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Mapping the absence: a theological critique of posthumanist influences in marketing and consumer research

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ABSTRACT
In this study, we critically examine the ongoing adoption of various posthumanist influences into the fields of marketing and consumer research from a theological perspective. By conducting a theological-historical assessment, we propose that it is not post-human notions of human/technology relations, nor their broader context in the emerging non-representational paradigms, that mark radically new disruptions in the continuing restructuring of the disciplines of marketing and consumer research. Instead, we argue that what is taking place is an implicit adherence to a contemporary form of age-old Christian dogma. As a radical conjecture, we thus propose that an identification of certain similarities between Christian dogma and the grounds for various posthumanist frameworks suggest that posthuman thought may well herald the global dissemination of a far more elusive, authoritarian, and hegemonic system than that which posthumanists typically claim to have abandoned. Consequently, we elaborate on implications to developments in marketing thought.

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Posthumanism; non-representational theory; theology; technology; consumer culture; modernism; Christianity

Introduction

'To speak of a "return" of religion is inappropriate' (Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*)

In lieu of the more general 'relational turn' in philosophy and social science (Anderson, 2012; Burkitt, 2016; also Bajde, 2013; Hill et al., 2014), there has been notable and enthusiastic demand in both marketing and consumer research for an escape from the century-old ideological 'straitjacket' of Western modernism and humanism *understood as positions that favour essentialized rationality and the sovereign subject as a privileged being* (also Campbell et al., 2010; Hoffman & Novak, 2018; Scott et al., 2014; Venkatesh & Meamber, 2006; also Fırat & Dholakia, 2006; Henshaw et al., 2016). The scholarly recognition of what we dub 'humanist-modernist' (H-M) restraint has been accompanied by a denouncement of the Western onto-epistemological canon as a hegemony that has, throughout its history, led to a long list of global socio-ecological catastrophes (e.g. Brown, 1995; Jafari & Süerdem, 2012; Scott et al., 2014): colonialism, imperialism, excesses of both socialism and capitalism, and hierarchical, racial, and gender-based exclusions and

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prejudices – to name but a few (see Butler, 2006; Fox & Alldred, 2018; Haraway, 1991; Šimůnková, 2019; Susen, 2015). However, even though, as Tadajewski (2014) notes, the discipline of marketing has found itself supporting the global proliferation of the Western military-industrial establishment, and while a managerialist business-as-usual paradigm still reigns in marketing scholarship and education all over the world (e.g. Hackley, 2003; Tadajewski, 2018), a variety of critical challenges to the status-quo have been proliferating steadily. A central critical interjection in respect to the dominant H-M restraint has been various forms of *posthumanist* approaches, including non-representational theorising and other poststructural thought in marketing and consumer research.

In this study, we use posthumanist scholarship in marketing and consumer research as a general rubric for various scholarly approaches that attempt to move away from human-centricity (e.g. Canniford & Bajde, 2016; Hietanen & Andéhn, 2018; Hill et al., 2014; Lugosi & Quinton, 2018; Rokka & Canniford, 2016). While, from certain perspectives, *dedicated* posthumanist work constitutes a relatively minor approach in these fields, its impact in social sciences is formidable and growing (e.g. Bignall et al., 2016; Braidotti, 2013a, 2013b; Fox & Alldred, 2018, 2020; Haraway, 2015). Thus, posthumanist approaches mark a broader *tendency* of poststructuralist and non-anthropocentric theoretical aspirations that have been undeniable for quite a significant period already. While this tendency takes on numerous forms and theoretical inclinations, we focus on posthumanist thought's anti-essentialist trajectories particularly from the perspective of technology and consumer culture in marketing and consumer research. Despite its claims of novelty, we wish to shed light on how theological reflections thought long lost bear striking similarities to it. One reason for this is the dominant perception that posthumanist epistemology is generally seen to mainly stem from secular worldviews, thus able to break out of metaphysically-rich, hegemonic narratives such as the H-M restraint. As a move from hierarchical centres to denaturalise representational power, it also typically promises to give a much-needed voice to those at the margins, or altogether outside totalising hegemonies, that is, to the local, the heretical, and the oppressed (Braidotti, 2013a, 2013b; Hester, 2018; Lykke, 2018; Tsing, 2015). We compare the general onto-epistemological tendency of these approaches with the history of Christian theological thought. In so doing, we follow ascendant interest in historical sensitivity (e.g. Brown et al., 2001; Tadajewski & Jones, 2014; Tadajewski & Saren, 2008) and religiosity (e.g. Benton, 2014; Engelland, 2014; Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019) in marketing and consumer research to show how a theological analysis can shed light on the less-understood conceptual underpinnings of these discourses. Instead of exploring, reflexively and critically, religious worldviews and practices, we turn a theological gaze inwards. We do that by extending the definitional reach of Christianity: instead of focusing on its representational features, we bring into the discussion its non-representational influences in the cultural background.

Our analysis problematises the novelty of various posthumanist perspectives and their purported relinquishment of the H-M restraint from a historical-theological perspective (also Redding, 2012). We argue that the otherwise laudable struggles of scholars employing various non-representational approaches, including what has been tentatively labelled as the emerging field of Posthuman Consumer Culture (Buchanan-Oliver & Cruz, 2015; Venkatesh & Meamber, 2006; also Kozinets, 2015; Venkatesh et al., 2002), to abandon the suffocating 'too narrow views' (Tadajewski, 2004, p. 325; also Campbell et al.,

2010; Hoffman & Novak, 2018) of the H-M restraint and to escape from its 'dogmatic, ideological straitjacket' (Brown, 1995, p. 99), may well *represent the opposite* of what these efforts seem to be in many ways. It is in this context that we ask: What if posthumanist thinking and the decentred consumer subject are tools for the propagation of a stronger but more elusive hegemonic system, one that spreads through the denial of all other grand narratives, including itself? We will argue that the extant literature may be performing a *moonwalk* manoeuvre; what looks like a *move away* from the oppressive limits of what the M-H restraint represents is, in fact, a *move back towards* the historical theological core of the Christianity's onto-epistemological canon. We shall illustrate our argument with various historical and pragmatic examples and conclude by discussing some implications of how we understand both the historicity and the potential future trajectories of emerging thought in marketing and consumer research.

Reforming the fields, hybridising the consumer

Technologies of consumption in between

Undeniably, the fields of marketing and consumer research are undergoing a 'radical axiological shift' (Tadajewski, 2010, p. 789). This is a process that began in the early 1980s with the Hunt and Anderson debates (see Kavanagh, 1994) and which is far from resolved. Foundational notions such as *consumer, identity, agency, commodity*, and *markets* are constantly being redefined, weighted differently, or suggested for abandonment. Posthumanist influences in marketing and consumer research emerged together with 'post' paradigms across academia, such as postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism, all of which are dedicated to challenging the assumed stability and veracity of representations in H-M, which includes the 'self' as a privileged site of coherent meaning. They thus mark a continuation of the ongoing 20th century debates in philosophy of science that reveal the inherent politics of what were previously understood as foundationally rational selves and given hierarchical orders (such as Truth) in continuous processes of 'progress'. While naturally emerging under various guises and labels in its recent upswing, this *tendency* towards abandoning essentialist and representational modes of thinking has been written on the margins of more conventional marketing and consumer research for decades now. While it broadly covers various theorising that foreground nonhuman materiality and affectivity (e.g. Bajde, 2013; Hietanen et al., 2014; Hill et al., 2014; Valtonen & Närvänen, 2015) and poststructural considerations of distributed agency and desiring flows (e.g. Cronin & Cocker, 2019; Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2013; Hietanen & Andéhn, 2018; Hoffman & Novak, 2018; Kozinets et al., 2017), we turn to a brief ontological overview of these developments from the perspective of technology and consumption (also Šimůnková, 2019).

If one follows the technologically-focused and dedicatedly posthumanist literature in marketing and consumer research, one notices that its central impetus is the transgression of distinct and hierarchically-ordered boundaries drawn between human, nature, and machine (e.g. Campbell et al., 2010; Kozinets, 2015; Šimůnková, 2019; also Fox & Alldred, 2018; Herbrechter, 2013). What the many and deeply disparate streams of posthumanist thought[1] do share in common is the idea that the human is defined by an endless plasticity, an innate malleability that posits change and transgression as its inherent

form (Braidotti, 2013b; Fuller, 2011). Based on this understanding, the human is no longer seen from the perspective of a privileged centricity that is separate from its technological and material milieu (also Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2013; Hietanen & Andéhn, 2018; Kozinets et al., 2017). Any form of posthumanist theorising, whatever its particular form and political impetus, would be seemingly impossible within a strict essentialist worldview (also Fox & Alldred, 2020). By performing transgressions in terms of *going beyond* and *becoming immersed*, posthumanism invites us to abandon all normative, essentialist understandings and to start 'to think *inclusively* [. . .] and *relationally*, radically stretching the boundaries of human' (Ferrando, 2013, p. 8, emphasis added). When it comes to consumption, marketing and consumer culture scholars have thus asserted that it is through the radical contestation and the subsequent reconceptualisation of traditional accounts of the state of being human that the *cyborgian consumer* becomes a possibility (Campbell, 2010; Campbell et al., 2006; Giesler et al., 2009; Giesler & Venkatesh, 2005; Kozinets, 2015; Patsiaouras et al., 2014; Šimůnková, 2019). The cyborgian view would then break away from traditional logocentric grounds where 'consumers are theorized as information processors' (Giesler & Venkatesh, 2005, p. 661), or as disembodied, abstracted consciousnesses (Buchanan-Oliver et al., 2010; Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2013). Equally, a fixed, external social and natural reality – one that can be 'recorded' by an objective, rational, and scientific mind occupying a privileged centre – needs to be occluded (e.g. Giesler & Venkatesh, 2005; Hietanen et al., 2014; Scott et al., 2014). Such traditional narratives are seen to be based on hegemonies of certain knowledge, truth claims, representationalist worldviews, and Cartesian dualistic models of subjectivity that both separate and privilege the mind over the body (Campbell et al., 2010; Giesler & Venkatesh, 2005; Lai, 2012), and which have come to constitute the individualist meaning-centred grounds of consumer research and marketing (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Campbell et al., 2010; Kavanagh, 1994; Scott et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2013).

The general posthumanist tendency in marketing and consumer research scholarship thus steps in to shift the focus from such *narrow*, metaphysically-bounded accounts to much wider historical, socio-cultural and materialist contexts (Bettany & Kerrane, 2011; Buchanan-Oliver et al., 2010; also Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Hill et al., 2014; Šimůnková, 2019). Instead of being approached as disembodied, logical minds who observe from a privileged standpoint outside a quantifiable reality, consumers should be seen as immersed in ever-changing environments from which the strict, formal hierarchies of being, ontological categories, unbreakable boundaries, dualistic models of subjectivity, and causal trajectories are to be gradually redefined. These reconfigurations also contribute to the emergence of a 'hybrid marketplace' (Giesler & Venkatesh, 2005, p. 661), an environment defined as 'a plethora of social, economic and technological systems' (p. 666), which in their increasingly algorithmic form increasingly 'have semi-autonomous "agentic" elements of individual power and influence' (Kozinets, 2015, p. 154). As the limits *within* and *between* its occupants are becoming porous or pierced (Buchanan-Oliver & Cruz, 2015; Buchanan-Oliver et al., 2010), nothing is stable or fixed anymore: neither in terms of the occupier, nor of the occupied environment. As it becomes increasingly difficult to draw a clear, continuous line between the human, the non-human animal, and the machine, between biology and technology, subject and object, culture and nature, the puritan model of the rational consumer (Autio et al., 2011; Bettany & Kerrane, 2011; Šimůnková, 2019) – the infamous *homo economicus* – is increasingly

replaced by an unconscious desiring flow (Bradshaw, 2013; Gabriel, 2015; Hietanen et al., 2019) that is an effect of its technological embodiment (Haraway, 1995; also Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2013; Hietanen & Andéhn, 2018; Kozinets, 2015). It is the *prototypical posthumanist consumer*, a post-Cartesian being (Campbell et al., 2010; Giesler & Venkatesh, 2005) that can finally escape the powerful grip of the H-M restraint and thus *break free* from what is seen to constitute the traditional Western hegemonic canon.

However, we must not conceptually reduce the cyborg to a human-machine dichotomy, nor to yet another representational, essentialized structure. Rather, we should understand that the 'cyborg is a hybrid subject of history offered as part of a new political myth' (Shields, 2006, p. 209; also Patsiaouras et al., 2014). As some marketing researchers have noted, what the figure of the cyborg underlines and celebrates *in the first place* is a perennial sense of unfinishedness (Buchanan-Oliver & Cruz, 2011). Accordingly, following the philosopher Richard Kearney, the cyborg is an actant with *no fixed limits*, a non-essential and non-teleologically-oriented (i.e. not goal-seeking or purposeful) system (also Manoussakis, 2004). Everything about it and the environment it occupies is in flux and thus inherently *incomplete* and thus subject to constant change. Therefore, the cyborg simultaneously *occupies* and *is* the hybrid marketplace matrix; there is no dualistic distance in between (Giesler & Venkatesh, 2005; Kozinets, 2015; Lai, 2012; Šimůnková, 2019). The classical split between the consumer and the commodity is thus to be annulled along with various political spectrums, social divisions, or academic disciplines (also Darmody & Zwick, 2020). This includes *all* traditional accounts, or metanarratives. As such, what is deeply problematised here is not only Western metaphysics – as usually assumed (see Braidotti, 2013b; Herbrechter, 2013; also Campbell et al., 2006; Campbell & Saren, 2010) – but *any* worldview based on *totalities* (see Lyotard, 1984).

A Christian backdrop?

Before diving into the Christianity-posthumanist liaison, there is an additional historical contingency that has to be critically addressed – the one between Christianity and the H-M restraint. Although the origins of Christianity are not foundationally Western, its importance in the formation of Western civilisation can hardly be denied (Pannenberg, 1994; also O'Collins & Farrugia, 2003). Since becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire under Theodosius I (*c*. 347-*c*. 395) (the last emperor to rule over both its Eastern and Western halves), Christianity has influenced what is today known as the West (also Harrison, 2018) in multiple and profound ways. It is thus unsurprising that Lyotard (1993), among others, unequivocally links both modernity and Christianity, and Christianity and the West (also Vattimo, 2002).

With regards to Christian thought, it is no coincidence that Haraway (1991) sees the cyborg as a *blasphemous* creature: one capable of melting, through hybridity and porosity every justification for deeply stratified mutually-reinforcing hierarchies and oppositions underpinning the Christianity-informed, Western onto-epistemological hegemony. Her use of the term represents a specific act of insult and effrontery, a usurpation of divine authority, directed here explicitly against Christian theology as the universal and teleological metanarrative. Indeed, Lyotard (1988) portrays Christianity as the master narrative *par excellence* (also Boeve, 2014). Consequently, marketing research dealing with posthumanist approaches wields the promise of technological development as something that 'can plausibly disintegrate established truths that have underpinned Western

thought for millennia' (Campbell et al., 2006, p. 349), and that could create entirely new paradigms while investigating and revising the traditional accounts of existence (Campbell & Saren, 2010; Kozinets, 2015). Indeed, we are beginning to realise that technology 'replaced religion and psychology as the main source of models for how the mind, body, and universe work' (Campbell et al., 2010, p. 91), for dismantling the ideological straightjacket woven by the H-M restraint throughout the seven centuries following the Renaissance. This commonly includes a secular, that is, anti-metaphysical, stance in posthumanist scholarship; one that generally eschews 'superstitions' of yore that are seen to be part and parcel with old forms of thought privileging the human, traditional representations of 'truth', and natural standpoints (see Haraway, 1991).

While we do not disagree with the theorising outlined above, we also believe that subtler forces than surface ideologies are at play here. What we suggest instead is that the growing interest in the various posthumanist tendencies exhibited by marketing and consumer research scholars is *not* necessarily dictated primarily by a tendency to jump on the bandwagon of the new 'cool' things coming from other social sciences or humanities (Bode & Østergaard, 2013; Cova et al., 2013; Patterson et al., 2008). Rather, we claim that the adoption bares striking similarity to age-old theological ideas. If it is true that posthumanism represents the more or less pragmatic expression of an elusive and paradoxical theological system, then the active efforts of scholars to abandon a dogmatic and ideological straitjacket have far more complex underpinnings than seem to be acknowledged at the moment.

Theological underpinnings and their presences and absences

What theology?

At first glance, the heretical positions against all totalities purported by various forms of anti-essentialist theorising, in particular its self-purportedly secularist posthumanist variant, would seem to undermine every possible argument for the legitimacy of a discipline such as *theology*. Equally, for popular critics advocating empiricist scientific positions, theology should have no place in the university (e.g. Dawkins, 2007). Similarly, from a marketing viewpoint, theology departments are not especially known for their keen interest in popular culture or consumption, nor for their deep, enthusiastic involvement in the world of technological innovations. Yet, while not particularly prolific, interest in theological, religious and spiritual issues is far from absent in marketing and consumer research (see Belk & Tumbat, 2005; Benton, 2014; Brown et al., 1997; Cruz et al., 2018; Engelland, 2014; Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019). However, what usually falls under scrutiny is the way in which various religious or spiritual beliefs can be marketed and marketised (e.g. Abela, 2014; Culliton, 1959), and how they shape consumers' behaviour with regards to commodities and the market, both in the West (e.g. McAlexander et al., 2014; O'Guinn & Belk, 1989; Rinallo et al., 2012; Suddaby, 2019) and beyond (e.g. Choudhury, 2014; Cleveland et al., 2013; Jafari & Süerdem, 2012; Sandıkcı & Jafari, 2013). Apart from Brown et al. (1996, 1997) edited volumes that focused on more abstract concepts such as eschatology and apocalypse, the question of how Christian theology shapes the mentioned fields *themselves* and *not* the objects of their study has received relatively scant interest.

To provide further inspiration for our quest, Drenten and McManus (2015, p. 9) remarked that 'future research should challenge and refine the conceptual underpinnings of religion', and Iacobucci (2001, p. 111) in her meticulous study of biblical expression called marketing scholarship to 'occasionally "entertain angels" and study the [...] sublime, exquisite, and mystical'. This echoes Kavanagh's (1994) earlier suggestion that if marketing is to provide any new insights, it should broaden its conceptual tools and frameworks by taking a further interest in philosophy of science, technology, and theology. Recently, albeit in the context of methodological otherness, Ozanne and Appau (2019) also advised that we 'cannot successfully problematise negative aspects of the consumption of spirituality unless we first grasp how they understand their world' (p. 463–464). While their perspective was to reflexively explore unfamiliar worldviews, we wish to instead turn this gaze inwards, if only to find a hopefully striking speculative account.

According to some of the most authoritative dictionaries of the English language (Macmillan, Merriam-Webster, and Cambridge), theology is conceptually the study of religion and religious belief and a set of beliefs shared *within* a particular religion. In the present study, we define Christian theology in the broadest sense as something more than simply a devout discourse on which diverse religious practices are based (also Botez, 2017). When adopted, it has the potential to influence entire horizons of thought and how the world is foundationally perceived (Botez & Hietanen, 2017), to the way contemporary, digital technological gadgetry functions and is used (Botez, 2017; Hicks, 2012). Importantly, we argue that while some of Christianity's core dogmas are not subject to discussion, today – especially outside of recognisably faith-related environments and institutions – obedience to these dogmas is never imposed as such. Rather, it is normalised in culture and, especially in the West, has come to bear the guise of unlimited freedom, encouraging unbounded creativity (both artistic and intellectual), and constant dismantling of hierarchical stratifications.

The Christian faith would at first seem to be antithetical to postmodernism, and/or to any other non-representational paradigm – posthumanism included. Although Lyotard's (1984) *The Postmodern Condition* starts with a rather restrained incredulity, it ends with a more active notion: 'Let us wage a war on totality' (p. 82), which would include Christianity and its teleological drive that would have to be 'subject to eventual cancellation' (p. 66) at any given moment. Given all this, how can the argument that Christian theology might play an important role in the rise of profoundly anti-essentialist posthumanist thought still be made? We argue that the two approaches have to be taken together. In our view, Christianity is *simultaneously* a metanarrative *and* a counter-totality in the way Nietzsche (1967) recognised its paradoxical core. As he noted, what is generally and popularly considered as defining the very essence of Christianity represents the very opposite of it: all 'that which is Christian in the ecclesiastical sense is anti-Christian in essence [...] Utter indifference to dogmas, cults, priests, church, theology is Christian' (p. 98). There is no other religion[2] that spreads *through its own denial* in the way that Christianity does on a dogmatic level. In the following section, we will try to unpack these paradoxes further.

The non-dialectical workings of dogma

In order to assess how Christian theology shapes the fields of marketing and consumer research, we follow Böhme's (2014) distinction between theological *present absences* and

present presences in contemporary culture. The present presences are those which are prone to identification and can thus be categorised normatively in language, and are thus generally representational in nature. Paraphrasing Nietzsche (1967), we can enumerate here that which is readily observable in the form of cults, rituals, priests, or foundational texts: the very things marketing and consumer research literature has typically been focusing on and engaging with. The absences, on the other hand, are generally non-representational in nature: implicit culture-bound worldviews that escape immediate identification. They define Christianity as a whole beyond its confessional, cultural, linguistic, or political fragmentation.

To be clear, and in the same manner as posthumanist scholarship, we are *not* suggesting that Christianity is a monolithic structure. It would be absolutely incongruous to see it as such given its undeniable diversity and global reach. Today, after two millennia, to pronounce Christianity in the singular is to invite incredulity, as there are countless Christianities out there (Anidjar, 2015; Kim & Kim, 2016). There are countless versions of the Bible too (Pelikan, 2005), each bearing the marks of local, cultural expressions that can vary widely from one to another (also Paden, 1996). Accordingly, while followers of a given expression might strongly disagree, none of these forms are to be seen as foundational or a paradigmatic expression of 'true' Christianity. From a scientific, secular perspective the same goes for all religions (Paden, 1996). Nonetheless, while fully recognising this allegedly infinite spectrum of local Christian expressions and experiences, we are suggesting that there is also something that characterises this particular religion as a whole.

This elusive core of Christianity, or the common ideological elements that make up a given politico-historical and cultural expression 'Christian' (e.g. Protestantism, Catholicism, Anglicanism and so on), does not tend to change from one expression to another, but continues to remain relatively consistent. They can only become understandable through an analysis of its persistent *present absences* (also Botez, 2017). Often attributed to Augustine (e.g. Schaff, 1906), this can be summarised by the motto of *in necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas*, which can be translated as *in essentials, unity, in non-essentials, liberty*. Unity concerns the dogmatic essences or non-negotiable present absences, while liberty concerns the ever-changing practices of present presences. The core can function even when the present presences are openly and constantly modified in ritualistic practice.

To be clear, present absences have nothing to do with the things people almost instinctively associate with Christianity: Jesus, the Bible, the Credo, or taking part in the rituals of Sunday mass. Christianity, from its inception, was largely founded on the overturning of ancient Greek worldviews. Thus, one core absence in Christian dogma is its *foundational and total denial of the cornerstones of the ancient Greek worldview*, including any other similar structures present in whichever culture (e.g. Eusebius of Caesarea, 2006; also Botez, 2017; Dales, 1980). The rejection of the Hellenistic *doctrine of essences* by Christian thinkers was based on the fact that, unlike various ancient Greek polytheistic systems, Christianity is grounded in monotheism. For thinkers like Aristotle, Plato, and others, the essential Forms were eternal, divine structures in and of themselves, basically indistinguishable from the Gods (Lucretius, 1924; Vlastos, 1991). In turn, the ancient scientific endeavour, which presupposed the acquisition of certain knowledge about specific issues, was predicated on the fact that these Ideas, the essences, were present

within the fluctuating appearances and were fully reachable and knowable (Aristotle, 1933, 1960; Feke, 2012). Indeed, as Aristotle noted, 'there will be Forms of all things of which there are sciences' (Aristotle, 1933, p. 63) and, thus, 'it is obvious that there can be no science of the appearances' (p. 304, modified translation).

Given that the recognition of such Forms within various Hellenistic Schools (Aristotle's, Plato's and so on) influenced the experience of the world at all levels from the technological to the political to the linguistic (Long, 2011; Sinisgalli, 2012), their denial by early Christian thinkers triggered, in Foucault's (2002) words, 'an immense reorganization of culture' (p. 48). Radical re-evaluations or retranslations had to be undertaken in order to realign the entire reality to a narrative that no longer recognises the existence of the Hellenistic essences. Accordingly, giving that Christianity is a proselytising faith (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15), these present absences are to be extended to *all* other worldviews based on essentialist, formal understandings: paradigms otherwise known as 'totalities' (also Lyotard, 1988).

Within Christianity, the fact that God's essence, or 'that which is always the same, neither increasing nor diminishing, immutable to all change [...] standing in need of nothing else, alone desirable' (Gregory of Nyssa, 1978, p. 60) remains forever unknowable and inaccessible represents a very important theological issue for a number of reasons (Branson, 2014; Chrysostom, 1984). The first is that it defines the relationship between the divine and the human, the latter being created in the image and likeness of the former (Genesis 1:26). In other words, the human is created in the image and likeness of a God with an *unknown* essence. The *essence* was for the Hellenistic philosophers the warrant of certain knowledge. Within Christianity this no longer holds. When it comes to the created things, essence is 'in absolutely *none* of them' (Gregory of Nyssa, 1978, p. 60, emphasis added). Quoting Nyssa, Ward (2000), a leading contemporary Anglican theologian, noted that to experience the world in this way:

> is to experience a profound vertigo. For here there is nothing to take hold of [...] neither measure nor anything else [...] And thus the soul, slipping at every point from what cannot be grasped, becomes dizzy and perplexed (p. 91)

An essenceless world is, in-itself, one without identity and intelligibility; it is an endlessly malleable one, one that posits change and transgression over essential fixity. It is also a world in which nothing can be known with definite certainty. This also marks the inception of a non-dialectic of becoming: there is no essential structure (unconscious or otherwise), a secure starting point, or a grounding of necessity. A connection with this theological worldview and more recent non-representational, post-structuralist thinkers, such as Deleuze and Derrida, has also been found in philosophical literature (e.g. Günzel, 1998; Hickey-Moody, 2015).

An additional number of important issues arise from the above core notions and definitions. The first is that these views require strict obedience: as dogma they are non-negotiable. Second, they do not need to be expressed in theological parlance or solely within religious contexts and can thus manifest silently and unconsciously in the cultural background (Augustine of Hipo, 1955; Dales, 1980). Third, because the source of meaning becomes *external* to the contemplated issue there is no *intrinsic* quality or value in anything. In this context, one is enticed to remember the postmodern denial of intrinsic values and grand narratives. It is indeed unsurprising that key Christian thinkers are at

times approached as being the ones who laid the groundwork for 'the fundamental emphasis on the gap between signifier and signified that unites the many disparate "schools" of post-modern [...] theory' (Mosshammer, 1989, p. 122). The main issue here is that the absent essences are *always* off limits: in language, in scientific endeavours, in societal structuring, in defining what it means to be a human, and so on.

Without essences, and without access to the one remaining essence (God's), the question of how (something *appears*) generally replaces the question of why (something *is*). Description supplants explanation. In other words, the focus changes from the fixed *essence* to the fluctuating *appearance* (Maspero, 2010). In this sense, non-representational paradigms and the posthuman consumer echo Christian ontology in that it never concerns itself with reaching and fully knowing the essence, which is to say that, at the most fundamental dogmatic level, there is no tenable distinction between ontology and epistemology anymore (cf., Giesler & Venkatesh, 2005; also Hietanen et al., 2014). Indeed, as Basil of Caesarea (330–379), one of the most influential theologians in the history of the Church noted, we should 'depart from what concerns the essences [of things ... as] we are ignorant about the essential nature of the becoming' (Basil of Caesarea, 1886, p. 28, translation by author), and thus we will *never* arrive at an essential core self, or identity (also Rasmussen, 2013), one that lurks 'outside (or beneath)' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966, p. 252) 'the temporal and local' (Lévi-Strauss, 1974, p. 293).

According to Gregory of Nyssa (*c*. 335-*c*. 394), the non-essential Christian subject's hope of salvation equates to his capacity for *perennial reconstitution* (see Douglass, 2005). If we are to translate the above points to marketing and consumer research parlance, we might say that the trope of *salvation as perennial reconstitution* happens through consumption. The ever-changing appearances, the only elements that can be addressed and changed, are thus expressions of endless fashion, design, and other similar consumption choices (also Kent, 1996). Returning to our definition of the cyborg as an unfinished emergence that comes to both occupy and constitute the market, we can see how the dogmatic formulas of the present absences resemble contemporary expressions that are increasingly *de rigueur* within business schools across the globe.[3] The question then becomes: if the founding thinkers of Christianity defined the human as perennial incompleteness, how is it that a local expression of this theology including the H-M restraint came to be known as the pinnacle of essentialism, hierarchical, racial, and gender-based exclusions and prejudices – something that even marketing scholars are now keen to break free from?

Who's afraid of the H-M restraint?

One of the core reasons behind the adoption of various posthumanist perspectives by marketing and consumer research scholars is to find alternatives to the oppressive straitjacket that characterises the hegemonic H-M restraint. However, if we go back to its original sources, the ideals of this quest increasingly align themselves to the main tenets of the present absences of Christian dogma. The question becomes: Is the H-M restraint something to be dismantled, or does it itself create the conditions needed for perpetual dismantling, something in a continuous need of dusting?

With the risk of oversimplifying many historical contingencies, the present absences codified by key early Christian thinkers were adopted during the Renaissance period by

various leading humanists of the time. As the great scholar Pico della Mirandola (1463–-1494) suggested in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486), a document considered as the manifesto of Renaissance humanism (Borghesi, 2012), the human being does not have a nature or essence of its own. As Pico wrote, God addresses the newly created Adam thus:

> We have given to thee, Adam, no fixed seat, no form of thy very own, no gift peculiarly thine, that thou mayest feel as thine own, have as thine own, possess as thine own the seat, the form, the gifts which thou thyself shalt desire (Pico Della Mirandola, 1486/1998, p. 4)

Adam is then advised that:

> thou wilt fix limits of nature for thyself [. . .] Thou [. . .] art the molder and maker of thyself; thou mayest sculpt thyself into whatever shape thou dost prefer (p. 5)

What becomes clear in Pico's *Oration* is that 'our nature is that we have no nature' (Hauskeller, 2013, p. 83), or no essence. If indeed this text is to be approached as the manifesto of the Renaissance, then we can again see how notions of the human body 'as the seat of identity, a classic humanist assumption' (Campbell, 2012, p. 41) become increasingly problematic.

This brings us to consider the relation between modernity and the H-M restraint. As is generally accepted, the emergence of what is today called modern science occurred during the early modern period (ca. 1500), challenging the still dominant Hellenistic understandings of the world (Harrison, 2007). For example, Aristotelian views on scientific endeavour were relatively straightforward: certain knowledge equals knowledge of the primary, or final causes (Aristotle, 1960). Within Christianity, however, the Forms, or the final causes, have to be hunted down and banished from everywhere. And they were.

The scientific method and empirical approaches have ever since developed to constitute the gold standard for exploring the natural world. For our argument here, it is important to assess the ways in which the present absences may have contributed to the theorising of the scientific method. Through his method of inquiry, Francis Bacon (1561–-1626) reformulates and functionally transforms Aristotle's foundationalist conception of science as certain knowledge of the primary, or final causes (see Aristotle, 1960). As Bacon noted in his *The New Organon* (Bacon, 1860), 'a classic considered to be the great herald of the modern mind' (Almeida, 2009, p. 78), inquiring into the essences of things is nothing but the 'mark of an inept and superficial thinker', a 'crass and cumbrous superstition', or 'a disease of the intellect' (Bacon, 2000, pp. 44, 53). As he continues, such a folly 'needs to be checked and stifled' (p. 53) from the scientific endeavour. In other words, one way of distinguishing between science and non-science is by recognising that the former rejects *any* search for essences, primary, or final causes (hence its indefinite *falsifiability*). Accordingly, the English thinker sees the classical deductive method of reasoning, which Aristotle is sometimes seen as the father of (see Perelman, 1986), as 'the parent of error and the curse of all science' (Bacon, 1860, p. 70).

Bacon's contemporary, Descartes, the *bête noire* of many non-representational or posthumanist marketing scholars, followed the exact same route as his English counterpart. Descartes' ideal of science involved a different conception of truth, of language, and of what it means to the human (see Ijsseling, 1976). Undoubtedly, there are significant differences between Bacon's and Descartes' models. However, if we are to transverse the present presences into the present absences, things may start to look eerily similar again.

Indeed, as Descartes noted, 'we shall *entirely banish* from our philosophy the search for final causes' (Descartes, 1985, p. 202, emphasis added). To paraphrase Augustine: renounce essences, then continue to always seek newness.

Let us add one more *bête noire* next to Descartes: Auguste Comte (1798–1857), who is also today remembered as the founder of logical positivism. The utilitarian thinker Mill (1891) noted that:

> [t]he fundamental doctrine of a true philosophy, according to Comte [. . .] is the following: We have no knowledge of anything but Phænomena; and our knowledge of phænomena is relative, not absolute. We know not the essence [. . .] of any fact, but only its relations to other facts in the way of succession or of similitude [. . .] Their (phenomena's) essential nature, and their ultimate causes [. . .] are unknown and inscrutable to us. (p. 6)

Now, of course, the scientific method has been in continuous change in the last 400 years since Bacon. One thing that seems to persist however, being valid across the cultural spectrum as well (wherever science is practiced, be that Finland, China, or Kenya), is that there remains a specific interdiction against looking for essential properties, or, paraphrasing Marx, other 'metaphysical niceties'.

Now, is the banishment of essential properties just a happenstance shared assumption between very distinct modes of thought, the theological orders and empirical scientific reasoning? Or is there is a *direct influence* between the two? In other words, are we witnessing a coincidence, or a far more intertwined contingency? In his text *The Advancement of Learning*, Bacon made it very clear that his method of inquiry stands in stark opposition to the ones designed by the 'heathens'. The 'heathen opinion differeth from the sacred truth' (Bacon, 1826, p. 95), he noted, in that the former was focused on idolatrous essentialist representation. His approach, based on 'the Scriptures', is to be 'induced and inforced' over all others, it being 'the proper remedy to be applied for the keeping off and clearing away of idols' (Bacon, 1860, p. 54). As we noted, the extraordinary paradox at the core of Christianity is that it is simultaneously a metanarrative *and* a counter-totality. While firmly grounding his method on the Scriptures, Bacon *simultaneously* urges his followers to keep metaphysics, religion, and philosophy out of science (see Bacon, 2000), as these systems are likely to create superstitious, idolatrous, or representational reasoning (also Botez & Hietanen, 2017). Put differently, metaphysics and religion are to be kept out of science not *despite* of him grounding it on the Scripture, but *because* of it. While the secondary, regional points represented by the present presences, are subjected to discussions and constant changes, the core dogmas, or the present absences, remain consistent in the cultural background. There is, however, a fundamental distinction that sets Christianity apart from virtually any other similar systems: *it denies its own foundations*.

We argue that what we are addressing is a *strange* historical contingency. It works in such a way that the effect annihilates its premises, and thus tracing the effect back to its cause becomes very problematic. In this way, Christianity-as-metanarrative annihilates itself as the root by denying the search for essential properties, and thus a historical tracing of itself becomes unnecessary. Accordingly, it is only Christianity-as-counter-totality that remains accessible, and to be used as a tool for dismantling all other totalities – including itself. John Chrysostom (*c*. 349-*c*. 407), one of the most influential Christian thinkers, addressed this paradox early on, noting that it is God himself that shut

us off from the knowledge of fixed, eternal essences, and does so in order to persuade us to remain within the empirical, immanent sphere of becoming and not to waste time with matters which will forever be beyond our reach (Chrysostom, 1984; also Douglass, 2005). Those matters include God, too. As Chesterton (1909) noted, there is 'only one religion in which God seemed for an instant to be an atheist' (p. 255). Žižek (2017), a century later, noted as well that this tendency is indeed something unique to Christianity, and cannot be found in any other religious system. For him, what we find in other religions is people who abandon God and/or vice versa, but nowhere else do we find a God who is seemingly keen to abandon himself. Derrida (2005), too, recognised these extraordinary paradoxes at the core of Christianity. As he noted, '[o]nly Christianity can do this work (of deconstruction), that is, undo it while doing it' (p. 54). Thus, de-christianisation (or any other de-totalisation) that happens through various forms of deconstruction is nothing but 'a Christian victory' (p. 54).

Following a historical-theological reading, it would thus seem that despite their sophistication in regards to the analyses dedicated to the present and the future of technology, humanity, and consumption, the way in which the H-M restraint is approached remains historically problematic in the posthuman tendencies of marketing and consumer research scholarship. Akin to how the *present absences* can still motivate empirical science by disappearing into its apparent secularism,[4] it would rather seem that far from being an empowering and progressive movement that breaks open from all sorts of hegemonic straitjackets, posthumanism represents, on the contrary, a *radical narrative closely akin to the origins of Christianity*.[5] Our suggestions are not some sort of contemporary, postmodern, or heretical take on theology but, as Chesterton (1909) observed, 'the essentials of the old orthodoxy' (p. 255), one that is not foundationally Western in the least.

Our point is that once the present absences are embraced, if only implicitly, they become translated into representational present presences without necessarily being recognised as being the cause of a dogmatic necessity. It is indeed very difficult, if not altogether impossible, to stand against something that recognises neither limits, nor essences, *especially* when those claiming to stand against it – that is, the *heretics* (Levy, 2002; Schembri & Firat, 2017; also Cova et al., 2013) – are themselves deconstructing limits, essences, and totalities. As Derrida (1981) himself noted, deconstruction is indeed 'an immense and interminable work' (p. 35).

The (endless) fight for the survival of technological optimism

Giving conceptual life to posthuman markets and the cyborgian consumer by irrevocably decentring the sovereign subject and immersing it to perpetual flows of non-representational becoming is one thing. Keeping its idea alive in practice is another. As we have already noted, the cyborg demands a relational ontology that is completely devoid of identity, and thus there are no privileged places of cyborgian observation, nor stable spaces of any permanent essence. The exposure of the cyborg in emergent flows should be total in order to allow pure becoming without meaning or representation. In theory, this seems to be quite readily articulable, but in practice, however, it is very difficult to achieve a status of *total* immanence, immersiveness, and connectivity (also Brassier, 2010; Šimůnková, 2019). One reason is that the old, burning need for certainty

and meaning always gets in the way. With access to the essential side of reality being denied, the need tends to get transferred to the phenomenal appearances themselves – technology included.

As many forms of posthumanist literature tend to maintain, technology has the potential to disintegrate established truths that underpin the existing 'totalities', or the metanarratives, exposing them for what they actually are: socially constructed codes and not icons of any natural orders of things. Technology can thus spread across social contexts, cultures, and languages. In other words, technology is seen as an opportunity for breaking down binary oppositions that carry essentialist notions such as class (neither slave nor free), race/ethnicity (neither Jew nor Greek), and gender (neither male nor female) (Botez, 2017; see Buchanan-Oliver & Cruz, 2011, 2015; Fox & Alldred, 2018; Giesler & Venkatesh, 2005). Yet, from a theological perspective, the spreading of technologies simultaneously marks the continuous dissemination of present absences across the globe (Botez, 2017; also Linturi, 2015; Noble, 1999).

However, with access to the essential side of reality being denied, the need for certainty, security and meaning tends to get transferred to the phenomenal appearances themselves. Although technology helps greatly in the diffusion of the present absences at first, in time it seems to irresistibly turn against them under human control and capitalist profiteering (also Darmody & Zwick, 2020; Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2013; Hietanen & Andéhn, 2018). The danger of technologies falling back into media that support normative structures and essentialist fixity in contemporary culture is a very real one. At any given moment the idea of the cyborgian consumer might be again pulled out of the perpetual flows and morph back into an abstract, historical consciousness occupying a privileged place. Ironically, this happens through the *rigidification* of the very same technologies that bear the power to disintegrate such places, social media being a prime example. When that happens, the heretical *Homo economicus*, or the sovereign subject returns, while the *cyborgian consumer* is again in peril.[6]

As of late, some of the main technologies that are seen to enable and facilitate the rise of the cyborgian consumer – cyberspace and the Internet – have themselves come under critical scrutiny as they have allegedly failed in their original mission of liberating the subject from the supposedly constraining forces of a range of essentialist assumptions (see Arvidsson, 2016; Cluley & Brown, 2015; Hietanen & Andéhn, 2018; Zwick & Dholakia, 2004). As it appears, the once liberating global connectivity has increasingly become the 'world-wide cage', with social media now driving socially closed bubbles and echo chambers that create tribal environments (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Carr, 2016; Frimer et al., 2017), and algorithmic systems inducing increasing societal control (e.g. Bridle, 2019; Bueno, 2020; Faraj et al., 2018; Šimůnková, 2019). Within these cloisters, the posthumanist relational ideal turns back to essentialized representations, and thus the optimistic view of the cyborgian consumer cannot survive.

Recently, Facebook started to follow Twitter and Google in their capacity of turning our digital social existence 'into a huge echo chamber [. . .] and miserably fail[ing] to penetrate other social bubbles' (El-Bermawy, 2016, p. n/a). As a result, the largest social media platform in the world has become the epitome of isolation rather than social change through increased participation and inclusion (Carr, 2016). Unsurprisingly, Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web, argued that the WWW needs to be *saved* (Berners-Lee, 2017) from *becoming a limit*. As it happens, these technologies seem to have

become yet another straitjacket from which the cyborg has to be rescued. Thus, markets and consumption practices (which are both present presences) *ought to again be brought back closer to the present absences*. One way to do this is by moving away from the controlling, so-called authoritarian dictatorship of the sovereign states or the large corporations which killed the Internet (Staltz, 2017; VanDerWerff, 2015) by transforming it into 'a series of sealed wells' (Marsh, 2016, p. n/a).

One of the proposed solutions can be heard in the voices calling for the conceptualisation of more de-essentialized and de-centralised digital infrastructures – 'blockchain' being probably the most well-known recent example (Evans, 2015; Marsh, 2017; Tomasicchio, 2016). As it has been repeatedly pointed out in the popular media, the increasing centralisation of the Internet (Turk, 2018), one 'dominated by four or five huge companies with unprecedented power and capital' (Baker, 2017, p. n/a), clearly stands against the views shared by the Internet pioneers (Barlow, 1996). Nevertheless, in a similar vein to the Renaissance and Modernist thinkers, their views coincide with the requirements defined by the present absences; the cyborgian consumer's world should be one of non-hierarchical, horizontal organising (Harvey, 2012), one of 'commons', a non-exclusionary 'level playing field where everyone's voice would be heard, ungoverned by national' (Baker, 2017, p. n/a) laws or corporate norms. However, instead of a level playing field we now find ourselves in a situation of monopolies, paywalls, state censorship, and gatekeepers – online Russian collusion with the Trump presidency, the Cambridge Analytica scandal of Facebook opinion manipulation and biopolitical face recognition serving as examples among others (also Bueno, 2020).

Discussion: a tentative cartography of absence in posthuman marketing scholarship

The purpose of this study was not to propose another model that would claim precedence, but to critically assess the ongoing adoption of various posthumanist influences into the fields of marketing and consumer research from a theological perspective. We outlined our approach not *by adopting* theology into novel forms of marketing scholarship, but by drawing conceptual attention to the theology which is *already there* (also Taylor, 2001), ubiquitous in its disappearance and constant self-denial, most notably in the ways in which the emerging scholarship in the noted academic areas defines its methods, contexts, and goals. As an interesting parallel, Darmody and Zwick (2020) recently noted how marketing, as it becomes increasingly guided by algorithmic mediation, is undertaking a similar process of *proliferating through disappearing* into the system.

As we have noted, shedding light on how theological reflections thought long lost share much in common with various posthumanist anti-essentialist approaches can also inform us how marketing scholarship is always seeking conceptual novelty (e.g. Patterson et al., 2008) in a historical sense. In the literature, these frameworks are generally seen to hold the promise of disrupting and breaking age-old hegemonic narratives and thus tend to constitute a liberatory potential. This is articulated as taking place through the denial of dualistic models, teleological trajectories, and formal hierarchies linked to totalising frames of thinking and thus notions such as patriarchy and colonialism (e.g. Fox & Alldred, 2020). Approaching the issue theologically suggests caution. While disruption on the level of scholarly practice undoubtedly occurs, the presumed liberation from the

hegemonic straightjacket of a far more elusive dogmatic system remains suspect. In fact, in a very counterintuitive fashion, the very opposite may well be taking place: the more and the faster the deconstructive disruption (Derrida, 2002) occurs, the less the threat of liberation occurring, at least if one is to indeed attempt to break out of age-old Christian metanarrative as an undergirding ideological totality. However, the two tend to get conflated in the literature, where deconstructive disruption equals potential for emancipation. As a result, marketing and consumer research scholars who employ posthumanist tendencies may indeed implicitly herald a far more elusive hegemonic narrative than the one they claim to be dismantling.

There are, of course, some leading critical voices that were signalling this particular situation decades ago. In their highly influential work that has come to inform marketing scholarship as well (see Arvidsson, 2005; Cova & Dalli, 2009; Dholakia, 2012; Wood & Ball, 2013), Hardt and Negri (2000) unveil the structure of a homonym system that also bears a striking resemblance to the Christian model introduced above. As they noted, this hidden and abstract but rhizomatically spreading *Empire*, as a new form of distributed global dominance that breaks away from modernist imperialism, is built on an 'anti-foundational foundation' (p. 203), and is not defined by teleological trajectories. Following this, the imperial model remains 'always incomplete' (p. 199), 'impure', and 'hybrid' (p. 202), dominated by 'elusive, proliferating, and nonlocalizable' (p. 201) contradictions and paradoxes. Its spreading strategy is not the old 'divide and conquer' anymore, but it disseminates by allegedly recognising, embracing, and celebrating existing or potential differences. Its unique 'anti-foundational foundation' allows the Empire to perform a number of remarkable functions, such as being 'always renewed and always re-created' (p. 167) in its expansion. The spreading nature of the Empire is thus not defined by a closure, but strikingly by the opposite: it is the very definition of openness, democracy, unlimited freedom, and peace. As it proliferates through disappearing, it is very difficult to sense or detect. Because of this, the employed paradigms 'that appear to be liberatory', such as posthumanism, are not challenging 'but in fact coincide with and even unwittingly reinforce the new strategies of rule!' (p. 138). Yet, while Hardt and Negri go on to posit the idea of the Empire as a rhizomatic hegemony *that is both 'new' and Western*, a theological analysis of the present absences would suggest otherwise. As paradoxical as it might sound, the Hardt and Negri's model of the Empire is not necessarily at odds with the sovereign enclosure; it is simultaneously both of the same coin, both the implicit rule and also the demand to keep constantly reworking it, as it was from the perspective of the present absences. Similarly, while we defined the sovereign subject as 'heretical', it and its cyborgian counterpart are sharing (at least) one commonality: a perennially perfectible, quantifiable self (also Ashman et al., 2017). This explains why some posthumanists can also be nationalists, communitarianists or other type of localists (Serna, 2012; Zoltan, 2015).

It is indeed very difficult, if not altogether impossible, to stand against non-representational forces that recognise neither limits, nor essences, especially when those claiming defiance are themselves deconstructing limits, essences, and totalities. As we have tried to show, what strategies such as postmodernist, postcolonialist and, of course posthumanist are unwittingly reinforcing is not new, Eurocentric, or even inherently Western. In an ironic twist, the representational, inherited forms of power these critical theorists have taken such pains to contest were never embraced by Christianity

(more specifically, from its present absences' perspective), but constantly fought against. Accordingly, the posthuman differential hierarchies of the hybrid and fragmentary non-essentialist subjectivities parallel this religious system, as well as resembling the Empire. How such a deeply paradoxical structure can be challenged remains a question that is rarely asked in marketing or consumer research. One reason for such a silence is that in order to address the issue, one needs to bring in theology, which still tends to be largely seen as an epiphenomenon in marketing scholarship.

Coinciding with posthuman scholarship and proliferating consumer technologies such as global online connectivity, the present absences continue to function by simultaneously *dismantling and reconstructing* the H-M restraint at an ever-increasing speed. In their erasure, the absences proliferate everywhere. The consumer cyborg and the hybrid marketplace matrix must be constantly saved from hierarchies that stratify online connectivity and are thus constantly re-immersed in the perpetual flows, or other forms of technological mutations and morphological alterations that define the essenceless structure of embodied reality. So, as it appears, the proposed post-Cartesian, non-linear, rhizomatic, and many other types of non-representational, anti-essentialist, or anti-Modernist and anti-humanistic frameworks are not doing the desired job of truly heralding heresy, but instead they have the potential to proliferate an age-old hegemonic straightjacket further, particularly if understood from the perspective of Christian dogma. Thus, across the globe, every time a class in marketing and consumer research is taught from these perspectives (Bradshaw & Tadajewski, 2011), or a paper or a book chapter is published, there is the potential to further disseminate an Empire (to use Hardt and Negri's vocabulary). In this sense, our sensitising effort to put Christianity on the conceptual map of the grand array of posthumanist tendencies in marketing and consumer research is necessarily diagnostic only. Even more so, from the perspective of implicit dogma such efforts *should* remain, indeterminately, something that can only gleam in the margins.

Notes

1. While posthumanist scholarship indeed ranges from technological promethianism to animist and ecological views founded on feminist and postcolonialist critique (e.g. Åsberg & Braidotti, 2018; Haraway, 2015; Tsing, 2015), we attempt to focus on some of their onto-epistemological similarities. While posthumanism in marketing and consumer research has also covered diverse approaches from feminism to deep ecology (Bettany & Kerrane, 2011; Campbell, 2010), we focus here on the more general interest the literature has shown to a post-Cartesian ontology of the consumer and the hybridisation of markets, commodities, and embodied technologies.
2. Apart perhaps from the creatively destructive and the mutational forms of capitalism (also Zwick, 2018) if *religion* can be seen here conceptually in its broadest sense.
3. From lifetime learning and perennial marketisation of education (Raich et al., 2019), aspirations to increasingly replace teachers with technologies (e.g. Mullarkey, 2016), to heavy investments in artificial intelligence (Murray, 2018; De Novellis, 2018), business school management is increasingly looking into the augmentation of the human condition via means of commodifiable technologies that could move us perennially beyond ourselves.
4. On this matter we had the opportunity to have an interesting conversation with one Reviewer, who insisted that positivistic or 'quantitative approaches' are deeply invested in uncovering 'essential properties'. This, of course, would completely neglect the whole

doctrine of *falsifiability* of the entire edifice of the scientific endeavour. On the contrary, it is only when something is rendered 'un-falsifiable' that it stops being part of the scientific narrative altogether. *T*ruth only manifests when there is metaphysics that deny the very possibility of alternatives.

5. 'Radical', here, points to its original sense of being towards roots or a purified original position (see Botez & Hietanen, 2017).
6. As examples, there is continuous controversy over the promises and possibilities of genetically modifying humans (Regalado, 2019). Equally, we can see this happening in real time with the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak: the powerful return of the sovereign state brings back with it the sovereign subject as well.

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