Machines driving machines:
Deleuze and Guattari’s
asignifying unconscious

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Abstract
The psychoanalytic tradition is split. Most marketing theorists work with a linguistic model, treating the unconscious as an extension of conscious language. This article promotes the machinic model of Deleuze and Guattari, which treats the unconscious as a subjective but also asignifying. This means that the unconscious is comprised of colliding forces and their contingent connections, rather than a chain of signification in a wider symbolic structure. There are a small number of machinic or proto-machinic articles in marketing theory, but this article explores how explicating the Deleuzoguattarian model could reconceptualise: (1) the unconscious, (2) its relation to sociomaterial systems, (3) its relation to marketing practice, and (4) the role of critical marketing theory. This article also argues that there is a strategic benefit in searching for complementarities between Deleuze and Guattari, on the one hand, and other psychoanalytic thinkers, on the other. A united front of unconscious understandings would be advantageous in a discipline that lionises conscious choice. As such, this article presents the machinic model as another perspective in the already pluralistic tradition of psychoanalytic marketing theory.

Keywords
Assemblage, Deleuze, Guattari, machinic, psychoanalysis, schizoanalysis, unconscious

Introduction

Everywhere it is machines – real ones, not figurative ones – machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections.

Deleuze and Guattari (1988: 1)
‘It’ is the assemblage, a concept applicable to all manner of phenomena (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). Assemblage approaches abound in marketing theory (Canniford and Bajde, 2016), but recently there have been calls for a (re)turn to the original works of Deleuze and Guattari (e.g. Arnould and Thompson, 2015), where ‘further resources exist’ (Roffe, 2015: 42). This article focuses on their understanding of the unconscious as machinic, as an ‘asignifying and asubjective’ assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 9). Asubjective means that the unconscious exists outside of conscious awareness (i.e. subjectivity). This is an assumption that Deleuze and Guattari share with psychoanalytic thinkers like Freud and Lacan. Asignifying means that the unconscious has no meaningful structure and does not engage in processes of meaning-making (i.e. signification). Here Deleuze and Guattari differ from other psychoanalytic thinkers, who have typically adopted a linguistic model of the unconscious that emphasises symbolism, substitutions, and the like.

In the last few years, a number of marketing theorists have been inspired by psychoanalysis to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about topics like consumer choice (Gabriel, 2015; Nixon and Gabriel, 2016), ethical consumption (Chatzidakis, 2015; Chatzidakis et al., 2021) and market mechanisms (Cronin and Fitchett, 2020; Shankar et al., 2006). Despite internal diversity, it can be said that psychoanalytic marketing theory is also largely linguistic in its outlook. For instance, it treats consumption as a means by which the unconscious communicates repressed content (Cluley, 2015), marketing as an ‘indirect’ dialogue with the unconscious (Miles, 2014) and consumer culture as a rich repository of texts that ‘embody and communicate unconscious material’ (Patsiaouras et al., 2016: 59). This school of thought writes in terms of biography (Molesworth et al., 2017), scripts (Molesworth and Grigore, 2019) or confessions from the couch (Belk, 2015; Levy, 2015). The primary contribution of the present article is to explore what the Deleuzoguattarian concept of the machinic unconscious, as asubjective and asignifying, might add to this significant stream of studies into the unconscious.

This primary contribution is crafted by emphasising conceptual contrasts, drawing out proto-machinic insights from extant studies (e.g. Albanese, 2015; Chatzidakis, 2015; Hietanen et al., 2016). Describing how these diverge from the dominant linguistic model may open up opportunities for further conceptual and empirical research. However, differences should not be over-emphasised. Presenting a united front of unconscious understandings is especially important in a discipline like marketing, which is dominated by conceptualisations that intellectually assume the centrality of conscious choice (Tadajewski, 2019; Williams and Poehlman, 2017), and ideologically presume that choices should be provided by markets freed from state influence (Cronin and Fitchett, 2020; Fitchett et al., 2014). Although psychoanalytic ideas have been present throughout the history of marketing theory and practice (Schwarzkopf, 2014; Sutherland, 2013; Tadajewski, 2006), there are still many who prefer to marginalise or disavow the contributions of this productive, albeit often provocative, tradition (O’Shaughnessy, 2015). As such, the secondary contribution of this article is to emphasise how Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking might complement other psychoanalytic marketing theories.

The rest of this article begins by considering the relationship between Deleuzoguattarian thought and the psychoanalytic tradition. It then follows Schuster (2016) in tracing a ‘split’ in Freud’s work between earlier linguistic models and later machinic models. After this, a review of the existing literature makes the case that psychoanalytic marketing theory leans heavily toward the linguistic model; the central argument of this section is that although these studies are informative and impactful, they are limited by their reliance on the language metaphor. In response, the penultimate section returns to the machinic model and its assertion that the unconscious is asubjective and asignifying; the line of argument in this section is that the machinic model changes how
marketing theorists think about (a) the formation, and reformation, of the unconscious, (b) its situatedness within sociomaterial systems, (c) its relationship with marketing and (d) the ways in which critical marketing theory should write about these insights. The article then draws to a close by calling for further research that pluralises and promotes psychoanalytic marketing theory.

**Deleuze, Guattari . . . and psychoanalysis?**

The relationships between Deleuze, Guattari, and psychoanalysis have received relatively little attention in social theory (Schuster, 2016). This is arguably because Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1988) coined the term *schizoanalysis* to describe their work as a new-and-improved form of psychoanalysis. This neologism was chosen because they posited the schizophrenic condition of disconnected experience to be far closer to the messy mutability of reality than the narrative-led, chronological illusion of identity that ‘normal’ people labour under (Hietanen, Andéhn, et al., 2020). Schizophrenic tendencies were also becoming increasingly common amongst the general population, thanks to the ever-accelerating, ever-intensifying and ever-diversifying system of capitalism (Hietanen, Murray et al., 2020; Kozinets et al., 2017), potentially overtaking the earlier psychoanalytic concerns of narcissism, neuroticism, and perversion (Schuster, 2016). Put simply, many more people struggle to ‘biographically unify’ in market societies that are materially precarious and symbolically ambiguous (Lambert, 2019: 332). Deleuze and Guattari’s two-volume *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* eponymously encapsulates the important dialectical relationship between the contemporary socioeconomic system and the present-day psyche.

The first book in this pair was entitled *Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983), laying bare their ambition to challenge what they saw as the problematic post-Freudian orthodoxy of their day. As Guattari ([1989] 2014: 17) later explained:

> For more than ten years I have endeavoured to extract from the debris of psychoanalysis what still stands up, what deserves to be rethought on the basis of theoretical scaffoldings that are different to and, if possible, less reductionist than those of the Freudians and Lacanians . . . the undertaking that I have called schizoanalysis as a self-enclosed specialism.

There is much to differentiate schizoanalysis from psychoanalysis, but for the sake of building a clear and compelling contrast, this article focuses on just one aspect: whether or not the unconscious is treated as asubjective and asignifying (schizoanalysis), or simply asubjective (psychoanalysis).1 The asubjective describes ‘Freud’s basic idea . . . that, in addition to the conscious mental material and mental processes we engage in, there are thoughts and ways of thinking that are not available to us but are key in explaining why we do what we do’ (Cluley and Desmond, 2015: 3). This definition could be applied to the precognitive (Hill et al., 2014), the nonconscious (Cluley, 2015) or the subconscious (Tadajewski, 2019), but these formulations assume that asubjective processes can, and often do, become subjective or conscious experiences. The unconscious is more radical because it describes that which *cannot* be made conscious by the individual in question, and even resists becoming subjective when it is identified by an analyst or some other third-party observer (Cluley, 2015). The idea that the unconscious cannot be experienced or managed by the conscious self is an uncomfortable one (Holbrook, 2015), as it suggests ‘our ego does not even rule in its own house’ (Schuster, 2016: 61; Žižek, 2006: 1). As O’Shaughnessy (2015: 17) points out:
It follows from this perspective that belief in the autonomy of human beings as self-determining, self-conscious agents is considered wrong. Marketing academics, while accepting the notion of unconscious influences and even the suggestion that consumers are often on ‘automatic pilot’, shy away from this full Freudian determinism as too extreme.

In this regard, Deleuze and Guattari are uncompromising and unabashed psychoanalysts, arguing that the conscious self is an after-effect of unconscious processes with no causal power of its own. As Bryant et al. (2014: 4) recount, Deleuze and Guattari ‘set forth an ontological vision of an asubjective realm of becoming, with the subject and thought being only a final, residual product of these primary ontological movements’. In the technical terms of philosophy, the Deleuzoguattarian subject is an epiphenomenon, but in their own evocative words, ‘the subject is produced as a mere residuum...a form of a wonderstruck “so that’s what it was!”’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983: 25) Accordingly, from a Deleuzoguattarian perspective is not suitable to focus one’s analysis on the conscious experiences or post-rationalisations of the subject. Rather, attention must be paid to the asubjective forces that give rise to phenomenon of interest, including that of subjectivity.2

Deleuze and Guattari sought to differentiate themselves from other psychoanalysts. However, in the context of marketing theory and practice it is arguably more important to stress the similarities between psychoanalysis and schizoanalysis. Marketing is a discipline where models of conscious decision-making are pervasive (Tadajewski, 2019), often so prevalent that they can be assumed rather than explicitly stated. Following a critical review of the literature, Williams and Poehlman (2017: 231) conclude that, ‘the unstated null hypotheses appears to be that consumer behaviour is caused by conscious thinking unless shown otherwise’. Psychoanalytic marketing theory and schizoanalytic marketing theory face a common challenge: convincing reviewers and other gatekeepers that ‘intentionality needs to be carefully written out of accounts’ (Bettany, 2016: 192; O’Shaughnessy, 2015). Thus, it may be strategically beneficial to frame Deleuze and Guattari as additional (albeit unorthodox) contributors to the already ecumenical church of psychoanalysis. While die-hard Deleuzoguattarians or psychoanalytic purists may protest at this strategic positioning, a blend of idealism and realpolitik is often necessary to make and maintain manifest change in discourse or practice (Bode and Østergaard, 2013). In this case, de-emphasising the distinctions between schizoanalysis and psychoanalysis creates a united front of unconscious understandings that may help to challenge the centrality of conscious choice in marketing theory.

A Freudian split

The question of (a)signification is encapsulated in two different models of the unconscious, the linguistic model and the machinic model. The development of these two models can be traced back to the founding father of psychoanalysis himself, insofar as ‘it has been observed that Freud’s theoretical edifice is marked by a fundamental split or asymmetry’ (Schuster, 2016: 47). Throughout his career, Freud remained committed to the asubjective nature of the unconscious, but his opinion on whether the unconscious was also asignifying appeared to change over time.3

In his early work, Freud treated the unconscious as a signifying system, akin to a language. ‘If his lips are silent’, Freud (1905: 1953: 77–8) once wrote, ‘he chatters with his finger-tips’. This suggests that signification is a language larger (and stranger) than speech. Indeed, in early Freudian thought, ‘humans are symbolic creatures enmeshed in a cultural symbol system...organized according to patterns of hidden substitutions and correspondences’ (Cluley and Desmond, 2015: 7). Conscious meanings and unconscious significance may be mismatched or mistranslated in
complex and dynamic ways. Yet, the fact these two ‘languages’ share a relationship means that a form of translation remains possible. This explains why ‘Freud often draws on literary sources (Greek mythology and Shakespeare for example) to illustrate his theories, arguing that many of the therapist’s insights were gained through being able to understand the complex symbol system of language’ (Shankar et al., 2006: 497). An ongoing problematic in this early work was the extent to which this unconscious ‘conversation’ was similar to the conscious speech of the subject, and how this gap might be bridged. This open question explains why Freud, and his followers in marketing theory, search for symbolism in phenomena that straddle the threshold of the un/conscious, such as daydreams (Jenkins and Molesworth, 2017), YouTube videos (Belk, 2015) or fiction that indirectly describes the unconscious by describing consumption in detail (Patsiouras et al., 2016). Marketing theorists also work this logic the other way, treating marketing as a conscious process of trying to communicate with the unconscious (Loose, 2015; Miles, 2014).

Later in his work, Freud began to theorise the unconscious more in ‘quasi-machinic terms, as an apparatus for managing the stimuli that affect it from both without and within’ (Schuster, 2016: 47). One example of this more physical conceptualisation is found in Freud’s ([1905] 2009: 226) discussion of ‘the pleasurable character of the sensations of movement’. Giving the example of the unconscious excitement produced by the arrhythmic movements of a train, Freud ([1905] 2009: 204) considers how a stimulus can produce an excess of affect that then overflows into other excitations as a ‘concomitant effect’. As noted by Schuster (2016: 119), this is what Deleuze and Guattari would later describe as ‘nomadic intensities’. Indeed, those familiar with the work of Deleuze and Guattari will be unsurprised to learn that they followed in this ‘machinic’ mode. The epigraph of this paper is worth reiterating and expounding here. First, they wrote that ‘everywhere it is machines – real ones, not figurative ones’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 1). This stresses the material basis of unconscious forces as machines that interact physically with one another. Harman (2018: 228) notes that the term machine is deployed because of ‘its emphasis on actions and effects . . . what a machine does is more important than what it is’. This is reinforced by the second part of the epigraph, where Deleuze and Guattari (1988: 1) write of ‘machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections’. Machines are defined by their effects, not their origin, which affords an exploration of excessive energies overflowing their original context to affect seemingly disconnected choices (e.g. Chatzidakis, 2015). The most important point to labour? These forces are not driven by purpose, intentionality, or any other meaningful charge, but rather by the energies of prior collisions and connections.

The linguistic lineage of psychoanalytic marketing theory

As Schuster (2016: 47) succinctly summarises, in the linguistic model, ‘the unconscious is the continuation of speech by other means’. Marketing theorists have mobilised this premise to theorise consumption as a form of communication, a means through which repressed thoughts and feelings can be expressed without coming into conscious awareness (Cluley and Dunne, 2012; Cluley, 2015; Patsiouras et al., 2016). Ostensibly, this diverges from the semiotic school of interpretive marketing theory where products, services and other market resources are symbols that are consciously interpreted and then configured into largely intentional identity projects (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Bettany, 2016). However, one can also consider linguistic psychoanalysis as part of a broader more-than-phenomenological movement in marketing theory that looks beyond the first-hand accounts of consumers and other market actors (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011; Bajde,
For instance, Hill et al. (2014) implore marketing theorists to study difficult-to-articulate phenomena beyond cognitive and cultural representations. This resonates with Cluley’s (2015: 366) argument that consumption allows us ‘to express thoughts that we might otherwise find impossible to put into words’. It also accords with Gabriel’s (2015: 26) observation that Freud said very little about identity – actually an acutely late modern obsession – and instead theorised ‘the emotional and unconscious qualities of identity … that often remain ignored in contemporary discussions’. In contrast, the machinic model represents more of a break from extant marketing theory. Its starting point is that the unconscious is asubjective and asignifying, without a symbolic register of its own, displacing the more-than-phenomenological framing with an ‘inhuman’ interpretation. As Hietanen, Andéhn, et al. (2020: 743) eloquently explain, ‘the inhuman is the desiring intensities and machinic impulses where subjective experiences and intentions are peripheral at best’. An unintentional unconscious necessitates a novel theorisation of formation and reformation, as discussed in the next section.

It has been argued that many brands have built successful campaigns on the back of psychoanalytic ideas (Sutherland, 2013). These ideas are typically taken from the linguistic tradition. From this perspective, marketing can be conceived as a process of understanding how the unconscious ‘speaks’ and then learning how to effectively communicate to, and seduce, the target consumer’s unconscious with libidinally evocative advertising (Loose, 2015; Miles, 2014). One of the most famous proponents of the linguistic model was Lacan (1988: 82), who explicitly stated ‘the unconscious is structured like a language’. The shift in emphasis is subtle but significant. ‘Where Freud saw language as a means of accessing the human psyche’, write Shankar et al. (2006: 497), ‘Lacan saw language as constituting it’. As languages vary over time and between groups, Lacanian theory posits ‘that language as such resides in the act of others’ (Reyes et al., 2015: 119). This suggests a much more intimate relationship between those who manage shared discourses, such as advertisers and marketing managers, and the unconscious processes of everyday consumers. Studies in this vein explain why consumers continue to enjoy brands that are demonstrably unethical (Böhm and Batta, 2010), the shared ‘artistry’ of advertising and psychoanalysis (Loose, 2015) and the ‘psychotic tendencies’ of consumers whose ‘symbolic moorings’ to reality have been cut by the endless change of marketing campaigns (Lambert, 2019: 332). Against this, the machinic model presents an unconscious that cannot be managed through the sense-making system of language, at least not in any simplistic sense. Also detailed in the next section is the observation that management is possible only through physical manipulations of the mind via the medium of embodiment and its porous enmeshment into the environment (e.g. Bradshaw and Chatzidakis, 2016).

The linguistic model has become even more influential in marketing theory thanks to the introduction of ideas from a self-proclaimed Lacanian psychoanalytic thinker – Slavoj Žižek. His work centres on the ideological infrastructures that are inherent in language and thus imbibed by the unconscious. For Žižek (1989, 2006) subjects cannot experience reality directly but only through the filter of ideological fantasies, sense-making structures that exist in the unconscious and thus frame experiences in a way that is tolerable to the fragile ego. This follows Lacan, for whom ‘truth is fictional in nature because it is something that is caught up in the machinations of language. He distinguishes between truth and the real, the latter indicating something that is situated beyond the possibilities of representation and thus, as such, unbearable for the subject’ (Loose, 2015: 37–8). What Žižek (2009, 2019) adds is a greater emphasis on the role of capitalism in ideologically inflecting the unconscious. Unsurprisingly, this makes him especially attractive to critical marketing theorists, who have used him to theorise the unconscious fantasies at play within
social media marketing (Zwick and Bradshaw, 2016), business sustainability (Bradshaw and Zwick, 2016; Carrington et al., 2016) and the notion of market-based progress (Cronin and Fitchett, 2020). In these studies, the power of language is primarily in what is missing or elided. For example, inspired by Žižek’s (2002: 2) claim that ‘we ‘feel free’ because we lack the very language to articulate our unfreedom’, Cronin and Fitchett (2020: 5) argued that ‘market freedoms stifle the felt requirement for individuals to articulate their sovereignty through political demands’.

Again, the machinic model moves in a different direction. It takes the infrastructures of ideology more literally rather than linguistically, studying how material arrangements affect the physical substrate of the psyche (e.g. Hietanen et al., 2016).

**A subjective and asignifying: Mobilising a machinic model of the unconscious**

The majority of psychoanalytic articles in marketing theory can be thought of as part of the early Freudian tradition, adopting a linguistic model of the unconscious. However, the previous section has hinted at a small number of extant studies that outline a more machinic model (e.g. Bradshaw and Chatzidakis, 2016; Chatzidakis, 2015; Hietanen et al., 2016). This section explicates the machinic model of Deleuze and Guattari, demonstrating how an asubjective and asignifying understanding of the unconscious could contribute to marketing theory by reconceptualising: (1) the unconscious itself, in terms of its formation and evolution; (2) sociomaterial conditions, as machinic systems that shape the formation and reformation of the machinic unconscious; (3) marketing practices as attempts by marketers to manage machinic forces; (4) the purpose and dissemination of marketing scholarship, particularly that aspiring to be ‘critical’.

**Machines connecting machines: Conceptualising the machinic unconscious**

While the linguistic model suggests that the unconscious is structured like a language (Lacan, 1988; Žižek, 2006), the machinic model treats the unconscious as something structured by chance and circumstance. Deleuze (1953, 2004) describes the foundation of the unconscious as an array of accidental associations, accidents that the conscious subject subsequently attempts to make sense of. Deleuze and Guattari would later describe these associations as ‘habits’. In relation to their own ‘schizophrenic’ sense of selves, Deleuze and Guattari (1988: 3) recount that ‘the two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd... why have we kept our own names? Out of habit, purely out of habit’. Tadajewski’s (2019) historical research shows how intentional habit formation has long formed a central part of marketing theory and practice, and recently the idea of conscious habit management has been popularised (Clear, 2018; Duhigg, 2012), but Deleuze and Guattari treat habituation as an unintentional process of patterns emerging from the accidental association of unconscious forces. From a Deleuzoguattarian perspective, our identity is the sum total of habits that have formed over the years without prior purpose. At the same time, the collisions of forces in the machinic unconscious can also cause habits to be disrupted or dissolved, opening up new possibilities (Kozinets et al., 2017). If we ‘choose’ to identify and alter a habit, it is only because this desire for change has emerged from within our unconscious, not because a conscious self has transcended its unconscious basis in some way.

The interplay of habituation and differentiation in the unconscious also attests to another key contribution of the machinic model, its interest in theorising a primordial or primary form of
repression. For Deleuze ([1968] 1994: 18), ‘Freud shows – beyond repression ‘properly speaking,’ which bears upon representations – the necessity of supposing a primary repression which concerns first and foremost pure presentations’. In other words, most of Freud’s writing on repression concerns how unbearable content is hidden from the conscious self and indirectly communicated through other means (see Cluley, 2015), but why is some content marked as unbearable in the first instance? In posing this question, Deleuze draws attention to the fact that ‘repression does not take place in a neutral psychic space... but intervenes in a space that is already distorted or awry’ (Shuster, 2016: 66). The machinic model provides a means to explore that which emerges before, and in some sense remains beyond, the signifying structures of linguistic repression. This is a concern that has received less attention in marketing theory and would be a suitable subject of future research. One point of departure could be to return to Gabriel’s (2015) reading of choice and identity in consumer culture. Specifically, he quotes Freud’s (1926: 272) description of Jewishness as ‘many obscure emotional forces’, which might be taken literally as the foundation for a physicalist theory of how selfhood emerges and evolves in contemporary consumer culture.

**Machines configuring machines: Situating the machinic unconscious**

Schuster (2016: 52) argues that ‘which connections establish themselves, which particular syntheses end up composing the dense reality of the individual, is a throw of the dice’. This may be true in the circumscribed context of the abstract unconscious, but what about the wider context-of-contexts (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011) shaping an empirically-situated unconscious? The sociomateriality in which the unconscious is immersed and inculcated is not simply a matter of chance and circumstance. Rather, it is a series of systems with specific histories and trajectories, biasing unconscious (re)formation in particular ways rather than others. As Guattari ([1989] 2014) puts it, ‘all machinic systems, whatever domain they belong to – technical, biological, semiotic, logical, abstract – are, by themselves, the support for proto-subjective processes’. The Deleuzoguattarian position is that the ‘proto-subjective’ machinic unconscious shares a symbiotic relationship with the machinic systems that surround it. Here the term machinic is used very broadly, encompassing high-tech examples like the Internet (Kozinets et al., 2017) and its various economic and aesthetic platforms (Hietanen and Andéhn, 2018), but also less obvious systems like biomes that have been co-present with humanity for billions of years. Campbell and Deane (2019: 240) observe that, ‘we are more bacterial than human’, given that ‘there are as many as 100 trillion of them in a single human body, outnumbering human cells by a factor of 10’.

Although humans are enmeshed with bacteria and other ‘low-tech’ machinic systems, from canine co-consumption (Bettany and Daly, 2008) to horse leadership experiences (Smith, 2016), it is difficult to deny the step-change in technological development over the last few decades. As noted by Guattari ([1989] 2014: 1), ‘the contents of subjectivity depend more and more on a multitude of machinic systems’. For instance, the introduction of sophisticated segmentation techniques allows marketers to divide individuals into profitable patterns of behaviour (Cluley and Brown, 2015), while increasingly automated choice architectures allow algorithms to decide what choices consumers can see (Dholakia et al., 2020). From a psychoanalytic perspective, such technological developments exert asubjective transformations, without needing conscious awareness to exert their effect. A Deleuzoguattarian perspective also treats technology as asignifying:
This perspective looks outside the symbolic analysis of signs and their referents by focusing on how power relations and market discipline are implicitly constructed in the entirety of technological environments that channel desires and create consumer subjectivities. (Hietanen and Andéhn, 2018: 542)

The asubjective influence of technology is also asignifying because it is powered by physical structures, rather than symbolic associations. Consider the airport, which Hietanen et al. (2016) treat as a ‘machinic’ servicescape. They describe how security clearance habituates bodies into removing belts and shoes, while also inculcating a sense of anxiety that motivates mutual surveillance. Once the traveller has cleared security, they enter a hierarchical commercial space that separates the ‘haves’ into exclusive lounges and the ‘have nots’ into soulless concourses straddled by store environments. This class-structure-on-steroids is perpetuated on the plane, where certain people turn left and the rest turn right. Directly referencing the machinic, Hietanen et al. (2016: 306) conclude that the airport machine acts to ‘reduce the many imaginable behavioural patterns ... to those few deemed acceptable and desirable.’

Much more research is needed to understand how the machines within an individual unconscious are shaped by machines without. Such research may turn to high-tech contexts but also the microscopic and macroscopic machines that are not typically considered under the term ‘technological’, such as the bacterial (Campbell and Deane, 2019), the climatological (Campbell et al., 2019) or the hauntological (Ahlberg et al., 2021). Regardless of context, these new developments will share an understanding of the unconscious as embodied, with embodiment as a porous and pliable system inexorably entwined with an asignifying environment of subliminal stimuli (Bradshaw and Chatzidakis, 2016).

**Machines consuming machines: Managing the machinic unconscious**

From a marketing perspective, the meaninglessness and malleability of the machinic model suggests that advertisers, store designers and other market actors should pay attention to the environments that consumers move through. While the individual may be the accumulation of many rolling dice, *each die can be loaded*. If marketing is understood as a practice of creating and maintaining connections, or ‘habit formation’ (Tadajewski, 2019), then the managerial aim should be to make profitable connections more likely than others. For instance, Albanese (2015: 61) traces the history of subliminal influence from its controversial origins (in the ‘DRINK COCA-COLA’ hoax of 1957) through to recent research findings, where a number of academics have demonstrated the power of ‘stimuli below the individual’s absolute threshold, so that there is no conscious awareness of the stimulus’. Using phraseology like ‘stimuli processing’, studies of subliminal influence seem to be more closely aligned to the machinic model. They also have obvious managerial relevance – as consumer culture becomes increasingly fragmented and fluid, meanings become increasingly messy and consistent messaging becomes almost impossible (Hietanen, Murray et al. 2020; Lambert, 2019), so strategies to sidestep them may be especially valuable.

Chatzidakis (2015: 80) provides another study with proto-machinic insights: using the work of Klein, he theorises unconscious guilt as a force that precedes and motivates unethical acts, beginning with ‘the displacement of destructive and narcissistic desires’, whereby an affective charge like guilt may become ‘free-floating’ from any particular cause. This has much in common with the late-Freudian ([1905] 2009) or Deleuzoguattarian (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, 1988) model of unconscious affects as overflowing and nomadic. Eventually, the individual is driven to do something guilt-worthy, to ‘give unconscious guilt something on which to attach itself to, a way
to rationalise its existence, but also a means with which to dissipate itself’ (Chatzidakis, 2015: 85). Here unconscious guilt is asubjective, because it is not necessarily felt or experienced, but also asignifying, because it does not need to make sense in order to affect the body and psyche. Such work suggests that the success or failure of products and services may have much to do with the ways in which unanchored affects can latch on to a seemingly unrelated object. From a late-Freudian or Deleuzoguattarian perspective, this might be described as ‘blind narcissism’ (Schuster, 2016: 54). The blind narcissism of machines contrasts with the symbolic narcissism of the consumer as described by the linguistic model, whereby consumption is used to demonstrate the superiority of oneself or progeny (Cluley and Dunne, 2012; Patsiaouras et al., 2016). It is an unresolved question whether unconscious affects can latch onto anything, or whether there are certain machinic connections that are more likely than others due to biographical, biological, or sociomaterial factors.

Another unexplored issue is whether machines must overflow to operate. Wickström et al. (2020) suggest that many market resources, including those co-created by ‘communities’ of consumers, may lack the affective intensity necessary to overflow into other contexts. In these cases, consumption is not motivated by an overflow of machinic forces (Hill et al., 2014), but machines ‘melancholically’ searching for something that is missing in each situation (Wickström et al., 2020). Bridging psychoanalytic theories of desire-as-lack and desire-as-energy (see Belk et al., 2003; Kozinets et al., 2017), the machinic model may be mobilised to theorise how consumers extemporise an eclectic range of resources together into consumption assemblages that are only later (and perhaps never) configured into a coherent choice-led narrative (Hietanen, Andéhn, et al., 2020).

**Machines critiquing machines: Writing about the machinic unconscious**

When Chatzidakis (2015) studied unconscious guilt, he did so in the context of ethical and unethical consumption, contributing to a critical streak within psychoanalytic marketing theory. While many recent contributions have turned to the explicitly political works of Žižek to diagnose and discuss the ecological and ethical degradation of late capitalism (Bradshaw and Zwick, 2016; Carrington et al., 2016; Cronin and Fitchett, 2020), Deleuze and Guattari are also highly critical and political thinkers (Arnould and Thompson, 2015; Hietanen, Andéhn, et al., 2020). Their machinic model militates against a focus on ideological symbols or the significance of raising consciousness, but instead asks how unconscious critical affects can be generated and circulated within and between bodies. For instance, while the literature on the suggestibility of spatial arrangements provides examples of how the unconscious can be inclined towards capitalist accumulation (e.g. Hietanen et al., 2016), there is also evidence that critical sensibilities can be engendered by the machinic environment. When studying the Athenian district of Exarcheia, Chatzidakis et al. (2012) described how streets would intersect more frequently, allowing news of a protest to spread more quickly and making it more difficult for police to contain demonstrators. As such, one can draw a link between certain spatial arrangements and the likelihood of critical unconscious affects, a link that passes through an open-ended embodiment attuned to vacillations and reverberations in music and other forms of energy (Bradshaw and Chatzidakis, 2016).

This is especially important in an era that systematically thwarts the emergence of coherent critical subjectivities with the pincer movement of socioeconomic precariousness and socio-symbolic pandemonium (Lambert, 2019). Instead of waiting for the coherent critical subject who can step back, reflect upon contemporary conditions, and then make effective interventions,
Deleuzoguattarian thinking proposes working with incoherent critical forces in the hope of disrupting desire as it is currently configured. For marketing theorists aspiring to be critical, this means writing and working somewhat differently. As Hietanen, Andéhn, et al. (2020: 742) explain:

Adaptations of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s philosophizing on the immanent forces of the unconscious have risen to challenge joyous, affirmative readings of their work by bringing the dark and destructive aspects of desire into focus. We find an innate potentiality within such accounts, as they are themselves spoken by the inhuman within us – the forces which render our subjective intentions obsolete.

Hietanen, Andéhn, et al. (2020) begin to sketch out the contours of a new scholarly style or aesthetic, although certainly more work needs to be done. Again, this is an area of enquiry where Deleuzoguattarian and psychoanalytic thinking intersects. From the psychoanalytic side, Loose (2015) describes the power of art in understanding the unconscious and its relationships to marketing and advertising, but Small (2015) performs his psychoanalytic knowledge in a less prosaic piece. As noted by Cluley and Desmond (2015: 8), this ‘demands a form of reading alive to the play of similarity and substitution characteristic of the unconscious’. Moving from the linguistic model to the machinic model may require similar innovations in communicative practice. The objective should be the creation of methods that achieve ‘the communication of affective intensities beneath the level of meaning’, that puts into practice ‘this logic in which we are no longer dealing with persona interacting but just with the multiplicity of intensities’ (Žižek, 2004: 163). Market segmentation techniques can already sidestep the whole individual in search of profits (Cluley and Brown, 2015), critical marketing theory needs to make similar steps toward alternative ends. Echoing Deleuze’s ([1968] 1994: 18) interest in the ‘primary repression’ of ‘pure presentations’, critical scholarship might be reconceived as the means of presenting critical possibilities directly to the unconscious.

**Sublimating schizoanalysis: Pushing the psychoanalytic perspective further**

This article is part of a ‘small but growing literature dedicated to Deleuze [and Guattari]’s engagement with psychoanalysis’ (Schuster, 2016: 29). It is positioned within the psychoanalytic stream of marketing theory (Cluley and Desmond, 2015), which is well-established yet feels fresh and fricative thanks to its challenging counter-intuitive insights. The specific contribution of this article is its exploration of Deleuze and Guattari’s machinic model of the unconscious, which contrasts with the linguistic model in emphasising the asubjective and asignifying character of the psyche. In this mode of thinking, the unconscious is constituted by a meaningless morass of mutable machines, a flux of forces that collide and connect within the human organism, and is enmeshed within machinic systems that configure what human machines can experience and do. For marketing practitioners and critical marketers alike, this raises difficult questions about how best to intervene in the unconscious and to what ends. Thus, much might be gained from moving from a linguistic to machinic model. This article focussed on asignification as the key conceptual contradistinction, but future research may elucidate other contrasts. Psychoanalytic marketing theory may be extended by mobilising the machinic unconscious in directions that the linguistic model does not shed light upon. Alternatively, psychoanalytic marketing theory may be enriched by returning to topics that have already been covered by more linguistic models, such as
commodity narcissism (Cluley and Dunne, 2012), consumption-as-repression (Cluley, 2015) or marketing-as-communication (Loose, 2015; Miles, 2014).

Yet, despite their various contradistinctions, the two models need not be treated as mutually exclusive. Future research may prefer to explore the complementary relationship between the two models. As just one example, Lacan argued that when the human organism enters into the sociosymbolic system by learning language, it becomes a subject split ‘into the conscious and unconscious’ (Desmond, 2009: 850). Might a Lacanian-Deleuzoguattarian analysis be able to explore the interplay of forces across the threshold of language, via a vibrant enmeshed embodiment (Bradshaw and Zwick, 2016; Hietanen et al., 2016), with many proto-subjective machines remaining beyond the grasp of symbolism? Perhaps understanding the mystery and majesty of the unconscious will require such a hybrid model that addresses the linguistic, the machinic, and their complex connections. As noted previously, there is also a strategic reason for modelling together, as unconscious understandings continue to face much resistance in the conscious-centric epistemic cultures of marketing theory, not to mention marketing practice and popular understandings of marketing.5 It has been said that marketing theory has much to gain from, but also much to contribute to, the psychoanalytic tradition (Cluley and Desmond, 2015). The same may be said of Deleuzoguattarian and psychoanalytic thought, as well as their combination as a united front of unconscious understandings, which has much to contribute to the conceptualisation, and creation, of better marketing systems and societies.

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Notes

1. Like many theoretical branding exercises, this contradistinction between schizoanalysis and psychoanalysis relies on a rather simplistic representation of the old order. A close reading of psychoanalysis can certainly identify asignifying arguments, especially when one includes tacit, partly-formulated, or uncertainly expressed insights. However, for the purposes of the present article, it is an accurate enough generalisation that schizoanalysis is more explicit and enthusiastic in its emphasis of asignification than psychoanalysis.

2. At first glance, this argument seems to echo those marketing theorists who have sought to promote a post-phenomenological approach to analysis and theory building (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011; Bajde, 2013; Hill et al., 2014; Moisander et al., 2009). However, Deleuze and Guattari are clear-cut in their commitment to the epiphenomenal status of subjectivity, whereas marketing theorists typically allow for some ambiguity here.

3. Psychoanalysis can be split in other ways. For instance, Fullerton (2007: 348) describes the field as ‘strongly bifurcated’ into a ‘humanistic’ branch and another branch ‘influenced by the strongly positive spirit of contemporary science’. It can be argued that the linguistic/machinic split adopts an obtuse
alignment to Fullerton’s (2007) bifurcation: the linguistic model is largely humanistic in its focus on meaning and subjective experience, while the machinic model may provide more opportunities for interdisciplinary theory-building with neuroscience, environmental psychology, and so forth.

4. This is not to suggest that new terminology is sufficient. For Žižek, individuals are unconsciously invested in their fantasies and struggle to embrace alternatives even when shown (Bradshaw and Zwick, 2016).

5. It is certainly true that ‘we live in a post-Freudian world’, where ‘the basic tenets of psychoanalytic theory form part of our common sense’ and ‘we encounter psychoanalytic concepts throughout our everyday lives’, such as ‘a Freudian slip, the unconscious, narcissism, repression, fetishism, projection, and displacement’ (Cluley and Desmond, 2015: 3). At the same time, ‘it is a common intuition that conscious thought leads to behaviour’, and that ‘when people ascribe reasons for their own moment-to-moment behaviour – or the behaviour of others – they almost always point to conscious will as the immediate causal force behind action’ (Williams and Poehlman, 2017: 231). It seems as though there is an ongoing struggle in the public imagination between ego-centric conceptualisations and conceptualisations led by the unconscious (e.g. Hogenboom and Pirak, 2020), hence the need for a more strategic response.

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