

# Rethinking ‘marketing as applied economics’

**Mark Tadajewski** 

University of York, York, UK; Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, UK

Marketing Theory  
2022, Vol. 22(4) 643–665  
© The Author(s) 2022



Article reuse guidelines:

[sagepub.com/journals-permissions](https://sagepub.com/journals-permissions)

DOI: 10.1177/14705931221114170

[journals.sagepub.com/home/mtq](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/mtq)



## Abstract

This paper makes three intertwined arguments. Firstly, marketing is not simply an outgrowth of economics. Secondly, it is indebted to metaphysical, psychical and psychological research which provided the conditions of possibility for theorising marketplace interaction in our early history. Thirdly, marketing thinking has been and remains inflected by a position labelled ‘practical idealism’. It is a contrast to the ‘practical realism’ which also subtends our discipline. Adopting a genealogical approach, we explicate the threads of practical idealism weaved across Prentice Mulford, Thomson J. Hudson and A.F. Sheldon’s prominent works. Mulford provides the contours of the intellectual landscape. Hudson extends Mulford’s assumption grounds. Sheldon combines the articulations of Mulford, Hudson and studies in psychical research, outlining the viability of hypnosis and telepathy in sales practice. To distance itself from hypnosis and associations of manipulation, ‘suggestion’ was the epistemological-political replacement promoted by marketing theorists. Discursive transmutation was achieved through *epistemological deviation*. Epistemological deviation is conceptualised as the dismissal of and disengagement from a theoretical or hypothetical account without the consideration of appropriate evidence. W.D. Scott’s treatment of telepathy is an exemplar of epistemological deviation. It is a complete departure from the tenets of intellectual inquiry. What this means is that the promotion of psychology into marketing was accomplished – in part – by the abdication of critical reflection and not by its extension.

## Keywords

Marketing theory, psychical research, sales management, hypnosis, telepathy, suggestion, choice

## Introduction

It is a commonplace to argue that marketing developed out of economics. Kumar (2015: 2) asserts that the ‘predominant’ perspective until 1945 positioned marketing as a variant of ‘applied economics’; Yadav (2017), Ferrell (2018), Ferrell et al. (2015) and Key et al. (2020) agree with this view. Linked to this is the notion that the consumer was conceptualised as ‘rational man’ until

---

### Corresponding author:

Mark Tadajewski, Marketing, University of York, York YO10 5DD, UK.

Email: [marktadajewski@gmail.com](mailto:marktadajewski@gmail.com)

roughly the 1950s, with such views being undermined courtesy of consumer behaviour research<sup>1</sup> (e.g. Bartels, 1976; Ferrell et al., 2015). In making their cases, each of these authors cites broad analyses that present a standard historical narrative with marketing theory moving from its origins in economics, subsequently turning to psychology and the behavioural sciences in the mid-twentieth century (e.g. Ferrell, 2018; Ferrell et al., 2015).

Ferrell (2018) avers that this relationship with economics is supported by the overwhelming majority of the discipline. 'There is', he writes, 'almost complete agreement' that our early history used the insights of economics to interrogate and influence marketplace dynamics (Ferrell, 2018: 31). The 'almost' element of the sentence is telling. It indexes that there were other influences shaping the trajectory of our discipline; alternative theoretical, conceptual and empirical vocabularies that have been largely written out of the narratives which constitute our disciplinary memory. That these possible alternatives remain subjugated is hardly surprising.

As Jones and Tadajewski (2018) illuminate, some of the most prominent contributors to our discipline have discouraged questioning received wisdom (e.g. Robert Bartels). Importantly, they highlight the diverse paradigmatic lenses available at the cusp of the 20th century (e.g. the role of the German Historical School) and encourage research that refuses to accept taken-for-granted narratives. Part of this project involves identifying extra-disciplinary preconditions that facilitate or hamper ways of thinking about marketing, the consumer and their interactions. With this in mind, we seek to problematise the generative input of economics. We contend that our history reflects a much broader, more diverse confluence of theoretical resources than has been appreciated to date.

Where economics has been elevated to the forefront as the major constitutive force in driving marketing theory, we will pluralise the systems of thought that have shaped our discipline, fragmenting the largely 'unitary' account of marketing's genealogical development.

Placing the 'big picture' (Yadav, 2017) studies to one side, we accept the Foucauldian injunction to register that our scholarly horizons are constituted in 'piecemeal' form (Foucault, 1984: 78). We devote intellectual energy to the detail that is lost in broad-brush historical surveys, epistemologically destabilising the consensus that Ferrell (2018) validates, thereby revealing 'the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself' (Foucault, 1984: 82). In doing so, we necessarily attend to the power relations of the period. Our point is that there were other perspectives in evidence derived from psychology – notably psychical research – which were filtered and placed outside the bounds of acceptability by dominant figures in marketing and advertising such as Walter Dill Scott (1868–1955).

There are hints that the genealogical links between marketing and psychology run much deeper than has been appreciated. Kuna (1976), for example, depicts the early history of advertising as constituted by the psychology of suggestion, pointing to the role of W.D. Scott in promoting it. Scott was one of the most prominent pioneers of advertising. He articulated ideas in usable form for practitioners and set the scholarly agenda. With regards to the latter, we will argue that the discursive exchange of 'suggestion' and suggestibility for hypnotic and telepathic influence spotlights how 'relations of power' shape what counts as accredited knowledge.

While Scott was a major node in the promotion of a suggestibility discourse (e.g. Scott, 1907, 1909), he was not the empirical source for the suggestion thesis (Kuna, 1976). It was the product of investigation in psychical research, influenced by scholarship associated with the Nancy School as well as seminal explorations of consciousness. Notably important was the inquiry into hypnotic states associated with pioneers in psychical research, especially the work of Edmund Gurney (1847–1888) and F.W.H. Myers (1843–1901). These individuals and the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) are a *conduit* for the psychology of suggestion and the notion of the dual mind into marketing.

Engaging with these extra-disciplinary influences *pluralises* our understanding of marketing's 'conceptual and theoretical foundations' (Key et al., 2020: 4).

We look to the conditions of possibility and acceptability (Foucault, 2017) that tie the development of marketing to psychical research. At the same juncture as the rise of spiritualism and psychical research – circa the middle to the late 19th century – the U.S. witnessed the growth of New Thought. Writers associated with New Thought and psychical research influenced ruminations on marketing and sales. In untangling this complex ontological and epistemological bedrock, we follow Prentice Mulford's (1834–1891) explication of the power of thought, intersubjectivity and telepathy. These contours are fleshed out by engagement with Thomson Hudson's (1834–1903) reflections on the human mind. We then turn to Sheldon's discussion of the power of thought, hypnosis, telepathy and the role of sales practice in enlightening the consumer. Both hypnosis and telepathy were persuasion tools but understood in opposite ways. Hypnosis voided a commitment to service, while telepathy supported it.

Notwithstanding attempts to move away from the manipulative and criminal connotations associated with hypnosis, marketers could not fully break the connection. What they did instead was underscore the suggestibility of the consumer. This *appeared* to present marketing in a non-manipulative light. Early marketing texts declaimed hypnotism (discussed below) yet encouraged salespeople to treat customers in ways that maximised suggestibility, discouraging comparative product evaluations and stimulating immediate action through the use of object agency and mechanical methods.

## Theory

We aim to problematise the widespread consensus that marketing is the sole progeny of economics. This makes our project genealogical in its orientation to subjugated forms of knowledge. We adopt Foucault's recommendation that scholars should engage with his ideas to the extent that they are salient for the task at hand by focussing on the constitution of an academic discipline, explaining how marketing and salesmanship are 'fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms' (Foucault, 1984: 78), that is, from materials that are not usually incorporated into the understanding of the development of our subject. This aids us in discerning points of contestation, clarifying what is accepted, reworked or disqualified in our early history. Such research demands a focus upon the power relations operative in the filtering and ordering of marketing theory, noting the disparate forms of knowledge enrolled (e.g. Tadajewski, 2006a) or subjugated (e.g. Tadajewski, 2006b) as disciplinary consensus starts to take shape. Subjugated knowledge represents theories, concepts and claimed practical applications that are disqualified for institutional, epistemological or political reasons – usually some combination of all three. At base, the insights excluded are typically deemed to fall short of the level of scientificity (Foucault, 1980).

## The Sheldon School

Whereas Bartels (1976) charted the development of university instruction in marketing, we examine correspondence education, a form of learning by mail, where students received booklets and texts on a spectrum of marketing and selling activities. We consult the materials published by The Sheldon School (1902–1939). These were popular and Arthur Frederick Sheldon (1868–1935) made major contributions to marketing and salesmanship. His institution ultimately educated hundreds of thousands of pupils (Tadajewski, 2011). Former students applauded the content being circulated, emphasising how it enabled them to increase sales and secure promotion (Allen, 1924). Sheldon,

moreover, was praised for his impact on advertising theory via the AIDAS framework (i.e. AIDA with the added appreciation that satisfaction resulted in repeat patronage) (Tadajewski and Jones, 2021).

We draw upon relevant published books (e.g. Sheldon and McDowell, 1924) as well as lecture collections (32 volumes) circulated to paying subscribers who received textbooks, lessons, a subscription to *The Business Philosopher* and access to specialist staff. Course materials were informed by the latest research from multiple disciplines – notably psychology (Tadajewski, 2011, 2012) and dietetics (Tadajewski, 2019) – to help them succeed in the world. As a ‘science of salesmanship’, it was intended for application.

Before we delve into the literature that underwires Sheldon’s vision of business practice, we briefly discuss his views on selling. From the outset, it is apparent that Sheldon believes that ideas can shape reality. This is a fundamental axiom of New Thought (discussed below). Channelling the writing of Prentice Mulford, Sheldon exclaims: ‘Thoughts are things’ (Sheldon, 1911c: 12; (Sheldon, 1917: 93). Developing this perspective, our thoughts have ontological import. They are ‘a Force...It is time for man to stop considering thought as purely an abstract, unthinkable, unsubstantial thing; it is a reality; it is a real force’ (Sheldon, 1911c: 12).

Sheldon’s view about sales practice is far removed from the production or hard selling discourses we are told to expect in the early 20th century (e.g. Sheldon and McDowell, 1924: 275). What Sheldon calls business building is oriented around the customer, their requirement(s) and satisfaction in order to generate repeat patronage. Business building is buttressed by an axiology of service. Service did not connote servitude. It meant the ‘exaltation’ of the consumer (Sheldon and McDowell, 1924). Customer permanency and profitability were watchwords. As part of ‘constructive salesmanship’, all neophyte practitioners had to adhere to the ‘law of mutual benefit’ (Sheldon, 1911a) if they wanted to create ‘satisfied customers’ (Sheldon and McDowell, 1924). Importantly, Sheldon signals various influences on his thinking including Prentice Mulford, Thomson Hudson and William James (1842–1910). Such citations reveal the extensive engagement in Sheldon’s work with perspectives reacting to the materialism of the day.

## New Thought

The mid to late 19th century was a time of major change. Materialism was on a triumphant streak. Darwin had moved the process of evolution out of the purview of religious interpretation. Industrial development and technological advances had shown how the forces of nature could be harnessed. Even with the rise of materialism, there were countervailing discourses that emphasised the limits to human knowledge, the possibility for non-material interaction and the potentiality of survival after death.

For some, materialism was problematised by the spirit world. For others, it was undermined by the reality of non-material forms of interaction including mental mediumship, hypnotism at a distance and telepathy. In this context, New Thought gained traction. Genealogically, it grew out of transcendentalism, idealism, spiritualism, evolutionary ideas and Western interpretations of various strands of Eastern thought (James, 1945). Promoted through books, magazines and popular lectures, it expressed spiritual commitment and optimism about social advancement.

One of the most prominent voices advocating New Thought, Theosophical and psychical views for marketing and salesmanship was William Walker Atkinson (1862–1932). Atkinson had a retailing background, worked for a time as a lawyer, eventually moving into editing periodicals and writing books (Deslippe, 2012, 2013). He provided detailed introductory and advanced explications of the power of thought for influencing the customer based on the experimental and spontaneous

evidence for telepathy marshalled and theorised by Edmund Gurney, F.W.H. Myers, William Barrett (1844–1925) and Frank Podmore (1856–1910) who were associated with the SPR.

In 1910, Atkinson was asked ‘What is New Thought?’ He responded that it could not be easily defined. But it was underpinned by ‘practical idealism’. Practical idealism signified the recognition, appreciation and projection of force derived from an external entity (i.e. God, Supreme Being). More specifically, he invoked Prentice Mulford’s argument that ‘Thoughts are Things’. Looking ahead to our analysis, practical idealism, as we elucidate it, takes inspiration from theology, psychical research and cutting-edge psychology. We deepen Atkinson’s initial sketch on multiple fronts.

Firstly, we concur by registering the importance of sources of support that exceed the individual (i.e. a Supreme Being). Secondly, we point out that when the epistemological register shifts towards psychical research, so do the assumption grounds regarding the origin of support. As [James \(1945\)](#) underlined, the locus of power is moved from an external force (i.e. a Supreme Being) to an internal agency (i.e. the subliminal self/subconscious). Thirdly, practical idealism follows psychical research that indexed the internal generation of human potentiality courtesy of the subliminal ([Myers, 1903/1992](#)) or subjective self ([Hudson, 1893/1916](#)). Parsing human nature into a dual self, with an ‘objective’, ‘empirical’ mind and its counterpart being the subjective or subliminal mind, psychical research held that there are processes going on within us that we rarely appreciate ([Hudson, 1893/1916](#)). When used, they were transformative. Pragmatically, practical idealists called for people to utilise their subjective/subconscious mind to assist in personal, self and career development using the various sources of energy available to define their world. This is a notable difference between New Thought and practical idealism. In its developmental period, the former sought to treat disease via mental affirmation, behavioural change and appropriate treatment ([Braden, 1987](#)); the latter views health, wellbeing and vitality as partial conditions of possibility for financial success. Fourthly, Sheldon picked up these themes, turning them into a ‘philosophy of selling’. Idealism, then, is used to reference the creative visualisation and transformation of the social world. Visualisation and the power of thought had to be materialised through intellectual and manual labour oriented by ‘service’. Hence, a ‘practically’ oriented ‘idealism’.

To begin our journey, we turn to the intellectual scaffolding of Sheldon’s writing, starting with Prentice Mulford. Mulford had a varied career, ranging from pursuing (but not obtaining) a fortune in the mining industry, running for office, editing various outlets, writing and lecturing on a range of material, including a number of works sketching the parameters of New Thought. It is the latter we focus upon here, dedicating regard to his reflections on business practice. For Mulford, our thoughts were transmitted from our minds to the people and contexts around us. They shaped our ontology. This is why [Griswold \(1934: 309\)](#) depicted New Thought as a ‘system’ predicated upon ‘high powered mental telepathy’.

## **Prentice Mulford, blended ontology and thought power**

Mulford’s writing is more spiritually inclined than Sheldon’s predominantly Christian ethos. Both, nevertheless, saw themselves as ‘earnest seekers for truth and ready to accept it from whatever source it may come’ ([Sheldon, 1911c: 31](#)). According to Mulford, the universe is managed by a Supreme Being and mind whose power can be accessed to replenish our being ([Mulford, 1906](#)). This mind is ‘above’ us. All we need to do is ‘demand’ the power that is available ([Mulford, 1890d](#)) which becomes an input into our mind, enabling us to constitute the self we present to the world.

Ontologically, our empirical world has a counterpart in the spiritual world ([Mulford, 1911b](#)). The latter is the ‘unseen world’, peopled by spirits whose backgrounds and interests are as diverse as our

own. These worlds ‘blend imperceptibly into each other’ (Mulford, 1911c: 1). Our ‘real self’ is not physiologically anchored. Our mind is our ‘real self’, it is a source of creativity (Mulford, 1890d) and compared to a magnet (e.g. Mulford, 1911; Sheldon, 1911d). It can be ‘charged’ with positive and negative thought (Mulford, 1911e). But we are responsible for controlling our thought processes; through them we generate the consequences in our lives (Mulford, 1890d, 1911c).

Thoughts reverberate through the world in the same way that telegraph wires relay messages (Mulford, 1911b, 1911e). Thought power connects us with other minds. As Mulford writes, ‘Your mind is always working and acting on other minds to your advantage or disadvantage whether your body is asleep or awake. Your real being in the form of a thought travels like electricity through space’ (Mulford, 1890d: 9). Space, indeed, was a misnomer since people were connected intersubjectively, constituting one social body (Mulford, 1911c). Such intersubjective fusion was the conduit enabling the realisation of our desires.

### Practical Idealism, intersubjectivity and telepathy

These flows of power and influence were otherwise known as the ‘law of attraction’. The law of attraction is presented causally, with imagination leading to the manifestation of material expectations. This might seem implausible. Read charitably, what these authors were trying to foster was the desire to achieve success and the confidence to pursue a chosen career or entrepreneurial path.

We need to think about our commercial aims, planning and refining these ideas with people who can help us. Consistent with the ‘law of attraction’ (Mulford, 1890a: 10), our plans will draw support from those who appreciate what we are doing and connect us to social networks. These all help to ‘materialize’ our aspirations. To further their agendas, he encourages practitioners to unite traditional promotional methods – talking, writing and demonstrating – with the force sent out by the ‘spiritual mind’ which influences people ‘thousands of miles distant’ (Mulford, 1890c: 4).

Businesspeople needed to appreciate the importance of ‘sympathy’, that is, the ‘mingling’ of subjectivities to generate, develop and refine ideas (Mulford, 1911d). Intersubjective ‘mingling’ was enabled by thought waves (Mulford, 1890b). These radiate like the waves that follow ‘throwing a stone in calm water. The waves will continue to spread out in every direction, striking other minds’ (Mulford, 1911e: 12). ‘Mingling’ can occur ‘across continents’ (Mulford, 1890b: 9), with our ideas attracting ‘the unseen side of life’ who provide us with inspiration and strength that enables performance standards above the norm (Mulford, 1890b: 6).

Consistent with his reasoning, marketing communications suffuse the world via thought force:

‘...you are...ever sending from you, night and day, a current of force or thought which is pushing your plan, scheme, or business ahead. It is acting on other minds far and near, and putting ideas into those minds in favor of your idea, and making them say when you meet them in person and put out your plan, “That’s just what I need;” or, “That’s just what I want;” or, “That’s just what I’ve been thinking about”’.

(Mulford, 1890b: 3)

In effect, Mulford articulates a spiritually inflected version of the marketing concept. Innovations are the product of psychic demands, with large volumes of people subconsciously wishing for offerings. The steam engine, ‘electric telegraph’ and retailing innovations of A.T. Stewart (1803–1876), he maintains, are the products that resulted from spiritual requests for faster travel, information transmission and efficient provisioning (Mulford, 1890a, 1890b).



## Sheldon, human nature and self constitution

Practical idealism was business friendly, seasoned with discussions about the types of practices to be encouraged, combined with reflections on the use of the ‘unseen world’ to help expand product planning, development and marketing efforts. Mulford is cited directly by Sheldon, notably when the latter is outlining his ideas regarding the power of thought, its ability to shape the world, and the possibility for hypnotic and telepathic relations to function performatively to achieve success.

Sheldon’s ‘philosophy of selling’ is a less spiritually oriented discourse than Mulford articulates, but Sheldon and those writing for his correspondence school do make gestures to Christianity, God, along with spiritual powers that provide energy and sustenance (Sheldon, 1911b). For example:

‘Angels can do no more than to think in the Principle of Service, and God can be no more than that Principle. The highest thought one can have concerning the Deity is that He is...in essence Love and in action Service. We who are endeavoring to grow into his image and likeness can make no other rational endeavor than to render the highest and best service that we can qualify ourselves to perform and that from the love of God and man we thus become His Image and likeness, performing service from love to our fellow man’.

(Francisco, 1924: 12–13)

As mentioned above, Sheldon holds that ‘Thoughts are things’. Translated into sales and marketing, this means that the ideas we have about the house we want to operate, the types of products we intend to supply and the way we envisage interactions with customers, all shape and texture the social world. Still, thought must lead to application. Thinking is the initial step in the ‘subjective realization’ of Sheldon’s axiology (e.g. mentally visualising product and service innovations that satisfy). Putting it into actual practice is the transition to ‘objective realization’ (Sheldon, 1911f: 36), that is, the material manifestation of thought power. Apprentice practitioners are tasked with propelling their subjective desires, projecting their ‘thought vibration’ inwards to self-constitute and outwards to transform the competitive landscape. Their ‘desire to serve’ drives all elements of life (Sheldon, 1911f).

In Sheldon’s writings, demonstrating a commitment to service is the trigger for the ‘principle of attraction’ (Sheldon, 1911f). He equates it to the operation of gravity. If the sales worker thinks about service, letting its ethos permeate their lived reality, then their thoughts will have positive effects on the firm. Put differently, we gravitate toward positive forces in the world. All marketing actors consequently needed an appropriate ‘mental attitude’ based on positivity and faith in their ideas. Cultivating this service ethos might take time, but could be developed with application: ‘If...you lack proper desire to serve...Work, act, exercise the feeling of desire to perform the most valuable service possible. Do things which require this exercise...you will soon find out that it pays morally, financially, and in every way. And then, your desire to serve will be increased’ (Sheldon, 1911f: 26; emphasis in original).

Outlining a service philosophy through a Mulfordian lens, Sheldon offers structured guidelines to assist with self-development. Every morning, the trainee had to commit to the ‘law of self-declaration’, they needed to affirm their dedication to their roles. This was a demonstration of ‘faith in self’ – the loadstone of business success (Sheldon, 1911f: 20). It was meant to be undertaken at the ‘first’ moment ‘of consciousness’ so that it becomes habitual (Sheldon, 1911b: 65). Connected with this, they were encouraged to use their ‘imagination’ to generate the appropriate emotional energy to meet customer and employer requirements, doing this frequently to make ‘the positive feelings permanent and thus part of the moral fibre’ (Sheldon, 1911f: 22; emphasis in original).

We must, he opines, cultivate our ‘Ability, Reliability, Endurance and Action’ (Sheldon and McDowell, 1924: 72). Being enthusiastic, spiritually radiant, cheerful and devoted to maintaining our health and wellbeing through exercise, relaxation, quality sleep patterns, moderate consumption habits and avoidance of ‘mind’ and ‘body poisons’ is essential. Doing so enhances our ability to serve; service increases the likelihood of customer satisfaction and satisfaction leads to long-term relationships.

Sheldon promotes the importance of practical idealism. Salespeople had to make mental pictures of their clients, conjuring up their workplace, home life, ‘needs and desires’ (Sheldon and McDowell, 1924: 263). However, visualisation without effort led to failure: ‘the hell of failure is paved with the economic corpses of people who intended, or wanted, to serve well but who failed to develop their mental, spiritual and physical capacity to do so’ (Sheldon, 1929: 19). The sales worker is told to increase their knowledge of customer needs, marketplace trends and access pertinent sources of information (e.g. Sheldon, 1911g).

To understand how these ideas regarding the power of thought and telepathy were theorised in Sheldon’s writing, we need to turn to the foundation for his reflections, namely Hudson’s *The Law of Psychic Phenomena*, a book partly based on research conducted by the SPR and supplemented with his own experimentation.

## The Law of Psychic Phenomena

Thomson J. Hudson was a man of many talents. Like Mulford he shifted between various careers over the course of his lifetime (e.g. lawyer, journalist, work in the patent office) whilst delving deeply into psychical research. His ideas were extremely popular, yet sometimes viewed as problematic (Gale, 1897) given Hudson’s inclination to shift from empirical psychology to unverifiable affirmations about the existence of the soul (i.e. conflating the subjective mind with the soul).

Hudson’s concept of the dual mind takes us far away from conventional accounts of the consumer in the early 20th century. He outlines his core propositions. Firstly, his notion that our ‘mental organization’ was dual in nature. This thesis had a long history. Traced back to Plato, Hermetic philosophy, Swedenborg and figures associated with the SPR, Hudson remarks that it is an uncontentious interpretation of mind. It was ‘recognized by men of all civilized races and in all conditions of life’ (Hudson, 1893/1916: 28).

An individual has ‘two minds’ that have distinct characteristics. These were the objective and subjective minds. The objective mind enabled an individual to make sense of and react to changes in their day-to-day existence. It was the product of the brain and used the normal senses as inputs. The subjective mind, by contrast, is intuitive, emotional, the locus of deep reservoirs of memory and active when the objective mind is not (i.e. during sleep and hypnosis) (Hudson, 1893/1916: 29). Hudson, somewhat like Edmund Gurney and Frederic Myers, positions the subjective mind as enabling many of the higher – supernormal (Barrett, 1911) – faculties and activities of humanity.

Beyond memory, Hudson lists various clairvoyant functions of the subjective mind, including – like Mulford – enabling the mind to traverse the globe, picking up information and intelligence as it journeys. This hints at its non-material location, seemingly ‘free from anatomical relations’ (Hudson, 1893/1916: 46), ‘untrammelled by its objective environment’ (Hudson, 1893/1916: 73) and able to survive death (e.g. Hudson, 1893/1916: 73–74). It is the source and receptor for telepathy: ‘the ability to comprehend the thoughts of others without the aid of ordinary, objective means of communication’ (Hudson, 1893/1916: 30).



An important differentiator between the objective and subjective minds was the issue of suggestion; a topic securing *increased* scrutiny in the late 19th century. Hudson, Sidis, Sheldon and W.D. Scott were mainly responsible for its diffusion into marketing, salesmanship and advertising (e.g. Scott, 1911, 1921; Sheldon and McDowell, 1924; Shryer, 1912). We should note that their arguments stand in contrast to those that have been prominent in our literature. We have already discussed historical research that signalled the alleged rationality of the consumer until the mid-twentieth century. Curti (1967), on the other hand, emphasises oscillations in the practitioner literature between the poles of assuming rationality or irrationality. None of these accounts map on to the psychical literature *in toto*. Hudson and Sheldon, among others, posited that we were both rational and reasonable, but when the subjective mind was in the ascendant, more suggestible within certain bounds.

Admittedly, Hudson's writing tends towards blunt distinctions. He argues that the objective mind is basically not manipulable. Our critical reasoning skills will intervene when we are presented with dubious or misleading information. By contrast, the subjective mind is suggestible. Hudson overplays this considerably, writing of 'the constant amenability of the subjective mind to the power of suggestion' (Hudson, 1893/1916: 38). Undoubtedly, he does register that people were not equally hypnotisable, nor uniformly responsive to suggestion when hypnotised which testified to the ongoing power of the objective mind in monitoring and controlling the subjective mind (i.e. providing its own suggestions). Theoretically and empirically the conception of the subjective mind was developed via the hypnotism and psychical literature to which we now turn.

## Hypnotism and suggestion

The study of hypnotism was a condition of possibility for explicating the subjective mind (i.e. it revealed that our everyday consciousness existed in parallel with other streams of consciousness (sub-/under-/subjective) which the primary self often failed to appreciate and were hallmarked by suggestibility). Scholars in France, most notably, appreciated that hypnotism could be induced through suggestion (a perspective that hails from the Marquis de Puységur). For Hudson, 'suggestion' is a key factor in psychology. In the reflections of Sidis (1898), Shryer (1912) and Sheldon it forms a core component of salesmanship and advertising. Hypnosis helped, partly, to facilitate the theorisation of telepathy and its application in sales practice.

The genealogical threads connecting hypnotism to telepathy are complex. Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815) pioneered an early variant of what James Braid (1795–1860) branded as hypnotism. But it was in the hands of Ambroise-Auguste Liébeault (1823–1904), Hippolyte Bernheim (1840–1919) and the Nancy School that hypnotism was refined. To understate the impact of Nancy affiliates on Hudson and, by extension, Sheldon is difficult. Hudson avers that Nancy discerned 'the most important discovery in psychological science' (Hudson, 1893/1916: 96), namely, that we are constantly subject to suggestion directed at the subjective mind. Suggestion is 'the master-key which will unlock the secrets of every psychological mystery' (Hudson, 1893/1916: 96).

To influence someone through hypnosis requires close interaction with the hypnotist in the first instance. They had to secure the focus of the subject to open a channel for salient suggestions (e.g. Gurney, 1884: 484). Cultivated rapport and attentiveness to suggestion foregrounded the possibility for hypnotic induction at a distance (Gurney, 1887a) and provided the basis for an appreciation of the wider distribution of telepathic sensitivity (Hudson, 1893/1916). For example, *sommeil à distance* references the production of trance at distances ranging from 700 m to 7 km thereby portraying hypnotism and telepathy as a continuum (Gurney, 1887a, 1887b).

Whether we are talking about traditional (sensory) or non-traditional methods of communication the linchpin is the concept of suggestion and Gurney parses this into two types: *suggestion mentale* and *suggestion verbal*. The first refers to ‘psychical’ forms of thought transfer; the second to more widely understood variants of communication (Gurney, 1887a, 1887b). Gurney, Myers and Hudson all theorise a central role for the subjective/subliminal mind in sending and receiving ideas (e.g. Gurney, 1887a: 232). Significantly, Gurney contends that telepathy occurs frequently, usually between people with some prior association.

For obvious reasons, hypnosis and telepathy generated concern. It was allegedly possible to influence someone hypnotically or telepathically without them being aware of any influence attempt. Gurney depicts this vividly in his discussion of choice paralysis. In Gurney’s opinion, the hypnotic state is characterised by the ability of one person to ‘channel’ the mind of another to the extent that they are ‘absolutely at their mercy...working with a marked absence of individuality’ (Gurney, 1884: 482). In the hypnotic setting, the awareness of the subject can be mobile. What is being deflated is the ability of the subject to choose. Choice, will, self-determination and memory ‘are paralysed’ (Gurney, 1884: 487; emphasis in original). The subject exhibits ‘dog-like obedience’ to suggestion (Myers, 1892: 353); sensory perception is controlled by the hypnotist (Gurney, 1887a: 244); and intersubjective power relations are skewed so that the normal ‘barrier’ preventing influence was more easily penetrated (Gurney, 1887a: 242, 1887c: 404). In summation, this body of work questioned the idea of the human being as a self-determining agent, making their own decisions with free will and full recall. We might never register which part of our ‘subjacent’ being was charged with action nor who gave it the suggestions being fulfilled (e.g. Myers, 1892: 303).

## From Hudson to Sheldon

In his discussion of hypnotism, Sheldon draws upon Hudson’s distinction between objective and subjective minds. Sheldon explains that hypnotism involves letting the subjective mind take control and his concern stems from the fact that hypnotic practice deflates the will of the individual. It dehumanizes us, rendering us akin to automata (Sheldon, 1911e).

According to Sheldon, hypnosis *attempted* to eliminate consumer agency. This was a short-term perspective and he uses transaction marketing terminology to describe it. He is clear that deadening the will would eventually be registered by the customer and this had implications for the long-term viability of their relationship with a salesperson and company. A strategically more lucrative approach involved treating salesmanship as service provision, with service involving educating the consumer and *possibly* redirecting their focus from goods they assumed would meet their needs but were inappropriate (e.g. Sheldon, 1911f: 16–17). As such,

*‘Hypnotism Has No Place in Scientific Business Building. – I have said that, in your work of selling, your business is not to deaden or render inoperative the will of your customer by hypnotic methods, but rather to enlighten the will, thus leading it to intelligent choice and action’.*

(Sheldon, 1911e: 14; emphasis in original; see also Sheldon, 1924: 18–19)

Nonetheless, he clarifies when hypnotism might be used, the conditions enabling it, and a possible methodology for the ‘commercial mesmerizer’ who used their ‘thought-force’ to encourage people to purchase (Mulford, 1911h: 12). In this, Sheldon follows a commensurate path to Sidis (1898). Recalling the practices of stage hypnotists, he registers that they needed the audience to be ‘quiet’, so that they could direct the concentration of the ‘subject’. He grants the agent considerable

power, funnelling the senses to those topics, items or persons deemed appropriate, thereby *largely* shuttering the operations of the objective mind.

Those participating must abdicate their ‘will, reason and judgment’. If this happens,

‘...if the five physical senses, plus reason, judgment and will, can be completely nullified, then the suggestions of the operator are obeyed by the subject instantly and implicitly, so long as the hypnosis lasts. Under such conditions the ten-dollar-a-week clerk might be made to sign a million dollar contract, but the contract would not only be valueless, but he who procured its signature would be a de facto criminal – granting that the whole performance were thus possible’.

(Sheldon, 1911e: 16–17)

An association between hypnosis and crime was widespread and certainly one of the reasons for discouraging the application of the former (Krebs, 1906). Quite reasonably, Sheldon is not convinced that the conditions enabling the stage hypnotist to dethrone the will are present in the retail store. The most noticeable problem is that the selling environment is a bustling, pungent, noisy and distracting location in which attention faces competing options. Besides, Sheldon dismisses the idea that the salesperson can take control of the objective senses of the customer. A business context renders hypnotic control unlikely, but not totally impossible:

‘...[the] environment is not at all favorable to hypnotism in the ordinary walks of trade, so far as a suppression of the objective senses is concerned. As to the reason, judgment and will of customers, it is certain that they will not voluntarily be set aside. The subject, as a rule, would not be a willing subject’.

(Sheldon, 1911e: 17)

The procurement of a signature on a valuable contract via hypnotism would be a brazen and illogical move (Krebs, 1906). Pursuant with Gurney’s research, the first-time hypnotised subject could recall the event. Even if they were unable to remember signing the contract, they would notice a gap in their knowledge and, courtesy of their diary, be able to trace those responsible. Given the cultural climate and the fact these issues were flagged in material targeted at a wide readership, the astute practitioner would, we may assume, make the relevant connection (Krebs, 1906). In case it was not clear, Sheldon pointedly remarks on the damage hypnotism might wreak with customers: ‘Sales made under such [hypnotic] conditions... would not be honest transactions, and *business built on such a basis could not continuously and enduringly succeed*. On the other hand, salesmanship founded upon the law of mutual benefit, instead of nullifying the will enlightens it to the end of intelligent action’ (Sheldon, 1924: 19; emphasis added).

Developing his discussion of hypnotism, Sheldon shifts gears slightly. There was a class of salesmen who channelled Mesmer, dressing flamboyantly, attempting to make a strong impression on their interlocutor. The problem was that such departures from sober, articulate, customer-oriented strategies were purportedly bad marketing. In spotlighting themselves, rather than the product and patron needs, they stirred the critical faculties, making the client more wary and less likely to buy. Any hypnotic-like power these sales workers possessed was undone:

‘...if there is anyone who cannot sell goods to me, it is the swaggering, wordy, hypnotic-gestured type of fellow who bounces into my office or study in cyclone fashion. On the other hand, I find myself very tractable to the suggestions of that persuasive type, that gentle yet gallant “Knight of the Grip” whose

courtesy and honest purpose are shown even in his bearing. The psychological reason for this is not hard to fathom. The cyclone fellow has called my attention to himself, and my mind begins guessing at what he expects to do to me. My will is put on its guard and parries off his suggestions’.

(Sheldon, 1911e: 18)

Consistent with his antipathy towards hypnotism, Sheldon heralds the ‘principle of freedom and choice’. The patron ‘has a perfect right, if he chooses to do so, to choose his own thoughts; and, in spite of anything you may say or do, he may keep his thought battery at work thinking he doesn’t want your services or your goods’ (Sheldon, 1911d: 21–22).

## From hypnotism to telepathy

The conditions of possibility and acceptability for telepathy were the empirical research conducted by the SPR; texts like Hudson’s; combined with wider shifts that made mind-to-mind contact plausible, including the popularity of ‘thought-readers’ who were skilled at registering involuntary sources of information (i.e. gestural and muscle movements, inclination of gaze). Technological developments including wireless telegraphy were used to analogically legitimate telepathy (Barrett, 1911).

Although Sheldon was critical of hypnotism, he was supportive of telepathy, considered it a feasible strategy and ‘a legitimate field of study and a valuable one’ (Sheldon, 1910a: 12). He cites the SPR literature, referring to a speech by Sir William Crookes (1832–1919) who affirmed his belief in an ‘unseen world’ and telepathic communication (e.g. Crookes, 1912: 87, 91, 96). Like wireless telegraphy at launch, telepathy was subject to expressions of doubt. Even so, ‘the time is not far distant when thought transference, or mental telepathy, will be as thoroughly accepted as a scientific fact as is wireless telegraphy’ (Sheldon, 1911c: 13). Similar to Mulford, Hudson and others, Sheldon theorised thought as a force, sent and received by the subconscious. He accepted the ‘General Law of Telepathic Action’ (Gurney, 1887a) in assuming that mental ‘impressions’ can be sent to and received from customers. To be successful necessitated some degree of thought-transference:

‘Your province as a business builder is to serve your customer. He temporarily at least, does not desire you to serve him. *It then becomes your province to convey suggestions or thoughts into the mind of your customer*, to the end of persuading him to permit you to serve him by purchasing that which you have to sell, and by purchasing it at a profit, too. If the article is really valuable to him, you are entitled to that profit, because you have rendered him a service’.

(Sheldon, 1910a: 11; italics added)

All sales workers must strive to become a ‘sensitive’ (Sheldon, 1911d). They should cultivate the skill to ‘sense’ client requirements before they are expressed and recognise when to close the sale. The salesperson’s

‘...physical senses are so trained and the positive qualities of the mind are so developed that his power to sense the psychological moment is very keen. His mind is a sensitive plate which catches instantly the volitional resolve on the part of the customer, even though the latter may not have expressed it; yes, even though the customer himself be not clearly conscious of it. The true salesman is so thoroughly *en rapport*

with his customer's thought that his own subconscious powers detect by means of telepathy the true psychological moment'.

(Sheldon, 1911d: 25; emphasis in original)

In correspondence courses like Sheldon's including references to telepathy helped to substantiate the cutting-edge nature of the knowledge being imparted to students, but emphasis on service and customer orientation provided subscribers with the lexicon and ideas familiar to potential employers. It secured them jobs, increased satisfaction and generated positive word-of-mouth for the school.

## **Discussion: The politics of suggestion and boundaries of scientificity**

Our argument substantially extends and deepens those proffered by Bartels (1976) and Tadajewski (2011, 2019). What is not *widely* appreciated about Robert Bartels' work is that he is far more circumspect about the influence of economics on marketing than usually noted. The chapter where he makes some of his strongest claims is a rumination on what marketing scholars *might* have taken from economics. It is a speculative analysis, punctuated with what thinkers 'would have thought' (1976: 12) not what they actually 'did' think. Marketing, for Bartels, was less about the importation of economic theory or the application of economic thought. He depicts what scholars were doing in our early history as a 'departure' from economics (e.g. Bartels, 1976: 9). Economics is one of the springboards for marketing theorising; a springboard that required supplementation with psychology (e.g. Bartels, 1976: 36).

So, what we have in Bartels is (1) the recognition of the influence of economics; (2) a departure from it, with the marketplace used to retheorise market-consumer relations; and (3) he registers the importance of psychology and the role of desire in demand stimulation (i.e. a central plank in hypnotic, telepathic and suggestibility discourses). Marketing, in Bartels' text, is constituted by multiple threads which came together leading to the establishment of what we know as marketing. There was no single cause. It was the result of a confluence of thoughts and ideas reflecting the changing nature of the economic, business and social world.

What is important, he stresses, is the *power of thought* in facilitating our disciplinary emergence. It is this notion that nurtures all of the ways of theorising we have explored to this moment, nourishing the stream of literature flowing from Hudson, Sheldon, Atkinson as well as from Bartels. Foucault would depict it as 'the soil that can nourish them all in their diversity' (Foucault, 2000: 118). For Bartels, as for Mulford and Sheldon, 'thoughts are "things"' (Bartels, 1976: 3). Thoughts, ideas, discussion, debate and the dissemination of these in written form helped define the parameters of our discipline and practice (e.g. Bartels, 1976: 8). The difference between Bartels and the writers studied in this paper cuts to the centre of our subject and has not been registered previously. The divergence is between what we can term Bartels' 'practical realism' and Sheldon's 'practical idealism'.

Bartels invokes Mulfordian language, but within an overall narrative that stressed a stronger role for the external environment on marketing theorising (i.e. a thoroughgoing empiricism). As he gestures with reference to Paul Converse's intellectual trajectory, Converse was brought up in a religious environment, but his orientation to the practical needs of business 'tempered his idealism with realism' (Bartels, 1976: 149). Whereas Mulford, Sheldon and Atkinson envisage a more ontologically authoritative role for thought predicated upon popular metaphysical and psychical perspectives which hinged on the role of the subconscious rather than consciousness. An emphasis

on consciousness is generally associated with practical realism (cf. Atkinson, 1911; Strong, 1925). In the practical idealist frame, ideas are powerful. It is not, even so, a naïve idealism (cf. Myers, 1903/1992: 21). The laws of nature (i.e. gravitation) and the laws of the business world (i.e. the gravitational force that was the ‘principle of service’) were ever operative (e.g. Atkinson, 1911: 140–143; Sheldon, 1921: 116). Treating them as void was a dangerous move.

For practical idealists, the human mind was constantly active, always engaged in mental processing of one form or another. Our ability to connect with a Supreme Being, marshal the support of the spirit world, hypnotise others, telepathically shape consumer choices and decisions, all underscored the power of thought to pattern the world around us. What, in short, begins as subjective thought is realised in objective form as the tradable and saleable items in the marketplace. It is at once hyper-individualistic, presenting the agent as occupying the place of a ‘creator’ in the ‘centre’ of their ‘miniature universe’ (Atkinson, 1911: 194) at the same time as it appreciates the criticality of relationship formation and their ongoing maintenance to business success.

Where Tadajewski (2011, 2019) presents service and the creation of long-term business relations as axiologically orienting Sheldon’s publications, we can expand his analysis by connecting it with the power of thought. To be sure, Tadajewski (2011) cites the presence of telepathy in Sheldon’s work, but he does not develop this point. It is the conclusion to his article. Nor does he register the epistemological connection between hypnosis and telepathy. Outlining the latter and its links to the former has allowed us to explicate the complex extra-disciplinary factors influencing the development of marketing thought (discussed further below). As outlined, the relationship between hypnosis and telepathy was enrolled in a wider theoretical, conceptual and ontological framing via the explication of the power of thought and its role as an ‘invisible force’ permeating the social world.

For Mulford, Hudson, Sheldon and Atkinson, thought is the generative mechanism that Tadajewski (2019) did not explicitly articulate when outlining his nuanced account of the cultivation of habit and business relationships. Habit, then, *is* a central concept in Sheldon’s repertoire and prominent in marketing thought. *But* habits are stimulated by thought-power (i.e. by the subjective and objective factors proffered by marketers ‘mingling’ with consumer thinking processes) and the ramifications of these ideas project forward in time, encompassing the initial buying episode, a repeat purchase, the subsequent generation of habits and far more besides.

Sextus (1900) analytically bridges Mulford, Hudson and Sheldon using the same architecture (i.e. subjective and objective minds). For Sextus, the power of thought was the vehicle through which we can texture self-constitution and influence others. Thought power is canalizing. Whether generated by auto-suggestion (Atkinson, 1903; 1907a; 1907b), derived from hypnosis (Hudson, 1900), telepathy (Atkinson, 1907a) or traditional forms of interaction (Atkinson, 1912), the power of thought had the potential to seed habits, with our ‘bundles of habits’ (James, 1890) forming a core component of our ‘character’ (Sextus, 1900). Thought power thus moulds who we are and even ‘fixes the destiny’ (Sextus, 1900: 60). What were business (Tadajewski, 2011), consumption (Tadajewski, 2019) and socially constitutive elements in Sheldon’s thinking (Tadajewski, 2017) shape the contours of our lives (Sextus, 1900; Sheldon, 1904), the length of time we shop with a particular business (Tadajewski, 2011), the people around us, potentially affecting our passing into the ‘spiritual’ (Sextus, 1900) or ‘unseen world’ (Myers, 1903/1992).

To put it mildly, the view of human nature explicated in this paper is far more complex than hitherto outlined. Hudson espoused his interpretation of the dual mind and provided a nuanced understanding of human suggestibility; one that was influenced by psychical research. As a concept, suggestibility links what happens in the external context with our internal thinking processes. Through this prism, we are influenced by external forces and shaped internally by our own processes



of self-suggestion. For Hudson, the power of suggestion is eternally operative. Being responsive to suggestions is a foundational habit in mental constitution which can be traced to childhood socialisation (e.g. Scott, 1911: 93).

What it is important to realise is that the concept of 'suggestion' was demarcated from psychical research, alleged superstitions and occult views. Yates (1932: 78) thinks this was a superficial glossing of ideas. Clearly, moving from hypnosis (and, by extension, telepathy) to suggestion could be viewed as linguistic substitution. Examined closely, the changes were more profound. They reflect concerted institutional, political and often deeply unscientific proposals. According to Slaughter (1900), 'suggestion' signified distance from the complex ontological, epistemological and ethical questions being posed by psychical research. The discourse of suggestion connoted a refusal of the assumed 'superstitions' of psychical studies: 'The term "suggestion" means more than anything else, the clearing away of a long list of mysterious influences' (Slaughter, 1900: 156). Let us explore these power relations in more depth.

### Institutional power relations and discursive deviations

In various places, Scott (1907, 1921) attempted to differentiate 'real' psychology from pseudoscience. In doing so, his commitments reflect the changing nature of psychology as an academic discipline. In the 1880s, the boundaries between psychical research and psychology were in flux (Coon, 1992). As Foucault reminds us, comprehending the structure of the non-discursive realm is often important in helping disentangle internal disciplinary developments. Reflecting this, at various events such as Paris International Exposition, the SPR, the studies its members were conducting on hypnosis, subliminal mentation and the growing complexity of human personality were applauded (Hamilton, 2009). This continued into the 1890s, with Frederic Myers garnering intellectual affirmation at the Chicago World Congress of Religions when presenting his theories on the subliminal self. By the first decade of the 20th century, the intellectual terrain was changing (Hamilton, 2009).

The deaths of influential figures in the SPR (e.g. Gurney, Myers, Sidgwick, Hodgson) and a lingering sense that psychology 'savoured' of the 'psychic', 'occult' and 'general "spookiness"' among business people (Atkinson, 1912: 9) led to concerted efforts to parse 'real' psychology from the SPR literature which invigorated the writing of Hudson and Sheldon. Power relations played a fundamental role in efforts to legitimate a *version* of experimental psychology and the boundaries of scientificity were adjusted to 'expel psychical research from the agenda of scientific psychology' (Sommer, 2012: 23). More quietly, the ideas we have discussed (i.e. the importance of suggestion) underwent appropriation (Leary, 1987).

Where the SPR had a strong track record in conducting rigorous, experimental research (cf. Myers, 1893), being scientific now entailed the following: 'we must exclude any attempt at explanation based on the unknown or occult' (Slaughter, 1900: 156). Exclusion of 'the unknown' rather than engagement was apparently the order of the day. Scott falls into this mindset where the psychical was concerned. His views are important given that by 1912 they led to the 'enormous change' in the perception of psychology and its implications for marketing practice (E.K. Strong in Lynch, 1968: 153).

Scott believed that limited engagement with psychology was a function of 'prejudice' (Scott, 1907) and this was the result of the misapprehension that it dealt with the abnormal (i.e. 'double personalities') and psychical (i.e. telepathy). These views persisted and he set himself the task of revising them. Psychology, he states, is a practical science, eminently useful in the commercial

world. As part of this project, Scott engages in a discursive deviation that has little empirical warrant. Hypnosis did not *overly* trouble him. Telepathy did.

Scott's narrative represents a 'play of specific transformations' (Foucault, 1971) that reverses the ordering of hypnosis and telepathy, where hypnosis was problematic in Sheldon's work, but telepathy acceptable. Nonetheless, Scott's interpretation is epistemically questionable in that his discounting of telepathy appears influenced by a desire to legitimate psychology and cleave away alleged 'occult' views. The continued blurring of psychology with 'witchery, telepathy, astrology and kindred subjects' was brought home to Scott by one of his childhood friends who queried: 'What yer techin' that tom-foolery fer?' (in Jacobson, 1951: 79).

Scott relegates telepathy to the realm of 'medieval superstition' (Scott, 1921) whilst offering support for the empirical reality of hypnosis (discussed below). He acknowledges that telepathy had been investigated in the laboratory but insists, without substantiation and irrespective of the records of the SPR, that 'the results were...meagre' and no one of institutional standing supports it (Scott, 1921: 325). This is inaccurate at best, a perversion of the record at worst. Scott is dismissing a view that was inconsistent with his belief system. He was not making a credible case for its elimination on epistemological grounds. Telepathy was experimentally demonstrated and credible (e.g. Gurney et al., 1886/1918). However, as William James (1961a, 1961b) registered, the wider academic community betrayed the 'scientific method' by refusing to consider the evidence that had been published.

Nor does Scott register the connection between hypnosis and telepathy (i.e. 'telepathic hypnosis') (Hyslop, 1906). In itself this either indexes Scott's limited appreciation of a complex literature or a wholesale desire to disconnect himself from psychical research. Scott practiced hypnotism, eventually becoming 'an expert hypnotist in the course of his career' (Jacobson, 1951: 56). Yet, he was apparently unaware of the theoretical and empirical links between hypnosis and telepathy. Nor did Scott outwardly register the impressive reputations of those involved in psychical studies. His preference is consistently for a theory of suggestion closely aligned with non-psychical (Scott, 1907, 1921) and non-psychoanalytic psychology (Scott, 1909).

Refracting his influence (Lynch, 1968), Scott's negative view gained traction in seminal accounts of personal selling and advertising (e.g. Strong, 1922: 271). Telepathy was described as failing to meet the level of scientificity and the opposite of the tactics advertising practice should welcome (e.g. Swift, 1918: 11). Indeed, the changing parameters of scientificity at this point buttress ongoing disciplinary excision. Scientificity was predicated upon (1) a subject being taught in the university; (2) being predictable; and (3) replicable (Krebs, 1916: 126, 135). Krebs maintained that approaches including telepathy did not meet these criteria.

This statement of demarcation epitomises the flows of institutional power. Krebs is reversing his earlier views. When the subjugation of the psychical was not yet complete, he wrote: 'The important and absorbing study of psychics has passed the tentative stage and is now regularly taught, in its demonstrated facts and laws, in Continental and American universities' (Krebs, 1905: 480). In reworking his views, then, Krebs is delegitimising psychical inquiry and telepathy. Previously he had correctly acknowledged that telepathy appeared on the curriculums of numerous institutions (e.g. Gale, 1900). It was certainly discussed by correspondence school educators and entrepreneurs (Atkinson, 1907a, 1907b). While telepathy remained difficult to deploy in a consistent manner, practice enhanced receptivity (e.g. Garrett, 1941). Law-like generalisations were proffered (Warcollier, 1963). Nevertheless, it was not one of the 'approved methods' for use in 'scientific salesmanship' (Russell, 1910: 81). This did not mean telepathy was not 'true'.<sup>2</sup> Epistemologically, for Scott and Krebs, it was not in their politicised and scientifically deviant 'true'.<sup>2</sup> In effect, Scott and those academics who followed in his footsteps problematised metaphysical and psychical

contentions regarding human psychology and personality, their study and the expected payoff from such investigation.

## The embrace of suggestion

Like their experimental psychological brethren quietly incorporating psychical research in their armamentarium (Leary, 1987), marketing thinkers embraced the concept of suggestion (Scott, 1911). For Kuna (1976: 155), the promotion of suggestion through the concerted activities of Walter Dill Scott had a substantial impact on practitioners (see Jacobson, 1951). It was retrospectively recognised as a feature of commerce ‘from time immemorial’ (Brisco, 1916: 203). In their roles as businesspeople or customers, all members of society were suggestible (Scott, 1911). Such theorisation was a counterpoint to unrealistic interpretations of ‘man’ as logically oriented. The idea that people weighed evidence when making decisions was largely inaccurate. Scott (1911), for one, held that consumers rarely exhibit logic or reason when making consumption decisions. Imitation, habit and suggestion tend to prevail, with suggestion functioning as an extremely potent force in exchange relations unless an individual acted as a professional buyer who required ‘facts’ (e.g. Jones, 1921; Scott, 1911).

Recognition of the centrality of suggestion brought misconception, with it being marketed ‘as the open sesame to success’ (Scott, 1911: 36) and akin to ‘an irresistible hypnotic spell’ (Scott, 1911: 37). This said,

‘Suggestion is an important force in business. The use of suggestion in its application to influence, lead and control people must be separated from hypnotism. The hypnotic spell cannot be successfully defended as a power in business. The basic structure of influencing men is based upon suggestion. Efficient salesmanship depends upon the ability to influence people than upon anything else. Such being the case, suggestion...its meaning and the principles underlying its use should be understood by every salesperson.’

(Brisco, 1916: 203–204; emphasis added)

As a concept, suggestion manifested beliefs regarding the power of thought in a non-metaphysical guise (Scott, 1911; cf. Scott, 1909). ‘Thought’ (Jones, 1921: 135) and ‘ideas’ are now ‘the most dynamic things in the universe’ (Scott, 1911: 38). They provide us with a vision of the good life, spurring us to action. Harlow Gale and Walter Dill Scott tied suggestion to ideo-motor action, envisaging human thought as leading to action/completion – a characteristic assumption of AIDA (Strong, 1925) and embedded in Sheldon’s extension of this model to include satisfaction and repeat purchase (i.e. the AIDAS model).

Reading across this scholarship, the consumer was regarded as influenced by suggestion more than rational persuasion. Salespeople had to circumvent extensive cognition in buying episodes. Deliberation should be curtailed (e.g. Brisco, 1916: 207; Jones, 1921: 38) and positive suggestions used to smooth the interaction (e.g. Jones, 1921: 194). The customer ought to be led through the exchange with the ‘distressing necessity of deciding’ minimised (Scott, 1911: 168). Mirroring Gurney’s (1884) statements about choice paralysis and the shaping of target decision-making, the procedure had to be subtle. ‘Choice’ needed to ‘be eliminated’ (Brisco, 1916: 207), with attention concentrated on the salesperson’s offering. Still, the customer must ‘believe that they are making the purchases as a result of their own independent choice’ (Jones, 1921: 198). Similarly, for Brisco (1916: 205), suggestion was a ‘secret guiding force directing customers slowly, and without their

knowing it, to the goal of purchase'. The client had to 'feel that they are making the only natural selection...and are doing voluntarily what in reality they are doing from the suggestions of the salespersons' (Brisco, 1916: 211).

At every point, thinking and action was being 'carefully led' (Brisco, 1916). Scott, for instance, remarked that people can make suggestions to us, as can 'things' including 'money-envelopes, return coupons etc' (1911: 45). Attributions of agency to non-human actors was a common refrain. Jones (1921) develops this line of thought in a discussion of 'mechanical schemes' and 'mechanical tricks' that should be mobilised to ensure the culmination of the sale. One professional, for example, used an unusual fountain pen at the right psychological moment. Clients were apparently unable to resist using the pen to sign on the dotted line (e.g. Jones, 1921: 98). However, Sheldon's 'law of mutual benefit' meant that for him suggestion was not leveraged to the point it became reflective of a sales orientation (e.g. Sheldon, 1910b: 18). Mutual benefit and customer satisfaction led to repeat purchase and the creation of habits (Sheldon, 1924). These were the key to financial success.

Even with the swing to suggestion, marketing scholars did not completely jettison engagement with hypnotism. Scott (1911) presents hypnotic trance and suggestibility as poles on a continuum. He outlines how he taught students about suggestion, demonstrating 'its most extreme manifestations', that is, 'the hypnotic condition' (1911: 49). Put simply, he hypnotises his students, suggesting to them that a perfume being proffered is delightful. In reality, it was sulphurous. Extrapolating from this exercise, Scott maintains that hypnosis is an extreme variant of suggestion. Hypnosis and suggestion both embody 'four principles' which are 'universally' applicable when we want to influence people. Firstly, thought and ideas are dynamic; secondly, an external influence provides the suggestion; thirdly, the subject undertakes no comparative or critical analysis of the statements and objects presented; finally, suggestion triggers immediate response (Scott, 1911: 50). Despite Sheldon stating that hypnosis was problematic, Scott draws parallels between the assumption grounds of hypnosis and suggestion, at the same time as affirming that 'No business man should have anything to do with hypnosis' (Scott, 1911: 50–51).

Rather than see suggestion as nefarious and involving the abdication of will and choice, it refers (on a surface level) to influence situations characterised by less deliberation and little or no argument. Whether this is plausible is debatable, since the literature recommended channelling choice processes in ways largely consistent with Gurney's discussion of choice and behavioural paralysis.

## Thought in a neoliberal world

The notion that thought is powerful and can shape the social world continues to influence discussions of marketing and business success. Contemporary explications of these views such as *The Secret* (Byrne, 2010) are far removed from those outlined by Sheldon. Byrne (2010) cites Prentice Mulford, invokes the law of attraction, stresses that 'thoughts become things' and asserts we should 'think...life into existence' (Byrne, 2010: xviii, 9, 13, 15). Readers are encouraged to telepathize their clear, forceful thoughts to the universe, projecting the desires they want fulfilled. What Byrne's work does not underscore is that thinking has to be connected to hard work.

In spite of the popularity of Byrne's writing, it is only one facet of a resurgent practical idealism. Ideas with a much closer resemblance to those explicated above have, however, been reprised. Horowitz (2018), for instance, discusses the law of attraction, the connection of thought and action, the importance of visualisation, self-application and the power of the subconscious, citing many of the sources in this manuscript in his varied books. He avers that manifesting the reality we desire is contingent on the provision of service. Work combined with 'offering a service' is essential. We must determine what service will help us achieve our aims and pursue appropriate forms of self-

cultivation with vigour. New Thought values, practical idealism and the centrality of service to profitability and personal distinction have not therefore disappeared.

## Conclusion

The process of problematisation entails examining narratives and power relations whose reverberations extend to the present. By attending to a core argument found in much current thinking, that is, the notion of ‘marketing as applied economics’, we fragmented the unitary explication of the development of marketing thought. In contrast to ‘unitary’ accounts, our genealogical investigation pluralises marketing theory in the very earliest years of our disciplinary history. However, our revelatory exercise should not be understood as underlining a new turn in an otherwise progressive account of the growing sophistication of marketing thought. The picture is more complex. We exposed a profoundly unscientific dismissal of claims to knowledge, highlighting the shifting power relations associated with psychology as an institutionalising force at the cusp of the 20th century. Concomitant with this agenda was the subjugation of psychical research. Reflecting on these developments, we conceptualised the power relations involved as emblematic of a politically driven form of ‘epistemological deviation’. In this case, epistemological deviation involves the rejection of ‘scientific method’ (James, 1961a, 1961b) to cleave space for a preferred reading of psychology and its implications for marketing.

## Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## ORCID iD

Mark Tadajewski  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0879-272X>

## Notes

1. It would take too much space to comprehensively challenge these views. As the main text reveals, psychological thinking has had a far greater influence on the development of our discipline than is often appreciated (see Jones and Tadajewski, 2018; Tadajewski, 2006b, 2012; 2019, forthcoming).
2. Telepathy does not disappear from our discipline (see Tadajewski, forthcoming). Very similar ideas appear in the literature on Neuro-Linguistic Programming and sales practice. Chris Miles has touched upon these and related ideas in multiple important contributions (e.g., Miles, 2015, 2020).

## References

- Allen, LF (1924) *Prospecting for Prospects*. Chicago: The Sheldon School.
- Atkinson, WW (1903) *Thought-Force in Business and Everyday Life*. 18th edition. New York: Sidney Flower.
- Atkinson, WW (1907a) *The Secret of Mental Magic: A Course of Seven Lessons*. London: L.N. Fowler & Co.
- Atkinson, WW (1907b) *Practical Mind-Reading: A Course of Lessons on Thought-Transference, Telepathy, Mental Currents, Mental Rapport &c*. Chicago: Advanced Thought Publishing.
- Atkinson, WW (1911) *The Mastery of Being*. Holyoke: The Elizabeth Towne Company.

- Atkinson, WW (1912) *The Psychology of Salesmanship*. Holyoke: The Elizabeth Towne Co.
- Barrett, WF (1911) *Psychical Research*. London: Williams & Northgate.
- Bartels, R (1976) *The History of Marketing Thought*. 2nd edition. Columbus, OH: Grid.
- Braden, CS (1987) *Spirits in Rebellion: The Rise and Development of New Thought*. Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press.
- Brisco, NA (1916) *Fundamentals of Salesmanship*. London: D. Appleton and Company.
- Byrne, R (2010) *The Secret*. 10th Anniversary Edition. London: Simon & Schuster.
- Coon, DJ (1992) Testing the limits of sense and science: American experimental psychologists combat spiritualism. *American Psychologist* 47(2): 143–151.
- Crookes, W (1912) Presidential Address. In: *Presidential Addresses to the Society for Psychical Research 1882-1911*. Glasgow: University Press, pp. 86–103.
- Curti, M (1967) The changing concept of “human nature” in literature of American advertising. *Business History Review* 41(4): 335–357.
- Deslippe, P (2012) The Swami of Baltimore: recalling the life and legacy of William Walker Atkinson. *Maryland Life* April: 40–42.
- Deslippe, P (2013) William Walker Atkinson and the first issue of New Thought magazine. *New Thought* Winter, 22–23.
- Ferrell, OC (2018) Marketing’s identity crisis: it’s complicated. *AMS Review* 8: 30–38.
- Ferrell, OC, Hair, JF, Marshall, GW, et al. (2015) Understanding the history of marketing education to improve classroom instruction. *Marketing Education Review* 25(2): 159–175.
- Foucault, M (1971) Orders of discourse. *Social Science Information* 10(2): 7–30.
- Foucault, M (1980) Two lectures. In: Gordon, C (ed), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon, 78–108.
- Foucault, M (1984) Nietzsche, genealogy, history. In: Rabinow, P (ed), *The Foucault Reader*. London: Penguin, 76–100.
- Foucault, M (2000) Polemics, politics, and problematizations: An interview with Michael Foucault. In: Rabinow, P (ed) *Ethics: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*. London: Penguin, 111–119.
- Foucault, M (2017) *Subjectivity and Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1980–81*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Francisco, AB (1924) *Lecture on Thinking*. Chicago: The Sheldon School.
- Gale, H (1897) [Review] A Scientific Demonstration of the Future Life. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* Supplement: 330–335.
- Gale, H (1900) *Psychological Studies*. Minneapolis: Privately Printed.
- Garrett, EJ (1941) *Telepathy: In Search of a Lost Faculty*. New York: Creative Age Press.
- Griswold, AW (1934) New thought: a cult of success. *American Journal of Sociology* 40(3): 309–318.
- Gurney, E (1884) The problems of hypnotism. *Mind* 9(36): 477–508.
- Gurney, E (1887a) Hypnotism and telepathy. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 5: 216–259.
- Gurney, E (1887b) Further problems of hypnotism (I.). *Mind* 12(46): 212–232.
- Gurney, E (1887c) Further problems of hypnotism (II.). *Mind* 12(47): 397–422.
- Gurney, E, Myers, FWH, and Podmore, F (1886/1918) *Phantasms of the Living*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.
- Hamilton, T (2009) *Immortal Longings*. Exeter: Imprint Academic.
- Horowitz, M (2018) *The Miracle Club*. Rochester: Inner Traditions.
- Hudson, TJ (1893/1916) *The Law of Psychic Phenomena*. London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons.
- Hudson, TJ (1900) The fundamental principles of hypnosis. In: E.V. Neal and C.S. Clark (eds). *Hypnotism and Hypnotic Suggestion*. Rochester: New York: State Publishing Company, 140–145.
- Hyslop, JH (1906) *Enigmas of Psychical Research*. London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons.



- Jacobson, JZ (1951) *Scott of Northwestern*. Chicago: L. Mariano.
- James, W (1890) *The Principles of Psychology, Volumes I and II*. New York: Henry Holt.
- James, W (1945) *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. London: Longmans Green and Co.
- James, W (1961a) The final impressions of a psychical researcher. In: Murphy, G and Ballou, RO (eds), *William James on Psychical Research*. London: Chatto and Windus, 63–70.
- James, W (1961b) Extracts from letters and a lecture. In: Murphy, G and Ballou, RO (eds), *William James on Psychical Research*. London: Chatto and Windus, 63–70.
- Jones, DGB and Tadajewski, M (2018) *Foundations of Marketing Thought: The Influence of the German Historical School*. London: Routledge.
- Jones, JG (1921) *Salesmanship and Sales Management*. New York: Alexander Hamilton Institute.
- Key, TM, Clark, T, Ferrell, OC, et al. (2020) Marketing's theoretical and conceptual value proposition: opportunities to address marketing's influence. *AMS Review* 10: 151–167.
- Kumar, V (2015) Evolution of marketing as a discipline: what has happened and what to look out for. *Journal of Marketing* 79(1): 1–9.
- Kuna, DP (1976) The concept of suggestion in the early history of advertising psychology. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 12(4): 347–353.
- Krebs, SL (1905) Department of psychic research and practical psychology. *Suggestion: The New Psychology Magazine for Thinkers* September: 480–483.
- Krebs, SL (1906) *The Law of Suggestion: A Compendium for the People*. Chicago: Science Press.
- Krebs, SL (1916) Character Judging as a Business Asset, in Southern Pine Association (1916). *Selling Lumber: Being the Full and Complete Report of the First School of Salesmanship Held at St. Louis*, Missouri. Kansas. City: F.T. Riley, 124–149.
- Leary, DE (1987) Telling likely stories: the rhetoric of the new psychology, 1880-1920. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 23(4): 315–331.
- Lynch, EC (1968) Walter Dill Scott: Pioneer industrial psychologist. *Business History Review* 42(2): 149–170.
- Miles, C (2015) Ericksonian therapy as a grounding for a theory of persuasive marketing dialogue. *Marketing Theory* 15(1): 95–111.
- Miles, C (2020) *Marketing, Rhetoric, and Control: The Magical Foundations of Marketing Theory*. London: Routledge.
- Mulford, P (1890a) The drawing power of the mind. In: Mulford, P (ed), *Your Forces, and How to Use Them*. New York: F.J. Needham, Vol. 4, 1–18.
- Mulford, P (1890b) The source of your strength. In: Mulford, P (ed), *Your Forces, and How to Use Them*. New York: F.J. Needham, Vol. 4, 1–15.
- Mulford, P (1890c) The material mind vs. the spiritual mind. In: Mulford, P (ed), *Your Forces, and How to Use Them*. New York: F.J. Needham, Vol. 4, 1–14.
- Mulford, P (1890d) Some practical mental recipes. In: Mulford, P (ed), *Your Forces, and How to Use Them*. New York: F.J. Needham, Vol. 4, 1–14.
- Mulford, P (1906) Mental tyranny, or how we mesmerize each other. In: Mulford, P (ed), *Your Forces, and How to Use Them*. New York: F.J. Needham, Vol. 5, 1–18.
- Mulford, P (1911a) The art of forgetting. In: Mulford, P (ed), *Your Forces, and How to Use Them*. New York: F.J. Needham, Vol. 1, 1–13.
- Mulford, P (1911b) How thoughts are born. In: Mulford, P (ed), *Your Forces, and How to Use Them*. New York: F.J. Needham, Vol. 1, 1–12.
- Mulford, P (1911c) The law of success. In: Mulford, P (ed), *Your Forces, and How to Use Them*. New York: F.J. Needham, Vol. 1, 1–16.
- Mulford, P (1911d) The process of re-embodiment. In: Mulford, P (ed), *Your Forces, and How to Use Them*. New York: F.J. Needham, Vol. 1, pp. 1–9.

- Mulford, P (1911e) How to keep your strength. In: Mulford, P (ed), *Your Forces, and How to Use Them*. New York: F.J. Needham, Vol. 1, 1–12.
- Mulford, P (1911f) Consider the lillies. In: Mulford, P (ed), *Your Forces, and How to Use Them*. New York: F.J. Needham, Vol. 1, 1–8.
- Mulford, P (1911g) The art of study. In: Mulford, P (ed), *Your Forces, and How to Use Them*. New York: F.J. Needham, Vol. 1, 1–13.
- Myers, FWH (1892) The subliminal consciousness. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*. Vol. 7, 298–355.
- Myers, FWH (1893) Professor Wundt on hypnotism and suggestion. *Mind* 2(5): 95–101.
- Myers, FWH (1903/1992) *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*. Abridged edition. Tasburgh: Pilgrim Books.
- Russell, TH (1910) *Salesmanship: Theory and Practice*. Chicago: Washington Institute.
- Scott, WD (1907) *The Psychology of Public Speaking*. Philadelphia: Pearson Bros.
- Scott, WD (1909) An interpretation of the psycho-analytic method in psychotherapy with a report of a case so treated. *The Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 3: 371–377.
- Scott, WD (1911) *Influencing Men in Business: The Psychology of Argument and Suggestion*. New York: The Ronald Press Company.
- Scott, WD (1921) *The Psychology of Advertising in Theory and Practice*. Boston: Small, Maynard & Company.
- Sextus, C (1900) Hypnotism. In: Neal, EV and Clark, CS (eds), *Hypnotism and Hypnotic Suggestion*. Rochester: New York State Publishing Company, 49–94.
- Sheldon, AF (1904) A short talk about salesmanship. *The Minneapolis Journal* February: 11.
- Sheldon, AF (1910a) *Lesson Ten: Polishing the Points*. Chicago: The Sheldon School.
- Sheldon, AF (1910b) *Lesson One: A General Survey*. Chicago: The Sheldon School.
- Sheldon, AF (1911a) *Lesson Six: The Thing to Be Sold*. Chicago: The Sheldon School.
- Sheldon, AF (1911b) *Text-book K, Habit*. Chicago: The Sheldon School.
- Sheldon, AF (1911c) *Text-Book G: Six Laws for the Development of Reliability*. Chicago: The Sheldon School.
- Sheldon, AF (1911d) *Lesson Twelve: The Sale II*. Chicago: The Sheldon School.
- Sheldon, AF (1911e) *Lesson Eleven: The Sale I*. Chicago: The Sheldon School.
- Sheldon, AF (1911f) *Lesson Two: The Psychology of Service*. Chicago: The Sheldon School.
- Sheldon, AF (1917) *The Science of Business: Lesson One*. Chicago: The Sheldon School.
- Sheldon, AF (1921) The Philosophy of Rotary. In: *Proceedings of the 1921 Rotary Convention*. Edinburgh, Scotland: Rotary International, 109–145.
- Sheldon, AF (1924) *Twelve: Synthesis – the Sale*. Chicago: The Sheldon School.
- Sheldon, AF (1929) *Science and Conservation*. Rochester: D.U. Bois Press.
- Sheldon, AF and McDowell, GR (1924) *The Art of Selling*. Chicago, IL: The Sheldon School.
- Shryer, WA (1912) *Analytical Advertising*. Detroit, MI: Business Service Corporation.
- Sidis, B (1898) *The Psychology of Suggestion*. New York: D. Appleton and Company.
- Slaughter, JW (1900) Suggestibility. In: Neal, E.V and Clark, C.S (eds), *Hypnotism and Hypnotic Suggestion*. Rochester: New York State Publishing Company, 156–159.
- Sommer, A (2012) Psychical research and the origins of American psychology: Hugo Münsterberg, William James and Eusapia Palladino. *History of the Human Sciences* 25(2): 23–44.
- Strong, EK (1922) *The Psychology of Selling Life Insurance*. New York: Harper.
- Strong, EK (1925) Theories of selling. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 9(1): 75–86.
- Swift, EJ (1918) *Psychology and the Day's Work*. London: Allen + Unwin.
- Tadajewski, M (2006a) The ordering of marketing theory: The influence of McCarthyism and the Cold War. *Marketing Theory* 6(2): 163–199.

- Tadajewski, M (2006b) Remembering motivation research: toward an alternative genealogy of interpretive consumer research. *Marketing Theory* 6(4): 429–466.
- Tadajewski, M (2011) Correspondence sales education in the early twentieth century: The case of the Sheldon School (1902-39). *Business History* 53(7): 1130–1151.
- Tadajewski, M (2012) Character analysis and racism in marketing theory and practice. *Marketing Theory* 12(4): 485–508.
- Tadajewski, M (2017) The Rotary Club and the promotion of the social responsibilities of business in the early 20th century. *Business & Society* 56(7): 975–1003.
- Tadajewski, M (2019) Habit as a central concept in marketing. *Marketing Theory* 19(4): 447–466.
- Tadajewski, M (forthcoming) Writing telepathy back into marketing theory. *Marketing Theory*.
- Tadajewski, M and Jones, D.G.B (2021) From goods-dominant logic to service-dominant logic? Service, service capitalism and service socialism. *Marketing Theory* 21(1): 113–133.
- Warcollier, R (1963) *Mind to Mind*. New York: Collier Books.
- Yadav, MS (2017) Disciplinary memory and theory development. *AMS Review* 7: 1–3.
- Yates, DH (1932) *Psychological Racketeers*. Boston: Richard G. Badger.

**Mark Tadajewski** is the editor of the *Journal of Marketing Management*, an Associate Editor of the *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, the co-editor of two book series, as well as Honorary Visiting Professor of Marketing at the University of York and Royal Holloway, University of London.