Critical Conversations
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Your Questions?
• Critical Theory
• Habermas’ social theory
• critical marketing(s)
Caveats

• My focus is on the logic and key concepts.

• Less on history.

• Less on biography.
Critical Theory

- Nicolaus Copernicus
- Immanuel Kant
- Max Weber
- Frankfurt School
Geocentrism held sway from pre-Socratic philosophy to early modernity (late 16\textsuperscript{th} century).
Heliocentrism

Copernicus publishes his treatise in 1543 and dies the same year. Together with Galileo and Kepler they propose a different theory.
Heliocentrism was controversial since it pushed against pre-modern ideas. Eventually, the theory became “fact” and was dropped from the *Index of Forbidden Books* in 1758.
Appearance versus reality
Reason
The Enlightenment was a modern movement using *reason* to free humankind from the constraints of traditional authorities.
Kant said that the point of Enlightenment was to overcome our immaturity by daring to think for ourselves.
Pre-modern social structures were based around situated cultural understandings: family, tradition, religion, and so on.
When pre-modern social structures began to “melt,” the whole complex network of social relations became unstuck—*bare and unprotected*—impotent to resist the business-inspired criteria of rationality.
A specific type of “reason”

Privileged natural scientific and technologically exploitable forms of knowing.
“Reason” now becomes a tool or an instrument for means-end rationality...

i.e., “instrumental rationality”
Max Weber

This results in an industrialized and bureaucratized modern world designed for rational calculation and control.

“The polar night of icy darkness”
In addition...

That which is perceived as “non-rational” becomes marginalized.

“For Foucault, these supposed irrationalities would include matters of desire, feeling, sexuality, femininity, and art” (Belsey 2002, p. 46).
At about the same time that Weber publishes *Economy and Society*, a group of theorists in Frankfurt were asking the question, *Why? What went wrong?*
Maybe if we study what went wrong and come to understand it, we can fix it and reignite the promise of Enlightenment reason...
The Frankfurt School

A group of philosophers, sociologists, social psychologists, and cultural critics who worked in the period before and after the Second World War for the privately funded Institute for Social Research.
The School’s common *horizon* was the continental tradition in philosophy, particularly phenomenology, existentialism, and Marxism.
Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), the director of the institute, was chiefly responsible for developing the paradigm of Critical Theory during the 1930s.
How do you summarize Critical Theory?
Approaches

• Historical (Martin Jay)
• Philosophical (ontology, axiology, epistemology)
• Normative structure (how does it differ from traditional theory)


• Murray, Jeff B. and Julie L. Ozanne (2006), *Rethinking the Critical Imagination*, *Handbook of Qualitative Methods in Marketing*.

Normative structure

- Interdisciplinary
- Reflective
- Dialectical
- Critical
Interdisciplinary

• Phenomena are complex and multifaceted (cultural analyses).

• Dialectical philosophy, psychoanalysis, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, continental tradition in philosophy.
Reflective

• What are the underlying values, interests, and sentiments of the theorist?

• What are the underlying assumptions of the theory?

• How does this substructure influence explanations and who benefits?
Dialectical

• Imperceptible quantitative changes lead to fundamental qualitative changes.

• Sometimes combined with “materialism:” “consciousness is the result of being;” “existence precedes essence.”
Third use of Dialectical

- **Karl Popper**—concepts *correspond* to objects (realism); theory is a transparent window to the world.

- **Ludwig Wittgenstein**—concepts *cohere* to other words in a linguistic system (relativism); theory is language game.
phenomena theory
Critical

• “Ideologies” are false beliefs which serve to shore up social institutions and the relations of domination they support. (appearance vs reality)

• They may make what is a historical construction appear to be fixed and natural. (myth)
Critical—continued

• Social institutions are alterable projects that reflect particular interests.

• “Critique” is the process of excavating these interests and revealing them.
Eagleton (2007, pp. 1-2) introduces 16 different meanings of how the concept has been used in the social sciences. The way that the concept ideology is used depends largely on whether the researcher is focusing on *sociological* or *epistemological* issues.
Here, ideology consists of values, norms, beliefs, meanings, symbols, and customs. It is conceived of as a common framework or worldview.
Epistemological

Here, theorists become preoccupied with true and false cognition (Eagleton 2007)…understood in the context of reality and unreality, illusion, distortion, and mystification. This process sustains and legitimates the power of the dominant group—which helps them maintain control of social relations and social reproduction.
Two “moments”

• *Diagnostic*—what is wrong with the present society (*negative* critique).

• *Remedial*—how do we change it? Identify progressive tendencies (*positive* critique).
Nazis assume power in 1933

Institute was temporarily relocated, first to Geneva and then to the United States.
In the United States they encountered the full force of the *culture industries*...
Rather than resist the passivity and alienation associated with the current social conditions, people find comfort and identity in consumption. Ultimately, this deepens dissatisfaction leading to more consumption. This diverts attention away from critique creating a one-dimensionality.
In 1940, Horkheimer received American citizenship and moved to Los Angeles where his collaboration with Adorno would yield the most famous book of the first generation.
The purpose of the enlightenment was to erase myth and dogma and fulfill the promise of progress, reason, and order. Yet, the enlightenment’s orientation toward rational thought created a new form of domination.
Rationality is necessary for enlightenment; yet rationality is itself the origin of the problem.
Habermas is thinking...what appears to be a no way out bind, might actually be a flaw in their analysis...
Habermas’ social theory
Starting point

• Modernity is an unfinished *project*.

• Trick is to *work with* the dynamic of modernity, not against it.

• We should not sacrifice the *gains* (increase in knowledge, economic benefits, expansion of individual freedom, and so on).
First major work is a response to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*
The 18th century led to civic rights guaranteeing freedom of association and expression. This, along with a free press, gave rise to a public sphere...
Provided opportunities for private citizens to make use of their own reason in unconstrained discussion between equals.
“...a normative notion of public opinion crystallized around the conception of the common good that was established in these fragile but sheltered arenas of public discourse” (Finlayson, Habermas, 2005, p. 10)
Gradually, public opinion began to function as a check on the powers of closed government.
For Habermas, the ideals of the historical *Enlightenment*—*liberty, equality, justice*—are *implicit* in the concept of the public sphere.
What is a public sphere?
Habermas believes that in the 19th and 20th centuries, the public sphere becomes stage-managed by big corporations. Thus, we see the decline of the public sphere.
“When the laws of the market governing the sphere of commodity exchange and of social labor also pervaded the sphere reserved for private people as a public; rational-critical debate had a tendency to be replaced by consumption, and the web of public communication unraveled into acts of individuated reception, however uniform in mode” (Habermas 1962/1989, p. 161).
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Habermas concludes *Structural Transformation* with the hope that the idea of an authentic public sphere might reemerge...
Nearly twenty years later...
In 1998 the International Sociological Association listed this work as the eighth most important sociological book of the 20th century.
Top Ten

1. Max Weber *Economy and Society*
2. Charles Wright Mills *Sociological Imagination*
3. Robert K. Merton *Social Theory and Social Structure*
4. Max Weber *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*
5. Peter L. Berger & Thomas Luckmann *The Social Construction of Reality*
7. Elias, Norbert *The Civilizing Process*
8. Habermas, Jürgen *The Theory of Communicative Action*
9. Parsons, Talcott *Structure of Social Action*
10. Goffman, Erving *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*
First part develops a conceptual argument

Marx

- Relations of production
- Forces of production
- Work and labor
- Means and ends
- Subject and object
- *Instrumental action*
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**Marx**
- Relations of production
- Forces of production
- Work and labor
- Means and ends
- Subject and object
  - *Instrumental action*

**Mead**
- Human relations
- Human interactions
- Communication
- Consensus formation
- Subject and subject
  - *Communicative action*
By emphasizing *communicative action* as a substructure, Habermas was able to both critique and complement Marxist theories.
Subject and object (instrumental) (instrumental rationality)
Subject and subject (non-instrumental) (communicative action)
unreason
(instrumental rationality)

Reason
(communicative action)
Key point...

• Reason is not located in the knowing subject! (Kant)

• Reason is located in structures of interpersonal linguistic communication! (intersubjectivity)
Key point...

• Reason is not located in the knowing

The Linguistic Turn

• Reason is located in structures of *interpersonal* linguistic communication! (intersubjectivity)
Second part develops a social *ontology*

Habermas contends that modern societies comprise two basic spheres of sociality: *lifeworld* and *system*.
Lifeworld

• Realm of *intersubjectivity*.

• Provides the *horizon* (background knowledge) needed to reach a common understanding through communication.

• Concept borrowed from *phenomenology*. 
Human activity and everyday sociability (Durkheim’s *mechanical solidarity*).
• Lifeworld is more *basic*, it can stand alone.

• Home of *communicative action*.

• What would it take to energize the lifeworld into a vigorous *public sphere*?
“If agreement is to be the product of a ‘rational will’ (Kant), then the only permissible force is the ‘unforced force of the better argument,’ and the only permissible motive is the cooperative search for truth. Thus the situation of discourse must be such as to exclude structural constraints on argumentative reasoning—whether these be open or latent, conscious or unconscious. It must be an ‘ideal speech situation’” (McCarthy 1978, p. 308).
Ideal speech situation

• Others will speak so that we can understand them.

• They will communicate their true intentions.

• Shared normative context.

• They will speak the truth.
What?! This is wildly unrealistic!
What?! This is wildly unrealistic!

It is an unavoidable supposition; the very act of participating in a discourse involves the supposition that genuine consensus is possible and that it can be distinguished from false consensus.
Besides, our history is replete with ideals—religious, ethical, political, cognitive, artistic—that we know to be incapable of complete realization but that are no less effective in shaping social life.
As societies become bigger and more complex in the wake of industrialization, the task of social integration (solidarity) becomes increasingly difficult.
Under these conditions, *systems* such as the economy and the state administration ease the burden that falls to communication and discourse; they help hold society together (organic solidarity).
System

• Realm of *interdependency*.

• Responsible for the flow of goods and services or the *material reproduction* of society.

• Concept borrowed from Parsons’ *The Social System* and *Toward a General Theory of Action*.
• *Draws meaning from* the lifeworld.

• Home of *instrumental action*.

• Economic and administrative systems become gradually *detached* from family and culture.
As systems increase in density and complexity, they gradually *intrude* into the lifeworld and absorb its functions.
Oppressive social systems survive because actions fall into pre-established, *bewilderingly complex* patterns of instrumental reasoning. (not because of false consciousness)
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Habermas argues that as the domain of the lifeworld shrinks and instrumental action begins to dominate, social pathologies emerge...
• **Anomie**—loss of meaning.

• **Disintegration**—social bonds become administered (e.g., defriend).

• **Alienation**—feelings of helplessness against the system.

• **Social instability**—breakdown in social order.
“Completing modernity requires that the lifeworld be effectively preserved from the corroding effect of the system and there is at present no agent or force adequate to this task” (Finlayson 2005, p. 67).
In what ways are local markets threatened by economic and administrative systems that have uncoupled from their local contexts?
Key Question 2

Do negative effects and the loss of local markets result in social pathologies and how do these consequences impact our cultural experience?
critical marketing(s)
Diagnostic  Remedial
Critical Participant
- Exemplar
- Assumptions
- Institutional support
Critical Participant

Participatory Action Research, Ozanne and Saatcioglu (JCR 2008)
Axiology

- Improve human welfare.

- Practical problems of a group of people.

- “...provide workable solutions to immediate concerns and to develop local human capacities” (p. 424)
• Social world is cocreated, context bound, relational, and situated.

• Interests drive cultural practice.

• People have the potential for agency if they become aware of the constraints on their freedom.
Epistemology

• Solutions to problems are negotiated with participants.

• Theory builds on participants’ understandings.

• Phenomena are analyzed within the historical context in which they emerge.
Institutional Support

- **Transformative Consumer Research (TCR)**

- “A movement within ACR that seeks to encourage, support, and publicize research that benefits consumer welfare and quality of life for all beings affected by consumption across the world.”

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research, Arnould and Thompson (JCR 2005)
“...investigation of the contextual, symbolic, and experiential aspects of consumption as they unfold across a consumption cycle that includes acquisition, consumption and possession, and disposition processes and analysis of these phenomena from macro-, meso-, and micro-theoretical perspectives” (p. 871).
“...consumer culture describes a densely woven network of global connections and extensions through which local cultures are increasingly interpenetrated by the forces of transnational capital and the global mediascape” (p. 869).
“...the forces of globalization and postindustrial socioeconomic transformation have significantly eroded the traditional bases of sociality and encouraged instead a dominant ethos of radical individualism oriented around a ceaseless quest for personal distinctiveness and autonomy in lifestyle choices” (p. 873).
Epistemology

• “...qualitative data and an array of related data collection and analysis techniques have been quite central to CCT” (p. 870).

• “...infused by a spirit of critical self-reflection and paradigmatic reinvention” (p. 870; footnote).
Institutional Support

- *Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)*

- “Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is an interdisciplinary field that comprises macro, interpretive, and critical approaches to, and perspectives of, consumer behavior.”

- [http://www.consumerculturetheory.org/](http://www.consumerculturetheory.org/)
The ordering of marketing theory: the influence of McCarthyism and the Cold War, Tadajewski (MT 2006)
Axiology

• Identify the underlying social and political interests that guide paradigm formation.

• Transform what appears to be *natural* into *historical*.

• “Historical” is alterable.
• Structural influences result in dominant and marginal paradigms (strategic action).

• Actors bolster the dominant paradigm without awareness of the structure/knowledge connections.
• Historical analysis revealing the connections between knowledge and power.
• Excavate the *episteme* of the age (*archaeology*).
• Explain the politics of paradigm shifts (*genealogy*).
Institutional Support

• *Economic and Social Research Council* (ESRC)

• Organization of the seminar series in critical marketing.
In conclusion...
In what ways are local markets threatened by economic and administrative systems that have uncoupled from their local contexts?

Do negative effects and the loss of local markets result in social pathologies and how do these consequences impact our cultural experience?
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Thank You