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Marketing Transitions

With the widespread adoption of Fordist regimes of production and Taylorist regimes of management in early 20th century America (Gramsci 1971; Hardt and Negri 2000, 219-350), supply of commodities began to surpass market demand consistently for the first time in history. The advent of mass production required mass consumption and as a consequence, the profession of marketing management was developed. Though marketing management had its roots in agricultural economics and was characterized initially by pragmatic macro-economic concerns about distribution efficiencies and co-operative marketing of agricultural products (Bartels 1988), it obtained an increasingly dominant function within commercial practices as it focused on selling more of a particular product than the competition. The new priorities set by a nascent corporate capitalism that pitches companies directly against each other for scarce consumer resources produced novel needs for knowledge about the market, including knowledge about consumers. Hence, corporate marketing management developed early forms of market research to produce consumer knowledge that would help outsell any rivals. Early market research led to a view of the consumer as a relatively stable, homogeneous, and immobile set of preferences that could be managed and controlled with mass advertising (Beniger 1986). An understanding of the consumer as a psycho-socially complex and mutable collection of needs, wants, and desires did not emerge until the 1940s (Miller and Rose 1997; Rose 1997). But even then, the surveillance of consumers and consumer practices qua market research [or ‘commercial research’ as it was then called (see Elmer 2004)], while becoming increasingly sophisticated, was driven by a need of the corporation to control consumers, reduce marketing complexities, and improve production efficiencies (Arvidsson 2004). In other words, the surveillance of consumers was motivated by a company’s intention to align consumer preferences for products and brands with what was being produced.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the work undertaken by psychologically-inclined market researchers such as Sidney Levy and management theorist Peter Drucker changed the message coming out of commercial consumer surveillance. They posited that the primary challenge for the firm lies in identifying and responding to consumers’ changing needs and wants in the market (see e.g. Drucker 1950; Drucker 1954; Levy 1959) and that production processes and marketing activities were to be geared toward satisfying consumers’ needs and wants rather than controlling them for maximum sales. In other words, these scholars suggested that companies produce what consumers want instead of making consumers want that which the company produces. Similarly, contemporary marketing icon Philip Kotler declared that

achieving ‘customer satisfaction’ required the channelling of all efforts of the firm into identifying and meeting customer needs in specific times and spaces. For Kotler, marketing had to take on the character of an ‘applied behavioural science’ (Kotler 1972, 46). His promise to the emerging legion of professional marketers was that a concern with production efficiencies should be subordinate to discovering what customers wanted. He assured his students that such acquiescence would ultimately prove to be a superior strategy for securing market share and maximizing profits relative to a production-driven model that assesses opportunities based on a firm’s manufacturing efficiencies (see Kotler 1972; Kotler and Levy 1969).

What seems to be little more than a minor adjustment to the dominant view gave birth to a fundamentally new justification for intensified commercial consumer surveillance that dominates contemporary marketing discourse to this day, namely that market research is central to knowing and providing what consumers want. After all, from the vantage point of such early marketing gurus as Levy, Kotler, and Drucker, intense consumer surveillance is akin to providing an important public service because making consumers happy with products they desire, now elevated to something of a social policy, depends on the best possible intelligence about those same consumers (cf. Applbaum 2011 (forthcoming)). The ‘applied behavioural science’ revolution started a trend in academic and corporate marketing departments toward conceptualizing the consumer as a complex entity whose desire to consume may be boundless (as maintained by the economic branch) but whose motivations to consume (the what and why of consumption) are not well understood and require continuous scrutiny. Sales-through-domination, as Thomas Frank (2000) points out, no longer holds the cachet it once did.

While surveillance of consumers and their consumption practices has been an important task of corporate marketing departments for a long time (Arvidsson 2004), it has increased significantly in the past twenty years. Under conditions of hyper-competition (see e.g. D’Aveni and Gunther 1994), characterized by excess capacities of progressively more, and more alike, brands and products vying for the same consumer dollar (see also Barber 2007), corporations have sought to collect massive amounts of detailed and accurate information about consumers. The ability to store, retrieve and process this information has become widely recognized as providing a key competitive advantage in contemporary information capitalism (Zwick and Denegri-Knott 2009). The shift to digitized information (as discussed below) is perhaps the most important aspect for understanding the monitoring and measuring of consumers and their consumption practices as a form of surveillance. Specifically, the customer database has fundamentally changed the speed and degree to which companies are able to collect, sort and process information about consumers and thus erect an increasingly seamless surveillance assemblage (Haggerty and Ericson 2000; Zwick and Dholakia 2004b).

Importantly, as the mundane practices of consumption become important building blocks for the performance of economies they become subject to both an increased amount of scrutiny and direction. Today, consumption is about more than buying stuff, perhaps about even more than an expression of lifestyles, worldviews and identities. Consumption has become a proxy for proper citizenship, access to desirable socialites, and the possibility of connectedness to modern life and of cosmopolitanism (see Bauman 2001). Furthermore, with the rise of the knowledge economy, and specifically the internet, the separation between those that ‘produce’ and those who ‘consume’ has begun to blur (see e.g. Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010). It comes as little surprise, then, that understandings of what constitutes consumption are no longer universally shared (if they ever were) and moreover, that knowing what exactly to monitor about consumers and their consumption practices and more importantly, how to do so seems to be increasingly difficult to ascertain.

Practices and Digitization

Historically, ‘assembling’ consumers into marketable segments and categories began in earnest in the post World War II era. It expanded significantly in the years that followed as numerous organizations collected demographic and psychographic data to discover “attitudes, opinions, and interests” of consumers (Arvidsson 2004, 464). Differentiated segmentation of markets through these processes gave way to increasingly “smaller and smaller units of analysis” that allowed for increasingly precise targeting of consumers (Holbrook and Hulbert 2002, 716). The transition toward smaller segments and clusters of consumers occurred largely in relation to the growth of new information technologies and data processing. Central to this transition was the development of the consumer database.

Large-scale electronic consumer databases were perhaps first employed as part of the development of consumer credit (see e.g. Poon 2007) and large geodemographic information systems (GIS) in the US in the 1970s. Jonathan Robbin developed a system of consumer segments in the United States according to ZIP codes using the acronym PRIZM, short for Potential Rating Index for ZIP Markets (see Weiss 1988). Richard Webber developed a similar system called ACORN –A Classification Of Residential Neighbourhoods – in relation to postal codes in the UK at about the same time (see Burrows and Gane 2006). Both Robbin and Webber relied heavily on the nascent fields of information technology and software development to translate the geographic distributions of populations into socio-spatial arrangements, or ‘social clusters’ – “where people tend to congregate among people like themselves” (Weiss 1988, 11). It quickly became clear that such GIS-generated population clusters made a very valuable information commodity because location proved to be a “powerful predictor of all manner of consumption practices” (Burrows and Gane 2006, 795). Marketers hailed the newly available consumer data as it revealed very clearly the spatial distribution of socio-economic characteristics, tastes, preferences, and lifestyles. Combined with already existing market intelligence, GIS provided an even more solid basis for consumer segmentation as well as selection and de-selection of entire geographic areas for commercial communication, retail development, and product delivery.

In the 1970s and 80s, adding geographic surveillance to existing forms of lifestyle and socio-demographic surveillance certainly refined and rendered more useful for marketers the notion of consumer clusters and segments. However, real advances in commercial consumer surveillance occurred with the digitalization of information and the rise of data mining. The digital panoptic sort of consumers via algorithmic analysis, cross-referencing of data, and massively populated, electronic consumer profiles allowed for previously unknown and unknowable consumption patterns and behavioural relationships to emerge. As initial data mining techniques improve and begin to include, with the advent of the internet, real-time transactional customer data, descriptions of patterns of behaviour and predictions of future behaviour become increasingly accurate and meaningful. Real-time collaborative filtering and predictive modelling based on massive amounts of customer information aim at identifying a customer’s (or set of customers’) propensity to buy certain products, respond to certain marketing campaigns, be at risk for churn and defection, become a credit risk, and so forth.

By constantly (re)producing, storing and analyzing massive amounts of digital data, current forms of commercial surveillance of consumer behaviour represent a powerful response to the quickly changing desires, fluid identities, and spatial mobility of contemporary consumers (Arvidsson 2004; Featherstone 1991). As databases capture consumer activities ubiquitously and in minute detail, they become electronic repositories of complex consumer lives. While the digital code deconstructs complex, idiosyncratic, and often erratic behaviour into individualized and individualizing data points (Poster 1990), the algorithm reconstructs this data into a standardized, rationalized, and comparable structure, making it possible for marketers to identify ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ targets for professional marketing intervention. In short, the production of digitized lists of consumers via ubiquitous commercial surveillance serves to reorganize the

sensibilities and practices of marketers and the way marketing practice configures and controls spaces of operation, production, and economic value (Leyshon and Thrift 1999; cf. Poon 2007).

The Panoptic, the Modular and the Contingent

Over the years, analyses of surveillance and theories about marketing practice have approached commercial and corporate surveillance of consumers in a variety of ways. In one of the earliest pieces to detail consumer surveillance, Oscar Gandy relied on Foucault's use of the panopticon to describe corporate practices. Gandy's text, *The Panoptic Sort*, hinges on mechanisms that act as "a kind of high-tech, cybernetic triage through which individuals and groups of people are being sorted according to their presumed economic or political value" (Gandy 1993, 1-2). Consumer data are gathered and analyzed in ways that serve to dictate corporate offerings to various categories and segmentations of clientele. This panoptic sort draws upon past behavioural data to selectively narrow and limit options presented for future transactions, all of which is based on the identification, classification, and assessments of current and potential consumers. This rationalized marketing sorts out high quality economic targets and discards others in its discriminatory wake, existing, Gandy argues, as an antidemocratic system of control.

These concerns are further expanded upon in a later work in which he indicates part of the issue is that the illusion of choice is maintained against a backdrop of a continually narrowing range of options (1996). Gandy shows how the relationship between buyers and sellers has largely become an impersonal transaction controlled by cybernetic intelligence. It uses an increasingly automated collection of personal information to presumably allow for a form of personalized marketing (*ibid.*). In a later piece co-authored with Anthony Danna, Gandy's perspective is applied to a key element in Customer Relationship Management, viewing data mining as a social sorting process. Danna and Gandy (2002) suggest that the social consequences of data-mining practices have consistently been ignored, and that these practices may exclude classes of consumers from full participation in the market place (see also Zwick and Dholakia 2004a). They appeal to corporations to examine the potential cost these discriminatory techniques will have upon certain social groups and suggest that corporations need to consider more than the bottom line when engaging in marketing based on data mining practices.

Gandy's descriptions of consumer surveillance focus on databases, which themselves can also be seen as operating, to paraphrase Poster (1990), like a market super-Panopticon. Yet importantly, the panoptic power of the customer database does not manifest itself in the individualization of identities, although this process is intrinsic to the recoding of consumer behaviour into discrete and virtual 'data doubles' (Haggerty and Ericson 2000). Rather, as Elmer (2004, 41) observed, thereby extending Poster's focus on the linguistic construction and multiplication of data subjects, the panopticism imposed on consumers by information machines is much more concerned with the collection of personal information to discriminate individuals into previously categorized consumer lifestyle groups or 'profiles'. Hence Elmer (2004) puts the spotlight of contemporary market surveillance strategies on the reproductive (or cybernetic) aspect of electronic panopticism. Because data subjects are "always already discriminated and profiled" (Elmer 2004, 41), the contemporary mode of data collection and analysis must be understood as a dynamic process where existing surveillance and profiling systems and personal information continuously inform each other with each new interaction between the system and consumers.

Elmer's (2004) theorization of electronic surveillance and database technologies contrasts fruitfully with the influential Foucauldian analyses associated with the work of Poster (1990) and Gandy (1993; 1996) because it recognizes the need for database marketers to actively solicit consumers for information, hence conceptualizing the building, mining, updating and distributing of the customer database as a systematic modulation of the consumer population (Zwick and Denegri-Knott 2009). Therefore we can say that, in addition to consumer discipline, surveillance technologies perform a complex set of cultural, social and economic functions characteristic of the post-Fordist mode of production, such as the spatial and temporal

configuration of markets, the provision of various forms of knowledge, and the flexible connection of consumption and production. It is a departure from Foucault's architectural and optical conception of disciplinary power focused on enclosures, moulds and fixed castings (Deleuze 1992). Rather, drawing on Deleuze's notion of modulation better conceptualizes how control and power operate in and through techno-logical surveillance networks of contemporary information economies.

The shift in focus towards modulation and mechanisms of simulation still relies upon panoptic practices, as these provide the foundation for circular, recursive, and self-reproducing strategies of power aimed at forecasting future positions "in an increasingly dispersed and automated infoscape" (Elmer 2004, 44; see also Bogard 1996). It draws attention to the reflexive generation and projection onto consumers of market desires through the continuous configuration and reconfiguration of relationships and associations between always changing data points (see also Bogard 1996). Recognizing the feedback loop between data collection and analysis and the solicitation of consumers with more inquiries or with 'more of the same' products, this theory of information as modulation better explains how panoptic profiling machines operate to control and homogenize everyday consumption behaviour in advanced capitalist societies.

The emphasis on modulation and its co-existence with panoptic framings of surveillance maintain a particular focus on structures of power, ones in which corporate informational power far out measures those afforded to consumers themselves. Clearly, as Juliet Schor points out, it is striking that the growing power of corporations in terms of consumer information "has been accompanied by the dominance of an ideology that posits the reverse – that the consumer is king and the corporation is at his or her mercy" (2007, 28). However, though corporations are clearly not at the mercy of consumers, they are reliant upon their continued collaboration in the development of current and new market offerings and strategies. Consumers often happily participate in the personal information economy and the surveillance practices that underpin it. They are keen to reap the rewards and benefits found in the 'fun' of capitalism (see Thrift 2005). Consumer surveillance therefore must maintain this enticement and continue the reflexive practices described in the mechanisms of modulation and simulation, but this engagement with consumers suggests a surveillance that is performative and highly contingent.

That is, in addition to the panoptic and the modular framing of consumer surveillance through marketing, an additional view sees marketing as having a role in performing and formatting the phenomena it purports to describe (see Callon 1998, Cochoy 1998, Pridmore forthcoming). This more contingent view of marketing practice and its accompanying conceptions of segments, life-styles, life-stages, desires, and so on are seen as what make consumers tangible entities that can be understood and engaged (see Araujo 2007). A performance-oriented understanding of marketing demonstrates how the notion of 'consumers' is fully susceptible to change, and how the process of assembling and reassembling consumers is continual and indicative of a dynamic and iterative form of surveillance. This focus demonstrates how contemporary practices of marketing is less of an 'enclosure' but serves to 'configure' markets, by arranging and ordering marketing practice in ways that allow corporations to meet the needs of consumers that they 'know' and define – specifically their needs, their desires, their socio-economic status and more. This determines corporate offerings and marketing strategies as well as allows for a continual adjustment and evolution in ways that are best described as collaborative (see Pridmore forthcoming).

All of these framings of marketing as consumer surveillance (see Pridmore and Lyon 2011) are overlapping and interpenetrating. The panoptic, modular and contingent perspectives on consumer surveillance are intended to be illustrative of marketing in practice and demonstrative of the crucial concerns and issues raised by this increasingly pervasive and important form of surveillance. There are clear concerns regarding systematic exclusion and forms of cumulative disadvantage (see Gandy 2009), issues with respect to exploitation of consumers (see Andrejevic this issue) and the lack of corporate transparency (see Pridmore 2010). The trajectories of research in the area of consumer surveillance suggest that these issues and others are only going to become increasingly pertinent given the importance

of digital systems of information in the consumption of that which is ‘produced’ and the production of those whom ‘consume’. This is particularly true as the lines between the two continue to become irreversibly blurred, giving rise to the notions of ‘prosumption’ and ‘prosumers’.

Prosumption, as Ritzer (2009) reminds us, is neither historically new nor specific to 21st century information capitalism. Rather, by recognizing that production and consumption are two sides of the same coin, prosumption is intrinsic to all forms of capitalist and non-capitalist economies. Nevertheless, recent social transformations such as the emergence of the Internet and, in particular, its user-generated version commonly called Web 2.0, have moved practices of prosumption, the constant blurring of the production-consumption line, to the centre of economic value creation. It is, thus, this blurring that is most concerning to many social theorists today, including surveillance researchers. In a context in which the internet has become a pervasive tool, mechanism, and medium, the cybernetic and dynamic blurring of boundaries between consumers and producers serves only to heighten social, ethical, political and economic concerns. It should not be surprising then that a number of the articles in this issue address directly the rise of Web 2.0 and the integration of ‘user generated’ content as part of a focus on consumer surveillance. Other articles are connected as their focus is upon surveillance practices that rely upon the very same digital information infrastructures as Web 2.0. The articles both expand upon and diverge from the perspectives on consumer surveillance outlined above in order to shed some light on a practices and implications particularly in relation to empirical examples of consumer surveillance. They begin to elucidate and illustrate marketing and its reliance upon consumer surveillance practices in a world in which even the most mundane consumption practices can be scrutinized for informational value – a value that can be re-appropriated for the purposes of contemporary capitalism.

This issue

This special issue brings together cutting edge thinking on the most recent developments in the surveillance of markets and consumers. It connects with previous work and begins to point towards areas of research that have yet to be examined as interest to learn more about the workings of the ‘marketing-surveillance-technology’ complex grows among surveillance scholars and policy makers. The articles that make up this issue of *Surveillance & Society* are evidence of the wide range of important theoretical issues that emerge at the intersection of surveillance, consumption, and marketing. By acknowledging that both marketing and consumption need to be understood and analysed as material commercial practices (Slater 2002) deeply implicated in the reproduction of the social (Miller 2009), and by recognizing the growing influence of professional marketing management in actively shaping contemporary consumption practices and in controlling, influencing, managing and entitling consumers (see Lyon 2001) (Zwick and Cayla 2011 (forthcoming)) this collection of essays represents an important starting point for a further critical investigations of marketing as commercial surveillance.

As suggested above, Marc Andrejevic’s piece, “Surveillance and alienation in the online economy”, is focused on the exploitative nature of consumer surveillance in the development of interactive media. That is, Andrejevic reconceptualizes exploitation in light of the prevalence of user-generated content, indicating that commercial monitoring represents a form of power that seeks to manage and control consumer behaviour through exploitation. This exploitation is the extraction of unpaid, coerced, and alienated labour – the conscious, intentional activity of users – in ways that serve to generate corporate profit. The article draws attention to the economically productive character of consumer surveillance.

The concern about the exploitative nature of consumer surveillance is echoed in Christian Fuchs’ piece “Web 2.0, Prosumption, and Surveillance”. Fuchs’ critical political economic analysis sees Marx’s descriptions of surplus value and the cycles of capital accumulation as a central concern for conceptualizing the surveillance of consumers and their online activities. The piece describes the economic organization of Web 2.0 platforms, arguing that these platforms are important for discussions

about consumer surveillance specifically because they collect huge amounts of personal data in order to work. Fuchs uses the example of Google Buzz to conceptualize the cycle of capital accumulation and advocates means to circumvent the large-scale surveillance of consumers, producers, and consumer-producers.

The concerns about how consumers produce and perpetuate their own digital and material ‘enclosures’ is continued in Andrew McStay’s article. He suggests that consumers and their consumption should be re-evaluated in light of Dallas Smythe’s (1977) audience-as-commodity argument. McStay progresses and updates this perspective given the developments in online behavioural advertising that employs highly invasive technologies such as deep-packet inspection. McStay uses the case study of Phorm as an example to highlight the key features of this form of advertising, specifically non-personally identifiable profiling and its implications for contemporary commercial feedback.

This perspective is not far from Vincent Manzerolle and Sandra Smeltzer, who argue that contemporary marketing has created new sets of relationships between consumers and producers characterized by the growing information advantage of marketers, which they use to great effect. For example, routine forms of consumer surveillance are seen to circumvent the communicative relationship between consumers and producers within the market through the use of consumer databases that exploit individual vulnerabilities through behaviour and profile modelling. Manzerolle and Smeltzer’s argument, simply put, is that corporate consumer surveillance serves to eliminate any real hope for consumer sovereignty – so fundamental to the ideological justification of free market economics – even as the same corporations perpetuate the myth of the sovereign and empowered consumer. The article draws on the work of Harold Innis and medium theory to demonstrate how corporations such as Acxiom, a US-based data collection and management corporation, have progressively hidden the commercial mediation and exploitation of consumer identities.

The article by Karl Palmås takes the description of consumer surveillance in a theoretically divergent direction but maintains a focus on the relationship between new information technologies and manipulation, exploitation, and control. He indicates that panoptic views of consumer practices can be modified by an analysis of more ‘panspectric’ techniques of predicting consumption choices and tracking shifting customer desires. By using the Deleuzian concept of ‘assemblage’ and Manuel DeLanda’s notion of ‘the panspectron’, Palmås explores how a new societal diagram is being employed in the marketing practices of contemporary corporations. This diagram is a means of actualizing the abstract machine of stratification discussed by Deleuze and Delanda in which consumer behaviours are increasingly made predictable, and suggests that a political economy of propensity be explored in line with this panspectric approach to consumer surveillance.

Perhaps the most divergent article in this issue is by Magali Murià and Sergio Chávez, although their text once again focuses on the blurring boundaries of consumption, this time in light of its interconnections with trans-border labour. Their article “Shopping and Working in the Borderlands: Enforcement, Surveillance, and Marketing in Tijuana, Mexico” describes how border enforcement and surveillance reorganizes the mobility of local populations whose livelihoods are defined by cross-border social and economic activities. They suggest that inherent contradictions exist with the current border regime and its associated flows of labour, goods, and money that re-structure social relations, identities and differences, not only across the international fence, but also within Mexican border cities. It is clear that despite the contexts of new surveillance procedures and practices connected to the post 9/11 era, efforts to categorize differences used by U.S. authorities to identify, control, and discipline border crossers are often locally reframed into a binary distinction between consumers and workers. For Murià and Chávez, cross-border trade is indicative of how consumption and labour practices are not mutually exclusive and becomes systematically embedded in new border surveillance regimes.

In addition to the main essays, we have included two review pieces that connect to the themes of control, power, market ideology, and political economy as articulated throughout the issue. Nathan Jurgenson's review of the film "We Live in Public" makes an important and explicit connection between practices of what might be called exposure (see Ball 2009) and new forms of social media and networking. While the film is focused on the eccentric life of technology consultant and internet entrepreneur Josh Harris, the connection made by Jurgenson to Facebook and the more recent film "The Social Network" is indicative of the interplay of revealing and concealing that constitutes much of (digitally mediated) modern life. David Barnard-Wills' review of Oscar Gandy's book "Coming to Terms with Chance: Engaging Rational Discrimination and Cumulative Disadvantage" draws attention to Gandy's important contribution to the concerns and issues raised by contemporary consumer surveillance practices. As Barnard-Wills' review explains, Gandy's important text reminds us what is at stake when actuarial practices and methods begin to digitally allocate opportunities and life chances, particularly to those whose social, political and economic disadvantages clearly outnumber the advantages.

In sum, the articles represent a set of critical starting points from which to launch further investigations of consumer surveillance in practice. In many respects such a research project inevitably takes central aim at modern marketing practice more generally or, perhaps more accurately, its performative character. Performing marketing is a complex undertaking that involves a number of actors and tasks, including, centrally, market research. If we are to understand consumer surveillance we need to study how marketing actually 'works' as a material commercial and social practice—that is, investigate to what effect marketing operates in various social, cultural, and economic contexts; what kind of devices marketers employ and to what end; what kind of knowledge it concerns and, hence, what kind of power it produces; and, finally, what kind of subjectivities on both sides of the exchange relationship it encourages and configures. We believe that the essays published in this issue provide an excellent blueprint that helps open up this new intellectual space for scholars interested in drawing new links between marketing, consumption and surveillance.

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