

DYING TO CONSUME: MARKETING AND THE EXISTENTIALIZATION OF SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract

Purpose – This conceptual paper diagnoses the fundamental tensions between the social temporality of sustainability and the individual temporality of marketing in the Dominant Social Paradigm. We propose the notion of ‘existentialized sustainability’ as a possible way forward.

Approach – We take the Heideggerian perspective that death may bring individual and societal time into a common framework. From here, we compare anthropological and consumer culture research on funerary rites in non-modern societies with contemporary societies of the DSP.

Findings – Funerary rites reveal important insights into how individuals relate to their respective societies. Individuals are viewed as important contributors to the maintenance and regeneration of the group in non-modern societies. In contrast, funerary rites for individuals in the DSP are private, increasingly informal, and unconnected to sustaining society at large. This analysis reveals clear parallels between the goals of sustainability and the values of non-modern funerary rites.

Social implications – We propose the metaphor of a funerary rite for sustainability to promote consciousness toward societal futures. The idea is to improve ‘quality of death’ through sustainability – in other words, the ‘existentialization of sustainability.’ This opens up a possible strategy for marketers to actively contribute to a societal shift toward a New Environmental Paradigm (NEP).

Originality – The Heideggerian approach is a novel way to identify and reconcile the epistemic contradictions between sustainability and marketing. This diagnosis suggests a way in which marketing can address the wicked problem of global sustainability challenges, perhaps allowing a new spirituality in consumption.

Keywords: Sustainability; Death; Heidegger; Temporalities; Dominant Social Paradigm

Introduction

“By coming to terms with the significance of our finitude, he [Heidegger] claimed that we could free ourselves from the voracious appetite of groundless subjectivity that comes to the fore in the modern age.” –Simon (Cooper, 2003), *Technoculture and Critical Theory: In the Service of the Machine?*

Sustainability agendas are problematic because they are set up as a trade-off with ‘the future,’ in which compromises and reductions in the consumption of resources – and therefore present economies and lifestyles – are exchanged to ensure the continued availability of resources for future generations. The Brundtland Report for instance specifically defines “sustainable development” as development that is able: “...to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs...” (Brundtland et al., 1987). Our task in this chapter is to diagnose the fundamental tensions and contradictions concerning future orientations between sustainable consumption and marketing in consumer cultures. Bringing these two temporalities into a common frame is important since - despite recent developments in sustainability marketing ((Belz, Belz, & Peattie, 2012; Fuller, 1999) - a truly sustainable orientation has yet to appear in mainstream marketing (Gordon, Carrigan, & Hastings, 2011).

To address this complicated issue it is necessary to grapple with the “fuzziness” (Connolly & Prothero, 2003: 276) in the societal time horizon of ‘sustainable consumption’ and the radically individualized futures that are the focus of marketing (Zwick & Cayla, 2011: 7). This paper thus argues that *death* is a fundamental, but largely implicit and unrecognized ‘time horizon’ in discourses and practices around sustainability *and* in marketing, because it structures human imaginations of individual and social futures (Heidegger, 2015). This makes personal death an important contextualizing phenomenon that allows individual consumers to relate to the sociality of sustainability. We term this dynamic the ‘existentialization of sustainability’ as our call to explicitly recognize the time horizon of

death. Anthropological and historical studies of rituals and beliefs surrounding death provide key conceptual support for the claim that sustainability is a form of funerary rite. Our framework begins with the premise that mortality and funerary ceremonies represent an entrée point to help make “the ecological issue culturally significant” (Kilbourne et al., 1997). Thus, the structuring influence of anticipated death on future orientations constitutes a part of “...the universe in which ... consumer choices can unfold.” (Askegaard & Kjeldgaard, 2002: 31-32). This perspective helps us address the uneasy relationship between marketing and sustainability. We use this perspective to show how the AMA definition of marketing as providing offerings that have “value to society at large” can be made culturally and existentially meaningful for the individual consumer.

In the following sections we begin by discussing the relationship between sustainability and marketing as involving two opposed temporalities: social time and individual time. We then go on to show how these temporalities generate a wicked or apparently irresolvable problem that can be brought into a common conceptual framework by employing death to understand how the future is imagined. This suggests there is an intimate connection between sustainability and death awareness that points to ‘the existentialization of sustainability’ as a strategy towards making environmental concerns individually meaningful and thus worthy of action. Subsequently we show how the culture of death in the Dominant Social Paradigm (hereafter DSP) makes it increasingly difficult to articulate societal futures. Most importantly sustainability can be conceptualized as a metaphorical funerary rite, since funerary rites address the cultural aspects of managing: *putrescence and pollution, continuing the fertility of the living, and managing the regenerative aspects of the world which recreate the permanent order of society*. In the discussion we suggest that death is not merely a peripheral research topic in marketing and consumer studies, but an important theoretical lens that goes to the heart of what marketing is as a practice and a concept. In the conclusion we

point to future research and the development of new perspectives on established fields of study.

Sustainability and Marketing

As environmental concerns and sustainability have gained more traction in the public agenda, this has fostered a parallel discussion and debate about possible roles of marketing for promoting sustainability (Prothero et al., 2011). The discipline of marketing now has several books, articles, and educational courses promoting sustainable marketing practices, from product development to channel networks, strategies, and pricing (e.g. Fuller, 1999; (Solomon, Marshall, & Stuart, 2015). However, these approaches are still far from integrated into mainstream business and marketing practices due to the entrenchment of the DSP. The DSP is predicated on unlimited growth into the future: contemporary societies and transnational organizations are built upon structures and infrastructures that consume material resources at a faster rate than they are renewed or replenished over time (Kilbourne et al., 1997). At most these orientations have resulted in new marketing definitions that refer vaguely to added value for ‘society at large’ (American Marketing Association, 2013). At its core, marketing within the DSP is still about shaping and facilitating consumption, particularly the consumption of mass-produced consumer goods. For example, Connolly and Prothero (2003: 288-9) found that despite an increase in environmental awareness among Irish consumers, they largely do not link consumption in itself with environmental degradation. One of the most difficult aspects of sustainability is the need to address unsustainable practices at multiple levels, from individual-level consumer behaviour to global infrastructures and economic policies.

Prothero et al. (2011) set out a marketing research program to assist in a shift from the DSP to the so-called New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) (Dunlap & Liere, 1978). They

specify research themes to address consumer behaviour, promotion of the consumer-citizen concept to increase sustainability awareness, and the role of institutions and public policy through education initiatives and fostering collaborative consumption. Gordon et al. (2011) propose a 3-prong framework combining green marketing, social marketing, and critical marketing, in which each element works in concert to bring about sustainable marketing processes, sustainable lifestyles, and sustainable market systems. These approaches provide concrete research agendas and paths toward establishing a brave new role for marketing to support an international shift away from the DSP in consumer societies. However, they both point to the conflicts between ‘short-term’ and ‘long-term’ orientations (Gordon et al., 2011: 153; Prothero et al., 2011: 34) and are still uncertain about how to address the fuzziness of the future.

Sustainability and Social Futures

The ‘future’ is a troublesome concept in sustainability. Kilbourne et al. (1997) point out that the rights of ‘future generations’ are logistically impossible to include in valuation methods meant to calculate “true social costs” of consumption, especially in long term projections, because “...every discount rate, no matter how small, reduces posterity to zero value” (Kilbourne et al., 1997: 10). Likewise, Connolly & Prothero (2003) observe that the issues of sustainability are at root a question of time: ‘how long’ can certain levels of resource consumption last? Some researchers have developed environmental indicators to provide more precision. However, they also note that other scholars (Daly, 1990; Stern, Dietz et al., 1997) lament the imprecision and “fuzziness” in the scale, scope, and time horizon of the ‘sustainable consumption’ concept (Connolly & Prothero, 2003: 276).

While modern capitalism has arguably provided tremendous advances in terms of quality of life for the global middle- and upper-classes, it is also the source of unprecedented

and ever-deepening social inequality at regional and global scales (Sennett, 2007). We are confronted with an inherent problem in an economic system with concomitant consumerist DSP (Kilbourne et al., 1997). The loss of biodiversity and global climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions are two of the most pressing large-scale sustainability issues with a consumption component (OECD, 2016). The intensive production of forest and agricultural products driven by market demand, such as palm oil, is a major contributor to deforestation and biodiversity loss (Lam et al., 2009). All these debates ultimately concern resource calculations regarding communal or social futures. However, these social futures remain under-theorised or implicit, and they occur at a different scale than those employed in consumer studies and marketing.

Individual Time in CCT and Marketing

Rather than addressing societal time in issues of sustainability, marketing and consumer studies primarily focus on illuminating the individual, subjective, perceptive and cognitive aspects of time in the present and the agentic implications that follow. Here research has focused upon “An individual's time allocation decision[s]” (Feldman & Hornik, 1981); “...a model of the temporal cognitive system of the individual...” (Bergadaà, 1990); attempts to “...measure individual differences related to time...” (Francis-Smythe & Robertson, 1999); or noted that “Time is an “...exposition of “lived time” as it is experience by the temporally directed, embodied subject...and the implications it holds for studying consumption experience” (Toyoki, Schwob, Hietanen, & Johnsen, 2013) (Bergadaà, 1990; Cotte, Ratneshwar, & Mick, 2004; Feldman & Hornik, 1981; Toyoki et al., 2013; Woermann & Rokka, 2015). While these provide important insights into the experience of time, they are not amenable for understanding social or collective orientations toward the future in sustainability.

Another stream of consumer culture literature that has strangely received less attention explores the issue of temporality from postmodern perspectives. (Clarke, 1998), for example, generates a novel perspective on consumption and identity through what he terms 'postmodern conceptions of space-time'. Clarke articulates a concept of modern temporality as 'incompleteness', in which 'the future' is understood as unstructured potentiality. Sampath (1998) pursued the postmodern style in consumption studies by shrinking this mass of prospective temporality given by Clarke into the present as two kinds of imagination: either large and imposing futures or miniscule futures (Sampath, 1998, p. 458). However, the truly interesting contribution stems from Meamber's (1998) response to Sampath, who views the future as structured through 'desire' (Meamber, 1998, p. 463).

Subsequent consumer culture literature focuses on the future as a projection, prediction, extrapolation, or outlook. (Small, 1999), for instance, returns to a more classical discussion of anticipation as 'futurism' along the lines of Marinetti (2016[1914]) and Toffler (1970), in which 'future shocks' are pleasurably consumed as a means of ordering daily life. The future is articulated as fundamentally 'unknown' (Small, 1999, p. 342); this argument thus seems to overlook the importance of the ubiquitous anticipation of mortality for structuring, or perhaps better, limiting what individuals' can desire, but also the dire outlook of sustainability calculations. (Husz, 2002) expands this on the meso-level of analysis by discussing how Swedish debates on state lotteries reflect dilemmas of emerging modern consumer and welfare society at the beginning of the 1900s. Husz thus opens up a discussion on how 'the future' in consumer behaviour feeds into issues of agency and structures, and meso-level analytical connections. He does this by viewing state lotteries as a means of picturing the future, where playing the lottery sets up a conflict between community future-oriented planning and individual prospective dreams (Husz, 2002, p. 53), which interestingly

informs the debate about how sustainability and marketing relate to one another (Husz, 2002, p. 67).

However, this literature does not suggest any structure for thinking about ‘the future.’ Building on well-established psychological structures of near, medium, and long-term futures (Eyal, Sagristano, Trope, Liberman, & Chaiken, 2009), anthropological scholarship focuses on the conflict among these future orientations in decision making (e.g. Pace, 2004). The weakness of this approach is in the arbitrary phases imposed upon imaginations of the future. What constitutes the ‘near future’ as opposed to the ‘intermediate’ or ‘far’ future? Where and what is the boundary between these phases, and how does it relate to human motivation? This problem is often sidestepped by addressing the relative importance of the near, intermediary and far future stages. An example of this is (Guyer, 2007), who examines what she calls a ‘public culture of temporality’ in the Anglophone world. Guyer argues that we are witnessing a relative decline in the importance of the intermediate future, in favour of orientations toward both immediate and long-term futures. While calling attention to the weight or importance of the various stratifications of future depth (i.e. how far into the future one ‘looks’) is interesting and supported by some evidence, the question remains: near, medium, and long term for whom, in regard to what? More importantly, the question must be how to reconcile individual experiences of consumer time with the social time of sustainability. This tension leads to the super wicked problem of sustainability.

The Super Wicked Problem of Sustainability

There is an ongoing, overriding fear and uncertainty about the compatibility of sustainable living and maintaining current levels of wellbeing and ‘quality of life’ (Alam, Bala, Huq, & Matin, 1991; Belz et al., 2012; Fuller, 1999; Kilbourne, McDonagh, & Prothero, 1997; Kotler, Roberto, & Lee, 2002; Levett, 1998; Sheth, Sethia, & Srinivas, 2010;

Steg & Gifford, 2005). This tension points to a problematic decoupling of individual and societal interests on issues of time, which we here label a 'wicked problem', or an issue which is highly problematic or impossible to resolve. The challenge of grappling with the problem occurs since there is lacking, self-contradictory, or alternating conditions or assumptions about temporality that are hard to identify in common sense analysis. The term "wicked" thus has to do with resistance to resolution, and not moral evil as such (Ritchey, 2011). Indeed, when the notion of scale and the dispersed nature of the problem is added, we can follow (Levin, Cashore, Bernstein, & Auld, 2012) in terming global issues of sustainability "super wicked," characterizing it as a new class of global, environmental problems.

However, while consumption and thus marketing is at the heart of super wicked problems of sustainability, the concept has only received very little explicit attention in consumer culture theory. These wicked problems are constituted as a series of marketing conundrums that are pit against one another or more specifically dyadic alternatives about personal and social futures that explain why it has been so difficult for a truly sustainable orientation to appear in mainstream marketing (Gordon et al., 2011). As such, various scholars have conceptualized these competing motivations towards the future in the following ways: "consumer goods and hope" (Connolly & Prothero 2003: 286); 'psychology' and 'materiality' (ibid. 288), 'hedonistic consumer' vs 'responsible consumer' (D'Antone & Spencer 2015: 57); 'structural conditions' vs 'agency' (ibid); 'materialism' vs 'spirituality' (Stern 1997: 16); and 'personal well-being' vs 'welfare of the community' (Sheth et al. 2011: 24).



Figure 1: Distinct orientations toward the future

A theory of the future that centres on anticipated mortality offers a new perspective on the source and nature of the “wicked problems” of sustainable consumption in consumer culture theory. More specifically, mortality makes it possible to reconcile the relationship between individual and social future sides of the wicked problem, providing a novel theorization of “future depth”, i.e. how far into the future one’s imagination stretches that is important for understanding how the individual consumer relates to Brundtland’s ‘future generations’ (Brundtland et al., 1987). We propose a shift in sustainability research, away from focusing on the issue of ‘quality of life’ to the possibilities it opens up for a discussion of ‘quality of death.’ This would lead to the ‘existentialization of sustainability’ and make it relevant at the level of the individual consumer. What is needed is not to make people somehow more altruistic, but to make decisions for the good of society more rewarding for self-interest.

Anticipation of Death as an Anchor for the Future

Heidegger notes that to be human is to live permanently with imaginations of the future; the human being is always “ahead-of-itself” in its imagination (Heidegger, Martin, 2010, p. 228). Without anticipating the future in imagination it is impossible to initiate any

intentional, instrumental actions as a consumer (Robinson, 2015). However death is a fundamental rupture in imagined future time. Motivations for acting instrumentally towards the future and evaluating the consequences of those actions simply cannot be the same before and after death. The imagination of future death involves a limit to one's participation in society. After death, the individual is not there to experience the consequences of her activities initiated in the present. Death means that there is a point in time, in the future, beyond which it is no longer possible to take part in society, or consumption, or – *most importantly* - the consequences of one's own actions in the present. For the individual, the imagined future cannot be an undifferentiated march of time that extends from the present into various near, intermediary and deep future depths as Guyer (2007) holds, since death rips the individual out of society which continues on.

Here it should be noted that death is not interesting in and of itself, since it cannot be directly experienced. Death can only be anticipated *in* life. However death fundamentally structures the way one imagines and acts toward the future. This means that the individual consumer's ability to relate instrumentally to the future through consumer behaviour is predicated on future conditions of what we term 'pre-death' and 'post-death.' Drawing on Heidegger, we claim that death is an ontological condition which enables the wicked problems of sustainability to appear. Death is a phenomenological anchor for anticipated future time that constitutes a necessary horizon within which meaning can form for societies and individuals. This opens up the prospect of two times: the time of the individual and societal time.

According to Heidegger, appreciating the certainty of death is a conceptual prerequisite for attaining a sense of individuality (Heidegger 2010, 104; 237-239; 309-310; 329). Firstly, death is personal, being inherently mine and inescapable. Without death, experiences would eventually become meaningless and lose their unique character since they

continue forever. Secondly, death orients the individual away from the self and generates profound awareness of other selfhoods - that from which the self is torn away. For Heidegger, selfhood *and* social existence thus both appear in the awareness of mortality.

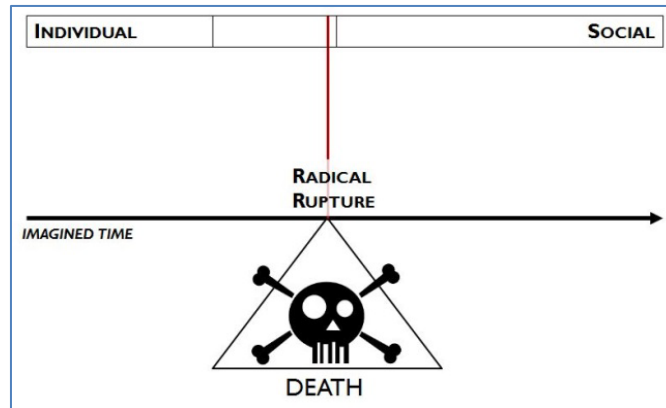


Figure 2: seesaw of death – anticipated future death as a radical rupture

Thus agency, psychology, materialism, consumer goods, hedonism and personal well-being are meaningful, because they are predicated on the imagination of the radical rupture of death, which generates individuality. For instance, it makes no sense to talk of the hedonism or the psychology of the dead *qua* dead, or that personal well-being is a meaningful concept post mortem.

Also, community welfare is inherently informed by a semantic of imagined temporality based on death or mortality. The knowledge of death allows the individual to think about society *as if* that individual was not a part of society. In her book *The Human Condition*, Hanna Arendt (2013) develops Heidegger’s perspectives on anticipating death by laying out a programme for examining its implications for individual action and behaviour and the endurance of humanity itself. Here Arendt notes how humans as mortal beings are fascinated with the idea of immortality. However, it also becomes clear that the human concern for immortality is itself indistinguishable from politics, since:

...without this transcendence into a potential earthly immortality [living on through others, through future generations], no politics, strictly speaking, no common world and no public realm is possible...but such a common world

can survive the coming and going of the generations, only to the extent that it appears in public. (Arendt, 2013).

Therefore the concept of immortality, as a refusal of death, introduces a second social temporality into human life. Here the true meaning and joy of consumption can only appear in the world and in sustainable responsibility to those other than oneself through anticipated death.

Sustainability involves imagining the well-being of society even though the imagining individual is no longer there to experience that well-being – that which goes on *without* the individual. In this sense, what sustainability actually asks of consumers is to imaginatively factor in their own mortality and take joy from that, since sustainability requires us to imagine “the ability of future generations to meet their own needs...” (Brundtland et al., 1987) i.e. imagining the needs of society after I die, rather than my personal needs that will end with myself. Here the other side of the dichotomy appears as: materiality, responsibility [to others], structure, spirituality and the welfare of the community.

Rather than ‘quality of life’, we suggest asking instead, how can sustainability be related to ‘quality of death’ or meaningful death? How can sustainability become existentially relevant for me in the present? Could sustainability be the centre of a movement toward a New Spirituality in consumption, one that brings into closer alignment certain domains of individual self-interest with ‘altruistic’ concerns about post-death futures? How can we become personally motivated towards altruism? Answering these questions requires examining cultural orientations towards death. In doing so we pay particular attention to the tension between individual and social temporalities embedded in socio-cultural practices of death.

Funerary Rites and Time

In his analysis of widespread metaphors of consumption, standard of living, and moral calculus in America, (Wilk, 2010) demonstrates how metaphors “offer openings for us to reframe environmental issues in ways that give us some realistic expectations of changing behavior.” We therefore propose the metaphor of an ongoing funerary rite for promoting consciousness toward societal futures; the idea is to improve, not our quality of life, but our ‘quality of death’ through sustainability. The cultural relevance of sustainability is intimately tied to conceptualizations and values regarding the environment (Press & Arnould, 2009). But caring about future environmental resources, climate change, and the continued viability of the human race is also deeply connected to cultural values regarding how individuals relate to society at large. We suggest that opening a dialogue about orientations toward the end of our lives and the consequences of pre-death practices for post-death futures could make both death and sustainability culturally salient in positive ways.

Mortality and related ceremonies are important features of every cultural system (Metcalf & Huntington, 1991). Anthropological and historical studies of death rituals and beliefs provide cross-cultural evidence of patterned orientations toward individual and social futures. Our framework begins with the premise that mortality and funerary ceremonies represent an entrée point to help make “the ecological issue culturally significant” (Kilbourne et al. 1997). This would involve making death more meaningful to the individual by making death meaningful to others. Here we review findings from funerary rites among non-modern societies and show how these provide an interpretive schema. They do so by illustrating orientations toward social futures that are compatible with values of sustainability in modern societies. Cultural metaphors profoundly structure the way human beings think about and comprehend the world (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

Similar to sustainability, funeral rituals across non-modern societies are concerned with reconciling two opposed temporal orders: the irreversible time of individuals and the eternal, cyclical time of societies (i.e. personal well-being vs. welfare of the community [Sheth et al. 2011: 24]). For example, Bloch (1982) argues that positions of authority in many non-modern societies are often conceptualized as belonging to an eternal and unchanging order, and their inviolability is therefore premised on a denial of history. But individuality and the flow of events pose a problem for this theoretically static world and a threat to the continuity of authority. (Kantorowicz, Leyser, & Jordan, 2016) notion of the king's two bodies – the king as institution and the king as a person – exemplifies the problem and attempts to overcome it. Legitimate authority is founded on the replication of the pattern ordained by the ancestors. Thus the purpose of sustainability, like funerary rites, is to shift the balance of importance from individual self-interest toward the social order and the future. This is done by drawing attention to the eternal time of society, or the continuity of the social order after one's death. In other words, we need to place greater emphasis on social imaginations of 'post-death' futures in our daily lives by making sustainability an explicit funerary rite.

Two important findings have emerged from cross-cultural research in pre- and non-modern societies: the use of funerary rites to deal with societal ruptures in both material and ideological senses; and the patterned relationships between rituals of death and social organization (Bloch & Parry, 1983; Goody, 1975; Hertz, 1905; Leach, 1961; Palgi & Abramovitch, 1984; van Gennep, 1961). Implicitly, funerals serve as reminders of social obligations and are platforms for the re-enactment, and therefore reinforcement, of these obligations within the family and larger community (Mandelbaum 1965: 195). In non-modern societies, mortuary ceremonies generally perform two functions: they formally

recognize the separation of the individual from the collectivity, and they re-establish the social order by reallocating the social roles the deceased once occupied.

Interesting parallels between funerary rites and sustainability emerge from this analysis. Funerals work to diminish and erase the deceased's individuality, often by identifying it with *putrescence and pollution* (individual self-interest is neither relevant nor desirable at death). Funerals reassert continuity by equating death with birth into the depersonalized collectivity of ancestors, which is the source of the continuing *fertility of the living* (our legacy positively contributes to the wellbeing of future generations). Mortuary rituals are often comprised of a series or progression of funeral rites for the deceased (Palgi & Abramovitch, 1984). In multi-stage funerary rites, the first disposal is associated with the time-bound individual and the polluting aspects of death; the second is concerned with the *regenerative aspects* which *re-create the permanent* order on which traditional society is based. Like funerary rites, sustainability requires cultural values and practices to ensure our collective continuity into the future by reducing our individual contribution to pollution and ensuring the regeneration of environmental resources. Death practices in the DSP are less amenable to sustainable thinking though. The next section shows how contemporary orientations towards death in the Western world are characterized by an existential poverty with its emphasis on 'pre-death' and individuality.

Death Practices in Modernity and the DSP

In the following we show how the individual's linear, unrepeatable time, as embodied in contemporary cultural values of achieving a 'good death' supersedes the importance of sustaining the eternal, or cyclical, time of the social order, which is now increasingly fragmented (Robinson 2015). In contemporary consumer societies we see significant shifts in cultures of death and conceptualizations of the relationship between individuals and the

maintenance of the social order. These historical processes radically transformed the interpretation of individual mortality and what it means for the continuation of society. Contemporary cultures of death work to decontextualize the individual, and therefore decouple individuals from the consequences of their life and death for the future of society. Blauner (1966) argues that death has become less disruptive to the collective while its consequences have become more serious for the bereaved. Similarly, the French historian Ariès (1974, 1977) observes that the twentieth century is associated with major changes in the concept of self and in interpersonal relationships.

We argue that this development poses a problem for addressing issues of sustainability; the disconnection and irrelevance of individuals from the functioning of society means that the consequences of individual consumption practices are also experienced as disconnected from society at large. More specifically, the individualization of death removes it from the social sphere of life, thereby making it difficult to reason about post-death consequences for ‘future generations’ (Brundtland et al., 1987). Furthermore, we would like to stress that although we are speaking here of individuals and individual-level consumption in relation to society and the environment, this cultural pattern has consequences for resource consumption and production at structural and systemic levels as well. Cultural values that emphasize the relationship between resource consumption and societal well-being and regeneration can help foster more sustainable social and production arrangements.

Becker (2011 [1973]) popularized the notion of the “denial of death” to describe contemporary American culture, although Parsons (1963) suggests that the American orientation to death is more accurately described as apathy, associated with feelings of uncertainty and not knowing what to do. The avoidance of death as a taboo topic extends into academic marketing and consumer studies; death and funeral rites only very recently received

attention as a research topic. (Dobscha, 2015) edited volume establishes the major domains in which marketing and consumer culture intersect with death, with chapters that examine the death industry, death rituals, the ‘consumption’ of death itself, and the materiality of death in relation to the body. This work provides an important and much needed discussion of death in marketing research. One consistent finding from this collection points to a general shift across western societies, from a denial of death to celebratory movements that embrace death as an important component of life.

Kübler-Ross's (1969) work, for example, helped to bring about significant changes in the cultural climate of death, particularly in the field of medicine in America (Palgi & Abramovitch 1984). She began a movement to redefine death as “the last great opportunity for ‘growth’ and personal transformation,” focusing on the notion of the “good death” (Green, 2012: 3). While working to eliminate fear, denial, and apathy, this cultural re-focusing on one’s own death is highly individualized rather than social. The individual: “...is given transcendental value, the ideological stress is on his unique and *unrepeatable* biography, and he is conceived of in opposition to society and his death is therefore not a challenge to its continuity” (Bloch & Parry 1982:15). This culture of death influences the imagination of time by placing much more weight and focus on pre-death futures than post-death futures. In extension, it becomes difficult to reason about individual importance for society through sustainability actions.

Both Blauner (1966) and Ariès (1975) observe that with the nuclear family replacing traditional community, affectivity has become concentrated on very few persons whose disappearance causes a dramatic crisis. Mourning and bereavement are widely understood as an intensely private experience that ought to be shielded from public view. In their empirical study of New Zealand post-mortem practices, Schafer and McManus (2015) analyse discourses among funeral professionals and representations of death and personalization in

the media, and compare these against the experiences of bereaving individuals. They found that these discourses emphasized ‘celebratory death rituals’ and an empowering bereavement movement (an extension of Kübler-Ross’s notion of the ‘good death’). However, these discourses obscure the neoliberal responsabilization of funerary rites and disposal, in which individuals increasingly bear the logistical, financial, and emotional costs. In response, an increasing number of New Zealanders are choosing to bypass public, celebratory funerals in preference for private and informal disposal (Schafer & McManus, 2015). These options are not only cheaper and more private, allowing mourners to be shielded from public scrutiny of their grief. Informal funerals allow the bereaved to focus on ‘authentic memorialization,’ in which the most meaningful aspect of last rites is the placement of ashes following cremation, so that it reflects the connection of the deceased to natural landscapes and stays true to the ‘essence of the dead’ (Schafer & McManus 2015: 68). A similar dramatic rise in cremation after death is occurring in the US; deaths resulting in cremation rose from four percent in the 1960s to over 43 percent by 2012 (Cenzig & Rook, 2015).

Importantly, Bloch and Parry (1983) go on to point out that not only do the deaths of individuals seem irrelevant to the functioning of society, but conceptualizations of society itself as an eternal, unchanging order have been completely disrupted. Indeed, Robinson (2016) demonstrates how contemporary media discourses express increasing anxieties about fragmented futures – that is, our social imagination is torn between multiple possible future scenarios. Taken together, these socio-cultural developments – the fragmentation of social futures, the ‘personalization’ and personal responsibility for achieving a ‘good death,’ and the decoupling of individuals from society – profoundly contribute to the wicked problem of sustainability.

A Common Framework for Sustainability and Marketing

As explained above, the Heideggerian perspective views our consumption behaviour as predicated on imagining two distinct kinds of futures: our personal ‘pre-death’ future and the future of society ‘post-death.’ In the pre-death future it is possible to act instrumentally towards consumer objects and anticipate experiencing the consequences of that action later on. Thus, shopping for groceries in the afternoon is meaningful in order to prepare and eat dinner in the evening. After all, why shop for dinner if you expect to be dead before dinnertime? Intentional actions are always predicated on expectations of longevity. This imagining of one’s presence in the future informs one’s actions and motivations in the now. This is the future condition that concerns psychology research on short-term and long-term consumer orientations, for example (e.g. Howlett, Kees, & Kemp, 2008; Mogilner, Aaker, & Pennington, 2008). But death here constitutes a boundary for what kind of personal motivations can arise and how far you can think into the future. In imagining the future consequences of our decisions and actions post-death, it becomes possible to visualize being removed or disappearing from the social context in which these consequences are felt - the world goes on without the person who dies. Therefore, in post-death imagination, the consequences of present (consumer) behaviour *only* goes through people *other* than oneself. This is not to say that we only consider the impact of our actions on others in our imaginations of post-death futures; rather, the ability to imagine the world *as if* one were dead is a key ontological element that allows us to consider the wellbeing of present society and inform altruistic motivations in the present.

How people relate to the social groupings and society they identify with is culturally patterned. And as we have argued above, cultures of death and funerary rites are highly significant arenas for signalling and reinforcing values such as responsibilities to the group and contribution to the collective wellbeing. In the contemporary DSP, we observed

fundamental problems with enacting sustainability agendas, because of difficulty in understanding the connection between consumption (primarily of mass-produced goods) with environmental consequences. In addition, individualized fears of diminishing quality of life, diminished significance of the individual to the functioning of society, and increasing fragmentation of imagined societal futures further exacerbate the problem. At the same time, we point to the following cultural orientations toward death: 1) denial of or apathy toward death in Western society; 2) the primacy of nuclear family bonds over community bonds in bereavement; and 3) the more recent notion of the ‘good death’ as personal growth. These cultures of death in the DSP consequently help tip the balance between Self and Others (environmental conditions for the continuation of society) heavily in favour of the Self. Thus, concerns for one side of the super wicked problem – agency, psychology, materialism, consumer goods, hedonistic consumerism, and personal well-being – trump concerns about structural conditions, materiality, spirituality, hope, responsible consumption, and community welfare.

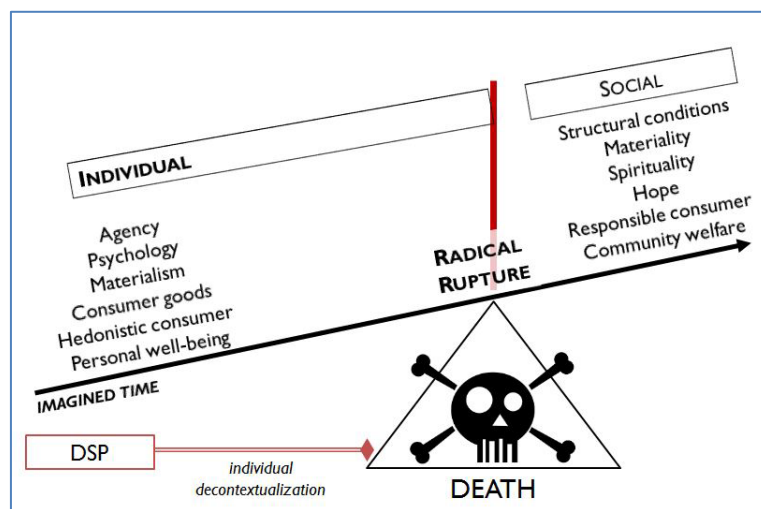


Figure 3: individuals in the DSP are disconnected from society at large

The metaphor of sustainability as a funerary rite allows us to identify potential cultural values and practices that can be mobilized to counter the individualizing pressures in the DSP. These are: 1) reconciling the individual temporality with social-environmental

temporality; 2) reconnecting societal wellbeing with environmental renewal; and 3) diminishing polluting effects in order to enhance one's quality of death. Promoting these cultural values helps align self-interested concerns with environmental sustainability through the valorisation of one's 'quality of death.'

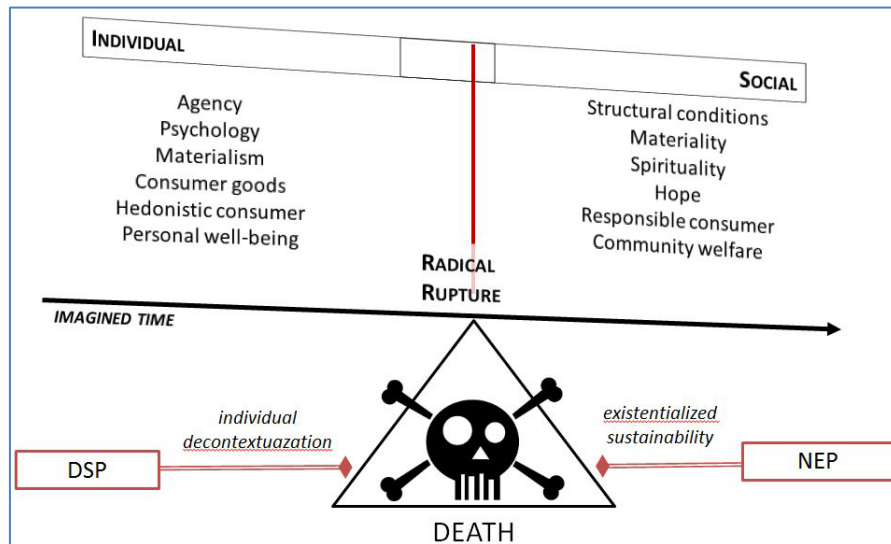


Figure 4: valorisation of sustainability through 'quality of death'

The marketing of green lifestyles and 'responsible consumption' has failed to be adopted in mainstream consumer cultures because it lacks existential urgency. As long as sustainability is 'only' a responsibility toward (imaginary) others and not a culturally valued identity project, it will remain relevant only to those minority groups who have taken up sustainability as a political cause. We argue that there is potential in fostering the personal relevance of sustainability projects for individuals through the metaphor of funerary rites. As Zwick and Cayla note:

...marketing represents a perpetual questioning machine asking the modern consumer to make a project of *oneself* based on ongoing *self-examination* and querying; to look at *oneself* as a set of constantly multiplying problems (too fat, too skinny, too boring, etc.) and as yet unrealized potentialities; to translate them into *personal needs and desires* [emphasis added] (2011: 7).

Therefore, in conceptualizing environmentally sustainable practices as a way to ensure one's quality of death, sustainability becomes an important horizon of meaning for all forms of consumption by modifying 'the questioning machine' itself. Death constitutes a limit to the questioning machine that must be included. An emphasis on quality of death provides a framework in which consumption is directly linked to others through the achievement of a culturally meaningful death, a death that contributes to the wellbeing of society. It is, "the desire to be seen and recognized by equals; it is the desire for our own image granted only through the perspectives of others." (Ingram, 2014). Thus, sustainability as a funerary rite means attaining existential meaning through the recognition of others, and understanding that the fulfilment of private desire can only be attained and truly heightened in a public world of mutual consideration.

Conclusion: Existentializing Sustainability in Marketing

We set out to diagnose the fundamental tensions and contradictions between the future orientations in sustainability and the individualized temporalities facilitated by marketing in its current role in the DSP. Although the AMA has in recent years expanded its definition of marketing to include activities that have "...value for customers, clients, partners, and *society at large*," this is only a vague nod toward the societal impact of marketing, and does not address the industry's fundamentally individualist orientation. We have shown that as long as mainstream marketing is embedded within a paradigm predicated on unlimited growth and unsustainable consumption of natural resources, the wicked problem of sustainability will persist, and a sustainability agenda in marketing practice will remain marginal.

There is a rich literature in consumer culture research, which examines the experience of temporalities, and also a burgeoning research agenda on death in consumer cultures.

However, both temporalities and death are addressed as objects of research through ideographic approaches. In contrast, we propose a perspective that theorizes the relationship between time and death from a coherent ontology. Employing the phenomenological and hermeneutical thought of Heidegger and Arendt, we argued that death is a fundamental and yet widely unrecognized anchor in thinking about the future that structures individual as well as social temporality. In other words, while the previous literature brings to bear many different theoretical perspectives on time and death respectively (e.g. practice theory, assemblage theory, postmodernism), our philosophical approach contributes with a synthesis of these seemingly disparate phenomena. Here death becomes a core theoretical perspective for understanding the temporalities of marketing *and* sustainability, opening up exciting possibilities for future research.

In so-called traditional societies, the issue of ‘sustainability’ was centred on maintaining the existing social order. But in modern, Western societies, the existing social order is not guaranteed or immutable – indeed, we see increasing calls for the end of capitalism and the DSP (Archibugi & Archibugi, 2000; Mason, 2015; Srnicek & Williams, 2015). The focus has shifted from maintaining the social order to maintaining planetary conditions to ensure the survival of humanity. As a consequence of globalization, conceptions of society have become entangled with environmental concerns at the scale of ‘humankind’ (Lifton, 1979). At the same time, however, individuals remain largely unconnected to the ongoing issues of protecting environmental resources.

Rather than worrying about ‘quality of life’ under a regime of sustainability, we suggest asking, how sustainability can be related to ‘quality of death’ or meaningful death? This would be an ‘existentialization of sustainability’ as a strategy towards making environmental concerns individually meaningful. To substantiate this, we show how sustainability can become culturally significant as a metaphorical funerary rite, since funerary

rites address the cultural aspects of managing putrescence and pollution, continuing the ‘fertility’ of the living, and managing the regenerative aspects of the world which recreate the permanent order of society. If marketing is indeed a questioning machine that translates problems into personal needs and desires, our perspective inscribes death as a problem into marketing. It becomes possible to translate societal needs into personal existential projects through sustainability as a funerary rite, ascribing meaning into life and into the finitude of life. This could point to a New Spirituality of consumption in the New Environmental Paradigm. In the NEP, the phrase ‘dying to consume’ would take on a wholly new meaning. Brundtland’s ‘trade-offs with the future’ could become individually desirable as a means toward a valued quality of death.

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