

Review of “Reconnecting Marketing to Markets”, edited by Luis Araujo, John Finch & Hans Kjellberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

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In approaching this book the reader versed in conventional marketing literature must set aside common notions of what a marketing text is ‘about’. The majority of marketing texts, whether in books, articles, or other media, aim to answer questions about how to do marketing. This book aims to do no such thing. Indeed, for the reader with a traditional marketing background (such as this reviewer), this is the first hurdle to overcome. Simply, if the book does not correspond to the reader’s stereotypical view of what a marketing book is like, why should the reader spend time reading it? Having overcome this first hurdle, then a second hurdle arrives pretty soon after, namely, if the book is not about how to do marketing, then what, exactly, is it about? And that is not the simplest of questions to answer. Other than parroting the title—the book is about marketing and markets—it takes a little time to understand just what it is about. To draw a parallel, which may be helpful to those readers old enough to remember, the slight sense of disorientation is rather like one’s first encounter with *Postmodern Marketing* (Brown 1995). This was the book in which Stephen Brown drew the attention of the marketing community to the work of post-structuralist and postmodern thinkers such as Barthes, Derrida and Baudrillard, and explored the challenges their ideas presented to the notion of scientific marketing. Clearly, the work must have something to do with marketing, since the author has chosen to put the word in the title, but it doesn’t look like any marketing book one has previously encountered. With Brown’s work, however, there was a strong, self-conscious sense of iconoclasm and an idiosyncratically amusing writing style to keep the reader going through the times of doubt. The present work does not aim to engage the reader through witty repartee, but follows regular academic conventions of scholarly writing. Nevertheless, it is entirely possible that this book is just as iconoclastic as anything by Stephen Brown (or Morris Holbrook, a name no doubt more familiar to American readers).

So, what is the book about, if not about how to do marketing? What should the prospective reader’s expectations be? Well, this is a book that aims to study the phenomena of markets and marketing, as components of wider social processes. The perspective in the book could be considered sociological. Indeed, of the 15 contributors, five have the word sociology in their job title, and six have the word marketing in their job title. Perhaps more accurately, the perspective lies somewhere between marketing and sociology. Of course, one does not want to fetishize the classification of scholarly research, but marketing scholars might consider the work to have similar intentions to some of the work in the field of macromarketing. However, while this may help the potential reader to grasp the tone of the book (concerning marketing phenomena rather than about how to do marketing), that is still not quite right. While macromarketing is not about how to do marketing, it is concerned with the impact and consequences of marketing systems on society, including second and third order effects (externalities) of marketing activities that are generally not of interest to marketing practitioners (Hunt 1981; Layton 2007). In other words, even in the field of macromarketing there is tendency to start from within marketing and look outwards, whereas the perspective of the present book starts outside marketing and markets, and looks inwards.

Finally, before dealing in a little more detail with the main themes of the book, one must address yet another preliminary question, since this is the *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*: is it about business-to-business marketing and markets? The answer here is a very clear ‘yes and no’. At a simple level, the book includes examples and case studies from B2B marketing and B2C marketing. For example, much of chapter 2 is based on an analysis of American retailers’ adoption of new technology (so B2B) while the empirical component of chapter 3 concerns end-customer buying processes in the electronics sector (so B2C). However, at a more complex level, one presumes that the authors of this book would argue that the distinction between B2B and B2C marketing is irrelevant to the work. That is (and I would not wish to put words in the authors’ mouths), *not* explicitly to take a position on the debate about whether the distinction between B2B and B2C marketing is valid, but to take the position that all marketing phenomena can be analyzed within the same sociological frameworks. Another way of putting this, perhaps, is that the distinction between B2B and B2C marketing, if it makes sense at all, only makes sense when one starts within marketing and looks outwards. Since this work starts outside marketing and looks inwards, using a sociological toolbox, the B2B/B2C distinction is simply ‘not there’.

What, then, of the main themes of this book? The first important premise of the work is that the marketing discipline largely ignores the concept of markets. In a commentary towards the end of the book, the sociologist Callon observes that the current American Marketing Association definition of marketing does not include the term market. In the introductory chapter Shove and Araujo argue that this state of affairs can be attributed to the broadening of the concept of marketing championed by Kotler and colleagues in the 1970s (Kotler and Levy 1969; Kotler 1972; Kotler and Zaltman 1971). Marketing came to be seen as a set of management technologies that could be applied widely, in profit-seeking and non-profit organizations, and for commercial ends or for social ends. Thus did marketing become de-coupled from markets. Consequently, the implicit notion of a market that is held by marketers, so the argument goes, is of something ‘out there’, existing prior to and independently of the interventions of marketers. In the second important premise for the work, however, the authors contend that markets do not ‘simply exist’, but have to be made, and then constantly re-made: “Marketing produces markets—not only, nor on its own, but still” (p1). Marketers are involved in the process of making and re-making markets. The ideas, models, frameworks and practices of marketing academics and professionals play a part in shaping markets; in the authors’ terms, marketing knowledge is performative. Much of the book is taken up with case studies and examples of just how markets are made and re-made through the interventions of marketers. In this way, the goal expressed in the title of the book—to reconnect marketing to markets—is pursued not, as one might have expected, through some careful redefinition of the meaning of the term market, but by attempting to demonstrate that the way markets are is partly attributable to the ideas and technologies of marketers.

This is an edited volume. There is considerable variation in writing style between the contributed chapters. In addition, much of terminology will be unfamiliar to the marketing scholar. This is further complicated by the fact that some of the contributors then introduce their own, apparently idiosyncratic, terminology. In some cases this can be disorientating for the reader. For example, the term ‘qualifications’ is clearly important to the meaning of chapter 4 (since it is included in the subtitle), but despite the author’s attempts to explain the meaning of this concept on pages 74 and 75, I remained unenlightened. Consequently, I am not at all sure that I understood the central message of this chapter. There is perhaps a broader issue here for scholars who aspire to bring alternative

disciplinary perspectives to bear on the field of marketing. Presumably, such scholars aspire to communicate with the marketing academic community, as well as the academic community of the 'home' discipline—in this case, economic sociology and the sociology of science and technology. So long as one is communicating with a group of enthusiasts, such as the marketing professors who have contributed to the present volume, it is reasonable to expect the readership to have gained some mastery of the relevant specialist terminology. However, if one wishes to communicate with a wider academic audience, then clearly greater attention must be paid to helping readers understand the basic concepts and terminology that cannot be assumed to be part of their normal working lives. Once again, this is reminiscent of the postmodern marketing movement, which sometimes seemed to delight in using terminology that readers in marketing were very unlikely to understand. For postmodernism this even makes a degree of sense, since disorientation, ambiguity and confusion may pass for postmodern virtues. Arguably, however, the authors and editors of the present volume should have been a little kinder to their readers.

In summary, the argument of this book is that the marketing discipline has neglected markets, and has represented them as passive backgrounds against which marketers operate their marketing strategies. The neglect of markets can be traced to the broadening of the marketing concept pioneered by Kotler and colleagues in the 1970s; marketing practices were to be seen as equally applicable in non-market and market contexts. However, marketing is not unique in having neglected markets, since the same is largely true of economics and economic sociology. The aim of the book is to “re-focus marketing’s attention on markets as socio-technological phenomena, rather than merely an abstract or institutionalized collection of buyers and sellers” (p117). In the view of this reviewer, this is a worthy aim, and the authors have made a good start on this project. A difficulty that they have is that in applying quite complex ideas from outside the marketing field to markets and marketing phenomena they use terminology and concepts that will be unfamiliar to most marketing students, scholars and practitioners. The reader who is from a marketing background may find the perspective of the book, and some of the concepts and terminology, slightly disorientating. Nevertheless, there are fascinating insights in this book, for the reader who can stay the course.

## References

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