

Transdisciplinary Consumption

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Abstract: For the past 100 years, research about consumption has stemmed from two main disciplines: (a) consumer studies/consumer sciences (including consumer policy and education) (a spin off from home economics) and (b) consumer behaviour research (a spin off from marketing). This paper focuses on these two disciplines because the results of their respective research are used to shape consumer policy and consumer protection legislation and regulations, marketplace competition policy and regulations, consumer product and service information, media coverage of consumer issues, consumer education curricula and pedagogy, and insights into an evolving consumer culture. This paper asks consumer studies/sciences and consumer behaviour scholars to embrace the transdisciplinary methodology in addition to the traditional empirical, interpretive and critical methodologies. It provides an overview of the four axioms of transdisciplinary methodology with examples to illustrate how consumer-related research would change to address the complex reality of 21st century consumption.

Keywords: Consumption, consumer behaviour, consumer studies, home economics, integral, sustainability transdisciplinary methodology.

Introduction

We would need three planet earths to sustain Canada's level of consumption - just *one* country (World Wildlife Fund, 2008), five planets if we include the United States. Consumption of this magnitude and complexity can no longer be addressed by individual disciplines, including consumer studies and consumer behaviour, whose focus *is* consumer behaviour. We are way past due for considering a transdisciplinary (TD) perspective for consumption. Not only do we need to work within higher education and across disciplinary borders to deal with the impact of such unsustainable consumer behaviour, we also need to cross the borders between higher education and civil society. Standing outside of consumption behaviour and examining it from an objective, distanced, disciplined stance (pun intended) totally negates the complexity and chaotic nature of relationships inherent in 21st century consumption.

Innocuous, seemingly harmless, consumer behaviour (e.g., having a coffee with a friend) is laden with layers of negative, intergenerational and planetary fallout, never before encountered by humanity. A simple coffee with a friend manifests itself in international politics, transcultural dynamics, global and local economics and development, human security and freedom,

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unsustainable development, human oppression and exploitation, even spiritual unwellness and lack of inner peace along with societal violence and conflict. The 21st global consumer culture has market values at its core. People exist to serve the market instead of the market serving society. The interests of the consumer society are in deep conflict with the interests of the commons, justice, peace and the human condition (McGregor, 2007b; McGregor, 2010b).

Furthermore, reflecting geo-politics, Majority World citizens (often called the Southern World or developing countries) experience the brunt of the fallout from the global consumer infrastructure, and their interests are in conflict with those of Northern, more affluent consumers. While Majority World citizens experience marginalization, exploitation, oppression and debilitating, uneven wealth and income distribution, Northern consumers tend to experience inner conflict and lack of peace as a result of living in a consumer society (not to mention excessive debt and bankruptcy).

Northern consumers consume more and more as a way to cope with the fear and anger that emanates from the angst of living in a consumer society. They grapple with alienation, dissatisfaction, disenchantment, misplaced self-identity, and false relationships (McGregor, 2010b). As push back from the inequity, Majority World citizens are increasingly engaged in the politically-intense globalization from the bottom-up movement. Wars and conflict are emerging as a result of citizen and political resistance to Northern hegemony. Between the two, North and South, even East and West, the resultant problems are too complex to be dealt with using conventional disciplinary approaches. A way is needed that can “move catalytically towards an emancipatory practice liberating one part of humanity from over-and ill consumption and the other part from structural poverty and social and political exclusion” (Markus Molz, personal communication, February 7, 2010).

Towards that end, this paper asks consumer studies/ sciences and consumer behaviour higher education scholars (in particular) to embrace the transdisciplinary methodology as a legitimate intervention. They will be expected to shift research paradigms enabling them to see the merit of respecting a fourth research methodology, transdisciplinarity, in addition to the traditional empirical, interpretive and critical methodologies (McGregor, 2007a; McGregor & Murnane, 2010). They will be expected to cross disciplinary boundaries *with the intent to change the borders* (Fairclough, 2005) and then integrate theories and policies and practices emanating from this disciplinary integration. And, they are expected to integrate many realms of reality as they work with other disciplines *and* members of civil society in intellectual border-work (Horlick-Jones & Sime, 2004) to address the context of 21st century consumption.

Historical Embeddedness of Conventional Consumer Scholarship

For the past 100 years, research about consumption has stemmed from two main disciplines: (a) consumer studies/ sciences (including consumer policy and education) (a spin off from home economics) and (b) consumer behaviour research (a spin off from marketing). This paper focuses on these two disciplines because the results of their respective research are used to shape consumer policy and consumer protection legislation and regulations, marketplace competition policy and regulations, consumer product and service information, media coverage of consumer issues, consumer education curricula and pedagogy, and insights into an evolving consumer

culture. As noted earlier, actions of consumers are negatively impacting the future of humanity, intimating that any scholarship that provides insights into this phenomenon merits attention and new directions. Intellectual scholarship devoted to the study of consumers should be valued because consumers spend upwards of 70% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in most developed economies, compared to business (11%) and government (19%) (e.g., U. S. Department of Commerce, 2009). Such market power warrants academic attention especially since that power seems to be abused and misused to the detriment of other citizens, other species and the planet (McGregor, 2010b).

Each of these two disciplines draws on the human, social and natural sciences for intellectual rigour and diversity, but usually from a multi-disciplinary perspective. They draw from economics, political studies, sociology, psychology, history, anthropology, and administrative/management sciences. Only those consumer scholars trained in home economics can claim an interdisciplinary approach, and even then interdisciplinarity brings disciplines together (either in person or theoretically) with no commitment to change the boundaries and relations among them (Fairclough, 2005). Each of these two disciplines is now defined and positioned as either multi-or interdisciplinary.

Consumer Studies and Consumer Sciences

Consumer studies and consumer sciences are concerned about the interests and welfare of consumers (Kroll & Hunt, 1980). Welfare refers to the fortunes of people or to their health, happiness and basic physical and material well-being. Interest refers to an advantage or a benefit. It is Latin *interesse* for “to differ and to be important.” Hence, consumer interest or welfare could be defined as actions taken by governments, businesses or consumers themselves that provide an advantage or benefit which enhances their economic fortunes or other aspects of their well-being. It is in the interests of consumers that their rights as market players are ensured so their fortune and well-being are not harmed or diminished. These rights are now understood to be information, education, safety, choice, health, redress, a political voice, and environmental integrity as well as basic human needs (McGregor, 2010a). Four major consumer activities are of interest in the field of consumer studies and sciences: choice making and decision making, financial management, buyership, and citizenship (Bannister & Monsma, 1982; Kroll & Hunt, 1980).

In more detail, consumer studies and sciences focuses on protecting the consumers’ interest vis-à-vis business activities, often through consumer protection policy, corporate regulation policy, and consumer information and education. In addition to emphasizing inter-economic unit interactions (with businesses and governments to procure goods and services), this discipline also focuses on intra-family and consumer economics and resource management with the intention of ensuring economic *efficiency* and, more recently, ecological *effectiveness* and sustainability. The consumer interest includes consumers’ interactions with entities other than products and services, including consumer organizations, labour organizations, and government agencies and political systems (Kroll & Hunt, 1980). The consumer education component of this field strives for consumer empowerment and *efficacy*, recently augmented with a global citizenship perspective (McGregor, 2007a, 2010c; Thoresen, 2005).

Consumer studies and sciences have always been considered an interdisciplinary discipline, especially when practiced by home economists, but also when economists and marketers consider the field to be their discipline of vocation (versus a discipline of orientation where they received their formal training) (Kroll & Hunt, 1980). Recently, several scholars advocated that consumer studies and sciences should shift towards transdisciplinarity (Liokumoviča, 2008; McGregor, 2007a, 2009b; Pålshaugen, 2008). Thoresen (2008) asserts that education for consumer citizenship demands *transdisciplinary teaching*.

Consumer Behaviour

The discipline of consumer behaviour has its roots firmly entrenched in the discipline of marketing, and any new foci is heavily dependent on the changing traditions of the marketing discipline (MacInnis & Folkes, 2010; Sheth, 1985). MacInnis and Folkes define the scope of the field as “the study of people operating in a consumer role involving acquisition, consumption, and disposition of marketplace products, services, and experiences” (p. 900). There is an ongoing discussion about whether consumer behaviour is an independent discipline or a sub-discipline of marketing. MacInnis & Folkes (2010) cite commentaries from the field that believe the field has gained sufficient stature such that insights into consumer behaviour can be valued for their own sake, and are not beholden to marketing for legitimacy. Regardless, consumer behaviour involves intellectual scholarship devoted to the study of consumers with a focus on helping businesses and policy makers better understand consumer behaviour so that it can be understood and influenced using advertising, branding, market segmentation, opinion leadership, persuasion, and behaviour modification, with attendant consumer protection and information.

Earlier versions of consumer behaviour research drew on the behavioural sciences of psychology and group behaviour of social sciences. While psychology has a sub-discipline called consumer psychology, sociology has not established consumer behaviour as a formal sub-discipline (MacInnis & Folkes, 2010). In the early eighties, consumer behaviour began to shift towards organizational and business sciences in order to cope with changing environments due to technology, regulation and global competition. In the mid-80s, consumer behaviour scholars began to focus on global consumer behaviour research (cross-cultural and international consumer behaviour) (Sheth, 1985). Some consumer research scholars have recently turned their attention toward consumers’ perceptions of corporate social responsibility and its impact on consumer loyalty and attendant consumer behaviour (McGregor, 2008b). The field also now embraces social marketing, political marketing and darker issues such as gambling and compulsive shopping. During all of these changes, it has remained multidisciplinary in nature, not interdisciplinary (MacInnis & Folkes) and certainly not transdisciplinary, although recent attempts to frame the field as transformative have potential (Mick, Pettigrew, Pechmann & Ozanne, 2011).

The Consuming World Has Changed

Since the inception of consumer studies and consumer behaviour, the world has changed. A global consumer culture has evolved predicated on materialism, the consumerism ideology, the neo-liberal market ideology, the conservative political ideology, and corporate led, top-down economic globalization (McGregor, 2008c). The result is further entrenchment of haves and have

nots, a situation now deeply exacerbated by the innocuous actions of consumption (McGregor, 2010b). We now live in a world where less than 20% of the world's population controls 85% of the world's resources and holds nearly 100% of the world's wealth. The economically affluent Northern consumer is engaging in consumer behaviour that is having a profoundly negative impact on Majority World citizens. And they are doing so from a rights position rather than shared responsibilities. In addition to consumer choices leading to the oppression, exploitation and harm of fellow human beings who make most of the goods and services consumed in the world, these choices have completely compromised the ecological integrity of Planet Earth and thousands of other species.

We have consumed, produced and de-legislated ourselves into a human condition and ecological polycrisis (van Breda, 2008). Morin (1999a) uses this term to describe a situation where there is no one, single big problem; rather, there is a series of overlapping, interconnected problems. In a polycrisis, there are inter-retroactions between different problems, crises and threats. A retroaction is an action that influences or applies to a prior time. This situation suggests that 21st century human and planetary problems are *so* complex, so interconnected, that they cannot be solved from the perspective of one or two disparate disciplines anymore. Consumer studies and consumer behaviour scholars must consider turning to the transdisciplinary methodology. Consumer scholars would move beyond studying symptomatic issues of credit acquisition practices, indebtedness, financial wealth, financial literacy and income security. Consumer behaviour (marketing) scholars would move from prescriptive approaches of how to influence consumer behaviour so as to improve the bottom line through brand loyalty, consumer confidence and consumer satisfaction.

Instead, from a transdisciplinary framing, both disciplines would grapple with human and ecological problems that manifest and *mask themselves as symptoms* of ill thought out consumption and greedy corporate behaviour. These global, complex, emergent transdisciplinary issues include: poverty and unequal wealth distribution; uneven economic, social and human development; human freedom, security and justice; self-determination; harmonious access to and distribution of resources; power relationships; human aggression; and, prevailing world views, ideologies and paradigms (McGregor, 2009a; UNESCO, 1998). A transdisciplinary stance involves removing the boundaries among disciplines within higher education as well as between the academy and civil society, where the human condition and ecological integrity play out on a daily basis and are deeply shaped by global consumption patterns and ideologies.

A New Role for Disciplines

Wilson (1998) argues that only fluency across the disciplinary boundaries will provide a clear view of the world and what needs to be done to ameliorate humanity's pressing problems, especially those exacerbated by consumption. As a caveat, the call for transdisciplinarity is not a replacement for disciplinary and interdisciplinary work; rather, it is to be a complement to existing academic practices (Paulino-Lima, 2010). Weislogel (2008) explains that transdisciplinary inquiry actually is dependent upon rigorous disciplinary work and the undeniable advances produced by various disciplines. However, transdisciplinarity demands *more* from disciplines. It strives to galvanize divergent disciplines to answer life's fundamental

questions using transdisciplinary thinking (Paulino-Lima, 2010), in particular, issues of sustainability of the human species and the planet as influenced by a consumer culture.

Transdisciplinarity would ask university consumer studies and consumer behaviour scholars to become *interdependent minded* so they can value the connections among and beyond the academy, connections that are needed to solve today's problems caused by consumption. TD scholars would know that all sectors have to work together *from the outset* to develop shared conceptual frameworks that integrate, extend and augment discipline-based learning (Neuhauser et al., 2007) with civil-society-based know-how and lived experiences. This scholarly work would involve bridging the gaps between three elements: (a) research and disciplines, (b) different social groups, and (c) different value sets, using integrative thinking (Pfund et al., 2006). And, when links are introduced between disciplines, as is the transdisciplinary way, the disparate disciplines gain opportunities to change their concepts, structures and aims (Jantsch, 1972). The enrichment gained when researchers cross disciplinary boundaries can further enrich their fields and facilitate knowledge advancement by fostering change (MacInnis & Folkes, 2010; McGregor & Volckmann, 2010).

A Transdisciplinary Methodology for Consumer-Related Initiatives

While *inter* means between two or more things, *trans* means zigzagging back and forth, moving across, going beyond, the blurring of, and pushing past, any existing boundaries. In this case, we are concerned with the boundaries around university disciplines and the boundaries between the university and the rest of society. Transdisciplinarity represents a deep respect for the synergistic potential between (a) ideas coming from academic disciplines and (b) ideas stemming from the consumers who are actually experiencing and living the problems. From a TD perspective, not only would the walls come down from around the disciplines within higher education (e.g., between consumer studies/ behaviour and other disciplines that inform their scholarship about consumers), but the walls would come down or become more porous between higher education *and* the rest of the world.

This boundary-blurring process involves an *academy-society interface* wherein, through a lengthy and complex process, academe knowledge *and* action-relevant knowledge are integrated (Liokumoviča, 2008). Horlick-Jones and Sime (2004) coined the phrase *border-work* to refer to the intellectual work that occurs when people living on the borders of the academy (university disciplines) and civil society engage in complex problem solving. Their intent is to enable new types of embodied knowledge to emerge through complex and integrated, mutually learned insights. Even more compelling is the notion that the work undertaken during these iterative border-crossings cannot be compared to that of networks or teams. Instead of networking, Engeström (2005, p. 316) coined the word *knotworking*, and defined it as “rapidly pulsating, distributed, and partially improvised orchestrations of collaborative performances between otherwise loosely connected actors and organizational units.” Molz (2009) explains that these knotwork sequences can be extremely productive and innovative and do so *without* any centre of control or authority. The locus of initiative changes from moment to moment as the actors focus on and circle around a complex problem and crisscross across boundaries. The unstable knot becomes the focus of analysis when conducting TD research because it metaphorically represents the elusive and improvised phenomenon of complex problem solving.

This paper will employ several other metaphors to convey the nuances of transdisciplinary work, which is predicated on chaos theory, quantum physics and living systems theory (Nicolescu, 2008b). These metaphors include a lava lamp, a tapestry and dance. Using a metaphorical approach enables one to convey deeply complex ideas. Metaphors serve as tools to help people make analogical leaps from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Metaphors can be conduits or passageways to help people learn new, abstract concepts. They help people extend their familiar knowledge of the world to a region that they have not yet experienced. From a transdisciplinary perspective, this region is very complex, composed of many interconnected parts and difficult to understand because of its intricacy. Metaphors simplify and augment people's joint learning processes, giving them a temporary common language while they navigate the space among the disciplines and between the academy and civil society. Metaphors give people new degrees of conceptual freedom, releasing them from the chains that bind them to their root disciplines (Judge, 1991; Rigney, 2001).

Transdisciplinarity is a whole new way of solving the complex problems of the world, especially those generated by 21st century consumption. Conceiving consumer issues through a transdisciplinary lens offers a new form of learning, inquiry and problem posing that involves cooperation among different parts of society in order to meet the complex challenges of a global consumer society (McGregor, 2005). It has its own methodology, different from the conventional positivistic, interpretive and critical paradigms (McGregor, 2007a; McGregor & Murnane, 2010): (a) multiple levels of *reality* and attendant levels of perceptions (ontology), (b) the *logic* of the included middle, and (c) *knowledge* as complexity and emergence (epistemology) (Nicolescu, 1985, 2002, 2005b; 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2008b). Cicovacki (2004, 2009) and McGregor (2009a, 2010b) recommend a fourth axiom for a TD methodology, that of *values* (axiology)² (see figure 1).

Four Pillars (Axioms) of Transdisciplinary Methodology

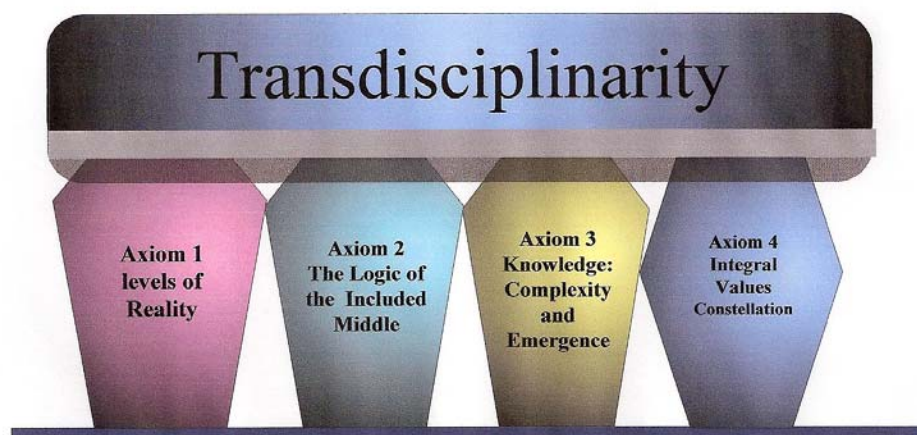


Figure 1: Pillars of Transdisciplinary Methodology

² As a caveat, not all TD theorists believe there should be a fourth axiom of axiology. Nicolescu (2007) credits Erich Jantsch (an Austrian) for underlining the necessity of inventing an axiomatic approach for transdisciplinarity and also for introducing values in this field of knowledge. Nicolescu does not see the need for a fourth axiom.

Axiom 1 - Ontology - Multiple Levels of Reality

Conventional approaches to consumer issues are predicated on the positivistic and empirical notions of fragmentation, separation, dualities (this or that), and universal laws that apply to everything and everyone (with no concern for context). From this perspective, consumer scholars would assume that the picture of reality (e.g., consumption) is incomplete and made up of many separate parts and that they can conduct experiments and develop theory about this reality, eventually building up a more complete picture. To do this, they would design taxonomies, categories and hierarchies, the most famous one in consumer studies being Bannister and Monsma's (1982) classification system for consumer education concepts. This is not a bad approach to study consumer interests or consumer behaviour. It is just not the approach that would be used within a TD methodology.

Rather than assuming that people can best understand consumer issues and the consumer interest as comprising one level of reality (that is, static, rationale, objective and generic with mind, body and soul disconnected and separate), a TD methodology assumes there are multiple layers of reality that interact with each other (see figures 2 and 5). Consumer scholars would respect the dynamic, complex relationships between, first, the political, social, historical and individual levels (called TD subject, the internal world of humans) and, second, the environmental, economic and individual and planetary/cosmic levels (called TD Object, the external world). Each of these levels of reality is characterized by its incompleteness; yet, together, in unity, these realities generate new, infinite knowledge (Max-Neef, 2005). Morin (1999b) refers to these many realities as *connective tissue*, in great abundance but with no ultimate foundation. Transdisciplinarity assumes "no level of reality constitutes a privileged place from which one is able to understand all other levels of reality; instead, a level of reality is what it is *because* all the other levels exist at the same time" (Nicolescu, 2006b, p.147).

Levels of TD Transreality for Subject and Object, with Hidden, Mediating Zone

(I am grateful to Basarab Nicolescu for his personal contributions to my understanding of this concept)

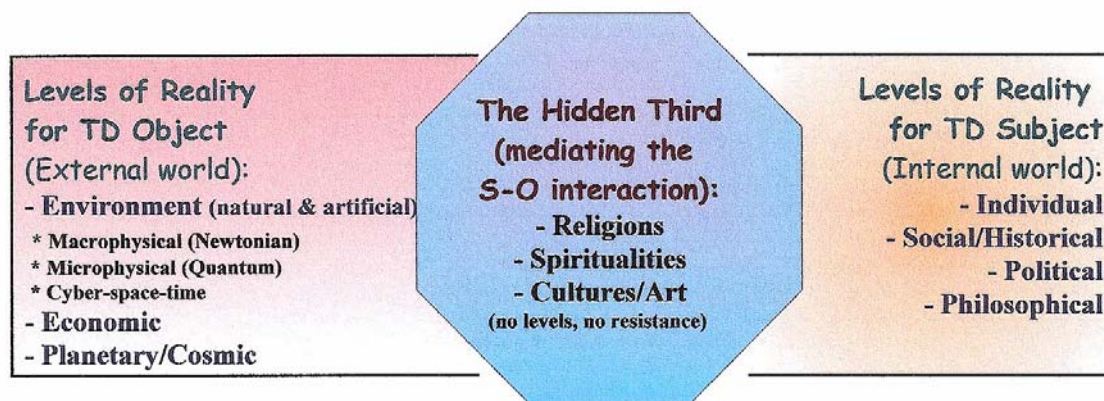


Figure 2: Transdisciplinary Object, Subject, and Levels of Reality

In more detail, the internal world of humans (the TD subject) involves a flow of consciousness across different levels of perceptions of the world. The external world of humans (the TD object) involves the flow of information across different levels of reality (what we know as disciplines or fields of study). Moments of breakthrough happen, those ‘aha moments’, when consciousness meets information and they share the *zone of non-resistance*. Thirdly, TD methodology employs the concept of *The Hidden Third* to refer to the place where people’s experiences, interpretations, descriptions, representations, images, and formulas meet up with information. Three levels of reality exist in this mediating zone: culture, religion, and intuition or spirituality (see Figure 3). For consumer studies and behavior scholars, this approach requires a deep shift from focusing on taxonomies, lists, individual theories and definitions about consumer-related issues to the *processes and energy flows* inherent in deep, complex interactions among people’s internal world, their external world and the mediating factors of culture, art, religion and spirituality. This particular axiom is concerned with multiple levels of interactive layers of *reality* replete with levels of perceptions and flows of information and consciousness among these layers of reality. The result is a unity of realities, a unity that better reflects the complexity of human issues influenced by unsustainable, possibly immoral or amoral, consumption (McGregor, 2008a, 2010b).

Coherence - Need breakthrough (shared zone of non-resistance) to create new TD knowledge:
Subject is able to communicate with Object (different disciplines can talk to each other!)

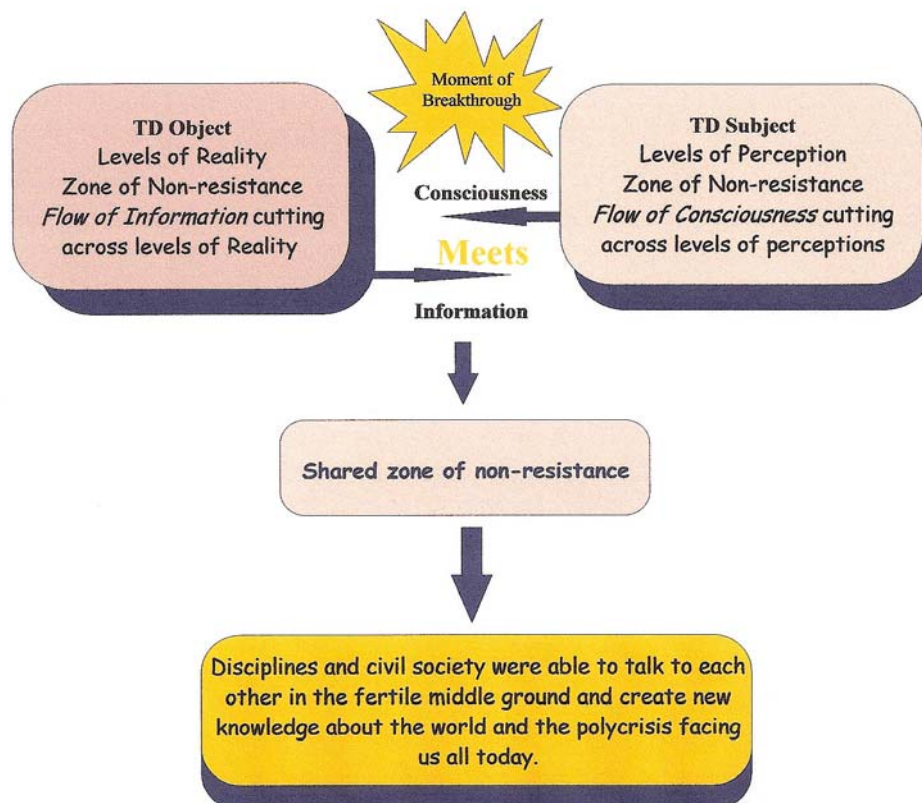


Figure 3: The Breakthrough Moment

Consumer studies and consumer behavior scholars who are currently practicing from an interdisciplinary perspective are already familiar with the idea of making connections between the human and social sciences (political, psychology, sociology - the internal world of a human) and economics and the natural and artificial sciences (worlds external to humans). TD would add the idea of accepting that culture, art, spirituality and religion act as mediators that enhance the links between these familiar disciplinary arenas (what TD calls levels of reality). Through this mediating link flows both information and consciousness, the latter being a stretch for conventional consumer scholar academics. Consciousness represents the internal world of humans, reflecting how they experience and perceive reality, as filtered through culture, art, spirituality and religion (referred to by Nicolescu (2006b) as *the sacred*). Most consumer academics are very comfortable with information as a concept but less familiar with consciousness and sacredness as concepts (McGregor, 2010b).

Axiom 2 - Logic - The Logic of the Included Middle

Ontology is concerned with what counts as reality (all of people's experiences that determine what appears real to them). Transdisciplinarity asserts there are multiple levels of reality. Nicolescu (2000, 2008b) acknowledges that each level of reality has its own laws and fundamental concepts and applies the logic of the included middle when referencing the relation between levels. Logic is concerned with the habits of the mind that are acceptable for inference and reasoning when arguing one's position on an issue. In philosophy, logic is concerned with answering the question "How do we know what we know?" Logic (reasoning and inference) is used in most intellectual activity, and perceptions of what counts as logic underpin all intellectual activity.

To offset higher education's tendency to be predicated on the Newtonian *logic of exclusion* (Nicolescu, 2008b), transdisciplinarity "conceives a broader horizon for the cognitive act" than that of reductionist-based scientific inquiry (De Mello, 2001, p.1). The logic of exclusion assumes that the space between objects or people is empty, flat, static and void of life (like the space between the balls on a billiard table). In academic life, this logic manifests as separate departments, journals, library holdings, conferences and professional associations. It is also evident in the familiar intellectual actions of: deduction (cause and effect), linear thinking, reductionism (breaking things down into parts to understand the whole from which they come), and either/ or approaches with no room for contradictions. The logic of exclusion is at the heart of most cultural grand narratives (Murphy, 2003), especially in the form of competition, economic success, individualism and techno-science.

Consumer behavior and consumer studies scholars employ the logic of exclusion, even though they are characterized as interdisciplinary (and even just multidisciplinary). Interdisciplinarity builds bridges between disciplines so ideas can cross back and forth across temporary, coordinated borders. The assumption is that a bridge is needed to cross the deep chasm between siloed, fragmented fields of study. In practice, this means that there are many instances when people from different disciplines or in civil society *cannot talk to each other*; hence, there can be no integration or generation of new knowledge (MacCleave, 2006).

The logic of exclusion is also predicated on fragmentation and separation and Classical Aristotelian logic of reality as dualities. Theories developed within each separate level of reality (e.g., political theories, economic theories) often remain separate, disconnected theories. Indeed, assuming that a whole can be understood by examining all of the parts, consumer scholars have gone about striving for *a complete theory* of consumer behavior by developing a large collection of mini-theories. There is an ongoing debate within the consumer behavior discipline of whether the field should strive for a unified theory of consumer behavior or be content with many smaller theories that describe bits and pieces of consumer behavior (e.g., information processing, adoption-innovation, decision making). This aspect of the consumer behavior discipline is a striking example of the logic of exclusion.

Classical Aristotelian logic says there *is no* middle ground between things (e.g., between theories or between disciplines). In contrast to a logic of exclusion, a TD methodology embraces the *Logic of the Included Middle*. This *inclusive logic* enables people to imagine that the space between things is alive, dynamic, in flux, moving and perpetually changing. It is in this *fertile middle space* that transdisciplinary manifests itself. TD has people stepping through the zones of non-resistance (away from one worldview towards another) (see Figures 2 and 3) onto a fertile, moving floor of the *included middle*, where they generate new transdisciplinary intelligence and knowledge, together.

A useful metaphor for this idea is the lava-lamp (see figure 4). As a soft light source, the lava lamp it is a see-through container in which one watches the slow, chaotic rise and fall of randomly shaped balls of wax. The ever-changing patterns are invigorating, progressive and in perpetual motion. The Logic of the Included Middle holds that there *is* middle ground *if* people accept that different actors have different *perceptions* of things. Finding new knowledge in the fertile middle ground is possible when everyone's ideas are heard. For each person, his or her point of view is his or her truth *until* it encounters something else, the ideas from another person or discipline. The balls of wax represent the formation and embodiment of this new knowledge. The viscous fluid of the lamp is always in movement, with new things bubbling up and falling back onto those moving about on the undulating floor (the included middle). Embodied knowledge is created from the energy generated from *intellectual fusion*. When the separate bits of knowledge and the people who carry them came together to dance in the fertile transdisciplinary middle, they move faster when they are exposed to each other than when they are alone, creating intellectual fusion (Lattanzi, 1998).

If people can move about in the middle ground (dance on the floor of the lava-lamp), come in contact with each other and get motivated, an energizing force is generated - a synergy is created. A sense of community and belonging is nurtured - a sense that they are part of something bigger than each one of them. At the same time, there is a realization that everyone is a new and different person in each relationship formed in the fertile middle. The strength and potentialities that emerge from this intellectual dance are life-giving and transformative.

In this space, while engaged in intellectual border work, people free float in *intellectual outerspace* instead of staying pinned down in their traditional, safe, disciplinary space or



Figure 4
Lava Lamp
Metaphor

particular way of knowing the world (Lattanzi, 1998). In this space, people would always *wonder*, and seek far-reaching solutions to the world's pressing problems. This free floating status makes it very easy to navigate between different, concurrent levels of Reality (see Figure 5), creating new, transdisciplinary knowledge. What appears to be a complete contradiction on one level of reality gets resolved if viewed from another level of reality (van Breda, 2007). Imagine the intellectual doors that would open if consumer scholars assumed that independent realities concurrently exist, and that they manifest themselves *to us* through our interactions *with them* in the included middle.

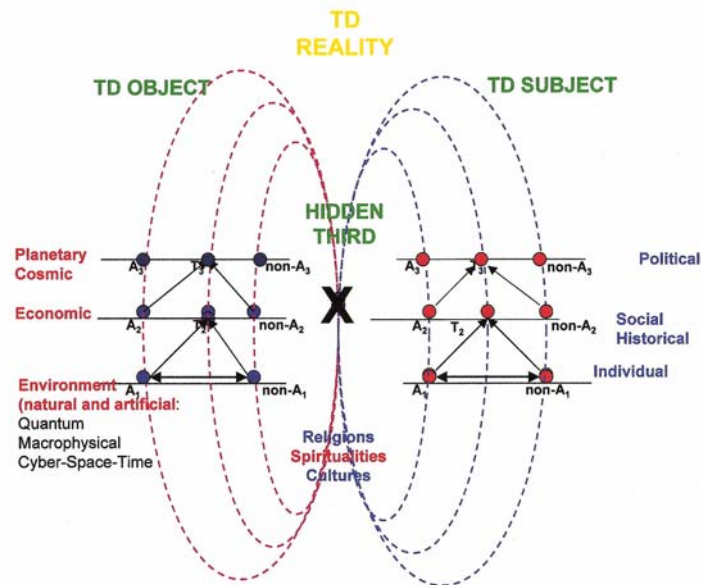


Figure 5 - Navigating Levels of Reality (used with permission of Basarab Nicolescu)

When consumer scholars use the logic of the included middle (making a space for contradictions and discontinuities in realities) to move through the different levels of reality (akin to different disciplines within the human, social and natural sciences), they would generate a permanent possibility for the evolution of knowledge. Transdisciplinarity holds that the logic of the included middle allows people to bridge adjacent levels of reality, enabling meaning-making systems to orient themselves to each other (Nicolescu, 2008b). Any theories that are developed at any given level of reality become transitory theories, which are open to change when confronted with contradictions from other, even new, levels of reality. Knowledge becomes an open, complex structure, rather than *a* completely unified theory (Max-Neef, 2005).

Perceiving the space between things as empty and void means people do not have to pay any attention to it - it is not part of their reality. It is common for consumer studies scholars concerned with the consumer interest to say “People fall through the cracks and become invisible. Their interests need to be protected through policy and advocacy.” But this mindset is also having negative repercussions from a global perspective, because it enables consumers to exclude any consideration for the consequences of their actions on *the invisible other* (the laborers and other species). One of the major features of 21st century consumption is the geographic and psychological distance between Northern consumers and Southern laborers. These distances have compromised people’s abilities to establish trust relationships, gain and apply knowledge of

ethical and moral principles, respect a sense of community and solidarity, and believe they can make a difference (Klintmann & Boström, 2006).

When consumer scholars use the logic of the included middle, they would naturally turn to other disciplines, industry, governments and civil society, and most especially to those implicit in, and affected by, the fall out of unsustainable and unjust consumption. The logic of the included middle creates a space for dialogue and knowledge generation between people. Arrogance and unwillingness to cooperate can lead to a sense of alienation and misunderstanding among those whose interests are likely to be affected by controversial decisions. Inclusive logic completely alters the balance of power in the adoption of controversial decisions. With TD, there would be attempts to reconcile different logics for the sake of solving the problems of humanity. This reconciliation cannot happen if people continue to engage with the logic of the excluded middle where everything is separate, disconnected and alienated. No longer would actions informed by siloed consumer research be designed in isolation, implemented using the logic of exclusion. A view from a specific discipline must take a back seat to transdisciplinary and integral views on the problems of humanity informed by consumerism.

Axiom 3 - Epistemology - Knowledge as Complex and Emergent

From a TD perspective, the consumer problems that need to be dealt with are not the mundane issues of credit, debt or financial wellness; rather, they are the pervasive problems of humanity impacted by consumption, problems that simply cannot be dealt with using the knowledge from one discipline. To reiterate, these complex problems include: the human condition, unbalanced energy flows, unfulfilled human potential, hindered freedom and justice, unsustainability, disempowered individuals and communities, uneven distribution of resources, and abuse of personal and political power through human aggression and uneven development (Morin, 1999b; UNESCO, 1998, van Breda, 2008). It is because of consumption, especially because of prevailing paradigms and ideologies that favor neoliberalism and political conservatism, that people experience the problems they do in the 21st century.

Twenty-first century consumers face the *symptoms* of larger-than-life problems that are complex (which is different from complicated, see below) and emergent, the latter referring to properties, insights and other nuances that arise and become visible as the problems are solved (to be discussed shortly). Therefore, to create transdisciplinary knowledge to deal with the root causes of human issues, consumer scholars would perceive there are multiple levels of reality. This stance translates to a marriage of environmental sciences, economics, politics, labor laws, sociology and anthropology, home economics, health and many other disciplines. This melding of realities has to happen in conjunction with the integration and cross-fertilization of insights from the academy with private and public sectors and civil society, using the logic of inclusion.

To that end, as with ontology and logic, transdisciplinarity strives for a different kind of epistemology. It respects a way of knowing based on cross-fertilization, complexity and emergence. Each will be discussed in detail because the TD methodology uses these familiar words in a different manner than a lay person, or conventional academic, in the fields of consumer studies or consumer behavior. A new vocabulary is needed or at least different understandings of familiar words, especially complexity and emergence. “Transdisciplinarity is

inseparable from complexity” and emergence (Morin, 2005, p.23). Of special note is the distinction made in transdisciplinarity between complicated and complex problems. *Complexus* means that which is woven together (Morin, 1999a). Although complicated and complex have the same root, they do not mean the same thing in a TD methodology. A complicated problem is characterized as hard to solve because it is intricate, tangled, knotty and detailed (see figure 6). It is one thing to untangle the strings of a complicated problem but quite another to re-weave them, along with new strings, into a new whole. The latter process is an inherent part of solving a complex problem because it features the concept of *emergence* (to be discussed shortly).



Figure 6: Knotted, Complicated Problem

Complexity

Although there are many definitions of complexity, Nicolescu (2006a) argues that the only one appropriate for transdisciplinarity is that offered by Edgar Morin (2005). His notion of complexity takes people beyond the opposite of being simple to a *method of knowing* that respects the mystery of the universe. His definition of complexity is outside the epistemology of classical science because it rejects reductionism, determinism and disjunction (binary truth). His notion of complexity requires that people (a) comprehend the relations between the whole and its parts (holons and holography) - the principle of distinction that retains relations (instead of reductionism). As well, the whole can be less than the sum of its parts. When a system self-organizes, it opens the door for the suppression of properties that *might* have emerged. His notion of complexity also requires that people (b) conceive relations between order, disorder and organization (rather than determinism), appreciating that order means stability, regularities and cycles (as well as conventional laws) and that disorder means blockage, collisions and irregularities (as well as dispersion and disintegration).

Within transdisciplinarity, “pertinent knowledge must confront complexity” (Morin, 1999b, p.15). Assuming, epistemologically, that there is a connective tissue between knowledge, its context and humans, Morin explains that complexity impels people to move from knowledge housed in separate disciplines within the academy to assembling and organizing knowledge dispersed in the natural, social, engineering, medical and human sciences. This assembly demonstrates the permanent connection between the unity and diversity of all that is human. What counts as knowledge has to expand beyond that which is generated by the scientific method to include the complex structure of understandings garnered through intricate webs of relations between people in the academy, the private and public sectors, and civil society (McGregor, 2004, 2006, 2007a).

In a most intriguing notion related to creating transdisciplinary knowledge, Morin (2005, p.13) urges people to “link concepts which normally repel each other logically, like unity and diversity. [People] are obligated to connect all these disjointed notions” so as to conceive a living organization or system. Morin suggests that, as this organization works to maintain itself, it degrades energy by its work, meaning it must draw energy from its environment. The organization depends on negative (maintain the status quo) and positive (deviate from the path) feedback to self-generate. Increasing deviation allows for transformation; hence, Morin’s notion of complexity implies that consumer scholars would pair unlike ideas to generate intellectual

deviations. This pairing of unlike ideas occurs in the *fertile middle ground* as people navigate different levels of reality, matching consciousness with information. The *logical core* of complexity is disparate pairs, dialogic. To keep these ideas apart leads to the breaking up of knowledge, preventing people from linking and contextualizing things; decontextualized knowledge leads to ill-solved problems of humanity, including those created by 21st century consumption.

Emergence

Poverty will be used to illustrate the principle of emergence (McGregor, 2009a). Poverty can be described along many dimensions: global and personal security, human rights, universal rights, moral responsibilities, order with justice, and global as well as intergenerational justice. It is definitely... a *complicated* issue, hard to solve using disciplinary knowledge. Transdisciplinarity holds that as people pass through the zone of non-resistance (accept that there are many realities) and enter the fertile middle ground to problem solve using the logic of inclusion, the process of emergence comes into being. Emergence refers to novel qualities, properties, patterns and structures that appear from relatively simple interactions among people, qualities that did not exist when presented in isolation. These new qualities are layered in arrangements of increased complexity (Morin, 2005; Nicolescu, 2008a).

To continue the example, emergence means consumer scholars would assume that poverty is *continually changing* as people try to solve it. It is a rich weave of societal structures and functions. This new weave of poverty (and people's understandings of poverty) keeps changing because new and coherent structures, patterns and properties *emerge* as a result of the interactions among people trying to address poverty while working within a web of changing relationships (on the included middle ground). Original perceptions about addressing poverty are left behind or transformed as a new weave and fabric takes shape (see figure 7, a new tapestry from the threads of the knotted, complicated problem (figure 6) and the synergistic energy generated during the intellectual border work). The energy created, the information generated and the partnerships formed also constantly change as understandings about the complex problem change - everything is in flux and *in-formation* (Lattanzi, 1998). The intent of transdisciplinarity knowledge creation is to get to know the world better by weaving together many ways of knowing and being in the world (Nicolescu, 2000).

Order and Chaos

As indicated, instead of just dealing with indebtedness, credit acquisition practices and the like, consumer studies and consumer behavior scholars would grapple with the problems of humanity including the problem of poverty and unequal resource distribution that can play out in consumers' lives as issues of credit, debt and housing. In the 21st century, consumers' daily lives are more complicated (knotted) and complex because the balance of order and disorder changes as life unfolds. To address this imbalance and tension, the TD methodology further requires that people adopt new understandings of order and chaos. Consumer scholars would learn to conceive of relations between order, disorder and self-organization,



Figure 7: Emergence

rather than conceive relations as empirical determinism. The latter holds that every state of affairs is determined by what came before it and constitutes a link in an unalterable chain of events: get a credit card, misuse it, get in debt, become poor - one thing leads to another in a predictable pattern. In the empirical methodology, chaos and disorder are seen as signs of deep trouble in the system. Not so, from a TD methodology. Wheatley (1999) explains that order and chaos are mirror images of each other. Order is created *through* chaos, through the processes of fluctuations, changes and disturbances. Chaos is order without predictability and is very different from the concept of order in the old science - predictable, controllable and consistent.

As well, a TD methodology includes the notion of self-organizing systems. Chaos is a necessary place to dwell if consumer scholars wish to engage in transdisciplinary inquiry and practice. They would trust that new insights will appear in this chaotic state, believe that they are self-organizing beings able to change. Being stable, while being open, is foreign to the old science, which assumes that when things wear down, the center cannot hold and things grind to a halt (even fly apart). In the TD methodology, being stable, while open, happens because of people's deep stabilizing center where they know who they are, what they need to do and that they are not acting alone (in the lava-lamp). As consumer scholars matured and developed self-knowledge, they would become more adept at this deeper, core stability (see figure 8) (Wheatley, 1999).

What comes to dominate over time is the internal dynamics of the system instead of the outside influences. Because people are partners *with the system* (through navigating the multiple layers of reality), they gain autonomy *from* the system. The more freedom people have to self-organize, the more order there is. The system and people co-evolve over time. From a TD methodology, consumer scholars would strongly believe in keeping themselves off balance so that they can change and grow through an open exchange with the world. It is then that they can behave in ways that defy the normal expectations and move themselves to new states of disequilibrium, knowing that a deeper stability is serving as their foundation while they solve complex problems of humanity that are exacerbated by 21st century consumption (Wheatley, 1999).



Figure 8: Order Emerging out of Chaos

Because targets keep shifting and the issues often must be redefined, consumer scholars engaged with the TD methodology face a lot of uncertainty (Allen & Varga, 2007). Although the process of fluctuations, changes and disturbances requires consumer scholars to accept uncertainty as they seek solutions, not everyone is able or willing to do so. Accepting uncertainty is essentially a function of culture change, a shift in outlook, and a willingness to seriously understand the views and aspirations of others. A transdisciplinary approach enables consumer scholars to look at knowledge from different levels and different perspectives. What is taken to be *true* depends on the framework of knowledge and assumptions brought in by individuals and their social, political, economic and occupational settings (Torkar & McGregor, 2010). TD assumes that traditional theories of truth are one-sided and inadequate. It is not that these theories completely miss the nature of truth; rather, they capture only a few relevant aspects of truth and disregard all others (Cicovacki, 2004). Pretty and Plimbert (1995) maintain it is essential to seek

multiple perspectives by ensuring the involvement of different actors and groups. Consumer scholars would integrate many levels of truth, resulting in unity, which better reflects the complexity of human issues. Consumer scholars would learn to appreciate that their thoughts, mental models and theories are necessarily incomplete and temporary props to current interactions with other actors. In fact, differing perceptions and views are a source of creative interaction, innovation and change (Allen & Varga, 2007).

Consumer scholars also would come to welcome chaos, uncertainty, tension, emergence and complexity because they would know it is going to lead to personal and disciplinary growth and evolution. Change creates chaos (a lack of regular, predictable arrangements). Consumer scholars would be able to self-organize (reorganize) when they can accept chaos and seek solutions to the lack of order (the problems of humanity). This reorganization leads to renewal. Consumer scholars would not try to maintain the old order but would enter into trustful, sharing relationships with others who have the same vision and relevant information and, together, create a new world and creative solutions to complex, emergent problems. Through rich processes and exchanges, multiple minds can interact and produce a complex knowledge containing its own reflexivity (in the lava lamp). *The knowledge is alive* because the problems the knowledge addresses are alive, emerging from the life world. This is a powerful approach to consumer scholarship.

Axiom 4 - Axiology - Integral Value Constellations

Because transdisciplinarity is about understanding the problems of the world (Nicolescu, 2007), those engaged in transdisciplinary work would be concerned with values. Traditional Newtonian science holds that research should be value neutral; there is no place for values in objective science (McGregor & Murnane, 2010). However, working together in fluctuating, enriching and challenging relationships necessitates a concern for values, especially since complexity infers the need for more than a single expert's solution. By their very nature, interactions among multiple actors as they solve problems in the polycrisis will give rise to value conflicts and contradictions. These conflicts can result in power struggles. In a TD approach, power is energy; it is the capacity generated through relationships. Without relationships, there can be no power. Whether the power generated as people work together to solve complex, emergent problems is negative or positive depends upon the nature of the relationships. That in turn is predicated on values. Furthermore, with power comes responsibility. Embracing this responsibility would be a challenge for consumer scholars unless the constellation of values at play is respected and managed.

Cicovaki (2009) makes a strong case for an axiology of transdisciplinary and McGregor (2009b, 2010) labeled this *integral value constellations*. Cicovaki argues that TD practitioners need to be able to deal with values and their systematic examination, even to develop a map of values that would serve as a coordination system for the TD map of reality people are trying to assemble. Values provide people with a center that gives them a sense of orientation to further develop their humanity. He maintains that one of the deepest problems of our time is the problem of orientation, of choosing and pursuing the "proper art of living" (Cicovaki, 2009, p. 14).

In the absence of clear vision of a new art of living ... in the center of all values, we are walking a very dangerous tightrope. ... In the face of the threatening dilemmas that we confront as individuals and as a civilization, it is of utmost interest to learn more ... about how they can be resolved. ... It is not at all improbable that humanity will not survive the twenty-first century. (Cicovaki, 2009, pp. 14-15)

Cicovaki believes that a TD axiology would empower people to dedicate themselves toward building a new kind of humanity to offset this doomsday projection.

So, because TD is deeply influenced by ethical, moral and pragmatic matters of orientation, consumer scholars would concern themselves with axiology (the science of values, ethics and morals). One of the intents of axiology is to link thinking (valuing) with action (Giuculescu, 1998). Consumer behavior is action oriented. Within transdisciplinary complex problem solving, thinking and action are intricately bound, necessitating a key focus on values. Indeed, Bazewicz (2000) affirms that transdisciplinarity holds a holistic vision of the world, and is concerned with the local and global integration of values.

Hartman (1967) posits that everyone's *value talent* is in motion, changing as situations change around them. Consumer scholars would learn from this approach. Three dimensions of values form the apex of anyone's valuing process, and each person values things in one of these three ways, or in some combination: (a) intrinsic value (personal or spiritual empathy and self-esteem); (b) extrinsic value (practical or situational, including role awareness and practical judgement/ thinking); and, (c) systemic value (conceptual or theoretical constructs of the mind including: system judgment (the ability to judge order within a system) and self-direction, motivation and persistence). The result can be tension amongst the three dimensions of values. Bottom line - how people think (what they believe is worthy) will determine how they act in a problem solving situation. Consumer scholars would appreciate that *proper valuing* requires attentiveness to all three value dimensions. To illustrate using sustainable consumption, a person may prefer a particular corporation (intrinsic), but a balanced value attention would also include paying attention to the vendor's performance according to corporate social responsibly sourcing standards (extrinsic), and its performance in a legal manner (systemic).

Cicovaki (2009 and van Breda (2007) urge people working with the transdisciplinary methodology to keep looking for agreement in the area of axiology. In order to develop the necessary tolerance of different viewpoints, so people can stay engaged in conversations about the complex problems shaping the human condition, consumer scholars would respect the role of axiology in transdisciplinarity. Küpers (2009) asserts that changes in value mixes are a key part of the rapidly changing global village, and that profound changes are taking place at all levels. He agrees with van Breda, that values often are the missing link in providing strategic solutions to key, global issues, which are informed by a collage of differing worldviews held by individuals, cultures, nations and regional and international groups.

Küpers (2009) further explains that peoples in civilizations progress naturally through three value systems: (a) collective values (tribal, dictator/ power and stability and order); (b) individual values (individual freedoms, private enterprise, free market values, then environmental and ecological values); and, (c) integrative/ integral values (integration of all of the previous values in order to build a stronger integrated approach to global issues). This approach is very similar to

Wilber's (2007) integral theory of everything, which includes insights from spiral dynamic theory. Consumer scholars would appreciate that it took centuries for the first two value systems to evolve (i.e., collective and individual) and the world is only just now approaching any semblance of integral values (Küpers, 2009; Wilber, 2009). That is why it is crucial for consumer scholars to continue to focus on values and citizenship (Thoresen, 2005).

The transdisciplinary dialogue, by its very nature, will witness the inescapable value loading of every inference and every opinion. Every line of conversation about the import of consumer decisions will face a potential clash of values, ethics and morals. Consumer scholars would reconcile the different sorts of knowledge characteristic of the sciences in the academy with the involvement of citizens in an extended peer community (Funtowicz & Ravetz, 2008). They would redefine and articulate tomorrow's values and reflect on the direction these values may lead humanity (Bindé, 2004). Society runs the risk of bad decisions if the *world of values* (axiology) is not taken into account and if conflicts cannot be resolved (Cicovaki, 2009). Given the polycrisis faced by the world, consumer scholars cannot risk enabling too many bad decisions, nor persistent conflict. They would respect the merit of valuing the differences among people and build on those insights. An *integral value constellation* would be a laudable goal for transdisciplinary consumer scholars.

Desired Emergent Developments - A Reframing of Consumer Scholarship

Because consumption affects everyone, everyone has a stake in the outcome – everyone's interests are affected, not just consumers. Torkar and McGregor (2010) coined the term *stakeholder* (instead of stakeholder) to reflect the idea that transdisciplinary scholarship entails people *sharing* ideas, solutions, threats and opportunities as they try to advocate their collective responses to complex problems - to address their stake in things as well as the stake of humanity and the earth. As they do this, people, including consumer scholars, would balance different logics, values, ways of knowing and would function on many different levels of reality. This is a profoundly new approach to dealing with the fallout of 21st century consumption.

And, as pressing as it is that consumer scholars begin to shift towards this methodology, this paradigm shift poses many, many issues (e.g., Pfund et al., 2006; Tourse et al., 2008), not the least of which are attempts to: (a) secure tenure, promotion and reappointment; (b) obtain grants for scholarship that spans disciplines and embraces civil society; and, (c) engage in scholarship that intentionally zigzags back and forth among comfortably siloed disciplines, each with their own departments, library holdings, professional associations and scholarly dissemination venues.

The following section shares a collection of ideas about how consumer scholars would have to reframe their approach to engaging in scholarship within the academy and between the academy and civil society. These ideas are gleaned from another paper on the topic of transdisciplinary consumer scholarship (McGregor, 2007a):

- It is the *context* of where the new knowledge will be applied that matters, not the agenda of the disciplinary home of the consumer scholars (Gibbons et al., 1994). TD assumes that knowledge is generated and sustained in the context of where it will be applied, rather than

- developed first, and then applied later by a different group, as is the case with basic science.
- The knowledge created in context *belongs to everyone* (because it was created by everyone) rather than being confined to (trapped in) a disciplinary map and useful for just one context. Novel ideas generated in the fertile space among and beyond disciplines can be nurtured and expanded by ensuring continuous feedback and input of everyone (Nicolescu, 1997, 2002), and by respecting the dynamics of knotworking (Engeström, 2005; Molz, 2009).
 - Consumer scholars would learn to rely on the *safety of the evolving collective* of actors and the potential and hidden *possibilities* rather than rely on the certainty of relatively risk-free disciplinary expertise. In TD, there is no one-right answer, no standard approach. With this in mind, consumer scholars would not stop at the first answer that seemed to satisfy their disciplinary dictates; instead, they would dig deeper through dialogue, perspective sharing, and in-formation (Lattanzi, 1998).
 - Consumer scholars would learn that the disciplinary, academe imperative has to be set aside to create a voice for those working in other types of organizational homes, in other contexts (especially civil society organizations) - a voice for the *humanity imperative*.
 - Consumer scholars would move from creating knowledge from a position of disinterested detachment to *negotiated knowledge* with those holding different interests but common concerns for human problems (Smith, 2003).
 - Instead of relying on the integrity of their disciplinary differences, consumer scholars would be open to transdisciplinary *de-differentiation* (Gibbons et al, 1994). That is, they would respect synergy (Greek *sunergos*, for working together) and sharing, rather than working in isolation and hoarding. They also would change perspectives so they saw information as *in-formation* in dynamic contexts, rather than being fixed and proprietary (Wheatley, 1999).
 - Consumer academics would accept the idea that they are *transient* - they have a foot in their academic home while roaming the connections available in the network of relationships (harken to the idea of knotworking). The knowledge they create is socially distributed and sustained through network building by mobile practitioners (Smith, 2003). Being transient would mean consumer scholars would become comfortable with not having a specific academic home. Instead, they would accept the idea of having a continued presence in their disciplinary field of knowledge, *but* do so whilst intellectually roaming in order to network with meaningful connections at the crossroads. Communications become key in this itinerant research and problem solving process as do value clarification and integration.
 - Consumer scholars would respect a new trait, *institutional diversity*. It refers to research and scholarship taking place way beyond the hallowed halls of the ivory tower. Scholarship would take place in departments and laboratories, think-tanks, research centers, institutes, retreats, through consultancy networks, in people's homes and living rooms, even on air planes (Smith, 2003).
 - Consumer scholars would no longer wear the mantle of 'founding father' because the TD knowledge that is created is a collective initiative - *an embodied knowledge*. Some consumer scholars may experience the pull to don this mantle more than others, especially because some efforts to form TD knowledge can slip back into discipline formation (Smith, 2003). This slippage happens because it is difficult to gain tenure and promotion in

an academy that still values disciplinary silos, isolated experts, and elitism. Consumer scholars exploring the TD path would expect complications and setbacks until academic governance structures, funding agencies and mind sets catch up. More seasoned consumer scholars would brave the repercussions of stepping outside the disciplinary boundaries into the rich fertile space between disciplines, where the academy meets society for the betterment of humanity.

- Because embodied knowledge *belongs to society*, consumer scholars that are familiar with employing positivistic criteria to gauge the robustness of the information (reliability and validity) would embrace other notions of robustness. Yes, it is still incumbent on those creating the knowledge to assure that it is of a certain quality. It would not bode well if un-robust knowledge was used to solve deep, human problems, even if the knowledge was jointly created in context. Smith (2003) and Gibbons et al. (1994) refer to this issue as the ‘quality control of knowledge production’, and suggest that criteria for *socially robust knowledge* (instead of empirically reliable knowledge) might include: justice, effectiveness, efficacy, autonomy, and other evidence of success after addressing the resolution of a pressing social problem. From a transdisciplinary stance, consumer scholars would explore the meaning of ‘*socially approved knowledge*’ (Smith, 2003).
- Within the confines of the traditional academy, conventional scholars can dispense with the influence of politics, theology and ethics in the pursuit of disciplinary truth because of academic freedom (Fuller, 2003). In the real world, where TD consumer scholars would be dealing with deep, pressing human problems, it is not possible, nor prudent, to dismiss the influence of the political economy and the social reality of citizens. Social concerns cannot be kept at arm’s length. They *are* the arms that shape the scholarship.
- Consumer scholars would gain respect for the *role of place and of the rhythm of the soul* in the process of integral and transdisciplinary learning and discourse. Focusing on the commons *releases the genius of society*, especially if scholars strive for fusion of indigenous, embodied knowing with conventional, disembodied knowing. The power of the people and the power of the commons deeply inform transdisciplinary thinking (personal communication, Ronnie Lessem, June 17, 2010).
- Consumer scholars would focus on leadership rather than the leaders. Leadership is a process involving discourse, and starts with wholeness, not the parts fitting together. They would focus on the discourse, on trying to find the language to have the conversation, so they can discover the patterns in each other’s’ thinking - *the integral gems* (personal communication, Wendelin Küpers, June 17, 2010).

The intellectual contributions of consumer studies/ sciences and consumer behavior scholars is paramount to the future of humanity and the planet. Their scholarly endeavors inform public and private dialog and decisions about the consumer interest and the role of business vis-à-vis consumer behavior. The whole of humanity is dependent on changing the nature of 21st century consumption so that it embraces a humanity and planetary imperative. The transdisciplinary methodology gives consumer scholars a powerful paradigmatic perspective from which to engage themselves, other disciplines and members of civil society in the process of solving complex, emergent human problems shaped by consumption, respecting the logic of inclusion, many levels of reality, integral value constellations, and knowledge as complex and emergent.

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