

Marketing and education — A clash or a synergy in time?

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Abstract

The notion of temporality receives little attention in the marketing literature and even less in recent literature on higher education. This paper discusses the notion of the temporality implicit in liberal higher education (where personal growth is its goal) and the temporality implicit in much of marketing activity. Marketing practice depends upon technique whilst the goal of education is practical wisdom transcending immediate time horizons. This situation creates a potential conflict that the hegemonic power of the market and its reproductive process, marketing, currently resolves. This marketing resolution constrains, enframes and forecloses what education might be.

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[T]ime refers not only to the way in which temporality is mediated differently by institutions, administrators, faculty and students, but also how it shapes and allocates power, identities, and space through a particular set of codes and interests. (Giroux and Giroux, 2004:226)

This paper suggests that marketing has contributed to the foreshortening of educational horizons through representing the world-as-a-picture (to borrow from Heidegger) within which actions occur. The application of the concept of marketing to education tends to emphasize control of satisfaction and efficiency in the immediacy of the knowable present. The hegemonic use of Western social clock time changes the unexpectedness, excitement and creativity of the future to the predictability of accountable events situated in a linear extension of the present. To use the terminology of Giroux (2003) and Giroux and Giroux (2004), the corporate time of action, measurement and efficiency in the epoch of consumerism usurps the public time gifted for the use of the university for reflection and critical appraisal of society, its knowledge and its moral positioning.

The premise of the argument is that current educational marketing supports a temporal system which renders the tem-

porality of its entities temporal-less through the cocooning of temporality in a chrysalis of the present structured by the use of marketing which promises clear, predictable outcomes designed to satisfy customer expectations. Changing the issue of the uncertainty of the future gives legitimacy to one meta-economic narrative where the extra return on incomes for degree holders provides the main customer incentive to buy. One of the consequences of education so marketed is the promoting of higher education on the basis of a means to an end and not an end in itself.

1. The world of higher education — intentions or possibilities?

The educational interpretation of people is about them having a potentiality or an actuality which their multifaceted action can realize, whereas the marketing interpretation of action is mainly concerned with consumption. For Heidegger, the potentiality of an entity is its standing-reserve, which its use and functionality realizes (Heidegger, 1977:117). Heidegger diagnoses modern technology as *Ge-stell*, ‘enframing’, a process of extracting which transforms the natural world into *Bestand*, ‘standing-reserve’ — a state in which objects *per se* no longer exist in or for themselves but only in or for something else. *Techne* realizes their purpose (Heidegger, 1977). This concept is very helpful for it does not presuppose the essential purpose of the object, just all the things the object might be. This position differs from one based on an

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Aristotelian heritage where entities have their own actuality; they are what they are learned to be. The dialect between the used and the user likewise reveals the temporality of these entities. Its danger and the danger of modernity is that, through the various technologies of one form of being – that defined by consumption – dominates.

Through the acceptance of the externalities of culture and particularly through the world created and increasingly defined by technologies (of which marketing is one), existential possibilities undergo a leveling down and temporal potential for being is existentially affected because of the disburdenment of concern for its own authentic Being and becomes indistinguishable from any other (Heidegger, 1962:164). The convenience and ease of this disburdening ensures the dominion of an unproblematic world over the authentic being in the world.

In terms of higher education's institutional mechanisms, time is used to define the student; duration of degree, number of credit hours, assignment deadlines, academic activities and allocation of research time to certain faculty and disciplines and not to others. The just-in-time, time is money corporate-ness of the academy ensnares administrators. This commoditization of time works against the reflection of critical learning and a vision for the development of the dignity of human rights, democracy and being. This perspective favors an identity of the present, intent on defining oneself in and through the mode of consuming – books, relationships, courses and education – in an attempt to gain an award which bestows greater economic power to consume.

In this sense, marketing brings a difference to the notion of worth by converting intrinsic evaluation into the tradable economic value via consumption. One consequence is that value replaces meaning as technology leads to less time for others and a potential loss of intrinsic meaning. Further, time becomes more accelerated and fragmented, leaving academics privileged not for their scholastic worth but as entrepreneurs, not shaped by considerations of social justice but by revenue. The ramifications for the world of education lead to a distancing from the temporal constructed meanings of the world to a world dominated by corporate time. This distancing transmutes a notion of the temporality of being into a sequence of presents where people forget the past or imagine the future in terms of the desire of the moment.

Young (2002) offers the example of the bureaucratic, machine-like modern university where teachers and students are 'suppliers' and 'consumers' with all that this system entails: a place where to be is to be an item of resource, an entity able to be used and marketed. Fitzsimmons (2002) and Standish (1997) articulate similar views of the impact of *Enframing* on education. Clegg (2003) offers the fullest expression of the changes in temporality in academic settings. She shows, through case studies, the tensions in tempo and temporality of academic life brought about through policy changes, arguing that these changes are not the consequence of academic evaluation but of external policy impositions.

2. Marketing ends and an education forever

The purposes of the application of forms of knowledge are very different for marketing and education unless the tem-

porality of the market entraps education. Comparing the marketing concept with liberal education, the former is about predetermined ends achieved through the application of marketing skills and technologies. Marketing's goals are realizable and knowable through such things as market share, sale volumes or profit. In contrast, liberal education is about the critical becoming of an educated person. Education is about the process not the end and is distinct from the academically-accredited person whose goal is the accreditation not the knowledge. The goal of accreditation is more similar to that of a marketing goal and this notion of education is rapidly replacing the idea of an educated populace with that of an accredited one. In this sense, governments interpret widening participation as a marketing rather than an education problem.

Simpson's (1995) temporalization of knowledge is helpful to draw more distinctly the separation. She argues that:

the technological project's focus is on securing an end, its attitude towards temporality is that time, in its unruliness, must be domesticated, must be brought under control. Opposed to this, *praxis* fully recognizes time as its field of action and as an enabling medium – for instance, the meaningful action of *praxis* as an application or repetition of the past understood as an historical legacy – and seeks, ideally, to maintain the singleness of individual identity through the vicissitudes of temporal existence. (1995:57)

The clarity and feasibility of an imagined future reflects how existing self resolves the complexity of its present in becoming its future. Each act has a temporality revealed as a preparedness to act either in a repetitive yet authentic and self-critical way or in an instrumental, closed-off and inauthentic restatement of what was. Forms of time – of which the abstract clock time is the most global – calibrate the duration of this being or becoming. Furthermore, Rämö's (1999) insightful application of forms of knowledge helps us to see that the technologies that deliver the marketing concept are *techne* and associated with a notion of the future dependent on the replication of the present. Thus, for Rämö, *techne* "enables the future to be engaged and interpreted as a series of presents" (1999:317).

Does a reason for concern about the marketing of education have validity? Educational marketers seemingly embrace the practices of marketing (see Gibbs, 2002) and the employment of practices of a technological age which do not facilitate the opening of individual possibilities through higher education. They lead instead to the closure of future potentialities (see Archer et al., 2003 on the alienating influence of marketing with the potential student world for choices of education). The adoption of marketing techniques, originally developed for more immediate consumption and used within education, encourages a foreshortening and a representation of temporal futures dependent on short-term operational goals, evident in semester courses, modular degrees, etc. The real danger is that this closure begins to determine the form of higher education. However, if higher education is not a product or service for consumption in this manner but is also a way of encouraging transcendental self-development, then educators need to do something to prevent the values of marketing become the values of education.

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