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## **Social Psychology, Marketing, and Re-installing the World.**

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Social Psychology has always contributed to Marketing. But this talk will not focus on reclaiming imports in a *pro domo sua* plea.

I will take advantage of the fact I am addressing this large and influential audience of Marketing specialists to disseminate a vision for a more sustainable world, a way Marketing could help with de-growth and more sustainable ways of life, in contrast with a consumption-encouraging and brand support approach that has been mainstream in the past decades; and suggest a transition path using sociability as a value.

But as it would be impolite to completely hijack this time slot, I shall first provide you with some social psychological take-away:

1 - a new technique, the Subcam

2 - the installation theory, a framework for analyzing complex socio-technical systems

“Installation theory” describes the evolution of our societies. This framework was created with action in mind: it is usable for governance, design, and more generally for those who want to change the World. It will show where Social Psychology as a specific discipline fits into the larger picture.

Finally, I shall advocate for a new ethical stand in using the power of Marketing to implement de-growth

## **Social Psychology and Marketing**

Because Marketing is interested in persuasion, changing attitudes and provoking specific behaviours, it has always used psychological theories, and more specifically theories coming from Social Psychology. Among these, for example theories of Influence (Ash, 1952), Norms (Sherif, 1935, 1936), Attitudes (Thurstone, 1928; Likert, 1932; Allport, 1935; Heider, 1946; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), Persuasion (e.g. Hovland & Weiss, 1951 among many others), Social Representations (Moscovici, 1961, Abric, 1984, Lahlou, 1998), Dissonance (Festinger, 1954, 1957, Brehm & Cohen, 1962), Active Minorities (Moscovici, 1979), Categorization (Tajfel & Wilkes, 1963); Commitment (Kiesler, 1971; Joule & Beauvois, 1998), to name only a few. And this from the early ages. As early as 1928, the famous work of Edward Bernays on Propaganda, one of the many ancestors of Marketing -although not the most politically correct and claimed today- explicitly refers to several social psychologist's work in order to address and influence the masses to sell them products, for example by manipulating the nature of the source of information to for better influence in claims. And I will come back later to Lewin's famous studies in the 1940's on how to persuade American consumers to eat glandular meat (Lewin, 1943, 1952).

Apart from theories and experiments, Social Psychology also brought many a technique which is now used in Marketing, especially in the consumer research side: to name the most prominent, in-depth interviews, focus groups, attitude scales, laboratory experiments on choices.

And these imports continue, one of the reasons being that quite a few members of the Marketing community have studied Social Psychology, especially those involved in market surveys and tests. Perhaps because of its positive bias towards change and innovation, Marketing as a discipline has always been fast to detect and adopt new theories and techniques, as I did experience myself. At the end of the 1990's, I invented the Subcam (Lahlou, 1999, 2006), a miniature video camera worn at eye-level by the subjects, which we use to get a first-person record of user's activity and to study interaction. While I am still striving to disseminate this technique in my own field among psychologists and cognitive scientists, one of the first researchers to use the technique out of my lab has been Pr. Mohamed Merdji (the organizer of this conference) here at Audencia –to study how consumers deal with refrigerated products and bacteria (Debucquet et al, 2007).

I need not insist: there will be in this conference numerous examples of these natural imports from Psychology. These imports are a sign of dynamism, of good health, of a discipline open and bold enough to look beyond its own boundaries and mix with other communities. Indeed, real-world issues are not disciplinary, and to address them we need tools from many disciplines.

But how many? And how deep should we go in transdisciplinarity? The next section proposes a framework, installation theory, which dares to venture some answers without getting lost in complexity.

### **Human behaviour and the Installation of the World.**

The determinants of human behaviour are distributed: some lay in the subject (motives, goals, preferences, habits), others lay in the context (artefacts, rules, other people). In an operational perspective, for practitioners who want to understand, predict or influence human behaviour, at a given moment, and a given place, the World can be considered as an *installation*. *Installation* must be understood here in the artistic sense of assembling patterns in space to modify the way we experience this situation.

The installation of the World guides subjects into their activity track, at three levels: physical, psychological, social. It is possible to frame this installation in order to influence behaviour. Let us detail these three levels.

The physical level refers to material reality and artefacts. It provides *affordances* (Gibson, 1967) for activity (which activities can be supported by the objects). For example, chairs afford sitting; buses afford transportation; on-line support affords help. One can only do what is afforded by the present environment. *This layer of installation is distributed in the physical environment* by construction of infrastructure, and various mechanisms of supply and procurement, e.g. by the market.

This first, physical, level of determination affords a tree of possibilities; but not everything that is possible will be realized. This is where psychology comes into play. To take action, subjects must interpret situations. Objects evoke for Humans specific *connotations of activity* (Uexküll, 1934), and operative images (Oshanin, 1977). At psychological level, *motives, representations and practice* provide possible interpretations of the situation by the subject: for example choosing between various artefacts (e.g. different brands of same product) which all provide some affordance for the desired activity. Representations include the “how to use” the objects; for example a web browser, a car, or a self-service restaurant. Representations also enable subjects to elaborate and plan behaviours. *This layer of installation is distributed over individual Humans*, by the means of physiology, experience, education and exposures to discourse (media, advertising, etc.).

But again, not everything that is even both possible and desired will be realized: a third level of determination, social, will cut off more branches from the tree of possibilities. For example, although we could drive on any side of the roads, only one is allowed in every

country. Because individual actions produce externalities, they are limited by others. Institutions are a social solution to control potential abuse or misuse, and minimize social costs [Coase, 1960] also called “negative externalities”. Institutions set common conventions which enable cooperation (e.g. people should all drive on the same side of the road; etc.). Many of the rules are already contained in the normative aspects of representations, but institutions are special in their capacity to *enforce* behaviour, by social pressure or more direct means.

*So, at a given moment, individual behaviour is determined by this distributed installation: artefacts installed in the physical environment, interpretive systems installed in humans, and institutions installed in society.* This enables us to understand better the role of Psychology in this framework. Because some determinants lay in the context, psychological theories alone cannot explain or predict behaviour; but because some determinants are psychological and social, a social psychological approach is necessary.

Installation theory is of course very schematic. Still, it enables a first orientation in the complex socio-technical systems which innovators must deal with; it provides a check-list for analysis and agenda for action. If we want to change the World, or more modestly one of its sub-domains, it is clear that no action limited to a single layer of determination -for example a new product, or a campaign- will be enough to change the behaviours of people. We should make sure that appropriate installation in the three layers (physical environment, individuals concerned, relevant institutions) has been addressed. What is left to us is the strategy of how to create and distribute such installation. For example, we could start by the physical layer by procuring products, and then try to recruit some institutions so they take over the educative part of the installation. Marketing has understood this a long time ago. A growing trend, for example, is to foster the creation of user communities and try to turn them into institutions around brands.

### **Changing the World**

Evolution of human socio-technical systems is a chicken-and-egg problem, and the more developed the society, the more difficult it gets.

In global societies, because the installation is distributed over large populations, and because local changes must stay compatible with the rest of society and activities, change is slow and needs considerable support. Representations and objects follow a co-evolution process: representations are constructed by the practice people have of objects. Conversely, objects are made after the pattern of their representation: cars are made to look like cars; receptionists are trained to behave as receptionists; etc. This is the reason why representations match with objects. Marketers, because they try to adapt offer to demand, play a crucial role in this co-evolution in market economies (Lahlou, 1996).

At a societal level, the co-evolution of objects and representations is monitored by domain-local communities of interest (users, providers, agencies, governments, lobbies, etc.) who set the normative patterns of objects, the rules of practice, regulations etc. Because these stakeholders know their domain, objects, representations and rules are adapted to users' behaviours. These stakeholders create institutions, which are both sets of rules to be applied to keep order and cooperation, and communities of interest aware that they play in the same game. This social and legal framework is also distributed, at various levels of societies. It is the result of historical co-construction, trade-offs, fights and other negotiation between stakeholders. This co-construction is a reality test, and its results reflect the *rappports de force* between stakeholders.

The co-evolution between artefacts and representations is done under continuous monitoring and control of stakeholder communities, which use institutions as social and economics tools

to safeguard their interests. The more developed the society, the more existing institutions, and the more complex the relations between the three layers, to control the externalities between domains. This is why we often complain in Europe that innovation is so difficult and slow here, when it sometimes seems easier in other continents. That is also why change is gradual, and often takes the pattern of a *leopardskin* (Lahlou, 2008), going faster where local conditions are easier, and gradually spreading as global institutions join the process.

### **Towards a more sustainable future: using sociability as a source of value**

In this global change management, as said earlier, Marketing plays a key role. Marketing has been in charge of implementing change for most built environment and policies, in a market context. But now, precisely, we have become aware of the limitations of the market system. Now, we face a new challenge with global sustainability, of which the current financial crisis is only one of the first global symptoms, together with climate change and ecological destruction. If we do not wish to follow the collapse route well analyzed by Diamond (2005) we now know that we must change the global regulation system within the next 25 years, in order to use less raw materials, energy, and avoid major conflicts for resources.

As the works of the SCORE group have shown at EU level (Tukker et al., 2007), the main issues and bottlenecks now in sustainability are about fostering sustainable consumption, helping consumers locked in unsustainable habits. Solutions are known, but we need to make the people change their behaviour.

Too often in the past, Marketing has been on the dark side of the force, mobilizing considerable resources only to move the frontiers between brand territories, in a zero-sum game. In doing so, though, a considerable amount of knowledge and agency has been accumulated. Now, marketers, the World needs your capacities to help de-growth. We have collectively failed in creating a sustainable civilisation, and there is little time left to change it into a better system. I am not talking here specifically about CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, which is probably a minor issue to which we may eventually adapt, but more generally about the way we regulate the system and always seek growth. The problem with scarce resources is that they create conflicts and oppression. To paraphrase what Kennedy said in his inaugural presidential address in 1961<sup>1</sup>: “ask not what Sciences will do for Marketing, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.”

Indeed each of us should see how he or she can contribute.

Now here is the one modest item of my contribution, as a social psychologist.

De-growth may be somewhat unpleasant. More often than not, sustainable ways of living are less comfortable, require more efforts, and the quality of the products may be lower seen from the user. This is of course not systematic, but anyone can understand that it is not always possible to do more with less materials and energy.

Then, now our planet has empty pockets, what added value can we bring people to compensate for this loss of physical comfort? My guess comes from my experience as a member of the SCORE group for research on sustainable consumption: *social value* is the resource. An observation of what does actually work in terms of sustainable consumption, for

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<sup>1</sup> “Now the trumpet summons us again--not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need; not as a call to battle, though embattled we are--but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in and year out, "rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation"--a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself. Can we forge against these enemies a grand and global alliance, North and South, East and West, that can assure a more fruitful life for all mankind? Will you join in that historic effort?  
(...)

And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you--ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.”

example the cases collected by the EMUDE<sup>2</sup> project led by Politecnico di Milano (Manzini & Jegou, 2003), shows that people who engage, and stay, in sustainable behaviours do it because they do it in groups. Whether it is for sharing washing machines, setting up more sustainable houses, or create collective bicycle repair shops, the initiatives that work do so because people engage into communities. This should be no surprise. In the end, what Humans look for is belong to a group where they are recognized, have status, and gain other's people's love. And for this they are ready to give, not only take. In fact, most consumption has this final use of building someone's position in groups. When people buy fancy cars, display brands on their clothes, and in general work or spend their money and time, it is usually for that purpose of gaining or keeping position in a group. The seminal work of Veblen (1899) on conspicuous consumption contains brilliant insights of this idea; in the same vein Maslow's scale of needs (1943) rates high Love/belonging and esteem<sup>3</sup>. Referring again to the seminal works of social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1943, 1952), we can see that using group participation and commitment as incentives we can make people change their habits, even make them do things they were initially considering as disgusting, such as eating glandular meats.

Therefore, we have here, in other Humans's attention and care, an almost endless source of value for humans. It is a sustainable source of value which consumes very little natural resources.

This is probably the way into which Marketing should engage in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. After the markets of goods and services, it is the markets of sociability which will be the next frontier.

Many of us have already recognized the social realm as a major source of value, and as said earlier there are numerous attempts to use it, but until now it has been mostly mobilized so serve the old regime of brands. It should now serve society itself, or there will be no 22<sup>nd</sup> century for the civilisation we have built. But make no mistake: when I talk about a "market of sociability", this means not that we should commoditize and sell sociability, as has unfortunately been often the temptation lately. I mean, on the contrary, that sociability is a kind of "money", a psychological reward system for performing other activities. Building markets with this new currency is certainly a challenge for Marketing.

There is an enormous work to do in installing the layers of a new, more sustainable, society. For this change, we need the enormous power of industry and commerce, who are the specialists of large-scale installation in the physical layer. Policy makers can help, but it is unlikely they succeed without the help of industry because they act mainly on the institutional layers. In this room are assembled hundreds of the most competent and influential specialists of connecting the three layers, installers of the World. My hope is that some of us do take their responsibilities in the vital challenge we are all facing. Time is short. It is your responsibility as Humans to turn the forces of Industry and Commerce into re-installing a better world, instead of competing against one another for better financial results. The transition will not be easy, because we are all addicted to the current regime. My belief is that leading firms and organizations into co-producing social value with people and institutions is probably a viable path into this transition from markets of goods and services to an economic system which directly addresses, and uses as an incentive, what Humans are most interested in: good relations with other Humans.

And for this, once again, you are welcome to see what Social Psychology can offer.

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<sup>2</sup> Emerging Users Demands for Sustainable Solutions. EU finding NMP-2002-3.4.3.3-2: Increasing the "user awareness" Specific Support Action.

<sup>3</sup> And several values at the top of the pyramid (morality, creativity...), when one thinks of it, are social in the sense that they mean producing something useful for society. See also Boltanski and Thevenot (1991, 2006) for a list of values.

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