of radical. It completely challenges our understandings of agency and responsibility within society, which could thereby provide better insight as to how social change could actually happen. This has relevance not only for scholars, but for activists and all others subjugated by structures of power.

As seen in the essays, political philosophy has a tremendous potential for refining definitions of frequently-used concepts in our field, from consumer activism to marketing strategy. Indeed, political philosophy can be used to address many unsettled questions about the nature of the social, knowledge, identity, ethics, choice, agency, consumption,

and marketing. As such, I argue that considering politics is not just central to my project—it is central to all research projects. Given the dominant role of power within society, politics simply cannot be ignored.

Essay 1

Connecting Contexts:

Political Philosophy for Consumer Culture Theory

Introduction

In their assessment of the state of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), Arnould and Thompson (2005) called for more integrative, inclusive theorizing. Askegaard and Linnet answered this call in 2011, with a critique of dominant epistemologies in the discipline. They argue that individualism has become endemic to existential-phenomenological consumer research, and that contextualism has limited the potential of ethnography within our field. The authors contend that while these epistemologies have yielded a wealth of useful knowledge of the phenomenological experience of consumption, greater theoretical depth and meaning can only be achieved if these context-dependent findings can be conceptualized with recourse to the surrounding sociological milieu. Here, the authors propose that for the field to advance, consumer culture theorists must develop theoretical frameworks that attend to the "systemic and structuring influences of market and social systems," (p. 381) as well the everyday lived experience of consumers.

This paper answers Askegaard and Linnet's call by considering how contemporary political philosophy, and specifically the work of Alain Badiou, can fulfill this role. Political philosophy, generally considered to be the heir-ascendant to the throne of continental philosophy, takes the relationship between social structures and political subjects as its object. As such, it has been incredibly useful for reconciling questions of structure and agency across the social sciences. Badiou, in particular, provides a powerful

and clear theorization of the relationship between sociohistoric conditions, knowledge structures, subjectivity, and behavior.

Here, I consider the implications of this new epistemological perspective for the discipline of consumer culture theory. The essay begins with a brief recapitulation of the dominant epistemological position of consumer culture theorists, as described by Askegaard and Linnet (2011), as well as a summary of the author's alternative epistemological proposal, which is grounded in the thought of British anthropologist Roy Dilley and French sociologist Edgar Morin. Next, I provide a brief introduction to political philosophy and the framework of Alain Badiou. The remainder of the essay is spent considering the implications of a Badiouian epistemology for the consumer culture theory canon, as demarcated by Askegaard and Linnet (2011) and Arnould and Thompson (2005) before them. Ultimately, I find that a Badiouian perspective has the potential to powerfully integrate extant findings within our research community.

Dominant epistemologies in Consumer Culture Theory

Existential-phenomenology and the limits of psychologism

Askegaard and Linnet identify two epistemological trends that have dominated the state of knowledge development in consumer culture theory. First, following Tadajewski (2006), they argue that psychological perspectives and a corresponding emphasis on the individual level of analysis have long dominated consumer research. In the case of interpretive consumer research, they find that the specter of psychology has led to a dominance of existential-phenomenological epistemologies and methodologies.

Askegaard and Linnet's (2011) contend that the dominance of the individual level of analysis in the existential-phenomenological tradition has had the unintended consequence of privileging the minutiae of everyday consumer experience over sociological forces which may shape consumer behavior beyond the level of conscious awareness. Askegaard and Linnet argue that this is not a pitfall of phenomenology in general, so much as how it is employed within CCT. They note that "some currents of phenomenological thinking distinguish themselves by taking as their point of departure the fundamentally social nature of human existence, analyzing how individuals merge their worldviews and participate in each other's experiences" (p. 394), such as the intersubjective tradition in phenomenological anthropology. Furthermore, they find that hermeneutic approaches to phenomenology are much more attuned to the holistic picture of social phenomena, not just individual experience. Indeed, such a balance can be seen on the main treatises on hermeneutics within our field (Thompson, 1997; Thompson, Pollio, and Locander, 1994; Arnold and Fischer, 1994).

Ethnography and the limits of relativism

The second problematic epistemological trend that they identify is the contextualism that commonly accompanies ethnographic perspectives. Beginning with the consumer behavior Odyssey and continuing through most naturalistic consumer research, they find a tendency to reify the contextually-dependent meaning created by cultures and communities. Again, this is not an intellectual trend specific to consumer culture theory, so much as an artefact from the ethnographic tradition's parent discipline, anthropology. Indeed, drawing on the work of Marilyn Strathern (1995), Dilley (1999) notes that the

epistemological project of that discipline has been the "contextualization of knowledge" (32). The challenge for anthropologists and consumer culture theorists alike is to theorize the meaning of context, or as Askegaard and Linnet describe it, the "context of context."

Towards an epistemology of CCT: Theorizing context through Dilley and Morin

In the article, Askegaard and Linnet (2011) begin the work of elucidating the meaning of context, as it relates to the study of consumer culture. First, they turn to Roy Dilley, who has capably synthesized work on the meaning of context within philosophy as well as social anthropology. While there is a great deal of disagreement on the subject, Dilley (1999) finds that common ground can be found when researchers consider contextualization as a practice of making connections—and, implicitly, making arguments about phenomena that are not connected. He argues that most of these practices can be described as one of three contextualizing moves: (1) appeals to *external context*, or the real world surrounding a phenomenon; (2) focus on *internal context*, or connections within the world of the phenomena like culture and language; or (3) studies of *psychological contexts*, or the way in which the mental worlds of individuals itself functions as a context.

Askegaard and Linnet use this framework to argue that the existential-phenomenological tradition of CCT has focused disproportionately on psychological contexts. They find that this influence frequently extends to ethnography within consumer culture theory, despite the fact that such a perspective may be inappropriate for fieldwork-based disciplines concerned with the social and cultural nature of behavior. According to the authors and Dilley (1999), ethnography at its best tends to be

preoccupied with internal context, or connections within the lifeworlds of informants. Building on Dilley's work, Askegaard and Linnet (2011) argue that a knowledge system can only be complete when it considers the dialogic relationship that exists between all three levels of context. The individual subjectivity of mental contexts must connect to the intersubjectivity of communities; from there, communal experiences must be connected to the social, cultural, political, and institutional environment that surrounds and defines them. This is because meaning is co-constituted between these levels of analysis; without consideration of all of these levels, we cannot make statements about meaning and knowledge at any one level.

From this point, the authors turn to the work of French philosopher of science Edgar Morin. Morin's main contribution to the field of epistemology is a theorization of the interconnectedness of these levels of knowledge production (Hawkins, 1997; Kofman, 1996). Morin criticizes both the subjectivism of the humanities and much of the social sciences as well as the objectivism of the hard sciences; as with Dilley (1999), he finds that absolutism and relativism can only exist and have meaning with recourse to each other. Morin theorizes that knowledge emerges dialogically between these levels of analysis, and through other complementary/antagonistic systems such as the dualism of the mind/body. Here, subjectivity and structures are found to be mutually co-constituitive; consequently, the study of one level of analysis without the other is not only incomplete, but also incomprehensible. Ultimately, the dialogic of comprehension, which Askegaard and Linnet explain is rooted in the Weberian and phenomenological concept of *verstehen*, emerges as the central dialogic through which knowledge is produced.

Based on this framework, Askegaard and Linnet present their final assessment of consumer culture theory. They find that the field has gone too far to one side of such dialogics, emphasizing subjectivism over objectivism, and emic detail rather than theoretical abstraction. The authors conclude by advocating for work that takes up the challenge facing fieldwork-based disciplines—the need for epistemologies which consider both emic lifeworld experiences and etic forces, operating beyond the level of conscious awareness.

Beyond Morin: Political philosophy as an alternative theoretical framework

While Askegaard and Linnet (2011) provide a provocative and challenging starting point for future research in CCT, many questions remain regarding what such an epistemology would look like in practice. As such, one must consider other developments within contemporary epistemology and social theory to answer Askegaard and Linnet's call for synthesizing, sociologically sensitive theoretical frameworks. The authors argue that CCT research grounded in theories of institutional agency (as explicated by Giddens and Bourdieu) have come the closest to realizing this potential but find that much remains to be done in terms of identifying unifying epistemological perspectives that could lead to a cohesive body of knowledge. Dilley (1999), on the other hand, contends that Foucauldian epistemologies may have the greatest potential for elucidating the connections between contexts, thus uniting the various horizons at which meaning is produced.

Here, I expand upon both of these suggestions by considering the epistemological position of contemporary political philosophy, which can be characterized as the "next

generation" of social theories that attempt to simultaneously grapple with questions of structure and agency. As argued by Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1998), contemporary political philosophy begins with Foucault's unfinished work, aiming to elucidate connections between political technologies (e.g. exercises of state power) and technologies of the self, processes by which we become both individuated and subjugated (Foucault, 1988). Starting with a focus on the relationship between powerful agents and meaning-making – or as Askegaard and Linnet would say, "searching for [the] agents who construct meaning" (2011: 387) – contemporary political philosophers build on Foucault (1979a, 1980), examining how meaning-making within external, internal and psychological contexts is largely influenced by power dynamics.

By following the impact of power across all three levels of context, an enhanced understanding of the co-constitution of social structures, cultural forms and subjectivities can be revealed. Indeed, given the common constituting role of power, analyses in political philosophy do not focus on subjects, agents or their co-constitution, as much as how power is antecedent to and constitutes both structures and subjectivity. Working from the assumption that power is the common constitutive factor across these levels of analysis, political philosophy is consequently a radical reassessment of the relationship between structure and agency. As with Askegaard and Linnet (2011), this theoretical frame raises serious questions about the agentic consumer and his desires.

To facilitate a dialogue between this tradition, the existential–phenomenological tradition within CCT and the Morinian alternative as formulated by Askegaard and Linnet (2011), I provide a brief introduction to political philosophy and the work of Badiou below. The article then proceeds to a comparison of these epistemological

systems. Next, I examine how political philosophy generally and a Badiouian epistemology in particular could be applied to the field of CCT. Given the interest in simultaneously attending to internal, external, and psychological contexts, French philosopher Alain Badiou's project is arguably the most appropriate. Badiou provides a new, powerful framework for examining the co-constitution of social structures, knowledge and subjectivity. Ultimately, I argue that this approach reflects a new generation of work that attempts to synthesize knowledge produced across universalist and subjectivist frontiers. As we will see in the following sections, Badiou's philosophy provides new insights into the operations of power, the production of individual subjects and the possibility of resistance in societies, despite the overdetermination of power.

A brief introduction to political philosophy

As noted previously, political philosophy is considered by many to be the heir-ascendant of the contentious family that is continental philosophy (Pluth, 2010; Dean, 2009; Riera, 2005; Hallward, 2003, 2001). It is one of the oldest traditions in philosophical inquiry, dating back to the political and ethical dialogues of Socrates (Plato, 387 B.C), and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (350 B.C. a) and *Politics* (350 B. C. b). These works were concerned with the nature of virtue and the good life, and in the case of Aristotle, democracy and model citizenship. Later political philosophers include Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Bentham, and Mill, as well as moral philosophers and political economists such as Ricardo, Smith, Proudhon, Marx, and Polyani (Wolff, 2006; Miller, 2003). In the case of political economy, the focus is on the politics of how economic systems are structured (Mosco, 2009)

Despite this stately provenance, political philosophy faded from prominence during much of the 20th century, as politics became the domain of political science departments, which in turn concerned themselves with micro-level concerns rather than a balance between localized politics and macro-level questions (Dahl, 2002, 1970). Nevertheless, it was a 20th century political scientist who provided one of the most succinct definitions of politics; Harold Lasswell explained that politics refers to "who gets what, when, and how," (1936).

In the last ten years, political philosophy has re-emerged as a *tour de force* in social theory and philosophy. This return has been attributed to the irreconcilability of postmodern philosophies with questions of meaning and value (Riera, 2005; Graeber, 2001), which Peter Hallward (2003, 2001) argues is epitomized by the nihilism of traditional Derridean deconstruction. As noted above (Agamben, 1998), modern-day political theorists frequently begin with a reconsideration of Foucault's works on power (1980, 1979a, 1975). Rather than be overwhelmed by the seemingly-all-consuming nature of power structures, philosophers such as Jacques Rancière (2010, 1992), Chantal Mouffe (2005, 1993), and Alain Badiou (2006, 2005, 2001) are interested in how social change may be possible, even if it is not probable. Once again, contemporary political philosophy can be seen as a new iteration of the ongoing debate surrounding how agency and structure affect social interaction, and a reaction to the work of scholars such as Anthony Giddens (1984).

Foucault is not, however, the only theorist who has been revived by contemporary political philosophy. In essence, this project reinvestigates the place of politics in 20th century social theory, beginning with the critical theory project of the Frankfurt School,

through to Habermas's work on democracy (1981) and the public sphere (1962). The more political projects of Bourdieu (2005, 2001, 1993) could also be read into this tradition, as he attends to the influence of powerful actors within fields of cultural production. To summarize this school of thought in the terms of the foregoing epistemological discussion, political philosophers study the intersection between objectively existing power structures and the subjective experience of life within them.

A brief introduction to Badiou

Within the frame of political theory, Alain Badiou's work is arguably the most comprehensive and explanatory framework. Throughout a series of major philosophical treatises (Badiou 2006, 2005, 2001, 1982), Badiou theorizes how sociohistoric conditions structure knowledge, which in turn produces particular subjectivities, ultimately shaping individuals' ethics and actions. While Badiou maintains a critical interest in cultural hegemony (along the lines of Gramsci, 1971, and Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947), Badiou diverges from these earlier thinkers by focusing on how resistance could nevertheless be possible, even if it is improbable. In other words, while he would agree with Foucault (1980), Giddens (1984), and the final work of Baudrillard (2010), that social action is largely controlled by the most powerful actors (which Nitzan and Bichler 2009 demonstrate is synonymous to those with the most capital), Badiou devotes his full energy to understanding how such rigid structures could be altered. His theory can thus be characterized as one of social change.

Again, following Foucault (1980), Badiou argues that discourse and social action are generally structured by the interests of powerful actors (2006, 2001). He refers to this

as *the state of the situation* or the *status quo*. Put differently, the state of the situation can be described as the sociohistoric conditions in place at a given time. Here, and in the work of Rancière (2010, 2006, 1992) and Žižek (2011, 2000), the status quo of contemporary consumer culture is characterized as a *post-political consensus*. Emerging after the fall of the Soviet Union, the post-political consensus is a state of affairs where major issues of political economy have been put to rest in favor of a unitary neoliberal capitalist logic.

Badiou (2006, 1993, 1982) contends that the *knowledge structure* which accompanies the state of the situation is *ideology*, which he defines as knowledge that serves the interests of those in power. This is a major divergence from dominant usages of ideology in cultural studies, anthropology, and post-structuralist social theory, which takes a relativist stance and uses the term to describe the belief structure of a social group (Eagleton, 2007; Dilley, 1999). Rather than seeing all knowledge production as a politically-neutral discursive game, Badiou reanimates critical theory conceptualizations of knowledge, emphasizing the role of power in intellectual production and culture creation. In essence, Badiou and his contemporaries are calling for a reconsideration of this distinction, and the depoliticization inherent in the breakdown of this usage.

Again, tacitly building on Gramscian notions of cultural hegemony (1971), Badiou argues that the dominant knowledge structure, or ideology, surrounding an individual has a powerful structuring influence on subjectivity. In his early work, Badiou argued that the subjects produced by ideology were not subjects at all, as they were not truly involved or conversant in the political matters of society (1982). More recently, Badiou theorizes that individuals become *subjects of the state of the situation* in the

absence of other knowledge structures. In turn, their *ethics*, defined as duty to society (following Aristotle, 350a B.C., 350b B.C.,) are guided by the state of the situation. Within a capitalist consumer culture, a subject of the situation would be socialized into an individualist, value-maximizing ethic. For example, the subject may be more concerned with his/her own employability, rather than labor politics more broadly; or with their own access to resources and consumer goods, rather than in social welfare.

Nevertheless, there are rare moments when the state of the situation is called into question, and Badiou refers to such a moment as an ***event.*** Following Lacan (1966), the event "punches a hole" in existing knowledge structures, allowing for the formation of counter-ideological understandings of power relations in society. Here, power means much the same as it does across the social sciences, from the work of French and Raven (1959) to Robert Dahl (1970) and Haugaard (1977): power refers to the ability for one individual to influence the behavior of another. It is power "over" another. This is distinct from the idea of positive liberty, the "power to" do something. It is also a major departure from Foucault, for whom power was diffuse and a great number of subjects are implicated (1980, 1979a, 1975). Within Badiou's oeuvre, the focus is on critiquing the very few individuals consciously wield power, rather than fixating on how a great number of individuals are unconsciously implicated (2006, 1993).

Ultimately, Badiou goes even farther than his Marxist forebears, calling the understanding of power *truth* rather than knowledge. Here, truth is defined as knowledge that would hold true for all people, regardless of differences in social class, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality. Given these limitations, truth is a fairly narrow concept—there are not many "truths" that would hold for all, across all of these differences. Indeed,

Badiou's truth can be characterized as a universal contempt for oppression, which, Badiou would argue enslaves everyone—even those who do the oppressing (1993). As such, he is arguing that anti-authoritarian politics are universally valuable, and indeed is questioning the legitimacy of power (as explicated above), in general.

While truth is thus delimited, it is nevertheless experienced through an infinitude of subjective instantiations. Truth can be known *collectively* through *politics*; *dyadically* through the experience of *love*, and the creation of a subjectivity which exceeds the sum of its two component people; and *either collectively or individually*, as the result of *artistic or scientific discovery*. Such a truth is so irreconcilable with dominant knowledge that it requires new discourse, and commands radical changes in personal ethics and behaviour. Badiou describes the individuals created through such transformations as *subjects of truth* (2006, 2005, 1993, 1982); within the domain of politics, they could be described as *political subjects*.

To see an illustration of the relationships between the sociohistoric conditions, knowledge structures, identity, ethics, and action outlined herein, please see Figures 1 (Badiou's General Theory of Social Action), Figure 2 (Badiou's Theory of Post-Politics), and Figure 3 (Badiou's Theory of Political Subjectivity).

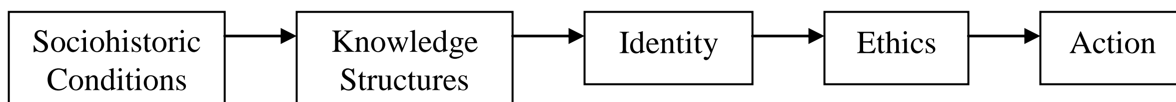


Figure 1. Badiou's General Theory of Social Action

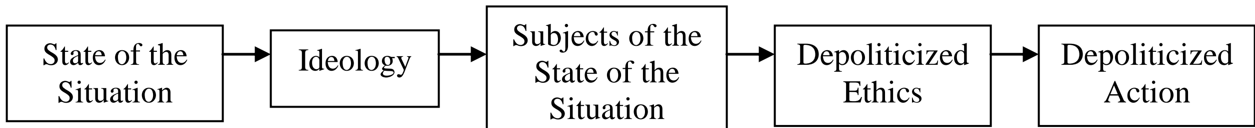


Figure 2. Badiou's Theory of Post-Politics

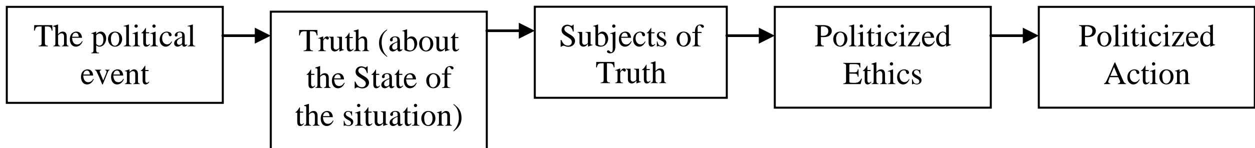


Figure 3. Badiou's Theory of Political Action

Ultimately, Badiou's intervention in social theory is nothing short of a fresh attempt to reconcile universalist and contextualist approaches to knowledge production. On the one hand, Badiou argues that there are objectively-existing power structures, whose interests are well-known and communicated through ideology. With this in mind, he reopens the question of universal truth, which he defines as critique of ideology. At the same time, Badiou maintains a continuity with 20th century phenomenology (especially Heidegger 1927), arguing that the experience of such a truth is always subjective; located within the situation; and inextricable from the eccentricities and personal history of a particular human being. As such, the exact nature of the ethics and action resulting from the experience of truth is always locally- and personally-specific. Taken together, this means that an individual has their own subjective experience of politics, coupled with an understanding of how this has meaning beyond his or her own life.

Building on this epistemological foundation, Badiou's perspective also offers a radical new ontology. Again, following Heidegger (1927), Badiou is concerned with the nature and meaning of being for various subjects, within different social contexts. Within his philosophy, social contexts (the status quo and the event), knowledge (ideology and truth), and subjectivity are all defined in terms of relationships to power; as such, the very nature of being is revealed to be defined by politics. This is a major ontological development, and is frequently considered to be the most important intervention of Badiou's project (Riera, 2005; Beistegui, 2005; Hallward 2003, 2001).

Comparing epistemologies

In many ways, contemporary political philosophy shares many of the assumptions of Askegaard and Linnet's Morinian epistemology. First, and perhaps most importantly, the current generation of political philosophers are interested in the intersection between objectivism and subjectivism. Specifically, they are interested in the intersection between objectively-existing power structures; subjective, individual experiences of domination in these systems; and localized strategies of resistance. In the work of Badiou, this takes the form of a shared understanding of dominance and power, developed in spite of the fact that subjects differ infinitely in their experiences. As with Morin, Badiou's work re-invigorates hermeneutic phenomenology's (Dilthey, 1923; Weber, 1913) concern with *verstehen*, or intersubjective understanding.

Badiou differs, however, on a number of essential parameters. First, and perhaps most importantly, while Morin is interested in cognitive processes of knowledge formation, Badiou's epistemology is in and of itself more sociological. Badiou is

concerned with *where knowledge comes from* and *what kind of knowledge is formed*. Rather than entertain phenomenological preoccupations with individuals' perception and sensation, Badiou's questions the genesis and importance of the individual subject at all. As indicated by the distinction between truth and ideology, the two forms of knowledge in Badiou's philosophy can be described as knowledge created by subjects of truth, and knowledge created by the dominant society. Both kinds of knowledge are always socially defined, and the individual simply adapts them to his or her individual experience. Compared to Morin, then, Badiou is much more critical of the co-constitution of subjects and structures of power. The central dialogic for Badiou is not between subjectivism and objectivism, but between dominance and resistance.

For Badiou, this is not the case only for political knowledge, but knowledge production in general. In a Kuhnian move, Badiou is interested in power dynamics within the domains of science, art, and love as well as politics, arguing that in each case there exists a dominant social logic, and the truth developed and held by subjects that resist. Ultimately, this means that epistemology itself is never politically neutral, and reminds us that researchers necessarily make ethical decisions when developing projects (e.g. to produce knowledge in the interests of power, or that critique those in power). Finally, Badiou differs from traditional perspectives in CCT, as well as the Morinian alternative, in his correlative theorization that ontology itself is politically defined.

With this final critical intervention in mind, Table 1 presents a comparison of the philosophical assumptions of the three epistemologies discussed herein. Building on these distinctions, the next section will explain how a Badiouian epistemology could be

applied to consumer culture theory, and how it differs from the extant dominant epistemologies of the field.

Table 1. Comparison of Philosophical Assumptions Across Perspectives

	Existential-Phenomenology	**The Morinian Alternative**	**Badiouian Political Philosophy**
Epistemology (nature of knowledge)	Subjective	Intersection between universals and subjective experience	Intersection between universals and subjective experience
Ontology (nature of being)	Socially-constituted	Precedes knowledge	Politically-constituted
Axiology (nature of value)	Value of fidelity to subjects' subjective experience	Values determined by the world as it is	Value defined in relation to power/politics
Context of interest	Mental context	Brings together mental, internal, and external contexts	Brings together mental, internal, and external contexts
Structure and Agency	Analyzed to the degree to which subjects are conscious of it. Can be phenomenologically described.	Co-constituted, dialogically defined.	Defined by power, which in turn defines knowledge and subjectivity.

Political philosophy for CCT: Consumer culture as a political system

> Despite its marketing origins, early leaders in the consumer behavior field desired to establish an independent field, one that would break free from marketing and not be beholden to a marketing perspective… The distancing from marketing also emanated from a growing disdain of big business during the late 1960s and a disquieting recognition of the potential negative societal consequences wrought by advertising and marketing in action…
>
> MacInnis and Folkes (2010), p. 900-901

As noted previously, political scientist Harold Lasswell famously defined politics as "who gets what, when, and how" (1936). In more concrete, sociological terms, politics

refers to structures and exercises of power within any economy, with economy defined here as the system of resource distribution that exists in almost all human societies (Swedberg, 2003; Carruthers and Babb, 2000). Within the contemporary world system, defined by the aforementioned post-political consensus, politics in this sense have not disappeared so much as been relegated to markets—the distribution systems whose logics ultimately determine "who gets what, when, and how." As such, the study of market systems is necessarily a study of political systems, defined as "pattern[s] of human relationships that involve, to a significant extent, power, rule, or authority" (Dahl, 1970). Indeed, revisiting the quote above from MacInnnis and Folkes (2010) with this in mind reminds us that politics has been a chief concern of consumer researchers from the inception of the Association for Consumer Research.

Despite the centrality of politics to all marketing phenomena, and the political constitution of social phenomena more generally, the topic is rarely explicitly addressed in the mainstream consumer research literature. Here, I consider the implications of political philosophy for the field of consumer culture theory. For the sake of continuity and comparability, I follow Askegaard and Linnet (2011) in taking the four research programs enumerated by Arnould and Thompson (2005) as a starting point. While their presentation was not meant to be normative (Arnould and Thompson 2007, 2005), the pillars nevertheless can be viewed as an analytically useful conceptualization of dominant levels of analysis within the field of consumer culture theory. Here, I draw on the political philosophy literature very broadly, to provide a general exposition on the meaning of politics at each level of analysis. This is so that scholars interested in other analytical and epistemological projects within political philosophy (e.g. drawing on

Foucault, Bourdieu, and Giddens, or possibly Rancière, Žižek, Habermas, Marx, and other critical theorists) can have a starting point for further work in this vein. The next section demonstrates how a Badiouian epistemology, in particular, can synthesize knowledge arosss these variegated traditions. Ultimately, the goal of this theorizing process is not to make a normative statement about the supremacy of a Badiouian epistemology, so much as to reveal the clarifying potential inherent in contemporary social theory, which is increasingly dominated by political philosophy.

Identity

According to Arnould and Thompson (2005), the first major theorization of consumer identity comes with Russell Belk's (1988) "Possessions and the Extended Self," which argues that members of most human societies come to express and understand themselves through their production and consumption of material objects. Subjectivity is produced from a variety of consumer practices, from merely "contaminating" an object by possession and simply "being" a person in possession of a particular body, to creating archives of one's life and displaying one's status through conspicuous consumption. Belk supports his formulation with a formidable theoretical arsenal, ranging from the psychology of William James and Gordon Allport to Sartrean existentialism. Nevertheless, the approach is essentially psychological and sociological, with Belk noting that "[f]uture research seeking a broader perspective would benefit from consulting the additional literatures in Marxism and neo-Marxism, critical theory, folklore, political philosophy, environmental psychology, macromarketing, semiotics, impression management, and collective memory" (p. 145).

Later work has continued this interest in how identity projects are constructed through consumption. Examples include studies of consumers" beloved belongings (Ahuvia, 2005; Curasi, Price, and Arnould, 2004; Price, Arnould, and Curasi, 2000); the stabilizing effect of possessions for immigrants, migrants, and postmodern subjects (Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould, 2012; Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard, 2005; Thompson and Tambyah, 1999; Oswold, 1999; Peñaloza, 1994; Belk, 1992; Mehta and Belk, 1991; Wallendorf and Reilly, 1983); and the inescapable patterning resulting from social structures such as class (Marcoux, 2009; Coleman, 1983) and family (e.g. studies of mothers' identities, Epp and Price, 2008; Thompson, 1996). Indeed, possessions are valued for their identity stabilizing potential even in squatter communities (Üstüner and Holt, 2007) and amongst the homeless (Hill, 1991; Hill and Stamey, 1990). With the advent of social media, it has been found that consumers are increasingly producing and managing multiple selves (Schau and Gilly, 2003); that said, this does not necessarily mean that the self is fragmented, only that it is instantiated differently in varying contexts (Belk, 2013; Bahl and Milne, 2010; Ahuvia, 2005).

One older, traditional way of studying the politics of identity would be to consider whether or not one holds a "politicized" identity. Following the work of anthropologist Ralph Linton (1936), this can come by one of two routes. The first are *achieved identities*, which consumers work towards. Perhaps the best example of an attained politicized identity in the consumer research literature would be an activist identity, again best explicated by Kozinets and Handelman's (2004) study of anti-consumerists. The notion of an identity attained through participation in an activist group is key to their analysis. Many of the consumer activists they interviewed explained that they had

experienced some sort of "revelation," or consciousness-raising experience, that drove them to adopt an activist identity. They reported identifying as "people who care" about important social issues, and often joined organizations to reinforce these identities. In the end, it is notable that an activist identity is something to be achieved, which ultimately implies that depoliticized consumer subjectivity is the norm, and that assuming an alternative subjectivity requires significant identity work. Paradoxically, this oppositional approach to activism and politics has the potential to alienate the very people they were hoping to convert.

The second route is through possession of an *ascribed identity*—one that is not chosen, but rather assigned as a result of one's place in a given social order. The extant consumer research literature on subjectivity, elaborated above, has frequently addressed the subject of ascribed politicized identities. Examples include the class-defined identities of affluent (Hirschman, 1990) and marginalized consumers (e.g. Üstüner and Holt's work on quatters and Hill (1990) and Hill and Stamey's (1991) work on the homeless). Others involve the differential valuation of racial, gendered, or sexual identities, for example in the work of Crockett and Wallendorf (2004), Thompson (with Hirschman, 1995) and Kates (2004, 2002), respectively. That said, such conceptualizations of ascribed identity are relatively soft, compared to the work that originally coined the term (Linton, 1936), which saw ascribed statuses as rigid, inflexible, generally agreed-upon, and life-determining. An example of such work on ascribed status outside of our field would be the study of the rigid caste structure in India (Cohn, 1968).

Contemporary political philosophy provides a radically different perspective on traditional conceptions of identity. From Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse, to Foucault

and Bourdieu, to Butler, Žižek, and Badiou, thinkers from this school of social theory would contend that such identities are largely the result of sociohistoric patterns and forces. In a way, they are not so much identities as social and material conditions under which individuals are forced to live. Consequently, scholars in this tradition more frequently speak in terms of subjectivity than identity, and are interested in the processes by which particular subjects are inspired and encouraged, while others are forgotten, discouraged, and even punished. In Askegaard and Linnet's (2011) terminology, political theorists would call for work on identity that moves beyond the psychological context to understand how mental landscapes and social identities are constituted by structural factors and sociological phenomena.

With these considerations in mind, sociohistoric approaches become favored methods for studying the individual and the meaning of subjectivity. Thus, the line between this pillar of CCT, and work on the sociohistoric patterning of consumption, becomes blurred within the lens of political philosophy. As such, I will return to these questions about identity in greater detail in the section on sociohistory below.

Cultures, subcultures, and communities of consumption

Arnould and Thompson (2005) describe the key objective of this research program as illuminating "how… the emergence of consumption as a dominant human practice reconfigure[s] cultural blueprints for action and interpretation, and vice versa…" (p. 873). They consider crosscultural research as a key tradition within this program, as well as work on communities of consumption (Muñiz and Schau, 2005; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001); subcultures of consumption (Belk and Costa, 1998; McAlexander and Schouten,

1995); and projects on consumer tribes (as reviewed in Cova, Kozinets, and Shankar's edited collection on the subject).

Within anthropological and cultural studies of consumption, politics are discussed in terms of the politics of inclusion, exclusion, and status within a given cultural grouping. An example of this can be seen in Schouten and McAlexander's (1995) study of Harley Davidson enthusiasts, where status-seeking and the demonstration of expertise was an incredibly political matter within the subculture. Indeed, in both their literature review and empirical findings, the authors contend that authority and power structures are essential components of subcultures, even those that are seen as "deviant" departures from the hegemony of everyday life. Established members of the biker community would even actively create barriers to entry, and engaged in activities that demeaned more casual members. As such, leaders of subcultures have power over desired resources such as belonging and knowledge. Ultimately, Schouten and McAlexander find that while Harley owners are strongly devoted to an ideology of "freedom," this is not freedom in a macropolitical sense of the term (e.g. freedom from structures of oppression, authority, and work). Indeed, here, and in other work on consumer subcultures (Goulding, Shankar, Elliott, and Canniford, 2009; Belk and Costa, 1998), participation in the mainstream economy is actually necessary to fund the leisure activity, and "getting away" may actually reinvigorate one as a worker (see Fleming, 2009, for a theorization of this relationship between labour and leisure).

A political philosophy intervention in this tradition would consequently argue that one cannot understand a culture without understanding its relationship to other cultures, and to the greater social milieu. The emphasis would be on dynamics between different

groups within a larger cultural field, or, following Immanuel Wallerstein (2004), in an integrated world system. In other words, the account would be considered incomplete without a consideration of the sociohistoric patterning that underlies the consumer tribe, culture, subculture, or community. This is in line with Askegaard and Linnet's (2011) idea that internal contexts of cultures, communities, and subcultures (as well as subjective, mental experiences of life in cultures) must be contextualized with recourse to surrounding social phenomena, if they are to have meaning.

Scholars interested in the politics of a subculture might also critically examine the sociohistoric structures that influence who achieves power within the group, and would consider the experience of those who are dominated by higher-status members. There are a number of examples of such work within the literature on the sociohistoric patterning of consumption, so with that, I turn to this research program next.

Sociohistoric patterning of consumption

As noted by Askegaard and Linnet (2011), the extant literature on the sociohistoric patterning of consumption provides some of the most concrete studies of politics within consumer research, and is also one of the perspectives most amenable to extension via political philosophy. This research program concerns how social, historical, and political forces influence consumer practices, and is thus directly applicable for scholars working with critical and political theory. Indeed, the dominant theoretical programs within this tradition—Bourdieuian work on cultural capital and Foucauldian analyses of power and domination—are forebears or (retrospectively-included members) of the project of

contemporary political philosophy itself. This section considers these traditions one by one, and theorizes the role of politics in each.

Bourdieu and Capital in Fields. Bourdieuian perspectives on the sociohistoric patterning of consumption have been productively applied by consumer culture theorists for quite some time. Within this tradition, Douglas Holt's work is perhaps the best known, beginning with his adaptation of Bourdieu's work on cultural capital in an American context (1998). In contrast with sociologist Michelle Lamont, he finds that cultural capital does structure American consumption, much as it does French consumption; the nature and composition of the cultural capital, however, is quite different in the American context. Üstüner and Holt have studied this localization of cultural capital in Turkish squatter communities (2007) and amongst status-conscious consumers in Turkey (2010). In 2012, Üstüner and Thompson presented a major extension of this work in their study of interdependent status games—actual dyadic enactments of class socialization—observed in interactions between hair stylists and their clients.

Bourdieu's work as a political philosopher can be seen in his essay "Structures, Habitus, Practices" (1993). Here, he illuminates the relationship between cultural capital and economic capital, revealing how finance fuels the world of cultural capital production. Bourdieu critiques the drive to dominate in both spheres of capital accumulation, and the differential social valuation of actors based on arbitrary markers of cultural capital. It is in these later projects spearheaded by Tuba Üstüner that we come the closest to employing the political philosophy of Pierre Bourdieu. In Üstüner and Holt's

(2007, 2010) work, and Üstüner and Thompson's article, for example, the authors seriously consider the experience of domination and critique the sociohistoric structures that lead to such experiences. Another successful Bourdieuian political analysis can be found in Douglas Allen's (2002) study of the sociohistoric patterning of higher education choices, as he explains how seemingly-personal decisions are shaped by larger political structures. Allen ultimately criticizes the social structures that subconsciously track lower-class individuals into less desirable schools and professions.

Foucault on Power and Domination. Craig Thompson has long been a popularizer of Foucauldian traditions in consumer research. He and Elizabeth Hirschman explicated the hegemonic nature of dominant knowledges in their work on the beauty myth and the sociohistoric conditioning of women's bodies through the gaze (1995). Thompson and Tambyah (1999) developed a sociohistorically-informed genealogy of the idea of cosmopolitanism, critiquing the colonialist assumptions inherent in the concept. Later, in a study of the natural health market (2004), Thompson found that complementary medicine discourses served multiple ideological purposes simultaneously—namely, the profit-motive of companies involved, as well as consumers' desire for alternatives to mainstream health care.

Finally, in his work with Diana Haytko on fashion, Foucault's "technologies of the self" (techniques of self-governance through which individuals conform to cultural ideals) take center stage. Techniques of the self are an essential element of contemporary social control systems, as individuals do not realize that they are being socialized to a certain standard, and feel a (false) sense of control in the situation. Jeff Murray replicated

this analysis with informants who were middle-aged, rather than college-aged, and found much the same results: dominant discourses powerfully shaped consumers" sense of style (2002). Even escape comes in socially-structured channels; in Murray's words, "What started out as an "emancipated space" ended up just another packaged, historical identity" (p. 439).

Foucauldian sociohistoric analysis has been used productively in several recent studies, including Goulding, Shankar, Elliot, and Canniford's (2009) exploration of rave culture in the United Kingdom. The authors found that the state was somewhat agnostic to whether or not ecstasy was taken in clubs; here, drug laws are shown to be differentially enforced, based on the social status of the group engaging in the activity. The authors ultimately take a critical position on the blatantly classist approach to drug policy, and the notion that resistance to such policy is what is punished, rather than particular behaviors. Karababa and Ger (2011) found that consumers actively attempted to resist official prohibitions against coffee-drinking and drug-taking in the context of Ottoman coffeehouses. They found that coffeehouses created spaces where social class boundaries could be transgressed, and a wide variety of individuals could be exposed to critique of the authorities. In these empirical examples, and in Foucault's own theory (1975, 1988), the structuring and oppressing functions of power are a central concern. Consequently, Foucauldian consumer research is immanently applicable to political theories of consumer culture.

Ideology

The fourth major research program in consumer culture theory, as outlined by Arnould and Thompson, is the study of ideology. Within CCT, and in cultural studies more broadly, two uses of the term ideology predominate. The first contends that ideology is the belief structure of any group, and hence is not necessarily political (Williams, 1976). The second approach starts from the premise that ideology is knowledge that serves the interests of those in power. This distinction between ideology and other forms of knowledge dates back to *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels, 1846), and is a central assumption of critical theory, from the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947) to Althusser (1971a) and continuing into the work of Habermas (1989).

This is the perspective adopted by most contemporary political philosophers. It is an important intervention, as it re-opens the door to intellectual inquiry on questions of truth, value, and ethics. Nevertheless, it stops short of the heavy-handed, top-down, authoritative definition of truth advocated by traditional Marxist political economy. Once again building on Foucault, political philosophers such as Agamben and Badiou remind us that truth and ethics can only exist with recourse to local conditions and subjective experience. In Badiou's philosophy, this would take the form of a subjective experience of a commonly-held truth that goes beyond the individual—a realization of the universally oppressive force of power. Taken together, such a theorization of knowledge and ideology is in line with Askegaard and Linnet's (2011) call for perspectives on knowledge that take into account the structuring influence of society.

Within the extant consumer culture theory literature, ideology more frequently refers to the belief structure of any social group. For example, in Spiggle's (1986) study of underground comics, she refers to the "ideology" of the consumer counterculture. In

Tse, Belk, and Zhou's (1989) study of political ideology in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, ideology refers to the political philosophy of any of the nations; a similar approach was employed in Zhao and Belk's (2008) semiotic analysis of how "anti-consumerist political ideology" is co-opted by advertisers in modern day China. Hirschman's study of the "ideology of affluence" was an analysis of belief structures held by the affluent, and promoted through mass media (1990). In his work on technology, Kozinets (2008) uses "ideology" to refer to a consumers" belief structure about technology. Another key use of the term "ideology" can be found in Varman and Belk's work on nationalist ideology in India, where they argue that it is analytically most useful to think of ideology as a general phenomena that reflects the structures of "a lived reality" (2009, p. 687).

This is not to say, however, that all consumer researchers have worked with the more apolitical, decontextualized usages of the term ideology. Building on Terry Eagleton's theorization of ideology (1991), Elizabeth Hirschman turned toward a critical theory definition of the term in her 1993 Marxist-feminist critique of dominant masculine ideologies in the consumer research literature. Here, ideology is presented as a form of knowledge used to exert power and discipline subjects, in line with Gramscian conceptions of cultural hegemony. In her work on the social sculpting of the body, ideology is once again defined as a force of social control exerted in the name of profit (with Thompson, 1995). Later, David Mick (2003) argued that the omnipresence of consumerist ideology is a central facet of contemporary life, and suggests that the study of ideology may be a unifying interest for consumer researchers. Coulter, Price, and Feick (2003) do much to address questions of politics, contrasting "socialist" and

"consumerist" ideologies in Eastern European consumer culture, and allowing for the possibility that both can be hegemonic. Finally, what is arguably the most rigorous theorization of ideology in mainstream CCT research can be found in Crockett and Wallendorf's (2004) study of the normative political ideology of consumerism, and alternative ideological stances such as black nationalism. In their ethnographic study of consumer strategies in an under-served urban center, they found that sociohistoric forces shaped consumers' ideological positions, and that ideology then guided behavior.

Synthesis: A Badiouian theorization of consumer culture

Found, in translation: Badiou for CCT

Upon reconsideration of the four dominant programs of research in consumer culture theory, the applicability, relevance, and potential of Badiou's general theory of social action should quickly become apparent. Looking again at Figure 1, one can see each of the four pillars within his conceptualization: sociohistoric conditions subsume the (1) sociohistoric patterning of consumption and (2) cultural membership; (3) marketplace ideologies line up with Badiou's concept of knowledge structures; and (4) identity is cast in terms of subjectivity. Building on this reconceptualization of identity, Badiou's work on subjects of the status quo and subjects of truth can be directly translated onto consumer culture theory notions of "the consumer" and "the activist." This is illustrated in Figures 4 and 5.

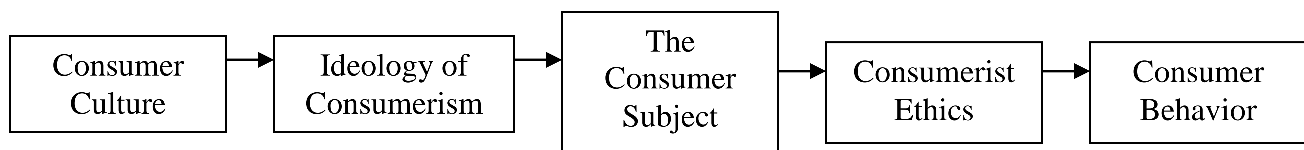


Figure 4. A Badiouian Theorization of Consumer Culture and Subjectivity

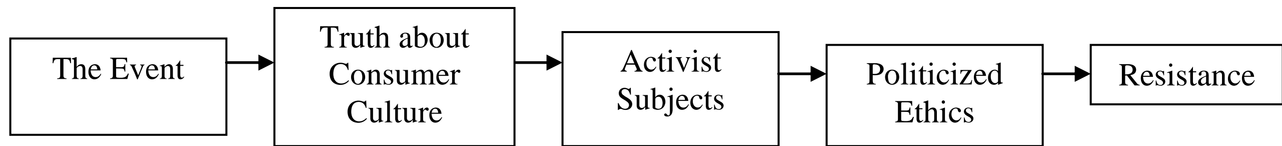


Figure 5. A Badiouian Theorization of Resistant Subjectivity

Implications

In the end, a Badiouian conceptualization of consumer culture and resistance raises serious questions about fundamental assumptions within CCT research. In order to compare, it may be helpful to first summarize Badiou's assumptions, once again. Badiou takes power to be his central analytic category, and other concepts are defined in terms of their relationship to power. Moreover, these other categories are theorized as a product and consequences of power relations—power structures social forms, which in turn produces specific knowledge forms, which lead to the development of different subjectivities. This, in turn, influences the politics of participation—as well as resistance. As power structures both knowledge and subjectivity, Badiou's philosophy is both an epistemological and ontological intervention.

Epistemological implications. Askegaard and Linnet (2011) made a powerful observation about consumer culture theory when they noted that dominant epistemologies of the field emphasize certain contexts over others, and frequently fail to provide a uniting vision that could lead to a comprehensive body of knowledge. They argue that in order for the field to advance, consumer culture theorists must take up Morin's (2008;

1992; 1986) call for epistemologies capable of balancing objective and subjective forms of knowledge production.

Political theory is nothing if not a radical reconsideration of epistemology, as political theory argues that the meaning of information can only be known with recourse to its conditions of production—in other words, whether it was produced by those in power, or those that resist power. As noted in the foregoing discussion, the emergence of political theory reflects a major paradigm shift within social research more broadly, away from postmodern, relativistic, linguistic theories of culture, toward theories that are capable of considering the intersection between objective power structures and subjective experience. The concept of the event, moreover, presents a novel model of how knowledge is produced within society, which is of great importance to social researchers. In light of such a seismic shift in parent disciplines, consumer culture theorists would be wise to apprise themselves of these developments.

Perhaps most importantly, for scholars of our field, are the implications about consumer consciousness—or how little consciousness consumers really have about factors that influence their behavior. While this may seem like a major, negative critique of the notion of "the consumer," or a blind return to older critical theory perspectives on false consciousness, a Badiouian epistemology would in fact be more positive. Once scholars have a firm understanding of what consumers do and do not know, they can gain a greater understanding of what can be learned from existential-phenomenological perspectives, which operate at the level of conscious awareness. Moreover, it provides a refined understanding of consumer ethics and responsibility, seen below, by raising

questions about the information that consumers actually have, and the options that consumers are really available to them within contemporary market systems.

Ontological implications. Starting from contemporary political philosophy, and Badiou's philosophy in particular, it can be argued that knowledge and subjectivity are always politically constituted. From this perspective, an understanding of power is a pre-requisite for analyzing how meaning is made within the consumer contexts we study, much less comprehending macro-theoretical concepts like context. With Badiou's ontological intervention in mind, I contend that the charge to theorize "the context of contexts" is truly a call to analyze the "meaning of contexts" such as society; culture and community; and subjectivity. Here, I consider the meaning of these context, as well as other key constructs within the study of consumer culture.

First, a Badiouian analysis would argue that there is no such thing as a consumer. Much as *on ne naît pas femme: on le devient*[1] (de Beauvoir, 1949), "consumer" is not a natural category of being. From the perspective of political philosophy, the unexamined use of such a category in our research is a bias, and such use risks obfuscating the actual political connotations of such a subject position. Political events such as the global financial crisis restructure who is and is not a consumer, and also provide new opportunities for understanding how such subjects were constituted in the first place.

Political theory would also critique the notions of consumer agency and choice, arguing that "real choice" means having actual control and influence over the means of production. It highlights the absurdity of constructed choices like Coca-Cola vs. Pepsi

[1] Translation: "One is not born a woman; one becomes [a woman]."

(which, in political economy, would be considered as relatively identical products whose value comes from the power imbued in the product by its producers). As such, "marketing" is still relevant, if we question current theories of value (e.g. Vargo and Lusch's 2004 theory of co-production) and focus on how marketing is a political communication technology (Kotler and Levy, 1969). Consequently, the epistemological and ontological implications of a Badiouian perspective have meaning and resonance even for those who want to do managerialist research, as it focuses on what matters, and what is knowable.

Last but certainly not least, the work of Badiou and his contemporaries provides us with fresh thinking on the nature of the ethical subject. This especially has implications for scholars interested in social problems that will require a massive restructuring of ethics (e.g. combating global warming). In turn, this provides us with an important new theorization of consumer agency, as political philosophy would say that consumers only have agency to the degree to which they can affect structures of power. Consequently, Badiouian analysis urges us to focus on "differences that matter," such as the difference between "agents who make meaning" (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011), and consumers who are subject to their choices. In more concrete terms, it would raise questions about the agency and ethics of consumers who have had no choice but to make poor dietary decisions, and who find themselves to be morbidly obese; or who have had no choice but to enter into crippling debt in the markets for health or education. Rather than question why bands of powerless activists fail to transform power structures, it would direct our attention toward those who suppress dissent to preserve the status quo.

Ultimately, Badiou's theory on ethics is a fundamental reconsideration of the concept of responsibility, and who actually holds it within a society.

Discussion: Putting new epistemologies into practice

> [A]s researchers, our choice of conceptual tools cannot be separated from questions of ontology and even ideology. … [O]verly individualist epistemologies in consumption research may be influenced by a liberalist ideology of self-emancipation. With each analytical concept that one employs, one also implies an answer to fundamental questions such as: What is the "state of nature" of man as a social animal? How does the self develop? How does human cognition work? Is there free will?
> Askegaard and Linnet (2011), pp. 395-396.

The goal of this article is to demonstrate how political philosophy, and specifically a Badiouian epistemology, can synthesize knowledge derived from the study of mental, internal, and external contexts. Based on the arguments and illustrations made in the preceding sections, I argue that a Badiouian perspective has this potential. In the previous section, I considered the epistemological and ontological implications of such an intervention. Here, I begin the work of determining what it would take to put Badiouian epistemology into practice, in a fieldwork-based discipline.

First, since knowledge is partial if it does not consider structures of power, methodologies that do not take into account structures of power (or at least state assumptions about power relations) are inadequate or inaccurate. Social inquiry that fails to do this risks becoming no more than social constructions about social construction—all of which are, of course, meaningless except in their relationships to power. In other words, the purpose of social inquiry should be studying ideology, not producing or administering it.

As such, political methods such as rhetorical analysis, critical discourse analysis, political economy, political science, and critical/political theory have an important role in social inquiry (Fairclough, 2011), even though they have been traditionally underestimated in consumer research. The suggestion that we should consider the place of economic analysis may come as a shock to a community of cultural researchers, but we must remember that if culture is defined in terms of power, enacted largely through economic means (as noted by Bourdieu, 1993), ignorance of economic phenomena constitutes a major disservice to the field. Moreover, it reminds us of the economic factors that motivate participation in consumer culture phenomena such as brand communities. It reminds us that when we do research on such topics, we are always taking an ethical position when we analyze (or "forget" to analyze) the economics and politics of who benefits from such participation. That said, there is no reason to throw the baby out with the bathwater. While existential-phenomenology as it is practiced in CCT has the potential to reify the individual and the consumer subject, a Badiouian scholar would argue that the investigation of mental contexts is nevertheless an integral part of the study of subject formation and the subjective experience of domination.

Following Foucault, as well as Askegaard and Linnet (2011), a Badiouian perspective would also encourage scholars not to limit themselves to verbatim quotes conscious experience, conducting supplementary historical research on the influence of social forces in everyday life. Ethnography should once again be considered a broad study of not only personal and intersubjective experience, documented in interview transcripts, but also the relationship between cultural contexts and larger social phenomena (Madison, 2011; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 2011). We should be encouraged

to move beyond individual accounts to study intersubjective understanding, and finally how intersubjective knowledge in one context relates to phenomena in others. Most of all, as noted by Askegaard and Linnet (2011), we cannot do this work "in an extremely cursory manner that rarely adds societal and cultural perspectives to the analysis but merely suggestive hints" (p. 393). To advance the field, we must now do the work of making connections.

Conclusion: The silver lining

The point of this essay, Askegaard and Linnet's (2011), and the political theory project is not to downplay the importance or the rigor of prior research. The intention is to push knowledge production beyond a seemingly-intractable postmodern impasse on questions of value. Additionally, while it affords an even larger role to power than theory by Foucault, Bourdieu, and Giddens, it does so to illuminate the conditions of possibility within society, and thereby elucidate what would actually have to happen to make social change possible. Badiou's promise is that another world is possible, and that it has the potential to counteract the impossibility of the present. Much as we created this world against all odds, and with access to different information, we can create another with what we know now.

Despite the tremendous differences between political epistemologies and traditional consumer research epistemologies, consumer culture theory still rests on excellent intellectual territory, as the study of consumption is an ideal site for researching these dynamics of power, knowledge, and subjectivity. With a concentrated focus on a small, well-defined unifying set of constructs (e.g. power, subjectivity, ethics), the

possibility of advancing knowledge on subjects ranging from piracy to obesity to resistance is renewed, as is the potential for synthesis within and across disciplines.

Finally, there has never been a better time to adopt such a perspective. Amidst a global financial crisis, an era of austerity, and new waves of resistance, it is essential that consumer culture theorists integrate knowledge about sociological phenomena into our understandings of collective and individual experience. Political philosophy provides the best available set of tools for contending with the economic changes of the present, which are already radically restructuring consumer culture.

Essay 2

Theorizing the Politics of Consumption and Resistance:

Lessons from Occupy Wall Street

From September 17, 2011 to November 15, 2011, thousands of people camped in a miniscule, unremarkable Financial District park as a way of expressing their concern about the American economic downturn. Beginning with this one simple, ongoing act of civil disobedience, the consumer activist movement known as Occupy Wall Street was born. Seemingly overnight, the protest tactic spread to nearly 1,000 cities in 82 countries, and "Occupy" emerged as a global movement (Adam 2011). With these developments in mind, *Forbes* magazine reported that both the American recession and Occupy Wall Street were top ten news stories of 2011 (Rapoza 2011), while *Time* magazine declared "the protester" as its Person of the Year (Anderson 2011). In both of these publications, Occupy Wall Street was presented as a companion to other mass mobilizations of the year, including the pro-democracy demonstrations of the Arab Spring and the European anti-austerity protests.

Inspired by the unexpected appeal of these movements, this paper presents a consumer research study of the original Occupy Wall Street (OWS) encampment in New York City. The project also takes inspiration and motivation from three ongoing conversations within the consumer research community. First, given the nature of the study, it is almost imperative to consider the extant literature on consumer activism. As such, the paper begins with a review of this literature, and the analysis considers how Occupy Wall Street conforms to and challenges existing conceptualizations of economic

activism. Second, the paper responds to calls for political and sociohistoric theorizations of consumption phenomena (Askegaard and Linnet 2011; Thompson 2011; Murray 2002). Advocates of the political perspective have argued that it can function as a necessary corrective to the theoretical gaps resulting from the heavy use of psychological, sociological, and cultural studies perspectives in our field.

The paper then seeks to bridge these two conversations, proceeding with a focus on resistance—and, in turn, consumption—in political terms. Here, I argue that political philosophy provides the necessary and appropriate language to advance our understanding of these phenomena. In particular, I find the perspective of contemporary philosopher Alain Badiou to be especially useful, as his political theorization of the nature of structure and agency has already addressed similar gaps in the fields of cultural studies, sociology, history, psychoanalysis, and the philosophy of science (Pluth 2010; Dean 2009; Riera 2005; Hallward 2003, 2001). Third, and finally, the project considers the implications of political theory for ongoing discussions of the philosophy of science in consumer research, focusing particularly on critical methodologies, but also considering the conduct and ethics of consumer research in general. Here, I discover that the omission of political considerations in past analyses has significant epistemological and ontological consequences, impairing our understanding of core constructs such as meaning, subjectivity, agency, and responsibility. Building on these three foundations, the findings sections explain the Occupy Wall Street phenomenon with recourse to traditional and emerging theories of resistance. Ultimately, I find that a Badiouian political analysis of discourse at Occupy Wall Street provides fresh insight into the constitution of not only the activist subject, but also the consumer subject.

The consumer activism literature

The state of the field

Within the consumer research literature and beyond, one can easily argue that Kozinets and Handelman (2004) provide the most theoretically-advanced account of consumer activism. As noted by these authors, other accounts of consumer activist movements have been by-and-large descriptive and historical, attempting to categorize consumer movements based on emic differences in their goals and actions. Examples of this include Monroe Friedman's (1999, 1985) study of boycotts, which traces the history of these movements from the contemporary back to the Irish boycott of exploitative British landlord Charles Boycott in 1881. Friedman takes a broad view of boycotts, including everything from labor boycotts, where the employees of a company call for action, to obstructive boycotts, which actively prevent consumers from making purchases (a classic example of an obstructive boycott is the famous Woolworth lunch counter sit-ins during the civil rights movement, which Malcolm Gladwell notes were are particularly effective strategy, (2010)). Ultimately, the goal of this exercise is to build a descriptive taxonomy of boycotts throughout history.

Another example of such an approach can be found in the work of Gabriel and Lang (1995; updated, 2006) who looked at consumer activist movements more generally, and go back even farther than Friedman in their history of consumer activist movements. They argue that there have been four major historical periods in consumer activism: the rise of Co-Operatives in Britain, beginning in 1844; the "Value-for-Money" movement exemplified by consumer watchdog organizations such as the Consumers Union (who

publish *Consumer Reports*); the Naderist, anti-corporatist consumerist movement; and a contemporary "ethical consumption" movement focused on ethical and ecological dimensions to market activity. The authors argue that all four movements live on in some form to this day, and have in many ways converged in the anti-globalization movement of the 1990s and 2000s. In the case of boycotts, they argue that such actions have a longer history than Friedman relates; they cite the 1773 Boston Tea Party as an early boycott, and conceptualize boycotts and consumer activism more generally as attempts for consumers to gain power in an era of rising industrial and corporate power. Consumer researcher Terrence Witkowski (1989), too, cites anti-British good movements in the American colonies as some of the earliest modern examples of boycotts. Histories of boycotts outside of the Western context can be found in Belk and Zhao (2012) and Zhao and Belk (2009), which examine the historical progression of resistance to the importation of Western products in China.

Lizabeth Cohen (2003) takes a similar approach, looking at how consumer movements (Gabriel and Lang's (1995) "Value-for-Money" movements and Friedman's (1999) consumer and labor boycotts) have waxed and waned in the 20th century with transformations in consumer politics more generally. She details the rise of the "citizen-consumer" of the New Deal era, who were interested in the "general good" and trusted that the welfare state was a legitimate solution to the unprecedented economic stagnation of the Great Depression, to the "consumerized" citizens of the contemporary, who approach political situations as if they are consumer decisions, "judging [policies] by how well served they feel personally," (p. 9).

One notable exception comes from management scholar Hayagreeva Rao (1998), who used institutional theory to explain the emergence of consumer watchdog organizations (CWOs), arguing that they arose from growing consumer disdain with corporate practices. Here, CWOs are conceptualized as institutional entrepreneurs whose goals are, following economic sociologist Arthur Stinchcombe (1968) "preeminently political," meaning that they seek to mobilize resources and transform structures of resource distribution.

Considering this extant literature, Kozinets and Handelman (2004) argued that what was missing from past work was "a theory-based understanding of contemporary consumer movements," (p. 691). These authors sought to rectify the problem by employing New Social Movement (NSM) theory, which draws on the work of *Jürgen* Habermas, Alain Touraine, Manuel Castells, and Alberto Melucci. Following Touraine, Kozinets and Handelman define consumer activist movements as "social movements that attempt to transform various elements of the social order surrounding consumption and marketing," (p. 691) specifically seeking "changes in the principles, practices, and policies of organizations, businesses, industries, and governments," (p. 691). In the anti-consumerist contexts these authors studied, there is a further goal of "fundamental change to the ideology and culture of consumerism," (p. 692) and "the totalizing and hegemonic cultural forms defined by capitalist markets," (p. 692).

Within Kozinets and Handelman's (2004) study, and again following Alain Touraine (1978, 1969), an activist movement is defined by (a) the totality it seeks to take part in or transform, (b) the identity it creates for itself, and (c) an enemy, with which it competes for a stake in the totality. Many of the consumer activists they interviewed

explained that they had experienced some sort of “revelation,” or consciousness-raising experience, that drove them to adopt an activist identity. They reported identifying as “people who care” about important social issues, and often joined organizations to reinforce these identities.

Advancing the literature

For scholars interested in contributing to the ongoing theorization of consumer activism, there are two logical paths forward. First, given that the extant literature is notably under-theorized, advancement may come from considering alternative conceptual frameworks and philosophical discourses. Second, and building upon this premise, one could study new, emergent consumer activist movements, using emic findings to interrogate reigning etic explanations (Goulding 2002). This paper adopts both initiatives, considering the study of new social theories here, and analyzing the new social movement of Occupy Wall Street in the findings.

In the search for alternative theoretical perspectives, I begin by considering an emerging theoretical current within the field of consumer culture theory (CCT): political analysis of consumption phenomena. The sections that follow recount this conversation and then go to the source, considering how political philosophy can answer such calls for the political analysis of consumer activism and other consumption phenomena.

The politics of consumption

> “Interpretive consumer researchers working within the Association for Consumer Research-*JCR* community have not historically emphasized the

> political dimensions of symbolic consumption. By arguing against a positivist, utilitarian form of consumer research that, at the time, was the dominant intellectual paradigm, the early interpretivists were emphasizing an extreme form of agency… This assumption of agency directed attention to a form of interpretive research that emphasized the creative role of the consumer. At the same time, this view of agency turned attention away from the political and oppressive potential of the symbolic. Future interpretive research in consumer studies needs to embrace the dialectical interplay between agency and structure, or what is referred to here as the sign experimentation-sign domination tension. By doing this, a more critical view of consumption begins to emerge," (Murray 2002, p. 439).

The quote above is from Jeff Muray's (2002) "The Politics of Consumption." It is here that the question of politics, and the call for political analysis as a method, are explicitly introduced in consumer research.

His essay was inspired by Thompson and Haytko's (1997) "Speaking of Fashion," which investigated the ways in which consumers attempt to harness countervailing meanings to resist the hegemonic codes of consumer culture. There, the authors argue that consumers successfully "appropriate" and recombine the syntax of fashion, in order to express complex resistant forms of subjectivity. The goal of Murray's intervention is to push this theorization of consumption and resistance one step further, to actually analyze the politics of these consumer practices—the ways in which these practices are defined by their relationship to structures of power. Hence the question becomes whether countervailing meaning is "meaningful" without genuine countervailing power.

Murray contends that even resistant practices, such as voluntary simplicity, have become largely marketized. Evidence for this phenomenon has been found by numerous other cultural critics (Heath and Potter, 2004; Frank, 1997; Frank and Weiland, and contributors, 1997). This, in turn, redefines their politics, and hence meaning. For example, when composting is promoted by a private firm that sells composting

accessories, the stakes and ethics of such a practice are transformed, as composting is not just in the environment's and individual's interests, but also that of the firm. In other words, the practice is no longer motivated solely by environmental values, but also market capitalist values. In this way, practices that were once radical can paradoxically become practices that support capitalism. For this reason, Murray (2002) contests Thompson and Haytko's (1997) idea that consumers' "market responsiveness" will be the mechanism by which radical transformations of the society could occur.

Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in the question of the politics of consumption. One site of this would be the 5th Consumer Culture Theory conference (held in June 2010), where a number of papers were presented on the subject. This resulted in a special issue of the *Journal of Consumer Culture* on "consumption as political and moral practice." In the editorial of this issue, Thompson (2011) ultimately questions "what kind of political power consumers actually exercise through marketplace mechanisms, particularly if their collective goals do not mold with profit-maximizing imperatives," (pp. 139-140). Here, Bryant Simon's study of boycotts (2011) is the contribution that most explicitly takes up this political question. In his analysis, he finds that concrete, economic practices like boycotts can constitute a form of political power that cannot be achieved by consumption, participation, and narrative play with cultural meaning alone. Nevertheless, he warns that such market actions are not substitutes for other forms of political mobilization, such as unionization and general activism.

The question of politics also resurfaced in Askegaard and Linnet's (2011) "Towards an Epistemology of Consumer Culture Theory." Here, Askegaard and Linnet trace the omission of political considerations within our field to the ways in which

existential-phenomenological and ethnographic perspectives have been utilized in our field. They contend that the specter of psychology in consumer research led early interpretive researchers to maintain a focus on psychological contexts and the "lifeworlds" of individuals, even as they adopted cultural methods which might dictate that they do the opposite. As with Murray (2002), they find that this has led to a biased perspective on the agency of the consumer. From other disciplinary and epistemological viewpoints, the reality is that "[c]onsumers consistently navigate, but only to a limited degree conduct, let alone create, the social universe of meanings that attach to consumer goods and practices – and then most often according to a score that they have not written themselves," (p. 400). Working from this perspective, they call for the development of "a contextually (socially, culturally, politically, and institutionally) oriented CCT," (p. 384), which integrates sociohistoric levels of analyses into our work.

The project presented here, on the politics of resistance, is intended primarily as an addition to this ongoing conversation. It is largely motivated by Murray's (2002) and Askegaard and Linnet's (2011) imperative that consumer researchers theorize the politics of the phenomena that they study. To do justice to this directive, it is necessary to understand the meaning of politics, political systems, and political analysis in general, as well as within the context of consumer activism. I turn my attention to this task next, arguing that political philosophy provides the appropriate language and analyses for such work. I then consider how it has been used by scholars of consumer activism in other disciplines, and then consider how the theoretical literature on activism could be developed further.

Theoretical lens: Political philosophy

Sometimes described as "political theory," political philosophy is considered by many to be the heir-ascendant of the contentious family that is continental philosophy; as such, it has had quite an impact throughout the social sciences more generally (Pluth 2010; Dean 2009; Riera 2005; Hallward 2003, 2001). Nevertheless, the recent swell of interest in politics as a category of social analysis should not be interpreted as a sign that political philosophy is a "brand new" school of thought; it is actually one of the oldest traditions in philosophical inquiry, dating back to the political and ethical dialogues of Socrates (Plato, 387 B.C), and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (350 B.C. a) and *Politics* (350 B. C. b). Beginning from these stately origins, the approach starts from the premise that politics are a central organizing force within societies, with politics defined here as power dynamics within a society (Dahl 1970). Power is argued to structure social organization, subjectivity, and ethics; taken together, these elements found the origin of political systems (Dahl 1970). Put differently, political science and communications scholar Harold Lasswell famously defined politics as "who gets what, when, and how," (1936, cover). Political analysis is consequently the analysis of power within societies—"the study of influence and the influential," (Lasswell, p. 13). At a minimum, and again in Lasswellian terms, political analysis seeks to elucidate the "conditions" engineered by the influential to ensure that they "get the most of what there is to get," (1936, p. 13).

Modern day political theory can be described as a response to the philosophical impasse resulting from the dominance of radically relativistic, subjectivist strains of postmodernism in the academy—what would be characterized as extreme forms of deconstructionism and poststructuralism in the typology of postmodernisms presented by

Fuat and Venkatesh (1995). Traditionally associated with thinkers such as Baudrillard and Derrida, this flavor of postmodernism is argued to leave scholars with few viable tools for considering questions of value, ethics, and intersubjectivity within their work (Riera 2005; Hallward 2003, 2001). Contemporary political philosophy, exemplified by the work of Jacques Rancière, Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, and Slavoj Žižek, seeks to rectify the situation through the use of political and ethical analysis, which provides a framework by which meaning can "matter," once again.

As noted by Agamben (1998), modern-day political philosophers frequently begin with a reconsideration of Michel Foucault's works on power (1980, 1979a, 1979b, 1975). Foucault is not, however, the only theorist who has been revived by contemporary political philosophy. In essence, this social theory camp attempts to trace the evolution of political inquiry from ancient times to the critical theory project of the Frankfurt School, through to Habermas's work on democracy (1981) and the public sphere (1962). The more political writings of postmodernists such as Baudrillard (2010) and Derrida (1993) are revived here as well. Bourdieu's work can also be read into the canon of political philosophy, particularly the projects that focus on the influence of powerful actors within fields of cultural production (e.g. 2005, 2001, 1993). Ultimately, political philosophy raises serious questions about traditional conceptualizations of structure and agency (e.g. Giddens, 1984), given that power influences both society and subjectivities.

Even new social movement theorist Alain Touraine can be read back into this tradition, as his work is very influenced by political philosophy, specifically critical theory and Marxist traditions. Indeed, his formulation of the relationship between the totality, the activist, and the enemy, is essentially a political analysis; Touraine (1969)

was interested in how the two different actors fight for control within organizations, polities, and abstract political systems (e.g. workers within capitalism). With this reconsideration of Touraine in mind, and given the demonstrated utility of political philosophy in other consumer activist contexts, the next section explores the utility of contemporary political philosophy for the study of consumer activist movements.

The politics of resistance: Political philosophy for consumer activism

As mentioned previously, many academic fields have grappled with the same issues of structure and agency; have lost sight of the question of politics; and have in the end sought answers from the field of political theory. The study of social movements is no different. Indeed, within the eight years since Kozinets' and Handelman's (2004) article was first published, the most advanced theorizing of social movements (and social action more broadly) has occurred not within the field of sociology, as with New Social Movement theory, but instead within the domain of political philosophy. This section presents noteworthy examples from this tradition. Drawing on the political writings of Foucault, Habermas, Butler, and the Frankfurt School thinkers, among others, these authors have placed politics at the center of their analyses of activist movements. Building on this foundation, the final section considers how these and other political theories of consumer activism could expand current understandings of the phenomenon.

New accounts of consumer activism

Again, political accounts of consumer activism have been developing apace across the social sciences in the time since Kozinets's and Handelman's writing (2004). For

example, in “Beyond the Boycott,” cultural theory scholar Jo Littler (2005) turns her attention to the contemporary anti-globalization movement, which as Kozinets and Handelman (2004) note seeks to transform consumer culture entirely, rather than the actions of individual firms or consumers. Grounding her analysis in the work of Judith Butler, she contends that movements have the greatest chance of truly effectuating change when they are reflexive about the social relations that they are trying to transform, applying critiques to their own organizations as well as external “others.”

Two notable studies have emerged on culture jamming and subvertisement (the practice of creating subversive parodies of corporate advertisements), in the time since Kozinets and Handelman (2004) wrote on the subject. These two studies pursue alternative theoretical avenues, further broadening our perspective on the meaning of consumer activism. Sandlin and Callahan (2009) use newly-emerging affect theory to explain the “emotional hegemony” of the mainstream market, and then consider how culture jammers attempt to similarly manage emotions—but for social change. Vince Carducci (2006) adopts the perspective and methods of political analysis to determine whether culture jamming tactics succeed in addressing questions of power over representation in modern consumer culture. In line with Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel’s (2006) findings on anti-Starbucks subvertisements, Carducci ultimately finds that such practices may ultimately help multi-national corporations learn to manage consumer discontent and thus function *even more* effectively, thereby clearly undermining the missions of activist organizations.

This concern is echoed by Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, in his condemnations of socially-responsible consumption phenomena such as fair-trade coffee.

Using the techniques of political economy, Žižek finds that such trends actually support global consumer culture by encouraging nominal improvements in production conditions, decreasing pressure to address fundamental questions of political economy (2009). In the coffee market, for example, Žižek argues that fair trade initiatives make consumers feel that labor issues have been addressed and resolved, diverting attention away from unresolved struggles inherent in one-crop, commodity monoculture farming (e.g. how it transforms economies, social relations, and cultures, ultimately leaving farmers in a fundamentally precarious and dependent position). Similar arguments have been made by Andrew Potter (2011), and in Roopali Mukherjee and Sarah Banet-Weiser's edited collection on "commodity activism" (2012), where contributors consider examples ranging from fair trade to the Dove "Real Beauty" campaign, to buying T-shirts for cancer charities.

Another theoretical approach to the study of anti-consumerist activism can be found in A. K. Thompson's *Black Bloc, White Riot* (2010). Here, he critiques the sociohistoric conditions that structure participation in the contemporary anti-globalization movement, specifically privileged positions in terms of race, class, and gender. In line with Littler (2005), Thompson argues that movements which fail to be reflexive on these issues will never succeed to be better than the mass society they critique.

A final interesting emerging area in the study of activist movements comes from scholars interested in the relationship between new Internet technologies and political organizations. Legal studies scholar Cass Sunstein jumped on the subject quickly in 2002 with *Republic.com*, years before Web 2.0 was a household catchphrase. Sunstein was interested in how many believed that blogs and Internet forums had the potential to

transform the democratic process. Returning to the work of the founding fathers of the United States, and also grounding his analysis in the social theory of Jürgen Habermas (particularly *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 1962), Sunstein ultimately argued that the Internet will fail to be the “truly democratic forum” many hope that it will be.

He updated this work in 2009, as social media had developed by leaps and bounds, and found even more empirical evidence to support this position. Sunstein found that the Internet actually served to fragment the polity more than it brought it together. Indeed, he finds that while the Internet has the potential to make seemingly insignificant trends “go viral” overnight, these are isolated, difficult-to-control phenomena, and not an effective strategy for achieving major political change. Moreover, he draws on the political economy of media studies to demonstrate how media concentration has only grown with the Internet, meaning that the viability and impact of small publishers has actually decreased in the past 15 years. Media studies scholar Zizi Papacharissi (2010) makes a similar argument, finding that the scope of the privatization and individualization of everyday life has only grown with the Internet, which significantly decreases the likelihood of the emergence of a public sphere of democratic engagement.

Integrating theories of consumer activism

Following sociologist Klaus Eder, Kozinets and Handelman (2004) argue that social activism is a product of the modern era, wherein individuals are freed of the constraints imposed by pre-modern communities. Political philosophers would contest this assumption, however, arguing that society is more controlled, or "programmed"

(Foucault, 1980; Touraine, 1969) than ever, operating through Gramscian (1971) cultural hegemony rather than brute force. In Bourdieuian terminology (1984, 1977), symbolic violence has replaced physical violence. This does not, however, mean that social control has weakened. Indeed, as the culture as a whole acts as an authority, it becomes increasingly difficult to identify specific enemies; to articulate specific stakes; and to develop political actions. Consequently, successful dissent is increasingly foreclosed.

Despite the growing improbability of effective dissent, contemporary political philosophers are nevertheless interested in how dissent and social change *could* occur. As a counterpoint to Foucault's work on power (1980, 1979a, 1975), contemporary philosophers (Žižek, 2000; Agamben, 1998; Badiou, 1993) have re-investigated Aristotle's classic texts on politics (e.g. Aristotle, 350 BCE a) and ethics (Aristotle, 350 BCE b), ultimately arguing that the solution is the formation of new polities (e.g. societies, states, and communities), which in turn encourage different forms of subjectivity and ethics, rather than reform within existing corrupt polities. Following Habermas (1981, 1962), these thinkers are interested in how the public sphere could be revitalized, providing space for political education and negotiation that is not dominated by current forms of cultural hegemony. Only by stepping away from existing polities, they argue, can people engage in political thought that is not simply a product of the capitalist consumer culture.

Ultimately, activism is characterized as a political practice within a political system, characterized by actions that seek to contest, resist, or seize power. In turn, political analysis of activism focuses on the relative forms of power and influence that activists and their adversaries can levy in support of their positions. This differs from the

sociological and cultural approach presented by Kozinets and Handelman (2004), and which dominated much of cultural anthropology at the time (Dilley 1999), which is more focused on describing the values and identity work of activist communities. A political analysis of similar data would be interested in the sociohistoric forces that influenced whether or not individuals participated in activism; what sorts of communities and spaces they created; the concrete political tools the organization sought to mobilize against powerful others; and the tools these powerful actors had at their disposal. In short, political philosophy asks how activism can come to matter—how it can possibly transform meaning within society. This question of how activism can come to matter is particularly central to the thought of French philosopher Alain Badiou; as such, the next section presents a Badiouian perspective for analyzing the politics of consumer activism.

Theorizing the politics of resistance—and consumption: The political philosophy of Alain Badiou

Badiou starts from the Heideggerian imperative (1927) that ontology (the study of the nature of being) should be revived as a central category of philosophical inquiry. Working from the perspective of political philosophy, however, Badiou takes this directive in a radically different direction. Again, political philosophers are concerned with the structuring influence of power across all domains of social life. With this in mind, Badiou ultimately contends that the very nature of things—the meaning of objects, experiences, subjectivity, and group membership—is politically constituted (e.g. defined by power relations). He theorizes that power structures sociohistoric conditions, which in turn influences knowledge; this then encourages the formation of particular types of

subjectivity, ethics, and social action (1993, 1982). In order to fully understand Badiou's social theory, one must consider how he conceptualizes each of these levels of analysis in greater depth; as such, this is the goal of the following sections. The final section then brings these elements back together, to explain his philosophy and its relevance to the study of consumer activism.

Sociohistoric conditions

Badiou's framework begins with the idea that there are two types of sociohistoric conditions, each defined by its relationship to power structures. The first, the *status quo* or *the state of the situation*, refers to societies dominated by the interests of powerful actors. As implied by his use of the term "status quo," Badiou contends that this is the typical form of sociohistoric conditions. The alternative is *the event*, a moment in time and space where the power structure of the status quo is questioned and an attempt is made to subvert it. Following Kuhn (1962), Badiou contends that events can occur in the sciences and arts as well as in politics, as individuals and collectives become aware of the hegemony of dominant paradigms within their communities of knowledge production. It can occur in the field of love, as one's care for the other transcends the nature of sexual (or individual) difference and a dyad emerges whose interests are more important than that of either partner alone (2009, 1982). In the field of politics, finally, the event occurs when a group of individuals have a radical realization about power dynamics within society.

Knowledge

In turn, the status quo and the event shape *knowledge structures*. Here, Badiou (1993, 1982) adopts a Marxist typology of knowledge structures, which starts from the premise that *ideology* is information that serves the interests of those in power, whereas actual *truth* analyzes and contests structures of power. This radical conceptualization of ideology and truth can be seen as having origins in the Bondsmen's tale in Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807). There, Hegel argues that disempowered and marginalized individuals have a uniquely comprehensive understanding of power, as they have an inimitable firsthand understanding of the "reality" of domination. For example, an exploitative boss or corrupt banker is unlikely to have full knowledge of the immiseration that results from their actions, and they have no incentive to learn; those subjected to their power, however, have no choice but to know. Within the status quo, powerful actors use ideology to explain and naturalize their behavior, so as to suppress this self-consciousness. Knowledge is formed when individuals begin to understand and question the legitimacy of such power relations. As such, the status quo generally dominates, while events (characterized by this revolutionary knowledge) are comparably rare; nevertheless, Badiou contends that social researchers should focus their efforts on conditions under which social change could occur, and he locates such potential in the event.

This characterization of ideology and consciousness can also be traced back to *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels, 1846), and is a central assumption of critical theory, from the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947) to Althusser (1971a) and continuing into the work of Habermas (1986). Moreover, it is a core tenet of critical theory methodologies (Hetrick and Lozada, 1994; Murray and Ozanne, 1991). This is in

stark contrast to the definition of ideology used in Kozinets' and Handelman's (2004) account of consumer activism, and within consumer research more generally. Consumer research scholars frequently follow the cultural studies tradition identified by Raymond Williams in *Keywords* (1976), which defines ideology as the cultural beliefs of any social group.

Subjectivity

Starting from this distinction, Badiou (1993, 1982) argues that there are two primary forms of subjectivity: the subjectivity of everyday life, formed as a product of cultural hegemony and the status quo; and radical subjectivities, formed in response to encounters with knowledge that resists power. In the field of politics, exposure to genuine knowledge of power dynamics within society is the prerequisite for political subjectivity. Following Aristotle and Agamben (1998), Badiou defines "being fully human" (1993, 1982) in terms of political participation; one can only have their own ideas and subjectivities if they manage to step away from socialities and knowledges structured by powerful groups in society.

Ethics and action

In Badiou's philosophy, ethics are defined in terms of the choice to ally oneself with power, or against power. In turn, an in line with the extant marketing literature on ethics (Ferrell and Gresham 1985), ethical actions are only possible when an individual has access to knowledge of power structures (1993). Those that choose to exploit power relations for personal gain are *evil*, while those who truly understand the power dynamics

of society and choose to resist are *good*. Those that do not have knowledge of how power operates are *neither good nor evil*.

Synthesis

As noted previously, Badiou's theory has already had great success in synthesizing knowledge within the social sciences, as it is able to simultaneously grapple with questions of structure, agency, knowledge, ethics, and action. Here, I briefly consider his theories in their entirety, as a point of departure for their application within the field of consumer research.

From the preceding discussion, one can see three main theories emerge. The first, seen in Figure 6a, is a general theory of social action—a theoretical account of how the social world is constituted. This progresses from sociohistoric conditions to knowledge to subjectivity and finally ethics and action. The second, a theory of the status quo (Figure 6b), starts from the state of the situation, which is perpetuated by ideology, which forms people as subjects of the status quo, and which ultimately leads to ethical positions and actions which are evil and neither good nor evil. In contrast, Badiou's theory of political action (Figure 6c) starts from the social structure of the event, which is defined by genuine knowledge of power and domination. Subjects of the event are genuine political subjects and citizens, and exhibit ethics and actions that are good, or which seek to ameliorate the deleterious effects of domination within society.

Figure 6: Badiou's Theory

6a) General Theory of Social Action

Sociohistoric Conditions → Knowledge Structures → Subjectivities Created → Ethics

6b) Theory of the Status Quo

State of the Situation → Ideology → Subjects of the State of the Situation → Evil and neutral ethics

6c) Theory of Political Action

The event → Truth → Subjects of Truth → Good ethics

As seen here, the distinction between "activists" and "ordinary people" is not merely a semantic, descriptive, and sociological demarcation between different demographics; indeed, it is a matter of ontology—of two mutually-exclusive ways of being. In turn, these different forms of subjectivity command different forms of ethics and action. By using politics and power as a unifying language with which we can describe these types of subjectivity, activist movements are not merely cultures or subcultures, but different types of polities to which individuals subscribe. In turn, Badiou illuminates once again how knowledge and identity can come to matter. With these considerations in mind, Badiou's theory is proposed as a potential explanatory and synthesizing framework for the study of consumer activist contexts such as Occupy Wall Street. Ultimately, however, Badiou's framework says as much as it does about powerful actors and everyday consumers as it does of political actors, as it is a theory of the constitution of contemporary society more generally. The goal of the next sections, then, is to develop a Badiouian methodology for consumer researchers operating in a variety of contexts, rather than just for those that study activism.

Methodology: Extending critical theory approaches

"[C]ritique assesses what exists, what might exist and what should exist…"

Norman Fairclough, 2010, p. 7

As politics is afforded ontological status within contemporary political philosophy, and politics in turn structure different forms of knowledge, there are significant epistemological considerations for consumer researchers who might want to use a Badiouian political philosophy—or any other political theory, for that matter. With these preconditions in mind, this section addresses the methodological differences between political philosophy and traditional cultural and social research. Political theory is considered as an extension of the critical theory project, and of critical theory methodologies within consumer research. These epistemological premises, in turn, provide the foundation from which a political analysis of consumer behavior can be developed.

To do this, I begin by considering the article that is arguably the reigning standard on critical methodologies for consumer research, Murray and Ozanne's editorial on the subject (1991). As noted by the authors, and reiterated by Hetrick and Lozada (1994), translating critical theory into research practice necessitates certain methodological assumptions. First, most researchers using these methods generally employ a critical realist approach to ontology, which assumes that there is an objectively-existing outside world, but that our access to it is subjective, socially constructed, and discursively-mediated (Fairclough, 2010; Murray and Ozanne, 1991). Murray and Ozanne contrast this with traditional qualitative consumer research (as outlined by Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf, 1988; Hirschman,1986; and Spiggle, 1994), arguing that these traditions start from the assumption that there is no mind-independent reality, which leads them to adopt a fully interpretivist ontology. In terms of axiology, critical theory is characterized as

embracing a practical, liberatory ethos. Building on this, Murray and Ozanne's (1991) critical theory epistemology assumes that knowledge generated should serve these emancipatory interests—in other words, that knowledge should further human liberation from oppressive structures of power.

Here, I consider the ways in which contemporary political philosophy is an extension of the critical theory and methodologies advanced by Murray and Ozanne (1991). Returning to the opening quote from this section, notable critical methodologist Norman Fairclough (2010) contends that the intervention of critical research is an ontological one: it seeks to theorize the nature of being within society, as it is; and it then considers the range of possible social phenomena, within and beyond these limits. Following Murray and Ozanne (1991), it is also an axiological project, or a matter of values, as knowledge produced from these premises makes concrete statements about stakes and benefits, with the implication that researchers are obligated to make an ethical decision about what "side" to take.

As noted in the previous section, contemporary political philosophy ultimately goes a step even further than Fairclough (Dean, 2009; Hallward, 2003). Many thinkers in this field argue that the distinction between ontology and axiology is a false dichotomy. This is because being, itself, is politically constituted (Rancière, 2010, 1992; Badiou, 1993; Agamben, 1998). For example, whether or not one is an activist is shaped by political forces, as would be the very meaning of knowledge and ideology. This carries with it a specific epistemological implication: since there is no being outside of politics, understanding the nature of being is necessarily a matter of understanding politics. This is a pronounced shift toward universalism over relativism, a move which Badiou (1993)

defends by arguing that knowledge of power is of interest to all of those oppressed by power, in any way. Again, following Hegel, even those who dominate are not free as they are dependent on the submission of those that they dominate, an inherently unstable condition which they must constantly manufacture and maintain (1807). As such, even they may benefit from such emancipatory knowledge. Consequently, the goal of any serious scholarly inquiry is defined as the production of knowledge about structures of power; the goal of any ethical research, moreover, should be the production of liberatory knowledge, rather than the production of ideology that simply serves to reinforce existing structures of power. With these assumptions in mind, the following section presents critical discourse analysis as an appropriate method for political inquiry in general, and for the study of Occupy Wall Street in particular.

Methods

As little concrete information about Occupy Wall Street was available *a priori*, a qualitative approach was warranted (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Working from the epistemological and ontological propositions outlined above, critical discourse analysis is arguably the most appropriate path forward. Much like grounded theory, the goal of CDA is movement from emic, ground-level reports toward etic, theoretical knowledge (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Goulding, 2002). Here, and in critical consumer research more generally, there is a particular focus on power as a structuring force within texts (Fairclough 2010, 1999; Fairclough et al. 2001; Denzin, 2001). In this way, critical discourse analysis is a particularly appropriate response to Askegaard and Linnet's

(2011) call for methodologies capable of considering the ways that power structures influence mental and cultural contexts.

In the course of analysis, critical discourse analysts generally adopt a theoretical framework for the analysis of power at some point in the process, or at least consider how the grounded findings inform one or more theories of power (Fairclough, 2010). It was only at this point that a Badiouian analytical framework was deemed most appropriate, as it provided the necessary language and theory with which to fully explain the phenomena of interest in the discursive texts—specifically, the relationships between social conditions, knowledge, subjectivity, ethics, and action. The findings of this section, in turn, are used to inform and expand a Badiouian theorization of consumer culture and consumer activism.

To provide adequate material for this sort of discourse analysis, a long interview format (as per McCracken 1988) was deemed most appropriate. That said, the ephemeral nature of the event presented a significant challenge for data collection. At the height of the occupation, in the fall of 2011, it was impossible to conduct long interviews, as the 'occupiers' were so busy with meetings and the general upkeep of the occupation site. Attempts resulted in incredibly short, fragmented interviews. As I was interested in extended accounts of the experience of occupation, I persisted, and was finally able to obtain long interviews in the spring of 2012, once the movement had moved off site and its activity was less intensive.

That said, the spring brought with it new challenges, as the movement was largely underground, making it difficult to find and recruit potential interviewees. Many were skeptical of the role of academia in promoting activist practice, and each interview

generally required that the author recount her own activist experience at length, and demonstrate her commitment to the movement by participating in relevant working groups. Ultimately, seven semi-structured long interviews (McCracken 1988) were conducted in the spring of 2012, which allowed for long narrative accounts of participation and extensive consideration of the participants' backgrounds in activist organizing. While this number of interviews may seem small for scholars steeped in the traditions of grounded theory, the material was more than adequate for the sort of critical discourse analysis (CDA) performed here, as the author was interested in distinctions that should be present in any interview on activism and Occupy Wall Street. In other words, even one in-depth interview could have indicated whether "subjectivation," the process of becoming an activist subject, was possible at Occupy Wall Street, and could provide insights that enhance our understanding of activist subjectivity. As more interviews are obtained, however, the claim that "subjectivation" is possible is strengthened, and the opportunity for learning more about the process as it occurred at Occupy Wall Street, and in general, grows.

Building on McCracken's guidance, the long interviews began with one grand tour question. Inspired by news writers' inability to identify the rationale behind the movement (Brisbane 2011), this question was simply, "What brought you to Occupy Wall Street?" From there, additional questions were asked to gain insight into participants' backgrounds and ongoing involvement with the movement. In addition to the interviews, publications, flyers, and publicly-available photographs served as memory aids and additional material for analysis, as recommended by Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf (1988).

Badiouian Analysis

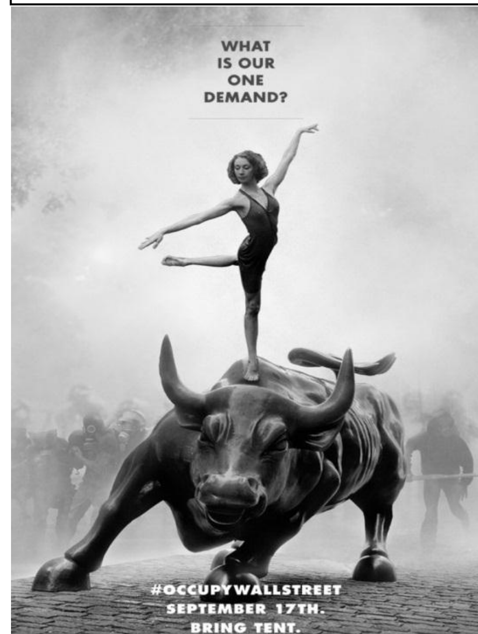
Sociohistoric conditions

Throughout the long interviews, there was a consensus that the *status quo* was corrupt and unlivable as a result of the encroachment of corporate interests into democratic processes. Occupy Wall Street was described as a platform for criticizing this status quo and experimenting with alternative forms of political and economic organization. At the same time, there was a great diversity of issues that motivated individuals to participate, and that structured their involvement in the camp. As Fran put it, while “[e]verybody’s concerned about the economy,” the particular issues that brought her to the movement were cuts to social services like mental health, day care, and hospital facilities; the privatization of public projects; the precarious state of funding for cultural institutions; and the continued occupation of Iraq. Charlie talked about how “corporate greed” had eroded workers’ rights, to the point where many had grievances but there were few recognized routes for amelioration. Mina argued that “[c]apitalism… doesn’t function in a way that’s life sustaining or dignifying to humanity in anyway, and it’s built on exploitative principles,” compared to Islamic economics; as such, “that was one of the biggest entries into OWS,” for her. In short, while corporate influence in politics was the central concern of the Occupiers with whom I talked, they generally focused their energies on specific sites of personal interest.

These findings and interpretations are well-supported by institutional narratives about the movement. Occupy Wall Street was the brainchild of *Adbusters*, an anti-consumerist organization that publishes an eponymous magazine. Adbusters was

originally founded by Kalle Lasn and Bill Schmalz, former ad men, and the organization frequently adopts social marketing strategies in the hope of creating social change. It was on the *Adbusters* blog that the first public mention of an Occupy Wall Street appeared, in a post entitled "#OCCUPYWALLSTREET: A Shift in Revolutionary Tactics," (Culture Jammers HQ 2011a). In this post, the *Adbusters* writers solicited suggestions for what "the one simple demand" of the group should be. They claimed that there was a tremendous outpouring of feedback, which they condensed into a single statement. On July 26th, 2011, they proclaimed that: "Our one simple demand is: stop the monied corruption at the heart of our democracy!" The title of the post, "Is America Ripe for a Tahrir Movement?" (Culture Jammers HQ 2011b) clearly indicates that the activist group took inspiration from the Arab Spring, specifically the Egyptian Revolution. The September/October issue of *Adbusters* magazine followed up on these blog entries, featuring a centerfold poster officially announcing the event (Figure 7). Here, the rallying cry of the protest is less explicit, simply "our one demand."

Figure 7: *Adbusters* centerfold



Within the first couple weeks of the occupation, the Call to Action working group compiled a comprehensive list of policy domains in which corporate influence was believed to be problematic. Examples came from the fields of environmental, housing, heath, military, and fiscal policy, to name a few. The resulting document was put to a vote before a large body of protesters (the General Assembly, or

GA) during their September 29, 2011 meeting, and was accepted. These concerns were transformed into *The Declaration of the Occupation of New York City* (New York General Assembly 2011) and distributed widely at the site.

Furthermore, these individual and institutional narratives are supported by sociohistoric scholarship. As noted by many researchers who study the recession (Stiglitz 2012; Mason 2012; Foster and Magdoff 2010), economic conditions in the United States had been poor for quite some time, and the number of people who had been personally affected was huge. The subprime mortgage industry began to collapse in 2007, and many financial institutions followed suit in 2008. These events set off a spiral of effects that impacted a wide range of consumers in the following years. Government policies, from leniency on corporate tax issues to high military spending, only fueled the crisis.

With these findings in mind, the occupation of Wall Street reflected a turning point in public consciousness of this state of affairs, wherein large groups of individuals finally felt the need to critique the status quo. As noted in the *Adbusters* blog entries, this high level of collective immiseration transformed into a movement as a result of inspiration from the Arab Spring. The Occupiers claimed that the successes of these movements had given them renewed hope for mass mobilization and democratic social change at home. As Michelle explained it, many felt that it was "the right moment" for a massive political action to occur:

> "At this moment in particular, I feel it is about corporations in bed with government, that there's no autonomy for elected officials that they don't actually serve the people who elect them; they serve the corporations that fund their campaigns… I think it was hitting the idea of being 'the right moment.' I think people felt very aware that things were wrong and really felt like they were being screwed."

Put differently, during a speech at Zuccotti Park, one anonymous speaker explained that "[t]he time has come. People are pissed. They're talking about the economy at the bus stop!" In other words, a collective lack of faith in the status quo was emerging. In Badiouian terms, this would constitute an alternative set of sociohistoric conditions described as *the event*.

Knowledge

Given that Occupy was an event, in Badiouian terms, one of the main functions of the Occupy Wall Street encampment was to create a space for political and economic education. Mina, a professional educator, described the Occupy site as a "commons for people to come and interact and exchange ideas." As for what ideas were exchanged on site, the Occupiers frequently discussed how mainstream coverage of the recession was highly biased, an assertion that was often supported with a surprising depth of evidence. As such, the event that was Occupy Wall Street was a place for disputing ideology and attempting to elucidate the truth about American political economy. The movement took advantage of a number of educational tools to communicate this message, including teach-ins by high-profile scholars and activists such as Cornell West, Judith Butler, Slavoj Žižek, Naomi Klein, and Bill McKibben. Working groups and affinity groups were places for people to discuss issues central to the movement and work on developing solutions to problems they identified. Several attempts to institutionalize the educational arm of the movement were made, including the Occupy University group, which aimed to start an open and free alternative university in New York City. Finally, the General Assembly (GA) was a place where people were educated about motions that were up for

vote, as well as a space for voting as members of a direct democracy. Indeed, the GA was a central site of socialization into the Occupy community for many.

Nevertheless, one method stood out as particularly central to the educational aims of the movement. The Occupiers primarily built understanding of what they considered to be economic ideology and economic truth through one-on-one conversation. Occupiers who were personally affected by the recession told how their knowledge of the machinations of power came from first-hand experience. Douglas, for example, had experienced quite a bit of job insecurity. He had worked numerous jobs without benefits since graduating college; had been laid-off from a professional job; and was eventually living and working on a commune partially out of necessity. Charlie explained that his participation was largely a result of his experience of police harassment as a poor street vendor:

> "You have your civil rights, your constitutional rights, your human rights. And when they get violated, then you have to take action, you have to take legal action to say look, my civil rights have been violated, my human rights have been violated, my constitutional rights have been violated. I have a constitutional right to sell products, to protest, et cetera. You have a right not to have your stuff taken from you—[against] illegal search and seizure!!!"

Those who had not been personally devastated by the recession recounted stories that had affected them, which they had heard from people who had experienced some of the worst. Bill had a number of these stories, including one about an Iraq war veteran who was Occupying as "penance" for what he did during the war, and several others about college graduates who were hopelessly indebted and underemployed, or unemployed. The following is an example of one that he liked to tell "protest tourists" (a.k.a. casual visitors to the camp):

> "She told me this story about how she and her husband sold their house, bought a smaller house, had about $500 000 as their nest egg. She went to Merrill Lynch… They wanted a safe investment. [Their broker] put them in a Triple-A rated mortgage bonds, and they paid him a commission, and in about two-and-a-half years, their life-savings was worthless. What she found out was that her broker… with the money that she paid him for advice, had taken credit default swaps out on the very bonds that she bought, so that now…they paid them to take their life-savings legally away from them. And explaining this to people, I'd say, 'This was done to such a great degree, that the whole system collapsed on itself, and the government had to turn to that woman and her husband and say, "Look, we've got to bail out the very man who stole your money. So, we're going to use your tax dollars to bail him out. And, that man was bailed out.' … And it's like, "That's the system we're supporting? That's why we're occupying.'"

Here, Bill employs a discursive maneuver that was common at Occupy Wall Street, which I describe as *recasting*. He recasts this archetypal story of a spurned investor not as one of poor, greedy consumer choice, but instead as one of orchestrated corporate fraud. The firm is not described as a "job-creating" or "value-creating" enterprise, as they might be described by the conservative news media or by Romney's presidential campaign, but instead as robbers. He may also be attempting to *meet the person halfway*, in terms of social class, by presenting a relatable story about well-to-do, successful people who had been wronged by investment banking practice. The goal of such maneuvers is to move people from *ideological* understandings of the economy to understandings that Badiou would describe as *true*, or in line with economic realities. Ultimately, Bill argued that using these "real stories" helped people "latch on to and understand, and emotionally feel that this is a real thing that happened." From there, "People started to feel, I thought, started to really understand why the occupation was there." In the end, these discursive practices fit with Badiou's idea that the goal of political action is to create a shared sense

of justice, based on “real,” or true, experiences of oppression and understanding of politics.

Subjectivity

Ultimately, Badiou argues that the possibility for social change lies in the potential for these kinds of knowledge to transform subjectivity. This is a phenomenon I saw time and time again in my interviews, as informants explained that their knowledge of the economy had been in flux, and that they chose to express that by becoming "Occupiers." For example, Philip noted that:

> My biggest reason for coming here… I realized that much of what I'd believe much of my life wasn't true. It's not just that conservativism isn't right, but especially on economics, it turned out to be crap. Reganism… believed that it would make everybody off. Lower taxes, more incentive to work, less regulation… it didn't work out.”

He also described the government's deceptive activity surrounding the Iraq War as another example of knowledge that turned out not to be true, explaining that “there were no weapons of mass destruction, and there was the forgery of documents to make it look like there was. In Italy, they admit this. In the US, our government won't tell us that.” In Badiouian terms, Philip's transition from economic conservative to radical can be described as a move from being a *subject of the status quo* to a *subject to truth*. Badiou refers to such changes as processes of *subjectivation*, or becoming a subject. As we will see in the next section, subjectivation gains meaning as it leads to changes in ethics and action, as well as identity.

Philip was not the only protestor with such a story; indeed, the demonstrators I encountered and interviewed frequently reported similar moments of political activation. Douglas had already been an activist, but nevertheless found Occupy to be a space of re-activation:

> "Well, the thing that appealed to me was that they were talking about the injustices of our economy and the reason I felt compelled to come up here is because it seemed like there was a, there was real energy here. That there were a lot people and a lot of…like that it was actually happening, like a real movement was taking off…in a way that I think is unique… people were occupying, actually having an encampment at Liberty Park, and the numbers were growing, and the amount of support from progressive media, from other social justice activists, including high-profile people like Michael Moore, and Cornel West, and Noam Chomsky were all adding their efforts. So, it seemed like there was, you know, that the conditions were right for a real movement to… take-off."

Douglas clearly connects the event ("the conditions that were right for a real movement to... take off") to his travel from the South to New York, and his commitment to the movement, which continued for over a year. Michelle, too, goes so far as to say that the movement had the power to re-politicize her, giving her hope once again that the *status quo* could be changed:

> "It did bring me back into activism, when I thought I was pretty much done with it… To a certain extent, it has given me a lot of hope, that… some of these problems can be solved and we can get our shit together. Then yeah, we could create something really, really big. To look back on it and say, 'Yeah, that was the moment we changed the course of all these things.' One of the biggest ways its changed me, especially in the early periods, the early few months in the park and stuff, I feel like it took a lot of compassion to be there and to listen to people, and to hear where they were coming from. I felt like it was a really heart-opening experience, to be able to listen to people, and to figure out where they're coming from, and to figure out how do we help each other, how do we work together, how do we do this together?

After having been "done with" activism, taking a job in advertising, and more or less resigning to the state of the situation, the event that was Occupy Wall Street had the power to re-constitute Michelle as a political subject, or a subject to truth. Again, the collective energy of the mass movement, and the work of creating an intersubjective understanding of economic problems, led to significant changes in identity and commitment. This was not an uncommon sentiment amongst those I interviewed. Indeed, many of the older occupiers had been long-time activists, whose political awakening had occurred decades earlier. Charlie had been actively involved in anti-war, disability, and civil rights activism for decades before Occupy Wall Street. Fran, too, had been active in the New York political scene for many years, fighting for better mental health care, to preserve cultural institutions, against racial discrimination, and to prevent hospital closures. While subjectivation was a new experience for some, like Philip, it was simply a re-activation of political commitment for others.

Ethics and action

As noted above, Badiou theorizes that changes in identity become meaningful as they lead to transformations of *ethics* and *behavior*. One common demonstration of such *commitment* to the movement was participation in working groups, which assisted in running the camp, and affinity groups, which were devoted to more abstract questions of politics and policy. Many who participated regularly found themselves in quite a number of groups, as seen in this quote below by Douglas:

> "Most recently, I've been concentrating my efforts with Occupy Faith and Occupy Catholics and Occupy Big Food. All of which are affinity groups, not

> actual working groups with the movement, but all of which are very involved and work closely with people who are in working groups. Um, I've also participated with a number of working groups… like the facilitation working group, that facilitates the general assemblies, and I was a part of the coordinators working group or the coordination working group."

Others, like Michelle, became dedicated to a particular group, for which there was much work to be done:

> "I started the Design Working Group and the idea was to be a hub of designers that people could get their ideas to try to get whatever they needed designed, there was a group of people who could get it done for them. It could be from getting a logo to doing flyers, doing posters, and I feel like I've been mostly in the group…and I've been doing a lot of the design work myself, but also, trying to help manage the group and help us function collectively.... I felt like I was bearing the brunt of a lot of…of having to do a lot of the administrative work.

She goes on to note that,

> "The thing that I keep trying to make a bit of time and space for are…infographics and fact sheets. Anything that I find that I feel could be educational to the broader public about. 'This is why we're here; this is why we're doing all this crazy stuff.' Because I think that people are open to it right now… I feel that if you show them facts, some sort of well-researched document saying, 'Corporations are giving our politicians this much money,' or, 'Laws are being written to allow so-and-so to screw you over,' that they get really mad. That people get really mad and I think that's why… Occupy blew up when it started. That's why so many people are coming out of the woodwork, because they understood that."

That said, working groups and affinity groups are just one way of participating, and again many argued that "Occupying," and thereby creating a steady space for education and organizing, was the most important aspect of the movement. Philip argued that the act of occupying itself was the key strategy, and what gave the movement its meaning. For him, the occupiers were "the edge," arguing that:

> "There are tons of groups out there that believe what Occupy believes. Tons of non-profits and individuals and groups. But why has Occupy Wall Street gotten so much attention? Because they occupy."

Another example of this can be seen in Bill′s interview, as he noted that he was initially not particularly interested in the protest, but that once he understood the gravity of the situation (by seeing the police brutality), he was inextricably involved, ″at the park 5, 6, 7 days a week.″ Instead of joining working groups, he decided his "role" was to walk around the park, facilitating discussions with protest tourists about what the Occupation was trying to achieve, and discussing with Occupiers what the movement should try to achieve.

For those I interviewed, knowledge, identity, and ethics became meaningful when transformed into actions, which they thought of as the best *strategies* for changing the most lives. As with individuals' reasons for joining the movement and pet issues, these too varied widely. Douglas, for example, cited actions such eviction defense and foreclosure prevention as strategies that had already made a difference in many people's lives. Michelle was also very interested in concrete actions, with tactics such as advocating for consumers to move their money into credit unions. Mina argued that there was an urgent need for action at all levels of the social structure:

> "I think we need a little bit of everything. I generally believe in anarchist principles of organizing, and that we need to dismantle the state. Ways for people to enter into questioning the government, questioning corporatism, questioning systems that exist, and then slowly moving them toward the left. And you need many different entry points for that."

Finally, Charlie thought that Occupy Wall Street needed to continue "partnering with other organizations. Taking care of the disabled, and stuff like that. And people who are homeless, you know what I mean? And working with the churches." For him, an important strategy of the movement was to provide "sanctuary" to those most in need.

For Badiou, too, “good” ethics are essentially matters of strategies, inspired by knowledge of some universal truth but nevertheless informed by subjective experience and tailored to local exigencies (1993). Ultimately, the Occupiers’ dedication to the truths they had learned, the ways in which they attempted to spread this knowledge, and their fidelity to the event clearly fit with a Badiouian interpretation of the phenomenon. Strategies like occupying foreclosed homes, moreover, are exercises of countervailing power that are intended to directly engage with actors within the state of the situation. This also fits with Norman Fairclough’s (2010) understanding of what needs to come next for researchers as well as political subjects:

> “I want to suggest a change in priorities for critical research generally… a partial shift in focus from structures to strategies… While neo-liberal capitalism was relatively securely in place, the priority was a critique of established, institutionalized and partly naturalized and normalized systems, structures, logics, and discourses. … To an extent, that agenda is being overtaken by events. Aspects of the character, flaws, fallacies, contradictions, etc., of neo-liberalism which had largely been ignored except by its critics have come to be widely recognized and even conceded by former apologists for ‘free markets’… Crises lead to a proliferation of strategies… leading to processes of strategic struggle,” (2010, p. 17-18)

Integration

Across the sections presented here, a Badiouian critical analysis helps elucidate the nature of the event that was (and is) Occupy Wall Street. All of the elements of Badiou’s theory, from sociohistoric conditions to ethics and action, are present and operative within the narratives the Occupiers related. While other theorists’ work could have explained some of the key phenomena, at no time did an alternative theoretical lexicon appear more appropriate or comprehensive. As such, Badiou’s theory of political action

(Figure 6) is directly analogous to the study of a consumer activist movement such as Occupy Wall Street.

This new conceptualization of consumer activism brings with it particular implications. For example, if consumer activism is the event, what is the status quo? In this study, and in theoretical formulations (Bauman 2007; Badiou 1993; Bocock 1993; Rancière 1992; Althusser 1971b; Touraine 1969), consumerism is the status quo of contemporary developed economies (Figure 8a). Consumer activism, on the other hand, is the political movement that seeks to question the dominant logics of this social organization (Figure 8b).

Figure 8: Applying Badiou to Consumer Culture and Consumer Activism

8a) A Badiouian Theorization of Consumer Culture

Consumer culture → Ideology of Consumerism → The consumer subject → Consumerist Ethics

8b) A Badiouian Theorization of Consumer Activism

Consumer Activist Movements → Knowledge of Consumer Culture → Consumer Activist Subjects → Politicized Ethics

By this token, most consumers are neither *good* nor *evil*, in Badiou's terminology, as they do not possess the knowledge required to act differently. Indeed, such knowledge is actively suppressed by the state of the situation. Activists are good, in that they understand power but do not use it to their advantage. Powerful actors that manipulate the status quo for personal gain are evil. Everyday consumers are neither, as their ethics and actions are generally a product of the status quo, and they lack the knowledge to act differently.

With these implications in mind, there are a number of similarities and differences between this conceptualization of consumer activism, and the standing consumer research account presented by Kozinets and Handelman (2004). Regarding the former, both are consumer activist organizations; by Kozinets and Handelman′s (2004) definition, they are "social movements that attempt to transform various elements of the social order surrounding consumption and marketing," (p. 691) seeking "fundamental change to the ideology and culture of consumerism," (p. 692) and "the totalizing and hegemonic cultural forms defined by capitalist markets," (p. 692). In both cases, the movement is defined as a social organization in opposition to the powerful status quo. Last, but not least, activism is seen to be the product of a "revelation" in both cases.

Nevertheless, there are significant differences between the two studies at both emic and etic levels. On the ground, Occupy Wall Street was very different from traditional consumer activist movements, as it involved a physical encampment and the establishment of a lived community, in the language of Tönnies (1887). This served to lower barriers to entry (as the organization was easy to find, and available at all hours), and to strengthen the socializing nature of the event. In theoretical terms, a Badiouian analysis of consumer activism, and specifically of the event of Occupy Wall Street, leads us to very different conclusions than Kozinets and Handelman (2004). First, it provides a sociohistoric theorization of the politics of activist participation. The genesis of the movement is grounded in the social conditions of the American recession, and the changes to social and knowledge structures this naturally entailed. The politics of participation (gender, race, sexuality, and class) are theorized and argued to have been

more progressive than traditional movements, as there were low barriers to entry and the movement did not depend on the leisure time of relatively well-off individuals.

A Badiouian epistemology, moreover, has significant implications for theories of ideology and knowledge in such contexts. Rather than seeing both consumer culture and the activists as having "cultural ideologies" that only differ qualitatively, the status quo and the event share a common knowledge about how society functions, but take different positions on the issue. The status quo employs this knowledge in the interests of those in power, transforming it into ideology; the event disputes this exploitative intersection between knowledge and power. Ultimately, there are not only qualitative but (at least ordinal) quantitative stakes between these two forms of social organization: it is clear to the organizers who would benefit from each type of economy.

The consequence of this is that activist subjectivity is not simply a subcultural identity to be achieved by adopting the right cultural values and wearing the proper "hoodie." Those that are the most disadvantaged are theorized to have the greatest access to knowledge of the oppressive power of the status quo, and consequently politics is not a matter of costly cultural identity work. By the same token, "consumerist" activists are actually likely to be less politicized. Finally, ethics is not something to be achieved through a "revelation" which we should all feel obligated to have, but a human facility that is actively suppressed by the status quo. This alternative theorization of consumer culture urges a focus on the power that a very small elite has over the ordering of economy and culture. From this perspective, activists and consumers are comparatively powerless. In order to create massive social change, transformations would have to occur

among this elite. While this is incredibly improbable, it is nevertheless important for the quality of our theorizing to understand this point.

Synthesis: Badiouian theory for Consumer Culture Theory

Once again, the primary goal of this paper was to expand our understanding of the politics of consumption and resistance. To do justice to this directive, it was necessary to adopt tools for political analysis: the philosophy and methodology of political theory; the framework of Alain Badiou; and the method of critical discourse analysis. In doing so, I also found it necessary to move beyond "embracing" the "dialectical interplay of structure and agency" (Murray 2002, p. 439), to consider the relative powerlessness of consumers in a world that is not of their making (Askegaard and Linnet 2011). Ultimately, a political philosophy perspective indicates that the distinction between structure and agency is false, as power shapes structure, which in turn molds subjectivity.

Murray (2002) suggests that marketization may affect the meaning of cultural practices; a Badiouian (or even Bourdieuian, 1993) analysis confirms this, finding that cultural practices are always defined by their relationship to power structures and the market. In other words, their meaning—the way in which they matter—is a function of what they say about economic and social status.

Moreover, subject positions are theorized as more than a matter of consumer choice, offered by the market, as a Badiouian theorization argues that subjectivity is defined by one's relationship to powerful market actors—be it allegiance, dependence, or resistance. Murray's thesis that real political action may be that which occurs outside the mechanisms of the market is supported, as political subjects are constituted by their

rejection of the market as the primary site of politics. This is in line with current work on the politics of consumer culture outside of our research community, particularly the ongoing discussion and theorization of citizenship as a counterpoint to "consumer citizenship" (Žižek 2011, 2009; Banet-Weiser 2007; Cohen 2003).

Building on the work of Fırat and Venkatesh (1995), Murray encourages studies of resistance as the "improbable behaviors… that appear to be outside the logic of commercialization" (p. 439), and a Badiouian analysis does just that, as it considers the improbable but possible avenues by which social transformations could actually occur. At the same time, it provides insight into the conditions of possibility that generally structure every day life, raising important questions about agency and responsibility. Badiouian political analysis also commands us to consider who has the most agency within the market. What market actors have the greatest influence over the cultural codes? How does this function as a form of hegemony? Who stands to benefit from the commodification of cultural codes? Who has knowledge, and how do they use it? Ultimately, political analysis provides us with a powerfully clarifying and synthesizing theoretical framework, leading to radical new definitions of core consumer research constructs such as the consumer, the activist (or citizen), agency, responsibility, and ethics.

Discussion: The ethics and politics of consumer research

> "Despite its marketing origins, early leaders in the consumer behavior field desired to establish an independent field, one that would break free from marketing and not be beholden to a marketing perspective… The distancing from marketing also emanated from a growing disdain of big business during the late 1960s and a disquieting recognition of the potential negative societal consequences wrought by advertising and marketing in action…"

MacInnis and Folkes (2010), p. 900-901

Recall again how political scientist Harold Lasswell defined politics as “who gets what, when, and how,” (1936, cover). Phrased differently, politics refers to structures and exercises of power within any social system (Dahl 1970), and is particularly relevant to the study of economies—the systems of resource distribution that are present in almost all human societies (Swedberg, 2003; Carruthers and Babb, 2000). Building on these premises, it follows that the study of marketing, the discipline that studies how goods and services are brought to market, should be intimately tied to the study of politics.

Revisiting the above account of the early history of consumer research (MacInnis and Folkes, 2010), as well as the early publications of consumer researchers, reminds us that politics should be particularly central to the field of consumer researchers. Early work in the *Journal of Consumer Research* considered many public policy issues, such as consumers’ use (and misuse) of information to make healthy food purchase decisions (Jacoby, Chesnut, and Silberman, 1977); safe product use choices (Staelin, 1978); electoral decisions (Swinyard and Coney, 1978; Nakanishi, Cooper, and Kassarjian, 1974); ideas about energy consumption (McNeill and Wilkie, 1979; Craig and McCann, 1978); and use of government-mandated banking information (Day and Brandt, 1974). Numerous projects tackled the subject of politically-motivated, socially-conscious consumption (e.g. Bourgeois and Barnes, 1979; Scott, 1977; Brooker, 1976; and Miller and Sturdivant’s 1977 study of consumer responses to corporate misbehavior). Even research on less-explicitly political subjects such as how to influence brand choice decisions (Reibstein, 1978), how to communicate in difficult media environments (Webb, 1979), and how to increase consumer compliance (Reingen, 1978) are political, in that

they have a stake in "who gets what, when, and how." The difference is that they are not critical, in that they side with the party who has greater influence across the power differential.

In contemporary consumer research, and specifically CCT, the political philosophy discussed herein is directly applicable to many conversations, including the burgeoning discussion of marketing system dynamics (MSD). Scholars within this tradition contend that advancing our knowledge of market processes will require moving beyond a focus on either consumers or firms. In the words of Zwick, Cayla, and Koops-Elson (2002), "Markets are not friction-free and culture-free spaces of exchange but are formed by complex constellations of actors," whose identities and potential for activity is defined with recourse to structures of power. As such, our understanding of complex social phenomena like value, cultural meaning, and subjectivity cannot progress without considering the agency of many types of political actors and objects as they constitute and are constituted through networks of power and information (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011; Giesler, 2008, 2006, 2003; Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Zwick, Cayla, and Koops-Elson, 2002). In this way, political analysis has the potential to address not only explicitly political contexts like consumer activism, but also the dynamics of market systems more broadly, which are necessarily matters of power, sociohistoric conditions, knowledge structures, subjectivities, ethics, and actions.

To conclude, it is helpful to remember that the omission of questions of politics is an oversight that is not specific to the field of consumer research, but one that has plagued social research for decades. As several notable essays have been written on the subject within our field (Askegaard and Linnet 2011; Thompson 2011; Murray 2002), the

question now is not whether or not to study politics, but how best to do so. It is my hope that the sections presented here, on political philosophy, political analysis, and Badiouian theory in particular, provide a useful starting point for further work within the field.

In the instances when these theoretical tools do not appear to be directly applicable to existing theory or methodologies, one should nevertheless keep in mind that Badiouian philosophy presents us with a general theory of meaning and ethics. As such, it is just as applicable to research practices as it is to consumption practices. A Badiouian ontology, for example, raises the provocative proposition that without an understanding of politics, there is no understanding. Therefore, to consider consumption constructs, subjectivities, and theories as "apolitical" or "not matters of politics" is missing the point—market phenomena are naturally products of political systems. Moreover, Badiouian epistemology reminds us that we make choices in our work, either to support those in power, or those that are resisting. We can study the actions of those on either side, but in the moments where we ally ourselves with a managerial perspective, or an activist perspective, we are making ethical choices and expressing our positions on ideological and class structures in society. If there is to be any hope for "interpretive knowledge" and "scientific knowledge" (Calder and Tybout 1987), it can only be by first understanding politics.

Essay 3

Marketing the Revolution:

Occupy Wall Street and the Challenge to Dominant Logics in Our Field

> Steve: "We need a simple name. A short name. Something that is easy for people to remember. Something that is different from the other groups that people might join."
>
> Tony: "But we have a complex message... one that can't easily be conveyed in a few words. It's a challenge to capture that meaning in just a few words."
>
> Steve, waving Tony's copy: "Well, we can't have writing like this. Yeah, it's a lot of information, it's true to what we do, but no one wants to read this much anymore."
>
> Tony: "Well, can't we keep posting it to the website?"
>
> Steve: "Who reads the website, anyway? Yeah, we can put the address on there, but chances are most people will never look it up. In any case, can we resolve to settle on a name for this, today?"

In the incident above, two brand managers are fighting over how best to represent a product. Such conversations are undoubtedly familiar for anyone who has participated in a marketing strategy planning session, or who has taught the most rudimentary marketing management course. Tony represents an older school of marketing thought and practice, focused on providing buyers with many details, so that they can make well-informed decisions. Steve, on the other hand, is responding to the fast pace of the contemporary mediascape, where consumers are short on attention and overwhelmed by information from an unprecedented number of firms. As the debate continues, Steve guides the group toward his approach, which he argues is the only logical option given the climate in which the organization’s customers operate.

Out of context, the above exchange is so routine that it verges on utter banality.

Indeed, it only becomes interesting when one considers where this exchange occurred—it is a verbatim transcription of a planning meeting at Occupy Wall Street. The project presented here is inspired by many exchanges like this that emerged during my study of the original Occupy Wall Street (OWS) encampment in New York City. With moments such as this in mind, this paper reconsiders what it means when non-business organizations—and even anti-marketing groups—make use of traditional marketing strategy, as these practices have important implications not only for not-for-profits, but for the meaning of marketing more generally.

This is done in three steps. The first involves a reassessment of the literature that defines marketing—from treatises on the nature and scope of the marketing concept to the service-dominant logic and beyond. From this review, I find that assumptions about profitability and commerce have been built into marketing theory for decades—sometimes quite explicitly, at other times seemingly unintentionally. This trend raises significant questions about the continued narrowing of the marketing concept, even as the use of social and non-profit marketing has grown prodigiously.

Second, and building on this, I use Occupy Wall Street as a test case for re-examining the importance of marketing for non-profit contexts, and vice versa. I begin by using my observational findings to illustrate the applicability of traditional marketing practice to non-profit and non-product contexts. Here, I detail the strategies that comprised Occupy Wall Street's marketing program, revealing that the movement can easily be characterized as a marketing organization. Indeed, even in this extreme boundary case, I find that marketing is not only rhetorically applicable but actively applied. Then, I consider the successes and failures of the program, using the standards of

the social marketing literature. By this logic, Occupy Wall Street can be seen as a failure in many ways.

Ultimately, I find it necessary to critically interrogate the assumptions of the social marketing literature itself, questioning whether marketing truly is the most appropriate toolkit for the types of social changes Occupy Wall Street was trying to effectuate. Here, I find commercial assumptions even at the heart of this literature, which may set up non-profits for failure from the outset. Within this discourse, failures are frequently attributed to "ineffective management" or the "unprofessional" nature of the marketers, when in reality impossible market positions, legitimacy gaps, and resource deficiencies are more likely to blame. In the end, this leads me to the unexpected conclusion that adopting the marketing concept may be counterproductive for many non-profits and activist organizations, and even some for-profit organizations (such as small businesses), in their efforts to achieve organizational goals. With these findings in mind, the paper concludes with a redefinition of what marketing is, with significant implications for both marketing scholars and practitioners, invested in both for-profit and non-profit sectors.

Literature review: Defining moments in marketing theory

> "The current essay takes advantage of the willingness of the marketing profession to think again about the nature of the field and its outer boundaries, arguing that the field has not yet adequately responded to Kotler, Levy, and Zaltman's urgings 40 years ago. The major proposition advanced here is that nonprofit and social marketing do not comprise a special (and minor) set of marketing applications. … Given [the challenges facing social and nonprofit marketers], it is proposed that commercial marketing should be viewed as a simplified, special type of marketing management with only one broad primary objective: maximizing sales."

Alan R. Andreasen, 2012, p. 37

This quote is excerpted from a recent essay by the pioneering social marketing scholar, wherein he argues that non-profit and social marketing remain marginalized by the mainstream marketing research community. Here, Andreasen claims that there is a persistent "business bias" (2012, p. 36) within the discipline, despite the fact that the American Marketing Association (finally) broadened the official definition of marketing to include the exchange of "offerings that have value for customers, clients, marketers, and society at large" in 2007.

Despite forty years of resistance, Andreasen nevertheless remains optimistic. Inspired by the updated definition, and Vargo and Lusch's (2004) successful advocacy for the place (and even primacy) of services within the discipline, Andreasen believes the time is ripe for reconsidering the scope of marketing once again. As such, he argues for a parallel intervention: that nonprofit and social marketing be considered as the standard by which marketing theory and practice are developed, given that they are arguably the most complex and difficult marketing tasks—not just "special cases" that attract the attention of "scholars outside the field's mainstream" (Andreasen 2012, p. 37).

Here, I take Andreasen's challenge as a starting point, reconsidering once again the place of social and nonprofit marketing within the discipline. I do so by way of a series of critical readings of dominant definitions of marketing within the field, which aim to elucidate the process by which social and nonprofit marketing became marginalized in the first place. I find that the "business bias" within the literature can be defined in terms of a single, identifiable construct, which has become entrenched within our definitions of marketing: the profit orientation. The literature review demonstrates the

gradual encroachment of the profit orientation within the marketing literature, and details the assumptions that have come along with it, from various schools of profit-maximizing economics.

Given the tremendous expansion of not-for-profit marketing practice, scholarship, and education (Andreasen 2011, p. xi), this is a lamentable state of affairs. Indeed, it signals that marketing academia is in fact falling out of step with practitioners—or "losing its way," as feared by Reibstein, Day, and Wind (2009). With the findings of this section in mind, the empirical component that follows seeks to remedy this situation, examining the relevance of marketing in what is arguably one of the most defiantly anti-marketing contexts possible: Occupy Wall Street.

The Nature and Scope of Marketing

> "…[M]arketing is a pervasive societal activity that goes considerably beyond selling toothpaste, soap, and steel. Political contests remind us that candidates are marketed as well as soap; student recruitment by colleges reminds us that higher education is also marketed; and fundraising reminds us that 'causes' are marketed. Yet these areas of marketing are typically ignored by the student of marketing. … It has been argued here that the modern marketing concept serves very naturally to describe an important facet of all organizational activity," Kotler and Levy (1969a)

The above quote is from "Broadening the Scope of Marketing," an inspired and oft-cited *Journal of Marketing* editorial that defines marketing a set of learning and communication practices tailored to the task of effective persuasion. Here, the authors argued that the marketing function has relevance for all organizations that create value for publics, from banks and non-profits to nations and churches. In a major departure from earlier models of marketing, which sought to establish optimal practices for selling physical goods, the piece redefines marketing as a politically neutral communications

tool—one that can be of use to many, potentially ideologically disparate, organizations throughout society.

While Kotler and Levy's (1969a) publication remains a touchstone for non-profit practitioners and scholars, as well as business ethics and consumer behavior scholars (e.g. Bartels 1974), mainstream marketing academics fought back with a series of articles that once again narrowed the focus of marketing, most arguing that researchers should focus on for-profits. The first installment of these articles came when Luck (1969) argued that the "essential nature of marketing" (p. 53) relates to the "market transaction," (p. 54). He contended that "Marketing is concerned with markets, of course, and markets must be characterized by buying-and-selling," (p. 54); as such, promotional activities by "nonbusiness" organizations should exhibit impressive "fundamental differences" (p. 54) from those of for-profit enterprises. He goes on to conclude that private enterprise is essential for providing for the "health, nutrition, and most other aspects of the affluent society," (p. 54), despite the fact that such services can clearly be provisioned in other ways, in other types of economies.

Kotler and Levy defended their position (1969b) by arguing that marketing practice was rapidly changing, as it was being adopted by non-profits and practiced in "primitive and socialist societies where the drive for private profit is not an issue," (p. 56). Building on these premises, the authors contended once again that it does no service to the field to exclude the activities and nonprofit marketing professionals. Indeed, they argued that it was likely to hamper the advancement of marketing theory and practice, noting that "marketing per se will forego the enrichment that comes from examining the same processes practiced in other contexts. If the current definition is not expanded, both

business and non-business marketing will be restricted in their growth," (pp. 55-56). In the end, the authors recast marketing in terms of relationships, values, and the "general idea of exchange" (p. 57), rather than market transactions alone.

A number of other scholars also came to the defense of Kotler and Levy. Lavidge (1970) not only agreed that "[t]he areas in which marketing people can, and must, be of service to society have broadened," (p. 27), but took the discussion a step further, arguing that the rise of unethical business practices was likely a result of blind faith in the profit motive as a guiding ethic. As such, Lavidge thought that marketers should be more receptive to critiques of their ethics in coming decades. Ben Enis (1973), too, agreed that marketing had to be considered in terms of values and exchange, "rather than the economic basis for the relationship," (p. 58). He attempted to codify Kotler and Levy's (1969a) proposition by theorizing the range of products, objectives, and audiences that marketing can address. Finally, Bagozzi (1975) formally defined marketing in terms of exchange, be it utilitarian or symbolic, and proposed that the discipline of marketing is the study of how "marketing exchanges emerge," (p. 39).

Despite these defenses, the critique of nonprofit marketing continued through the 1970s. Bartels (1974) considered whether the debate might be reflective of an "identity crisis" in the discipline, defined by a growing schism between economic and non-economic marketing researchers. He rightly contends that the former camp defined marketing more in terms of technologies, e.g. methods for bringing goods to market, while the "broadened marketing" camp was interested in the social processes of marketing, and new potential subject areas where these sorts of marketing concepts could be applied. While Bartels concedes that each approach has its benefits and disadvantages,

he ultimately believed that the broadened concept of marketing might obfuscate the goals of the discipline, leading those interested in the distribution of goods in market economies to continue their work under another, narrower disciplinary name.

Hunt continued the critique in "The Nature and Scope of Marketing," (1976). Here, Hunt advances the position that "many processes (e.g. political processes) do not involve an exchange of values," (p. 19), and as such, have no place in marketing. He goes so far as to say that "[s]adly, most administrators of nonprofit organizations… still do not perceive that many problems of nonprofit organizations are basically marketing in nature… Thus the major substantive problem concerning broadening the concept of marketing lies in the area of *marketing* marketing to nonmarketers," (p. 24).

In theorizing the disagreement within the marketing community, Hunt finds Kotler's own unpublished rubric from the 1972 AMA to be the most useful tool for outlining the debate. According to Hunt, Kotler presented three dimensions through which all marketing activities can be described: for profit/non-profit; macro/micro; and normative/positive. Ultimately, Hunt argues that it is desirable that marketing be a science, and that only positive, intersubjectively verifiable phenomena can be examined within a science. Hunt proposes that marketing scholarship, when done properly, is the "science of transactions." While he claims at this point that such a formulation does not take sides in the for-profit/non-profit debate, he later uses this focus on transactions to argue for a narrower marketing concept and science once again grounded in principles of economic exchange (Hunt 2002, 1990, 1983).

Challenges to the broadened concept of marketing

Subsequent generations of marketing theory have continued to move away from the broadened scope of marketing. The marketing orientation literature, in particular, did much to contribute to this backlash. While Narver and Slater made some space for values-driven businesses, contending that “for non-profit organizations the objective analogous to profitability is survival,” (1990, p. 22), “profit emphasis” is included as a key component of market orientation, and profitability is presented as a central outcome variable. Moreover, while Kohli and Jaworski view profitability as a “consequence of market orientation, rather than a product of it” (1990, p. 3), they nevertheless redefine the marketing concept as “essentially a business philosophy,” (1990, p. 1), and in turn define marketing orientation as “the implementation of the marketing concept,” (1996, p. 1). In this way, a profit-oriented business ethic was embedded within one of the most central concepts of our field. Day (1994) described the capabilities required to put a marketing orientation into practice, and once again assumed that the goal of marketing practice was profitability.

The profit orientation was further institutionalized with Hunt and Morgan’s "Comparative Advantage Theory of Competition" (1995). Again, while Hunt (1976) had previously argued that both for-profit and non-profit phenomena had a place in positivistic “marketing science,” Hunt and Morgan rescind this statement, using the theory of the firm (e.g. Porter, 1991) from strategic management to define the endpoint of marketing activity as superior financial performance—“superior and sustainable performance. ... relative to the world's best rivals," in Porter’s words (1991, p. 96). While they say that “superior financial performance” is not necessarily commensurate with profit maximization, the authors go on to note that profit and return on investment are

primary standards of performance. Indeed, while they allow some space for other organizational values, namely “moral” limits to profit maximization, the fact that financial returns are the only outcome variable of interest, and that moral considerations are positioned as competing with the value of profit, reveals that the comparative advantage theory of competition takes a normative (and negative) position on value-driven business. Last, but not least, the theory is developed specifically to explain the supposed inherent supremacy of competitive firms and economies, again implying that marketing pertains directly to commerce, and not non-business or even cooperative enterprises.

Vargo and Lusch's (2004) watershed article on the co-creation of value draws explicitly on Hunt's comparative advantage of competition, once again embedding the profit orientation into our dominant models of marketing organizations. Here, profit-oriented firms are once again taken as the norm, and competition is said to be one of the greatest drivers of innovation, as it enhances learning. Drawing on the work of Day (1994), they advance the position that knowledge created by the firm is one of the most important resources for creating value and consequently comparative advantage; in the process, they conceptualize profit itself as an essential form of knowledge, despite being clearly market-based and hence endogenous. Ultimately, they argue that the service dominant logic is an extension of relationship marketing, as firms and customers exchange information for mutual benefit—profit for the firm, and value for the customer. While some have argued that the service dominant logic can accommodate non-profit and social marketing perspectives (Andreasen 2012; Vargo and Lusch 2008; Abela and Murphy 2008), a reconsideration of Vargo and Lusch’s original formulation raises

significant questions about this assertion, given its dependence on concepts of comparative advantage and marketing orientation, which are in turn dependent on profit orientation.

Current state of the field

As of yet, there is no newer "dominant logic" for marketing, which means that the models outlined above remain the state of the art for marketing research and practice. That said, there have been numerous calls for new theorization in the field. Reibstein, Day, and Wind (2009), for example, published an editorial questioning "whether marketing had lost its way," (p. 1), which argued that there was a growing gap between marketing theory and practice, and a resultant need for models that reflect the rapidly changing economic conditions. Yadav (2010) documented the drastic decline in theoretical and conceptual considerations of such issues in the *Journal of Marketing*, despite the historical importance of these contributions for the advancement of the discipline. The 75th Anniversary special editorial issue of the *Journal of Marketing*, published in July 2011, has also attempted to tackle these issues. Building on Yadav's article, Deborah MacInnis (2011) provides a conceptual article on conceptual articles, with guidance on how these contributions could be constructed. Lehmann, McAlister, and Staelin (2011) decried the decline in relevance of contributions, despite rising levels of rigor.

The most pertinent editorial from this issue for the task at hand is by Phil Kotler, and builds on concerns about relevance raised by Reibstein, Day, and Wind (2009). Here, he proposes that organizations can only cope with the growing inescapability of environmental and economic crises by "reinventing" marketing. Kotler believes that

handling these societal transformations will require the social marketing sector to grow even larger, to deliver sustainable offerings and educate the public on environmental issues. Moreover, he notes that firms will need to incorporate environmental and non-economic values into their business models, preparing in particular for "demarketing," or necessary reductions in demand.

While it is too early to say what impact these interventions will have on the field, there is one preliminary sign that the will for reconceptualization and reconsideration persists. The 2013 American Marketing Association Winter Educators' conference was presented as a response to this issue of the *Journal of Marketing*, urging scholars to challenge "the bounds of marketing thought." This focus, taken together with the developments of the last few years, support Andreasen's (2012) arguments that the time has come for reconsidering the nature of marketing and the role of social and not-for-profit organizations.

Rethinking marketing and the profit orientation

> "The applicability of marketing concepts to such social problems is examined in this article. The authors show how social causes can be advanced more successfully through applying principles of marketing analysis, planning, and control to problems of social change."
> Kotler and Zaltman (1971), p.3

> "There is now a consensus among marketers that most nonprofit organizations, such as museums, zoos, and churches, engage in numerous activities (pricing, promoting, and so forth) that are very similar to the marketing activities of their profit-oriented cousins. There is also consensus that the marketing procedures that have been developed for profit-oriented organizations are equally applicable to nonprofit concerns… On these two issues, there now exists substantial agreement."
> Hunt (1976), pp. 23-24

Once again, the goals of this essay are threefold. First, the article seeks to reanimate discussion of the relationship between marketing and profit orientation. The aforementioned existence and persistence of the nonprofit marketing sector alone (Andreasen 2011; Kotler 2011) raises significant concerns about the *de facto* narrowing of the definition of marketing within the mainstream literature, and thereby provides an impetus for further consideration of this subject. Moreover, this oversight is concerning, as it generally limits the scope of marketing research to for-profit endeavors, which may ultimately hamper our understanding of processes that are central to all types of marketing organizations (Kotler and Levy 1969b).

Given the concerns raised in the previous section, the next objective of this paper is to entertain these considerations in an empirical context. I begin by unquestioningly adopting the assumption that for-profit strategies are applicable to non-profit contexts (Hunt 1976; Kotler and Zaltman 1971), and demonstrate the applicability of this logic in a notoriously anti-profit organization, Occupy Wall Street. Then, I problematize this assumption, questioning whether strategies developed in the for-profit sector are truly directly applicable to non-profit contexts. Here, I consider how this assumption has paradoxically built the logic of profit into even broadened concepts of marketing, again consequently obscuring our understanding of how marketing might be different in non-profit contexts. The paper concludes with a new theorization of the nature of marketing that raises important questions for all marketers, regardless of perspective on profit.

Methods

Qualitative inquiry is generally advocated for exploratory research in otherwise unknown theoretical and empirical terrains (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Hudson and Ozanne 1988).

Given that Occupy Wall Street was a newly-emerging social phenomenon, and that it would be difficult to obtain reliable information on the nature and marketing activities of the occupation in other ways, new, primary qualitative data collection was deemed most appropriate. Qualitative inquiry is also regarded as not only appropriate but advisable when a researcher is interested in reconsidering an established, well-trodden theoretical tradition (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Spiggle, 1994). Given the interest in questioning the assumption that for-profit marketing practices are directly applicable to non-profit marketing contexts, qualitative reinvestigation was thought to be superior to a review of the non-profit marketing literature, which has been produced and legitimated in terms of that very assumption.

Semi-structured interview methods were used, resulting in the collection of seven long interviews. As advised by Grant McCracken (1988), these interviews were organized primarily around a grand tour question, namely "What brought you to Occupy Wall Street?" The goal of this very broad, open, style was to avoid placing limitations on the range of phenomena reported. This open, emergent approach was also used when identifying potential interview candidates, as the author sought to engage with activists who were involved in the widest possible range of Occupy subgroups. Finally, this ethos guided the collection of additional materials: the author also conducted observations at public meetings; gathered every handbill available on site; took more than 500 pictures; and collected mainstream news coverage of key events and phenomena. These ephemera served as memory aids and additional material for analysis, as recommended by Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988). Last, but not least, the *de facto* authoritative account of Occupy Wall Street (*Occupying Wall Street*, Writers for the 99% 2011) was used as a

unique form of member checking, providing additional support for the authors' findings about the movements' history and contours. With these principles in mind, the sections that follow present the findings that pertain specifically to the marketing activities that occurred on site at Occupy Wall Street.

The Marketing Program of Occupy Wall Street

The Firm

> "[M]arketing isn't cool..."
> Kalle Lasn (1999, p. 165)

> "We don't need a million activists to jump-start this revolution. We just need an influential minority who smells the blood, seizes the moment, and pulls off a set of well coordinated social marketing strategies. We need a certain level of collective disillusionment... and then we need the leaders of the affluent, 'First' nations of the world to fumble a world crisis like a stock market collapse... "
> Kalle Lasn (1999, p. 212)

The drive to occupy Wall Street was initially engineered by Adbusters, an "antimarketing" marketing organization dedicated to producing "social marketing campaigns through its PowerShift advocacy advertising agency," (Lasn 1999, p. 220). The above quotes by Adbusters co-founder Kalle Lasn, a former marketing executive who left the for-profit sector to market the anti-profit cause, exemplify the ethos of the organization.

Taking into consideration the quotes, as well as the desire to engage in "anti-marketing marketing," it is clear that Lasn's attitude toward marketing practice is ambivalent. On the one hand, his well-known book *Culture Jam* (1999), from which these quotes were excerpted, provides a trenchant critique of the negative societal effects of marketing. On the other hand, Lasn obviously has a great deal of faith in the idea that

social marketing is an effective communications tool that progressive social movements must learn to harness. Indeed, here he is stating that massive activist organizations and social movements are unnecessary, so long as an "influential minority" can engage in adequately effective marketing.

The Message

While many news sources reported that the movement did not have any discernable message or demands (as exemplified by Brisbane 2011), this was not a true reflection of life on the ground. Indeed, perhaps owing to the marketing background of the organizers, Adbusters set out to establish a clear and simple social marketing campaign that would capture the spirit of popular unrest and concern about the economic climate. They commenced the process months in advance of the actual occupation, beginning with a top-down strategic planning exercise. On July 13, 2011, Adbusters released a blog post entitled "#OCCUPYWALLSTREET: A Shift in Revolutionary Tactics," which at once established a brand, tagline, strategy, and behavioral objective for the movement: occupy(ing). They translated this into an action plan, calling for 20,000 activists to "flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades and occupy Wall Street for a few months. Once there, we shall incessantly repeat one simple demand in a plurality of voices."

Inspired by the Tahrir Square protests, which they said "succeeded in large part because the people of Egypt made a straightforward ultimatum – that Mubarak must go – over and over again until they won," they asked blog followers to help decide "what is our equally uncomplicated demand?" Perhaps in an effort to guide and control the

process, the organization released the following as a preliminary suggestion:

> "It's time for DEMOCRACY, not CORPORATOCRACY... Beginning from one simple demand – a presidential commission to separate money from politics – we start setting the agenda for a new America. Post a comment and help each other zero in on what our one demand will be. And then let's screw up our courage, pack our tents and head to Wall Street with a vengeance September 17,"
>
> Culture Jammers HQ, July 13, 2011

This market research/campaign development exercise resulted in the following statement, which did not differ greatly from the original proposition:

> "It was our one simple demand that Barack Obama must ordain a Presidential Commission tasked with ending the influence that corporate money has over our representatives in Washington. Our one simple demand is: **STOP THE MONIED CORRUPTION AT THE HEART OF OUR DEMOCRACY!"**
>
> Culture Jammers HQ, July 26, 2011

Indeed, a reading of these quotes indicates that the organization had a good idea of its objectives from the outset. Nevertheless, a web forum was opened as a sort of nominal democratic gesture, or "honorary" focus group, from which the leaders "refined" the message. Once this "branding" or "product development" exercise was concluded, the message was then promoted by further blog posts, Twitter discussions, Facebook events, and a centerfold print advertisement in the August/September issue of *Adbusters* magazine.

New Management

The Adbuster organization's marketing capabilities have been criticized as modest at best (Haiven, 2007; Carducci, 2006). Despite many attempts, the organization has rarely

raised a great deal of money, and has consequently been unable to advertise frequently in general audience media, which might thereby attract a mainstream audience. While events such as Buy Nothing Day (held annually, on "Black Friday," the day after American Thanksgiving and the busiest shopping day of the year) have garnered the organization some small publicity successes, Adbusters is not a household name within the United States.

As such, it is unsurprising that the success of the movement depended on the involvement of other parties. According to an account provided by Writers for the 99%, a group dedicated to documenting the protest, "[T]he magazine was hardly involved… *Adbusters* provided little material support for the Occupation… They provided a couple neat images, and the idea… but the people on the ground in NYC did all the work," (2011, p. 10). Spearheaded by New Yorkers Against Budget Cuts (NYABC) and other local activist groups, who doubted that "something just put out on the Internet could [mobilize a protest of that size]," (p. 11), the self-appointed local organizers began to develop strategies that might actually achieve the goals set by Adbusters.

Inspired by the *Indignados* in Spain, who had been protesting the decline in economic conditions there, the local organizers decided that the movement should be non-hierarchical and the decision-making structure should be based on consensus and direct democracy—anyone could participate, make new proposals, and vote. They adopted the General Assembly format of the *Indignados* as their strategic planning forum, and held their first meeting in August, 2011. At the first meeting, the new management agreed that the movement should remain focused on economic decline and its effects on the political system, but decided to drop the presidential commission idea

from the original message. Specialized departments within the organization were formed at this time, such as the Outreach committee, which spent August and September gaining momentum for the movement, and the Tactical committee worked on locations and back-up locations for the launch on September 17th (Writers for the 99% 2011).

On September 17, 2011, approximately 2,000 people joined the "official launch" of the movement—the first day spent occupying a key financial district property, Zuccotti Park. Zuccotti Park was the only tenable space that day, and indeed for the next two months, for legal and strategic reasons. As such, it became the official "home" of the movement, or, in marketing terms, its main retail location. Once the park was secured, the main objective for the first day was to hold a major General Assembly on "occupied" territory. The meeting began with small focus groups devoted to developing an understanding of "why [the occupiers] are frustrated," with the political and economic climate of the United States (Writers for the 99% 2011, p. 17). The discussions held in this and other early general assembly meetings would inform *The Declaration of the Occupation of New York City* (NYC General Assembly 2011), a document which explicated the core message of the movement and how it applied to various domains of economic and cultural life, from the subprime housing market and private health care system to environmental reform and the ongoing occupation of Iraq. The *Declaration* was printed as an attractive leaflet and distributed widely on-site; it was also widely disseminated through the Internet.

From Political Organization to Polity

Within five days, the organization grew from an activist group to a miniature city, complete with many of the same divisions and functions as New York itself. Referred to

variously as “Zuccotti,” “Liberty Plaza,” and simply “Occupy Wall Street,” the camp quickly boasted a kitchen; a library; legal counsel; medical services; a media team; sanitation department; arts and culture hub; religious and meditation space; and a comfort station, which dispensed clothing, blankets, and other necessities. Moreover, the camp had neighborhoods, defined during daytime hours by the organizations that did outreach in those spaces (e.g. the union table, the veterans area), and defined at night by those who camped regularly in those spaces. In short, the movement had morphed almost overnight from an activist organization to an intentional community—a social group that chooses to live together under specified, alternative economic and cultural principles (Kanter 1972). Put differently, OWS can be described as a polity, or a geographically-delimited state with its own governance structure and mechanisms for regulating behavior (Dahl 1970; Hobbes 1651). While this massive change in social structure brought with it new challenges for management and government, it also offered renewed opportunities for marketing.

New Strategies

As OWS emerged as a community with a complex social structure that mimicked the city around it, the marketing efforts of the movement also became more like that of a city. First, there was a media team, devoted to crafting communications for consumption within and outside of the camp. Quickly, however, the group had to diversify and expand into a variety of other working groups, devoted to liaising with the mainstream media; editing promotional web content; designing advertisements; and publishing the newspaper of the encampment (the *Occupied Wall Street Journal*). These groups sought

to represent the occupation, promote its cause, and manage its image.

In addition to the mini-city's "official" marketing teams, the majority of community members engaged in some form of marketing for the movement. Given that they lived in the "retail space" of the movement, the vast majority of Occupiers accepted that liaising with the public was "part of the job" of occupying. This work could be described as less "organized" or "formal" than the efforts of the dedicated media team members, but it was certainly no less important. The park functioned as an essential "place," "outlet," or "channel" for people to exchange knowledge and experience about the economic collapse. Moreover, this function was not necessarily any less "professional" than that done by *The Occupied Wall Street Journal*, or any other OWS media production. From my interviews and observations, it was clear that the central "message" of the movement (ending corporate influence in politics) was well-understood and easily communicated to visitors, even as the protesters and visitors might have had "pet issues" that particularly compelled their participation. It was incredibly rare that someone would be questioned for being "off message."

Within the retail or "sales" space of the camp, one-to-one communication became the norm for a simple, institutional reason: there was no electricity, so one's cell phone and laptop would be dead within days of arrival. Wi-fi at the site was minimal to non-existent. Most of the "camping" members of the Occupation consequently embraced a return to "antiquated" 19th and 20th century technologies, including generating positive word-of-mouth; drawing supporters from existing social networks; distributing handbills and flyering; staging guerrilla marketing events; graffitti; and one-on-one persuasion or "selling." While many casual participants and some regular participants devoted their

energies to organizing via the web, the majority of campers felt that eschewing technology actually helped the activists organize and focus, with one going so far as stating that everyone should close their social media accounts (Freed, 2011).

Analysis: Social marketing "success" or "failure?"

Evaluating the campaign

In my observations in the fall and spring, as well as in interviews with Occupiers in the wake of the eviction, I asked the Occupiers to reflect on the perceived successes and failures of the movement. Across these accounts, the majority argued that the eviction from their Zuccotti Park "retail space" was the greatest loss the movement had experienced, and one that could not be easily replaced. Within the social marketing standards set out by Lee and Kotler (2011), grounded in the "4 Ps", Zuccotti functioned as a "*place*" where people could directly communicate the message of the movement; learn how to contribute to its sustenance; and liaise with the mass media. The space animated the dedicated work of the local promotions team, allowing Adbusters' original social advertising campaign to grow into a fully-fledged social marketing program. Indeed, it was also the most effective channel for *promotion*, as the mainstream news media did not tend to accurately communicate the movement's messages.

Without the camp, however, the "*price*" of participation became unduly high for casual members. Soon, participation was mainly limited to a highly-committed core of activists—the marketers themselves. Without the space, the movement was not able to offer many of the services and values that allowed the organization to function as an intentional community, including access to basic resources like food, medical care, and

clothing. While the movement has achieved some successes in the time since the eviction, such as outperforming the federal government in providing some services during Hurricane Sandy (Feuer 2012), performance has been greatly impacted and very inconsistent. Those that depended on the movement for these services were forced to turn to other social organizations, generally churches and charities. In short, the *product* and its value had shifted radically, as the movement was no longer able to offer a number of social and material values at a low cost.

Journalists, too, quickly tired of chasing the movement across a ragtag collection of meeting spaces. While their coverage had rarely been accurate, the adage that "all publicity is good publicity" applies here. Within mere weeks, I would frequently be asked if the movement even "existed" anymore, as the time in between news stories grew. The loss of media coverage placed further strain on communication with target audiences, leading to a decrease in the movement more generally.

Outcomes

Ultimately, determining whether Occupy Wall Street was a success or failure depends on how one defines the goals and objectives of the movement. Did the organization achieve the desired outcomes originally outlined by Adbusters: stopping "the monied corruption at the heart of our democracy," and forming "a presidential commission to separate money from politics"? To this, the answer is certainly no. Nevertheless, one could say that the movement significantly raised public consciousness of this issue. It provided many with an outlet for discussing their frustrations and for further political planning, at low cost to participants. It provided an unexpectedly high level of social and material

value for those that camped in Zuccotti Park, which was truly appreciated by the homeless, the jobless, and disaffected activists in need of some hope. It proved the superior efficacy of fully-fledged social marketing over social advertising, as the “place” or “channel” provided by Zuccotti Park radically transformed the organization’s value proposition, making the movement greatly accessible. Finally, the movement took advantage of timing, jumping on a moment of “collective disillusionment,” in Lasn’s words (1999). By acting when individuals had little to lose, they were able to advance a suitable value proposition.

Beyond social marketing: An alternative interpretation of the movement’s outcomes

The above analysis relies on traditional criteria from the social marketing literature: whether or not the movement was able to advance a credible marketing campaign (Lee and Kotler 2011). By these criteria, the movement experienced some successes, but the organization was not able to achieve its goals through marketing means. Once again, through the standards of the social marketing field, such a shortcoming is frequently attributed to the “inefficiency” of the marketers themselves, and the “unprofessional” nature of non-profit and activist organizations (Lee and Kotler 2011; Andreasen and Kotler 2008; Andreasen 1994; Bloom and Novelli 1981; Laczniak, Lusch, and Murphy 1979). Here, I am interested in presenting a brief alternative analysis of the outcomes of Occupy Wall Street. In short, I am interested in evaluating whether the organization could ever achieve its goals by marketing mechanisms, given its resources, capabilities, market position, and competition. Surprisingly, I find that an analysis grounded in the theory of comparative advantage (Hunt and Morgan 1995) is actually more useful than

social marketing analysis for both activist strategy development and academic theory advancement.

First, let us consider the movement's ability to communicate its message. While knowledge and human resources are argued to be the most important resources for creating comparative advantage (Vargo and Lusch 2004; Hunt and Morgan 1995; Day 1994), such resources were certainly not enough in the case of Occupy Wall Street. The movement had many with professional marketing and public relations backgrounds working on "official" and "unofficial" marketing efforts, and even benefitted from some pro bono representation by a professional public relations firm (Griffifth 2011). It had celebrity endorsers from Russell Simmons, Katy Perry, and Russell Brand to academics and intellectuals like Cornell West, David Graeber, Judith Butler, Slavoj Žižek, and Naomi Klein.

With this in mind, it was arguably the movement's lack of "tangible resources" that most hampered its success—finance, and with it access to advertising time and "retail space." Despite the fact that marketing efforts communicated by other means (in person, through flyers, etc.) seemed well-understood, the mainstream media frequently reported confusion about the movement's message (e.g. Brisbane 2011). Those that commented on the movement's "branding" efforts (Beales et al. 2011; Captain 2011) were primarily reporting based on such news reports, which were not in and of themselves created by the movement. For example, Beales and colleagues criticize the public relations efforts of the movement, offering their own "manifesto," without directly referring to any publication that was actually created by the movement—not even its own manifesto (the *Declaration of the Occupation of New York City*). Moreover, such critics

confused the "educational" and "promotional" (Andreasen 1994) aspects of the movement in their analyses, criticizing any documents, communications, quotes, or messages that were too complicated as "poor branding," when in reality they may have been intended as fulsome educational materials.

Rather than attribute the inability to continue working outside of the park to some lack of "marketing capability," it can be considered for what it is: an unfortunate dependence on powerful, external actors for space and publicity. Indeed, the ability to maintain the "retail space" of the park was not truly within the organization's powers. The moment the private property owners and the city grew tired of the occupation, Mayor Bloomberg called in what he refers to as the 7th largest army in the world—the NYPD—to take possession of the material resources and arrest the participants (RT 2011). It would be foolish to say that the few hundred unarmed protesters who were sleeping in the park during the raid stood a chance against an armed police force of 35,000. Moreover, the closure of the New York site and other occupations reveals the undeniable superior power of the movement's competition. FBI documents on the closure of the Occupations, released as a result of a Freedom of Information Act request (Partnership for Civil Justice Fund 2012; Apuzzo and Goldman 2012; Wolf 2012), revealed that banks and other corporations actually (and effectively) lobbied for the closure of Occupations, to preserve their own public images and discredit the movement just as it began to achieve some legitimacy.

In the end, an alternative analysis reveals that the objectives of Occupy Wall Street may be impossible in the current political milieu, and especially through marketing means, as the "competition" has significant advantages, which were ultimately used to

restructure the movement's value propositions and thus restructure consumers' choice scenarios. Such a traditional, "economic" marketing analysis reveals that the failures of the movement may have nothing to do with the "efficacy" of the marketers, so much as the impossibility of creating social change through market mechanisms, and from particular market positions. In the case of Occupy Wall Street, it reveals that social change is impossible without the consent and participation of more powerful actors—unfortunately, those who generally have the least incentive to participate. In turn, this ultimately raises serious questions about the central premise of social marketing: that "free" and "democratic" social change could occur by "consumer choice" in the "marketplace for ideas." With these concerns in mind, the next section reconsiders the foundations of this assumption, and with it the role of marketing in social change more broadly.

Reconsidering the relationship between commerce and social marketing

> "I was an academic product of the social revolution of the late sixties and early seventies and frustrated with what 1 was doing. My friends in Sociology and Political Science were worrying about issues like poverty, the Viet Nam war, and military recruiting on campus, and so on, while I was busy teaching my students how to market Chevrolets and Clairol Shampoo.... My 1975 encounter with |social marketing] opened my eyes to the potential for marketing to work positively for the good of society beyond merely (to use a classroom cliche of the time) 'delivering a better standard of living.'"
>
> Andreasen 1994, p. 109

> "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."
>
> Audre Lorde (1984), p. 110

As noted in Kotler and Zaltman's original treatise on the subject (1971), and echoed in Andreasen's quote above, the core assumption of the social marketing literature is that

strategies from commercial marketing practice are directly applicable to non-profit and activist contexts. In the analysis above, I have taken this assumption as my starting point, examining the implications of this logic by way of an exploration of empirical findings from Occupy Wall Street.

The analysis, however, raised significant questions about whether "the masters tools" can ever "dismantle the master's house," as Audre Lorde would say. Put differently, it questions not only whether marketing is *the* way to combat the abuse of democracy by corporations—but even *a* way. While Gerard Hastings and Christine Domegan write that, "[s]ocial marketing critically examines commercial marketing so as to learn from its successes and curb its excesses," (forthcoming 2013), the current study raises questions about whether this is something that social marketing actually *can* and *should* do. With such questions in mind, the goal of this section is to unpack the assumption that marketing is "a general function of universal applicability" (Bagozzi 1975, p. 39), and as such appropriate for the task of "planned social change" (Kotler and Zaltman 1971, p. 3).

So, to begin, what does it mean to say that marketing is *a* way to create such change—or even *the* way, as this literature often implies? First and foremost, it implies that *social change should occur by market mechanisms, rather than governmental mechanisms*. As noted by Andreasen and Kotler (2008), nonprofits and activist organizations perform roles and provide services that governments refuse to offer, and that are unattractive or untenable to for-profit firms. Rather than raise questions about whether these values may be more efficiently supplied by the government (as in the case of natural monopolies like rail and utilities, or when pooling risk enhances welfare, as

with healthcare), it is acknowledged that non-profit and social marketing is a preferable or at least accepted alternative to political and governmental changes.

Indeed, it is telling that Andreasen and Kotler (2008) note that the non-profit sector is more relevant in the United States than anywhere else in the "developed" world, as the public sector provides far fewer services in the U.S. than other advanced nations. Indeed, in the American context, the reliance on non-profits rather than government and social marketing rather than legislative change reveals an *acceptance of the competitive free market system for the circulation of goods, services, and ideas* inherent in the logic of social and non-profit marketing.

Regarding competition, Andreasen notes (1994) that a non-profit marketing campaign "explicitly recognizes that it faces direct or indirect competition for the target consumer's behavioral choices" (1994, p. 112), generally marketers and other powerful players who profit from promoting the opposite behavior. In cases where the "problem social behavior" targeted by social marketing is a matter of corporate misconduct, it implies that *marketing is preferable to governmental regulation*. An example of this is the recent inclusion of "financial well-being" in lists of "social problems" that social marketing must engage (e.g. Lee and Kotler 2011), which in turn implies that the way to intervene in economic disasters such as the subprime mortgage crisis is to teach consumers how to regulate themselves, rather than to seek governmental protections.

Relatedly, these premises reveal significant assumptions about ethics and responsibility within the social marketing literature—namely that "consumers" or "audiences" are responsible for social problems. Social marketing campaigns are frequently directed toward changing the behaviors of individual consumers (Andreasen

2012, 1994), which tacitly assumes that consumers are responsible and liable for their own well-being and social welfare. Consumers and "do-gooder" marketers (Lee and Andreasen 2011) bear the sole responsibility for social change, as actors who actually have greater power and resources (e.g. the government and powerful business interests) are "let off the hook." Even in cases where a government agency is engaging in social marketing, the use of social marketing over actual political and economic leverage accepts competition from other, more powerful players. Take, for example, this quote from Lee and Kotler (2011):

> "In social marketing, the competition is most often the current or preferred behavior of our target audience and the perceived benefits associated with that behavior, including the status quo. This also includes any organizations selling or promoting competing behaviors (e.g. the tobacco industry)… For a variety of reasons, we think social marketing is more difficult than commercial marketing. Consider the financial resources the competition has to make smoking look cool, yard cleanup using a gas blower easy, and weed-free lawns the norm." (p. 15).

The authors explain that such forms of social marketing are incredibly challenging, as the competition gains significant resources and advantages (especially financial capital) from the sale of these very products. Nevertheless, the choice to engage in social marketing, a very challenging and inherently disadvantaged tactic, implies that *there is no available or desirable alternative*. Political routes to social change, such as regulation, are either foreclosed or undesirable. Thus, when governments decide to use social marketing to combat smoking or negative environmental behaviors, it is tacitly acknowledging that *the right of for-profit firms to market even harmful products trumps the rights of consumers to health, social welfare, and environmental protection*.

The assumption that social welfare is the responsibility of individual citizens, and not other, more powerful social actors, is grounded in another: that *consumers make free*

choices about their behaviors. Andreasen (1994) argues that consumers make free choices between negative, problem behaviors and socially desirable behaviors, and that these choices must never be coerced, but chosen. Such faith in rational choice persists within social marketing guidebooks to this day (Lee and Kotler 2011), despite the wealth of skepticism for this perspective within the behavioral economics community itself. Rational choice is argued to be supremely preferable to systems where the government makes top-down decisions about behaviors (e.g. smoking cessation), which verge on "propagandizing" (Andreasen 1994; Laczniak, Lusch, and Murphy 1979). Nevertheless, the social marketing camp concedes that many objectives may be difficult or impossible to achieve by rational choice means. For example, in their discussion of Azjen and Fishbein's theory of reasoned action, Lee and Kotler (2011) acknowledge that a social marketing campaign is unlikely to be able to provide a "value proposition" that can reverse a seasoned smoker's decision to buy their next pack.

Rather than questioning whether the smoker's choice to buy their first pack was truly "uncoerced" and "free," social marketing assumes that consumers are always operating in a free market economy, characterized by free information and free choice. As such, this is a case where the for-profit camp has perhaps a more realistic perspective on the issue, compared to both social marketers and theoretical economists. In their "Comparative Advantage Theory of Competition" article, Hunt and Morgan (1995) contend that free information does not exist, and as such, free choice cannot exist. This is not problematic to them, however, as marketing is characterized as a practice of producing the best "comparative advantage" possible, given the firm's unique access to information. A realistic perspective on informationscapes, organizational capabilities,

resources, and power may in turn provide more helpful guidance for those attempting to effectuate social change.

Implications for organizations

The assumption that social organizations should compete in the free market has important implications for not-for-profit organizations. First, and most importantly, *social and nonprofit marketers are frequently convinced to accept more or less impossible competition*. It pits non-profits against other non-profits and commercial enterprises, in order to obtain essential resources such as financial capital, labor, time, attention, and loyalty (Lee and Kotler 2011, Hunt and Morgan 1995; Anderson 1982). As Lee and Kotler note (2011), the competition is almost always in the form of a more powerful, immanently better-resourced political player. Even in Kotler and Zaltman's foundational article on social marketing (1971), it is acknowledged that many agencies interested in adopting social marketing practices will not be able to afford it at all, or will not be able to raise sufficient funds to achieve the organizational goals through marketing means.

Here, I am arguing that this is not actually a fair competition, as it ignores or downplays differences in power and resources available to for-profits and non-profits. Drawing on Lee and Kotler's (2011) example of the American tobacco industry, consider the "competition" between a true not-for-profit smoking cessation organization like the *truth*^SM^ and the tobacco companies. The former is financed primarily through donations and institutional grants, and could never reach the type of capitalization that tobacco companies can, as consumer goods firms. If we finally acknowledge that behavior is not freely chosen, but largely determined by the influence of powerful agents (Laczniak,

Lusch, and Murphy 1979), it becomes clear that such marketing tasks are losing battles.

In cases like this, social marketing must attempt to overcome tremendous disadvantages, including differential market positions, levels of legitimacy, forms of institutionalization, entrenched methods of distribution, histories of influence initiatives, marketing resources (such as marketer education and experience), government buy-in, access to channels of communication, finance, and power. Indeed, economic analyses have long demonstrated that governments are in a much better position to effectuate changes in smoking rates, through the power that exists in legislation (York, Pritsos, and Gutierrez, 2012; Koh, Joossens, and Connolly, 2007; Cox and Smith 1984), so why implement social marketing instead? As noted in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, the reason why the States must rely on social marketing rather than legislation is because political routes are no longer an option, as even these have become so corrupted by the influence of tobacco companies (Bayer et al. 2002).

By the logic of the social marketing literature, however, this is not the reason why non-profits and social marketing campaigns frequently fail. This literature more commonly assumes that *failure to provide services is due to inefficient marketing and management* (e.g. Lee and Kotler 2011; Andreasen and Kotler 2008; Andreasen 1994; Bloom and Novelli 1981; Laczniak, Lusch, and Murphy 1979). Despite the fact that successful non-profit marketing is argued to require *more* skill than for-profit marketing (given the inherent challenges in attempting to achieve impossible goals with minimal funding), social and non-profit marketing is often described as haphazard and unprofessional.

The overemphasis on intangible capabilities and underemphasis on tangible

resources ultimately obscures the actual impossibility of many social marketing objectives, like reducing obesity in areas where consumers do not have adequate funds, time, or access to healthy foods. Indeed, blind faith in the power of marketing may obscure the routes and mechanisms by which social change might actually occur; in reality, political, public routes often may be significantly more effective than private avenues (King 1969). Misguided reliance on marketing by social organizations can have very serious consequences, as competitive advantages and privileges of more powerful organizations may actually become more entrenched, and social change less likely, in the meantime.

What marketing is…

> "The dictatorships are apparently today using advertising and other effective means of selling with greater thoroughness and intensity than does business itself, although the arts of propaganda are usually considered as of commercial origin. Business may learn valuable lessons from the experiences of politicians not only abroad but in this country as well on the technique of publicity."
>
> Paul D. Nystrom (1937), p. 298

As noted in the above quote by early marketing scholar Paul Nystrom, the relationship between marketing and commerce is an interesting and complicated one. On the one hand, we have marketing, which emerged primarily as a set of distribution and communication practices necessitated by the regionalization and specialization of production endemic to advanced economies (Kelley 1956). Then we have political organizations—in this case, the fascist parties of Europe—as well as non-profits like churches an zoos, which have at times made major strides by adopting and adapting marketing strategies for their own organizational exigencies.

As we have learned here, however, the adoption of commercial practices by non-

profits is not necessarily unproblematic. The analysis in the preceding section reveals that choosing to use marketing tactics to achieve social change always entails a certain faith in the capitalist free market system—even when the marketing occurs at Occupy Wall Street, or in “primitive and socialist societies” (Kotler 1969b, p. 56). The use of social and nonprofit marketing implies that the values and services of interest are not and cannot be provided by the government. In the case of social problems caused by corporations (e.g. environmental degradation, banking fraud, etc.), social marketing campaigns directed toward consumers function as an alternative to regulation and litigation. This sends an important message to consumers and social marketers alike—that social problems are our fault, and that we have the sole responsibility for ameliorating the situation.

Perhaps most importantly, this reconsideration of social marketing reveals much about the true nature of marketing. In short, marketing can be best understood in terms of politics, systems of power and influence that exist in any society (Dahl 1970). As seen above, marketing is a function of amassing the appropriate tangible and intangible resources, even in the social marketing field. The goal of this activity is to compete in a free market against those who are advancing very different value propositions, and who inhabit very different market positions. With such premises in mind, marketing is best defined as:

> Practices of harnessing comparative advantages and creating value propositions, so as to influence behavior.

This definition functions as a midway point or compromise between the more for-profit camp, and the social marketing camp. On the one hand, it draws in the financial orientation of Hunt and Morgan (1995), which has been tacitly embedded within many

other conceptualizations of marketing. On the other hand, it incorporates one of the main interventions of the social and non-profit marketing camps: that the goal is behavioral change (Andreasen 2012, 1994; Lee and Kotler 2011). Nevertheless, such a reconceptualization raises serious questions about the efficacy of social and non-profit marketing, as it may be very difficult for organizations to achieve their goals through competition in the free market economy.

Discussion

> "Leo Szilard was instrumental to the development of atomic bomb technology. However, at the end of his career, he also spent much of his time lobbying to ensure that his legacy was put to peaceful usage. There is a lesson here for those of us who wish to be 'social marketing experts.' We must devote our energies to building the best technology that we can. But we also owe it to ourselves and our communities to see that it is used for what a broad consensus of society agrees is its own social good."
>
> Alan R. Andreasen 1994, p. 113

Here, I question Andreasen's (1994) analogy that marketing is akin to atomic warfare, wherein he asserts that those interested in social change should start by creating "the best" marketing technology. If a technology is created in the first place for annihilation or circumventing democracy, what is its value to society? Why should an individual devote himself or herself first and foremost to this cause, and then to its regulation? Or, in the case of marketing, not regulation, but "more productive" use?

Ultimately, it is my hope that this essay conveys what I learned about social marketing in the process of this study. While I initially expected to find that marketing was simply and unproblematically applicable to a context like Occupy Wall Street, what I saw on the ground raised significant questions about this assumption. Further conceptual work ultimately revealed how the competitive and commercial assumptions of marketing

are frequently incommensurate with the goals of many not-for-profit and activist organizations.

Considering again Andreasen's anecdote (1994) about how he and many social marketing academics were inspired by the events of the 1960s, one can understand how social marketing emerged as an idea of how social change could occur. Society was rapidly changing, and marketers wanted to be a part of it; they wanted to understand what their role could be. Nevertheless, a resource-based analysis of this logic raises serious questions about whether marketing can be the most effective route to social change for many "problem behaviors"—or even a plausible route.

While this may feel like a negative development to those invested in social marketing, it is certainly not intended to be. Indeed, it is instead presented as a realization of the true stakes of social marketing activities, and how social change could actually occur. From this, it appears that many social marketing campaigns may be better waged through governmental means, rather than market mechanisms. Keeping in mind that the goal is advancing the social causes, and not necessarily social marketing, this conclusion should not be problematic—and it is certainly less problematic than accepting a never-ending cycle of losing battles.

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